

SHIPPING

Summary

Since 2019, the number of ships processed through most major ports in Queensland and throughput (amount imported and exported) has declined; a likely result of COVID-19 pandemic impacts.

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected the cruise ship industry. However, the industry has shown strong recovery since travel restrictions were lifted.

Independent reviewers found management effectiveness for shipping in the Region was *effective to mostly effective*.

What the Outlook Report 2024 says about shipping

Vessels transiting the Reef enter using one of six major shipping channels; the busiest is the Inner Route – Cape York to Cairns. Since 2019, the number of voyages through Hydrographers Passage, Palm Passage and the Whitsunday Area has decreased, while the others increased.

Management of the COVID-19 pandemic affected global maritime mobility, especially during March to June 2020 when the most severe restrictions were in force. In Australia, cruise ship activity halted between March 2020 and April 2022.

The Queensland Superyacht Strategy (2018–2028) aims to grow Queensland's share of the Australian superyacht sector to 90 per cent by 2028.

In 2023, the Douglas Shoal remediation works successfully removed ship-grounding generated rubble, with minimal impact to adjacent marine benthic habitats.

Benefits of shipping

Shipping provides a critical servicing role and supports the economy through imports and exports. Mineral fuels and lubricants, such as coal, was the largest export commodity in Queensland in 2022 with \$82.9 billion and experienced the largest annual increase in value — up 136.7 per cent when compared to 2021.

In the 2022–23 financial year, cruise ships spent a total of 491 days along Queensland shores, bringing 1,130,422 passengers. During this period, Queensland generated the second-largest economic impact from the cruise ship industry in Australia.

Vessels that visit ports within the Region provide economic benefits to adjacent communities. For example, cruise ships contributed approximately \$2.3 million into business across Townsville and the surrounding regions in the 2022–2023 financial year.

Impacts of shipping

A number of impacts occur as a result of shipping activities. These include ship groundings, operational and accidental discharges of ballast and bilge water, damage to reef structure and damage to seafloor, and vessel strikes with marine megafauna and noise pollution.

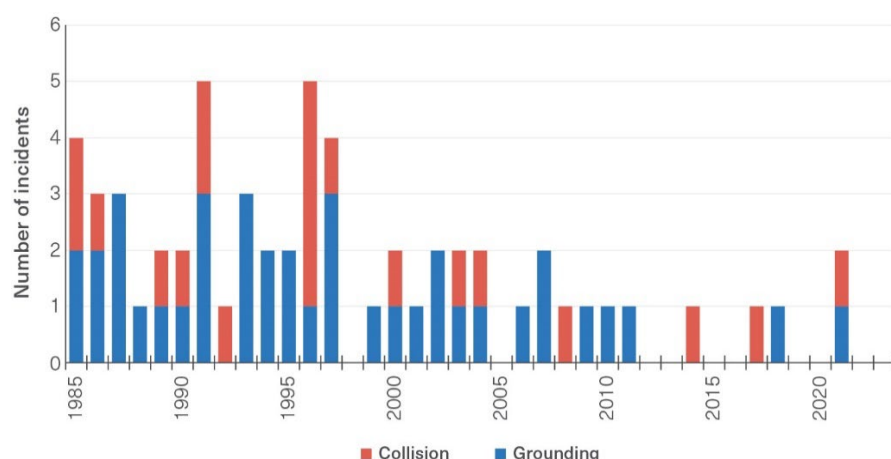
Since 2019, there has been one grounding, one collision and 16 near misses in the Region; and four oil spill incidents have been reported. Antifouling paint chemicals were present in the water column and/or in the sediment in the five main ports in the Region.

Since 2019, the use of sulphur scrubbers for vessel exhaust gas cleaning in ships has emerged as a potential issue for sensitive habitats.

Management of shipping

Shipping is well-regulated and effectively managed, reflecting the maturity of the planning system. A major focus of shipping controls is the reduction of the potential for incidents occurring and the rapid response to incidents.

Since 2019, the updated International Maritime Organization (IMO) strategy on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from ships and the *Queensland Superyacht Strategy (2018–2028)* have been adopted. The Q-SEAS program aims to enhance early detection of the presence of invasive marine species at ports.



Ship groundings and collisions, 1985 to 2023. Source: Reef Authority 2023