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Ship Registration in the Cayman Islands

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The Cayman Islands Shipping Registry (“CISR”) is a Category 1 British Registry, the highest possible ranking, and is authorised to certify all sizes and types of vessel. A ship registered in the Cayman Islands is a “British Ship” entitled to fly the red ensign flag and is afforded protection through the Royal Navy and its allies, together with access to an unparalleled diplomatic and consular network worldwide.

What types of registration are available?

The CISR caters to virtually all classes and sizes of vessel, from small yachts to supertankers and offshore drilling rigs to submersibles¹.

The CISR offers five types of vessel registration – full, interim, provisional, under construction and demise (bareboat) charter. Prior to accepting any commercial vessel for registration, the CISR uses a ‘merchant ship flag-in matrix’ scoring system to ensure such commercial vessel meets the minimum required safety and operational standards.

Are there any ownership requirements?

For a ship to be registered in the Cayman Islands it must be owned (as to at least a majority) by a “qualified person”. The definition of a “qualified person” includes, amongst others, bodies corporate and shipping entities or foreign companies incorporated, established or registered in:

- the United Kingdom or any of its Overseas Territories or Crown Dependencies (including the Cayman Islands);
- a Member State of the European Union or European Economic Area, including any overseas country, territory or dependency of such a Member State or
- an “approved country”; which means those countries listed under the Third Schedule of the Cayman Islands Money Laundering Regulations (i.e. Argentina, Austria, Australia, Bahamas, Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Bermuda, Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Gibraltar, Greece, Guernsey, Hong Kong, Iceland, India, Ireland, Isle of Man, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jersey, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Portugal, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and United States of America) or any overseas country, territory or dependency of such “approved country”.

In cases where the vessel is owned by a person that is not resident in the Cayman Islands, or a body corporate that is not incorporated in, nor has its principal place of business in, the Cayman Islands, it must appoint a local “representative person” (being an individual resident in the Islands or a body corporate incorporated in the Islands and having a place of business there) in relation to the vessel.

What is the registration process?

In order for an existing vessel that has not previously been registered at a British Port (i.e. registered in any Commonwealth country) to be registered in the Cayman Islands it must first undergo a registration survey conducted by a member of the CISR or an approved classification society².

¹ As a matter of policy, fishing vessels are not currently registered unless they are owned and operated in the Cayman Islands.

² Lloyds Registrar of Shipping, Det Norske Veritas, Bureau Veritas, Nippon Kaiji Kyokai, Germanischer Lloyds, American Bureau of Shipping and Registro Italiano Navale

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Following the registration survey, the certificate of survey (granted by the surveyor) and the tonnage measurement of the vessel are submitted to the CISR. Upon completion of the registration survey, the documentation that is required to be submitted will vary depending on the proposed use of the vessel. A list of some of the standard documents (including relevant CISR forms) is as follows:

- Application to register the vessel;
- Notice of the proposed name;
- Declaration of ownership (in the case of an owning company);
- Appointment of authorised person (in the case of an owning company);
- Bill of sale (if existing vessel);
- Builder's certificate (if new vessel);
- Deletion certificate from previous flag (if previously registered in another jurisdiction);
- Corporate resolutions (in the case of an owning company) and
- Certificate of good standing (in the case of an owning company).

Provided the relevant documentation is in order and the registration fees have been paid, the CISR will then issue a carving and marking note.

The carving and marking note will set out the requirements for affixing the name and port of registry to the vessel. The carving and marking requirements vary depending on the nature and size of the vessel to be registered. Once the carving and marking note has been complied with, an inspection must be conducted by an approved person (i.e. a flag surveyor, class surveyor, Captain of the Port, Customs Officer or Consular Officer). The person inspecting the carving and marking should sign and certify the note with his official stamp or seal. Upon receipt of the certified carving and marking note, which must be returned to the Registrar of Shipping in the Cayman Islands duly certified within 21 days of its initial date and issue, the Registrar will issue a Certificate of British Registry.

Following the registration of the vessel with the CISR, vessels are required to obtain a Radio Station Licence. The application for a licence must be made to the Information and Communications Technology Authority in the Cayman Islands and must include, among other things, an inspection certificate given by a person who is qualified to inspect radio equipment and certify that it is in sound working order³. The licence will normally be issued after the vessel has been registered; however, it is possible to obtain a licence in advance of registration in certain circumstances.

³ For vessels in excess of 300 tonnes, it is only necessary to submit a copy of the application to the Cayman Islands Marine Survey Department for an International Safety Radio Certificate.



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