



# **NAABSA Berth Procedure**

**Guidance to Berth Operators, Agents and Masters**

## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
1. GUIDANCE TO BERTH OPERATORS.....	3
2. GUIDANCE TO AGENTS AND SHIP OPERATORS.....	4
3. GUIDANCE TO VESSEL MASTERS.....	4

For any queries regarding this procedure, contact [harbourmaster@pla.co.uk](mailto:harbourmaster@pla.co.uk)

### **Port of London Authority**

London River House  
Royal Pier Road  
Gravesend  
DA12 2BG

(+44) (0)1474 562 200  
[www.pla.co.uk](http://www.pla.co.uk)

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: BEN FITZPATRICK FOR THE PLA

## INTRODUCTION

This procedure was first published on **03 April 2024** and updated on **17 July 2025**. It covers all existing and prospective NAABSA berths within the Port of London Authority (PLA) Statutory Harbour Authority area.

This document is aimed at Agents, Berth and Ship Operators and details the procedure for the operation of NAABSA (Not Always Afloat But Safely Aground) berths in the Port of London Authority's jurisdiction. Any berths operating as NAABSA berths and vessels using these berths must follow this procedure. Berths not yet declared as NAABSA should also follow the guidance in this procedure.

The safe operation of berths declared as NAABSA is the berth operator's responsibility. The responsibility shall encompass that the vessel and the ground alongside the berth is safe and fit for purpose. The safe operation of the vessel is the responsibility of the vessel Master.

## 1. GUIDANCE TO BERTH OPERATORS

The safe operation of a berth that is declared as NAABSA is the responsibility of the berth operator. This responsibility includes ensuring that when inviting a vessel to take the ground alongside the berth, it is safe and fit for the purpose. Berths should be inspected by the berth operator on each occasion before a vessel berths, to ensure there are no obstructions or changes to the bed level, which could damage the vessel or not allow it to berth correctly or safely.

**Thames Byelaw 51.4** requires the operator of an operational berth where vessels can reasonably be expected to ground whilst berthed to have in place and operate a programme of inspections of the river bed at the operational berth as is required in order to ensure that the river water does not hide any danger, obstruction or changes to the river bed level at and alongside the operational berth capable of damaging a vessel using the operational berth.

To ensure that up-to-date information is held by the PLA and that vessels can be programmed safely, berth operators should arrange to have periodic surveys carried out and the results passed directly to the PLA Hydrographic department at the following address: [hydroadmin@pla.co.uk](mailto:hydroadmin@pla.co.uk)

To apply for recognised NAABSA berth status, berth operators should complete a NAABSA declaration of compliance available at: <https://pla.co.uk/naabsa-berth-procedure-0> and send to the harbour master at the following address: [harbourmaster@pla.co.uk](mailto:harbourmaster@pla.co.uk). Operators wishing to apply to the PLA Harbour Master must first meet the following requirements:

- Appropriate insurance must be in place covering the berth for this use.
- A full risk assessment must be carried out by the operator, adequately assessing the risks of the berth for this purpose.
- A survey must be carried out to determine depths, seabed profile and the presence of any debris. Debris identified during the survey must be removed prior to commencement of operations as NAABSA.
- A programme of regular inspections is in place to ensure the berth(s) is(are) inspected at low water to check for any new debris that may impact the operation of the berth.

- Procedures for reporting incidents and maintaining a quayside watch must be in place.

NAABSA Berth operators must also ensure they meet the following requirements at all times:

- Any objects, however small, that drop or fall onto the berth bed should be reported to the PLA Harbour Master immediately. This is necessary to prevent any channel obstruction or vessel damage. An impact assessment should then be conducted, and the item(s) recovered prior to use of the berth' if deemed a necessary/safety requirement. **Vertical quayside MOB ladders are not to be used for such recovery.**
- Berth operators are reminded that maintenance dredging is subject to the requirements of a river works licence before the work is carried out. For more information visit: <https://pla.co.uk/dredging>
- Berth operators are reminded of the requirements of the Thames Byelaws (Byelaw 51 – Requirement to Maintain and Survey and Inspect Operational Berths), which they must comply with at all times. Further details can be found on our website: <https://pla.co.uk/port-of-london-thames-byelaws>

The NAABSA berth status will remain valid for 12 months from the date of the acceptance letter from the PLA Harbour Master. The operator must submit a new declaration of compliance 30 days before the expiry date in writing to [harbourmaster@pla.co.uk](mailto:harbourmaster@pla.co.uk) Failure to renew NAABSA status may result in delays and possible cancellations to vessel bookings.

## 2. GUIDANCE TO AGENTS AND SHIP OPERATORS

The following details the procedure to be followed by the Agent or Ship Operator prior to the arrival of a vessel at a NAABSA berth.

Prior to arrival, the Agent/Ship Operator must confirm that:

- The vessel calling at the berth is suitable for operating at a NAABSA berth and has appropriate insurance and this is annotated as such on the vessel booking.
- The berth has been declared as a NAABSA berth by the operator and is recognised as such by the Port of London Authority.

## 3. GUIDANCE TO VESSEL MASTERS

The decision as to whether it is safe for a vessel to lay on the berth is the responsibility of the Master. To assist with the decision, the following advice should be given:

- The vessel must have appropriate insurance for the use of a NAABSA berth.
- The riverbed consists of soft level mud or silt at the berth.
- The berth operator has the responsibility that the berth has been dredged and monitored for depth and profile including the expectations that undulations may exist.
- Masters are reminded that it is their responsibility to ensure safe access (via a gangway) is maintained between the vessel and shore at all times and states of tides/loading when alongside. **Vertical quayside MOB ladders are not to be used for access.**
- Masters should risk assess the use of the berth, taking into account factors including, but not limited to, their vessel's hull profile and any protrusions from the hull.
- Masters should ensure that suitable firefighting arrangements can be provided at the berth.

- Masters should ensure that the vessel uses the appropriate intakes, such as cooling water and fire main, so as not to compromise the mechanical performance of the vessel with the intake of siltation and other such matter.
- Masters are advised to tend the vessel's mooring lines and monitor its attitude and position at all states of tide, particularly when the vessel is grounding or re-floating. Masters shall be aware that vessels do not always re-float at the time expected due to the nature of NAABSA berths, and the crew should be aware of this.
- Vessels should be close to even keel when taking the ground on NAABSA berths.
- Any objects, however small, that drop or fall onto the berth bed should be reported to the berth operator immediately.