



# Maritime Cook Islands

## Vessel Registration Guidelines - Yachts

2026 | Vessel Registration Guidelines



**MARITIME**  
COOK ISLANDS  
The Cook Islands Ship Registry

# ABOUT US



## KIA ORANA,

The Fleet Department efficiently manages all facets of vessel registration within the Cook Islands Ship Registry. Our mission is to deliver a seamless registration experience that upholds the highest standards of safe and secure shipping practices, promoting cleaner oceans and sustainable maritime practices while ensuring compliance with international regulations and industry standards.

Headquartered in Rarotonga, Maritime Cook Islands (MCI) maintains a strong international presence, with regional operations across Europe and Asia supported by dedicated fleet managers in Italy, Croatia, Denmark, and Monaco.

MCI remains firmly committed to meeting the commercial needs of its clients by providing prompt, efficient and reliable vessel registration services and prioritizing the protection of shipowners, mortgagees and charterers.

**Moeroa Matheson**  
*Registrar of Ships*

# WHY THE COOK ISLANDS?



## IMO STCW WHITE LIST STATUS

The Cook Islands is a party to the IMO STCW White list.



## ELECTRONIC CERTIFICATION & FORMS

MCI issues Electronic Certification. The electronic forms enable quick document processing and streamlined communication.



## GLOBAL SUPPORT OF COOK ISLANDS OFFICES

Quality Service available 24 hours, 7 days



## NO RESTRICTIONS ON THE NATIONALITY OF CREW.

No restrictions to the nationality of seafarers employed on Cook Islands flagged vessels.



## COOK ISLANDS COMPANY FORMATION



## COMPETITIVE PRICING

Competitive registration, survey and certification fee structures.



## ISO 9001: 2015 CERTIFIED

MCI's quality management systems is certified to AS/NZS ISO 9001:2015 by Telarc.



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# SERVICES

## YACHT REGISTRATION

Our yacht registration services cover both private and commercial yachts. Clients may choose between 1, 3, or 5-year registration cycles, reducing annual administration and providing cost-effective solutions. We also offer specialized services tailored to the operational needs of yacht owners.

### PRIVATE YACHT REGISTRATION

A Private Yacht is defined as a vessel utilized exclusively for personal leisure, with no engagement in trade or charter-for-hire activities. To maintain valid registration, the following requirements must be met:

- **Operational Compliance:** Use is strictly limited to private purposes. Any transition to commercial activity requires a formal status change and full adherence to the MCI SYC, LYC, or LY3 codes.
- **Vessels Over 500 GT:** Mandatory classification and survey by an IACS-recognized Society is required to verify structural and technical integrity.
- **Safety Standards:** While exempt from certain international conventions, vessels must maintain rigorous safety standards to ensure the protection of the vessel, crew, and environment.

### COMMERCIAL YACHT REGISTRATION

A Commercial Yacht is defined A yacht engaged in trade, commerce, on charter or carrying passengers for hire that is registered and described in the register and on the Certificate of Registry as a commercial yacht. To maintain valid registration under the Cook Islands flag, the following statutory requirements must be met:

#### Standards and Codes

- **Vessels Under 24 Meters:** Registration is contingent upon full compliance with the Cook Islands Small Yacht Code.
- **Vessels Over 24 Meters:** Owners must ensure adherence to the LY3 (Large Commercial Yacht Code) or the Cook Islands Large Yacht Code.
- **Vessels Over 500 GT:** Mandatory classification and survey by an IACS-recognized Classification Society is required to maintain commercial status.

# SERVICES

## DUAL YACHT REGISTRATION

Dual Registration allows yachts to transition seamlessly between private use and commercial charter under a single, continuous registration.

- Yachts must adhere to the MCI Small Yacht Code, Large Yacht Code, and commercial technical standards at all times.
- While in private mode, yachts are exempt from commercial manning but must maintain all other statutory safety and insurance protocols.
- Ensures constant readiness for an immediate return to charter-for-hire activities without further technical surveys.

## DEMISE CHARTER

### DEMISE CHARTER IN REGISTRATION

A Demise Charter arrangement facilitates the formal transfer of a vessel's possession and operational control to the Charterer for a defined period. Under this structure, the Charterer assumes full responsibility for the vessel, including the statutory right to appoint the Master and crew. Upon the expiration or termination of the charter period, the vessel's registration automatically reverts to its underlying registry by operation of law.

### DEMISE CHARTER OUT REGISTRATION

A Demise Charter Out arrangement enables a vessel currently registered with the Cook Islands to be leased to a foreign charterer while suspending its operational status under our flag. During the charter period, full possession and operational control—including the right to appoint the Master and crew—are transferred to the Charterer under a foreign registry. Upon the expiration or termination of the charter agreement, the vessel's full registration status automatically resumes with the Cook Islands Ship Registry.

# SERVICES

## OWNERSHIP

MCI provides pathways for yacht owners to meet Cook Islands' ownership requirements. Owners can choose from membership-based associations or company structures, depending on their operational needs.



### **Cook Islands Yacht Squadron (CIYS)**

Established in 2006, CIYS offers yacht owners the same streamlined option to meet ownership requirements. Membership allows yachts to be registered without forming a company in the Cook Islands. Like CISOA, membership is open to companies, trusts, individuals, and partnerships, meaning foreign corporations can also participate without local registration.



### **International Company Incorporation**

The Cook Islands International Companies Act 1981–82 allows for the formation of international companies with administrative ease and flexibility. Incorporation must be conducted through a licensed trustee company, which manages both registration and ongoing compliance obligations.



### **Foreign Company Registration**

Foreign companies incorporated outside the Cook Islands can register under the International Companies Act to establish a local branch. This provides an additional option for owners seeking a Cook Islands presence. As with international companies, a licensed Cook Islands trust company oversees the registration process and administrative duties.

## MORTGAGE REGISTRATION

The Cook Islands' legal system is based on British Common Law, providing an efficient jurisdiction for maritime legal proceedings.

The Ship Registration Act establishes robust statutory safeguards for mortgagees' rights, offering international financial institutions the legal certainty required to finance vessels registered under the Cook Islands flag. Registered mortgages are recorded with precise date and time stamps to establish priority, ensuring comprehensive protection for financiers under a recognised Common Law framework.

## INSURANCE

- **Nairobi International Convention on the Removal of Wrecks, 2007**

Registered owners of ships above 300GT will need insurance cover arrangements, which meet the requirements of the Convention. The Convention provides a strict liability, compensation and compulsory insurance regime for States affected by a maritime casualty.

- **International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage, 2001**

The Convention applies to damage caused on the territory, including the territorial sea, and in exclusive economic zones of States Parties. This applies to vessels over 1,000GT

- **International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage (CLC), 1992**

The Convention applies to all seagoing vessels carrying oil in bulk as cargo, but only ships carrying more than 2,000 tons of oil are required to maintain insurance in respect of oil pollution damage.

- **Protection & Indemnity (P&I) Insurance**

All clients interested to register with MCI must insure their vessels with an approved P&I club. Insurance companies, financial security providers and P&I Clubs that are not listed on our website and wish to gain approval may submit a request to [insurance@maritimecookislands.com](mailto:insurance@maritimecookislands.com).



Scan to view our list of **approved Insurance Companies**



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# SURVEY & CERTIFICATION SERVICES

## PRE-CODING INSPECTION

Yachts looking to transition from private to commercial status require a pre-inspection survey and code analysis. Many yachts adhere to CE certification and ABYC Standards (USA) during construction. However, the Cook Islands Technical Team must assess compliance with the Small Yacht Code or Large Yacht Code regulations before considering eligibility for commercial registration.

## ISM, ISPS, MLC AUDITS

The Marine Operation and Compliance Department supervises the survey and certification process concerning ISM (International Safety Management), ISPS (International Ship and Port Facility Security Code), and MLC (Maritime Labour Convention). MCI adopts a close coordination approach with the approved Recognised Organisations acting on its behalf, providing instructions and concurrence as necessary. In some selected cases MCI can perform direct audits and issue relevant certification.

## COOK ISLANDS APPROVED SURVEYORS

Through the Regulatory, Technical & Operations (RTO) Department, MCI directs and manages a global network of approved surveyors to conduct all necessary surveys, inspections, and audits throughout the yacht's scheduled compliance cycles



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# REGULATORY STANDARDS

## REGULATORY AUTHORITY AND STANDARDS

Maritime Cook Islands compliance is governed by the Financial Transactions Reporting (Maritime Cook Islands) Regulations 2017 and the Countering Terrorism and the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction Act 2004. We maintain a proactive posture regarding Financial Action Task Force (FATF) standards, working closely with the Cook Islands Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) to uphold the integrity of our flag.

## THE COOK ISLANDS GLOBAL COMPLIANCE STANDING AND FATF CLASSIFICATION

Recognized by the Financial Action Task Force/Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering as a global leader in technical compliance—outperforming numerous traditional financial centers—the Cook Islands provides a secure and transparent jurisdiction for maritime registration. This premier standing is confirmed by current FATF assessments, which classify the Cook Islands as a fully cooperative, low-risk jurisdiction.

## EU AND OECD REGULATORY STANDING

The Cook Islands is a dedicated participant in the Common Reporting Standard (CRS) and the international framework for mutual assistance in tax matters, consistently meeting global benchmarks for transparency. The jurisdiction is currently advancing through its scheduled OECD assessment phase, demonstrating an active and successful implementation of CRS protocols. While "economic substance" requirements primarily focus on zero-tax environments, the Cook Islands continues to distinguish itself through a steadfast commitment to international cooperation and rigorous reporting standards. As a result, the jurisdiction maintains an excellent reputation with all major oversight bodies and is not flagged for any negative regulatory matters.



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# CUSTOMER DUE DILIGENCE

As the Administrator of the Cook Islands Ships Registry, Maritime Cook Islands (MCI) operates within a rigorous legal framework to maintain the highest standards of transparency, security, and international compliance. Our Customer Due Diligence (CDD) protocols are engineered to mitigate risk and safeguard the integrity of the flag, while ensuring a streamlined registration process for reputable ship owners and operators.

To maintain this standard, MCI employs a structured, risk-based approach to due diligence, executed across three distinct phases:

- **Identification and Verification (KYC):** We verify the legal existence of the owning entity and the identity of the Shareholders, Directors & Ultimate Beneficial Owners (UBOs) down to the natural persons. This requires independent documentation, such as Certificates of Incumbency and identification for controlling principals.
- **Ongoing Monitoring:** Compliance does not end at registration. Our Monitoring Division utilises advanced intelligence software for real-time tracking (AIS monitoring) & LRIT to detect "dark activity," unauthorized Ship-to-Ship (STS) transfers, or voyage irregularities.
- **Sanctions Screening:** All applicants undergo rigorous vetting against UN, OFAC, UK, and EU sanctions lists. MCI maintains a zero-tolerance policy regarding vessels or entities linked to sanctioned regimes or prohibited trade activities.
- **MCI strictly prohibits trading with sanctioned territories:** Cook Islands-flagged tankers are prohibited from transporting petroleum products from Russia, Iran, and Venezuela. Vessels found to be "spoofing" AIS data or engaging in deceptive shipping practices are subject to immediate de-registration.



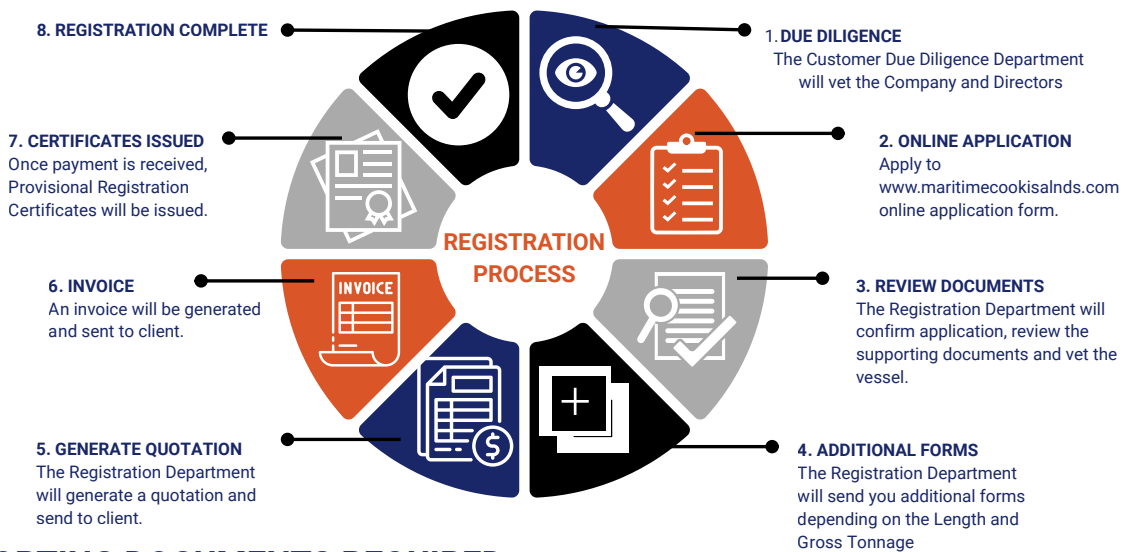
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# REGISTRATION PROCESS

The Cook Islands Ship Registry provides a streamlined, cost-effective vessel registration process, ensuring compliance with international maritime standards to help vessel owners operate securely and efficiently worldwide. Registration with Maritime Cook Islands follows a mandatory two-stage process, designed for both efficiency and thorough compliance.

## FIRST STAGE: PROVISIONAL REGISTRATION

Provisional Registration grants the vessel temporary legal status for an initial period of 3 months, extendable up to a maximum of 6 months total. This initial phase allows the vessel to begin operations while the owner gathers all outstanding documentation (such as deletion from the previous flag) and completes all mandatory statutory surveys



## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS REQUIRED

### Core documents required

- Bill of Sale / Builders Certificate (if new build)
- Evidence of Shareholding of Owners
- Certificate of Incorporation of owning company
- CISOA (For merchant vessels) / CIYS (for Yachts) Form and supporting documents (if applicable)
- Pre-registration Inspection (if applicable)

### Supplementary Documents based on vessel type

- If Merchant and Commercial yacht carrying out commercial operations**
- Copy of current P&I (including MLC) under previous flag
  - All officers onboard must submit application for STCW Endorsement

- If Merchant and Commercial yacht over 300 GT**
- Vessels last Port State Control Reports (in the last 3 years)

- If over 500 GT**
- Copy of Classification Certificates under previous flag
  - All copies of previous CSR. CSR Form 2, CSR Form 3 (as per SOLAS Chapter XI-I Regulation 5-8) (except private yachts, tugs, barges, fishing vessels)

- If Charter Registration**
- Copy of Charter Agreement
  - Written consent from underlying flag to charter to Cook Islands Flag (if charter registration)



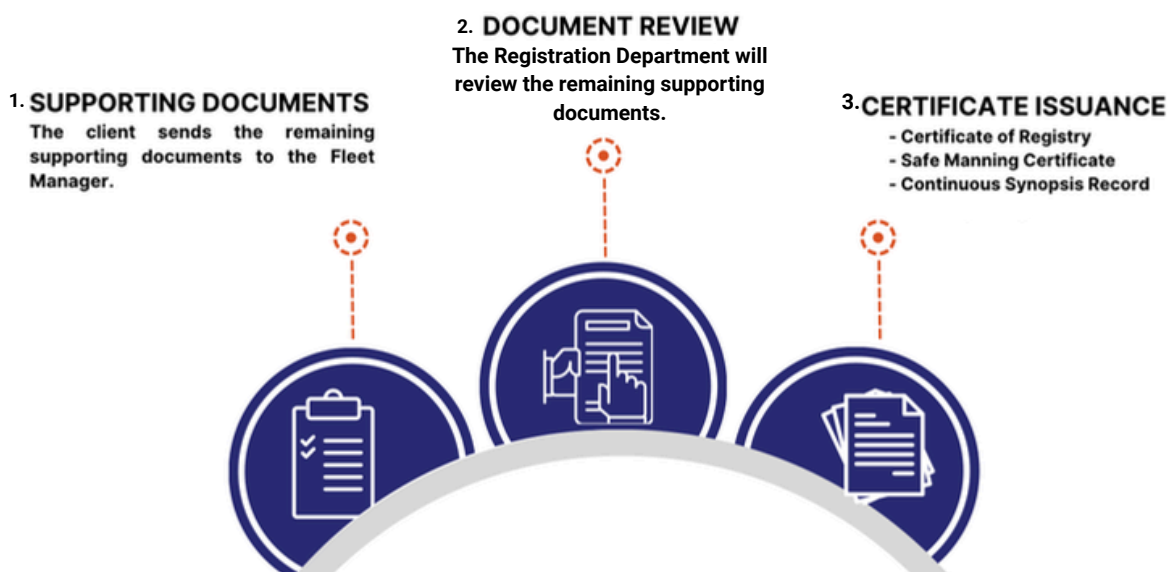
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# REGISTRATION PROCESS

## SECOND STAGE: PERMANENT REGISTRATION

Permanent Registration formally finalizes the process, securing the vessel's place on the Cook Islands Ship Register and validating its full compliance with national and international standards. The issuance of the Permanent Certificate confirms that all key documents have been verified, final requirements, such as the Carving and Marking Note and Proof of Deletion from the previous flag, have been met, and all necessary certificates (including officer endorsements) are in place

To successfully complete the permanent registration process, all supporting documentation and surveys must be completed within a 3-month period from provisional registration.



## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS REQUIRED

### Core documents required

- Carving and Markings Note, including photo evidence and a full photo of vessel
- Proof of Deletion from previous flag (if applicable)

### Supplementary Documents based on vessel type

#### If Merchant and Commercial yacht carrying out commercial operations

- Copy of P&I Policy evidencing financial security for MLC regulation 2.5 and 4.2 (applicable to all commercial vessels; MCI requires that the MLC financial security is maintained and will require evidence that it is maintained).

#### If over 300 GT undergoing international voyages

- Copy of Long Range Identification Tracking (LRIT) Conformance Test Report (CTR)

#### If over 500 GT

- Copy of Classification Certificates under Cook Islands flag
- Closed CSR (as per SOLAS Chapter XI-I Regulation 5-8)

#### If Charter Registration

- Proof of suspension from previous flag (if charter registration)



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# FLEET HIGHLIGHTS

FLEET HIGHLIGHTS AS OF MARCH 2026

## THE CORE METRICS



**760**

TOTAL VESSELS



**464,291**

GROSS TONNAGE



**666**

YACHTS



**94**

MERCHANTS

## YACHT STATISTICS



Total Yachts

**666**



Average GT

**172 GT**



Av. Length

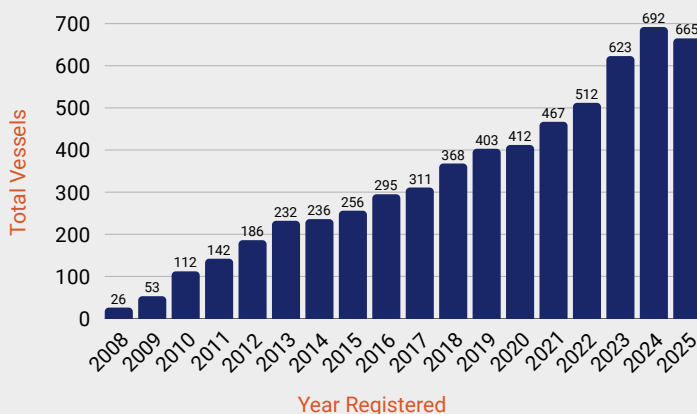
**24m**



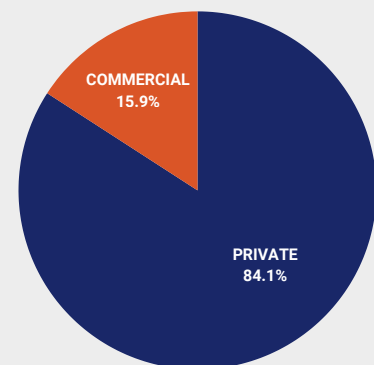
Total GT

**115,014GT**

### TOTAL NUMBER OF VESSELS REGISTERED FROM 2006 - 2025



### YACHT TYPE (COMMERCIAL VS PRIVATE)



- COMMERCIAL : 106 YACHTS
- PRIVATE: 560 YACHTS



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# CONTACT US



## COOK ISLANDS INTERNATIONAL OFFICES AND AGENTS

### Head office

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## Vessel Registration Guidelines - Yachts

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