



STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS.

**S.I. No. 589 of 2020**



MERCHANT SHIPPING (NAVIGATION AND TRACKING) (HEADING  
SYSTEMS AND TESTING OF STEERING GEAR) RULES 2020

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## MERCHANT SHIPPING (NAVIGATION AND TRACKING) (HEADING SYSTEMS AND TESTING OF STEERING GEAR) RULES 2020

I, EAMON RYAN, Minister for Transport, in exercise of the powers conferred on me by section 18 (inserted by section 9 of the Merchant Shipping Act 2010 (No. 14 of 2010)) of the Merchant Shipping (Safety Convention) Act 1952 (No. 29 of 1952) (as adapted by the Transport, Tourism and Sport (Alteration of Name of Department and Title of Minister) Order 2020 (S.I. No. 351 of 2020)), hereby make the following rules:

**Citation**

1. These Rules may be cited as the Merchant Shipping (Navigation and Tracking) (Heading Systems and Testing of Steering Gear) Rules 2020.

**Definitions**

2. In these Rules –

“fishing vessel” means any ship or boat of any nature whatsoever, irrespective of the form of ownership, used or intended to be used for the purpose of commercial fishing;

“heading or track control system” means a device for automatically operating the steering gear to steer the ship, it does not include any wind-operated self-steering equipment connected to the tiller or rudder of sailing craft;

“officer of the watch” means the person in charge of the navigational watch;

“qualified helmsperson” means a person trained or sufficiently experienced to steer that type of ship;

“qualified officer” means an Irish consul, a superintendent of the Mercantile Marine Office of the Department of Transport or any officer in a port in the State exercising the functions of such a superintendent;

“restricted visibility” means any condition in which visibility is restricted by fog, mist, falling snow, heavy rainstorms, sandstorms or other similar cause;

“steering gear control system” means the equipment by which orders are transmitted from the navigation bridge to the steering gear power units, and comprises transmitters, receivers, hydraulic control pumps and their associated motors, motor controllers, piping and cables;

“steering gear power unit” means –

- (a) in the case of electric steering gear, an electric motor and its associated electrical equipment,
- (b) in the case of electro-hydraulic steering gear, an electric motor, its associated electrical equipment and connected pump, or

- (c) in the case of other hydraulic steering gear, a driving engine and connected pump.

### **Application**

3. These Rules do not apply to fishing vessels of less than 15 metres in length overall.

### **Heading or track control systems**

4. (1) The master of a ship shall ensure that heading or track control systems on board the ship, where fitted, shall not be used in areas of high traffic density, in conditions of restricted visibility nor in any other hazardous navigational situation unless it is possible to establish manual control of the ship's steering within 30 seconds.

(2) Before entering any area of high traffic density, and whenever visibility is likely to become restricted or some other hazardous navigational situation is likely to arise, the master of a ship shall arrange, where practicable, for the officer of the watch to have available without delay the services of a qualified helmsperson who shall be ready at all times to take over the manual steering.

(3) The change-over from automatic to manual steering and vice versa shall be made by, or under the supervision of the officer of the watch, or, if there is no such officer, the master of the ship.

(4) The master of a ship shall ensure that the manual steering gear on board the ship is tested:

- (a) after continuous use of the heading or track control systems for 24 hours, and
- (b) before entering any areas where navigation demands special caution.

### **Steering Gear**

5. In areas where navigation demands special caution, the master of a ship shall ensure that the ship shall have more than one steering gear power unit in operation when such units are available and capable of simultaneous operation.

### **Steering Gear – tests and checks**

6. (1) The master of a ship shall, within 12 hours before departure of the ship, cause the steering gear to be checked and tested so as to ensure that it is working satisfactorily:

Provided that in the case of ships regularly making more than one voyage a week to or from the same port, a check and test of the steering gear need only be made once in that week unless a part of the steering gear or its control system has been dismantled or changed since the last test.

(2) The test procedure shall include, where applicable, the operation of the following:

- (a) the main steering gear;
- (b) the auxiliary steering gear;
- (c) the remote steering gear control systems;
- (d) the steering positions located on the navigation bridge;
- (e) the emergency power supply;
- (f) the rudder angle indicators in relation to the actual position of the rudder;
- (g) the remote steering gear control system power failure alarms;
- (h) the steering gear power unit failure alarms; and
- (i) the automatic isolating arrangements and other automatic equipment.

(3) The checks and tests shall include:

- (a) the full movement of the rudder according to the required capabilities of the steering gear;
- (b) a visual inspection of the steering gear and its connecting linkage; and
- (c) the operation of the means of communication between the navigation bridge and the steering gear compartment.

(4) The owner of a ship shall provide simple operating instructions, with a block diagram showing the changeover procedures, for the remote steering gear control systems and steering gear power units.

(5) The master of a ship shall ensure that the operating instructions referred to in paragraph (4) are permanently displayed on the navigation bridge and in the steering gear compartment of the ship.

(6) A person shall not supervise the operation or maintenance of the steering gear unless that person is familiar with the operation of the steering systems fitted on the ship, and, where applicable, with the procedures for changing from one system to the other.

(7) In addition to the routine checks and tests prescribed in paragraphs (2) and (3) a master of a ship shall ensure that emergency steering drills, which practise emergency steering procedures, take place at least once every three months. These drills shall include, where applicable, use of direct control from within the steering gear compartment, the communications procedure with the navigation bridge and the operation of alternative power supplies.

- (8) (a) The date, time and place that the routine checks and tests under this Rule are carried out and the date and details of emergency steering drills carried out shall be recorded by the master in the official logbook.
- (b) In ships not required to keep an official logbook, a record of each check, test and drill shall be made by the master of the ship and

be retained on board for a period of 6 months and be available for inspection on demand by a qualified officer or surveyor of ships.

**Revocation**

7. The Merchant Shipping (Automatic Pilot and Testing of Steering Gear) Rules 1983 (S.I. No. 317 of 1983) are revoked.



GIVEN under my Official Seal,  
8 December, 2020.

EAMON RYAN,  
Minister for Transport.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

*(This note is not part of the Instrument and does not purport to be a legal interpretation.)*

These Rules implement Chapter V of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) 1974, and subsequent Protocols and amendments, up to and including those adopted by the 90<sup>th</sup> Session of the Maritime Safety Committee of the IMO in May 2012, in particular Regulations 24, 25 and 26 relating to the use of heading and track control systems and the operation and testing of steering gear. These Rules apply to Irish registered ships and to Irish registered fishing vessels 15 metres or greater in length. They also apply to vessels registered in another state while they are in a port in the State or in the territorial waters of the State. The Rules revoke the Merchant Shipping (Automatic Pilot and Testing of Steering Gear) Rules 1983 (S.I. No. 317 of 1983).

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