



Australian Government
Defence

Introduction to the **Defence** **Seaworthiness** **Program**



Defence Seaworthiness Program
Australian Naval Seaworthiness Framework

DSwP Guidebook

Version: 1.0

October 2025

Note to readers

This guidebook is the first release and an introduction to the Defence Seaworthiness Program.

Every effort has been made to ensure the information in this booklet is accurate at the time of printing. However, this document is a guide and readers are reminded that the publications that define the Defence Seaworthiness Program remain the authoritative source.

October 2025



Foreword from the Defence Seaworthiness Authority



Seaworthiness underpins everything we do in the maritime domain. **The Defence Seaworthiness Program** provides the frameworks that I require as the Defence Seaworthiness Authority to be able to assure the Chief of the Defence

Force and the Secretary that our people are working in the safest possible environments, and that our platforms continue to meet their safety, environmental and international flag state obligations.

Warships, submarines, littoral vessels, and other maritime platforms are an amalgamation of highly complex, technical systems. Each system requires careful management, through dedicated maintenance schedules, upgrade cycles, certification, and governance measures. Adherence to these requirements provides us with confidence in the seaworthiness of our maritime assets.

The dynamic and evolving strategic situation in our region demands that our Fleet remains agile and prepared to sail at short notice, into all weather conditions, and responsive to a range of situations through the spectrum of disaster relief and constabulary operations, in competition, crisis and conflict.

The timelines of our operations do not always align with the maintenance schedules or upgrade cycles of our platforms. Flexibility is required to achieve essential sustainment

activities while also prioritising the success of our mission. Seaworthiness is a critical enabler to our ability to project maritime power. **The Defence Seaworthiness Program** enables us to keep seaworthiness front of mind in all that we do.

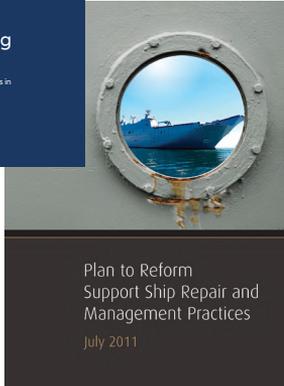
Under the program, those who are entrusted with the command and charge of our vessel operations are appointed to coordinate delivery against specified seaworthiness regulations and classification rules, with clearly defined accountabilities. It is my expectation that all hazards and risks in the maritime domain will be carefully managed to ensure seaworthiness is maintained, and that decisions will be made collaboratively, at the right level, and within the timeframes required.

As the Defence Seaworthiness Authority, I am committed to the **Defence Seaworthiness Program** and its frameworks. I expect that all who are involved in acquiring, sustaining or operating maritime capabilities are likewise committed. Our people are counting on it, and our mission depends on it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark D. Hammond', written in a cursive style.

Mark D. Hammond, AO
Vice Admiral, Royal Australian Navy
Defence Seaworthiness Authority

October 2025



The Evolution of Defence Seaworthiness

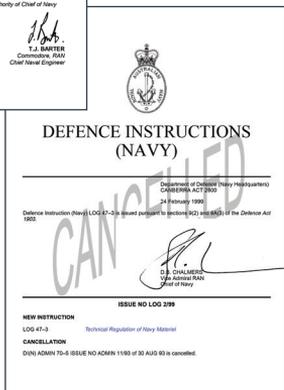
The maritime environment is dangerous and unpredictable. In the civilian sector, improved ship design and technology, advanced navigation systems, targeted regulation, risk management advances, and a stronger safety culture, have seen a reduction in vessels and lives lost at sea.

During the 1990s, the global shipping fleet lost more than 200 vessels a year. By 2014, the number halved and 2024 saw a record low of 27 vessels lost (Allianz, 2025: Safety and Shipping Review).

Civil maritime has demonstrated that smart, targeted regulation is effective. However, the unique and inherently dangerous nature of naval operations adds complexity to the regulatory space for Defence.

Technical regulation for Defence maritime safety emerged in the 1990s and was codified in 2003 with the *Australian Book of Reference (ABR) 6492 Navy Technical Regulations Manual*.

The Rizzo Review of 2011 identified major deficiencies in Navy governance, seaworthiness, management, and engineering. These deficiencies, along with pressures for regulatory reform across Defence, resulted in significant updates to the Navy technical regulations.



The Defence Seaworthiness Management System (DSwMS) was released in 2017 to provide a systematic approach to seaworthiness management by defining accountabilities and introducing independent layers of assurance between the Groups and Services and the Seaworthiness Regulator.

DSwMS has delivered many benefits for Defence seaworthiness and represented a sound governance framework. The evolving regulatory landscape, greater emphasis on safety and the environment, emerging technologies and other drivers of the Defence Strategic Review, made DSwMS too broad to use as a regulatory framework. This has resulted in the need to develop a new system of maritime regulations.

Further contributing to this complexity was the establishment of the Australian Naval Classification Authority in 2023, tasked with developing a contemporary, sovereign set of classification rules to assure the design and construction of Australian naval vessels, which duplicated some of the requirements of DSwMS.

Australia's strategic circumstances have substantially changed since DSwMS was introduced. Increased competition, rapid advances in technology, the planned introduction of nuclear powered submarines and the increasingly aggressive use of grey-zone tactics have seen the need for a new regulatory approach.

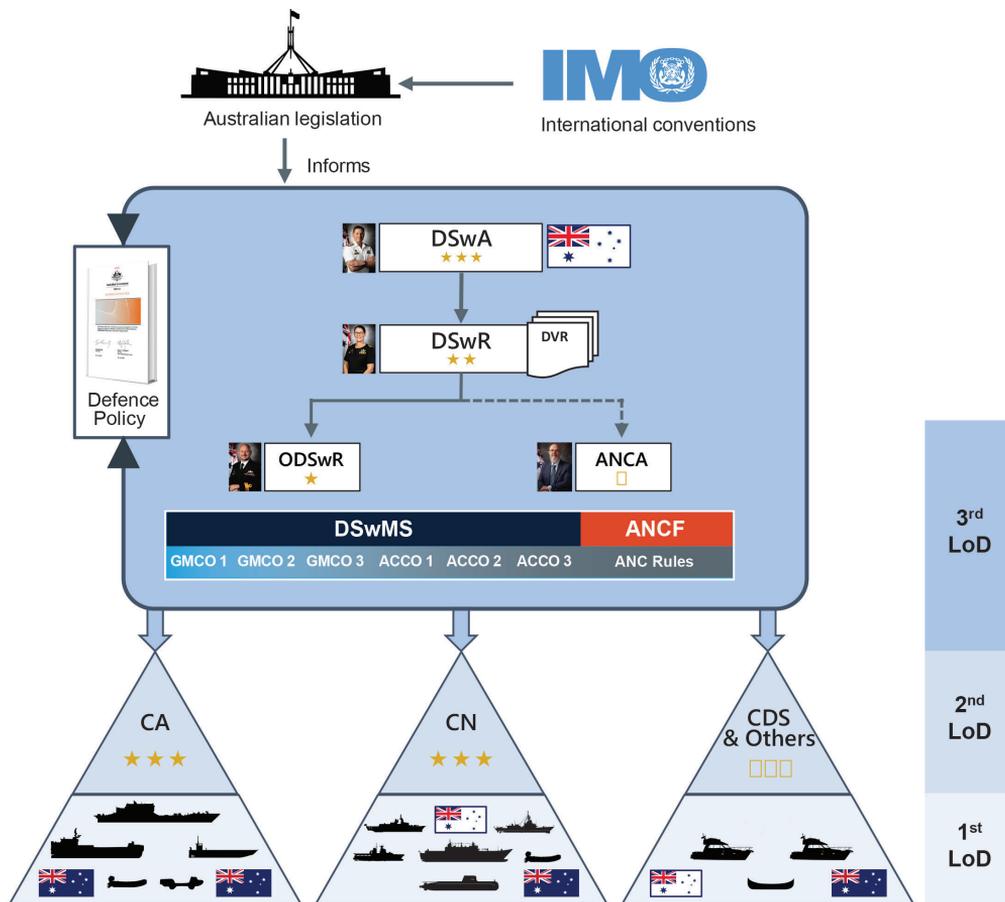


Figure 1: The Defence Seaworthiness Management System

A New Approach to Defence Seaworthiness

Defence must have justified confidence in its ability to deliver effective naval power. This naval power is underpinned by seaworthiness.

The **Defence Seaworthiness Program (DSwP)** brings together naval flag obligations, seaworthiness regulations and classification rules into one harmonised system to achieve the seaworthiness outcome:

To maximise the likelihood of achieving the specified operational effect for the defined tasking, where efforts have been made to eliminate or minimise so far as is reasonably practicable, hazards/risks to personnel, the public and the environment.

The DSwP assures that Defence complies with relevant international conventions, domestic legislation and regulations, while maximising opportunities for interoperability with coalition forces, global supply chains including overseas procurement.

The seaworthiness outcome is delivered by the seaworthiness community in response to the DSwP.

Successful implementation of the DSwP provides justified confidence that all naval vessels are safe to operate and operated safely and underpins the delivery of naval power in defence of Australia's national interests.

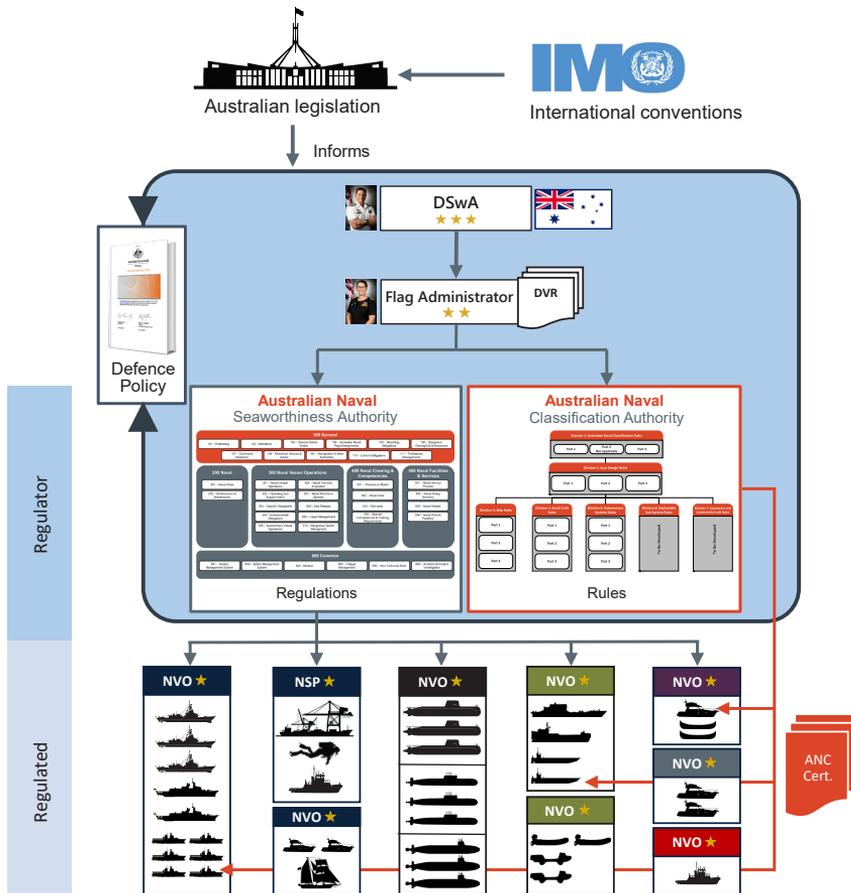


Figure 2: The Defence Seaworthiness Program

The Defence Seaworthiness Program

The DSWP comprises a system of harmonised frameworks that contain naval flag requirements, seaworthiness regulations and classification rules.

It has been designed to be:

- as international as possible and as Australian as necessary
- as civilian as possible and as military as necessary.

Under the DSWP, naval vessel seaworthiness is achieved if:

- a. there is demonstrated initial and continuing compliance with the regulations, including achievement of operating permits or certificates
- b. the naval vessel attains and maintains naval class, including compliance with the appropriate classification rules for the vessel.

Roles, Functions and Responsibilities

The Military Command Support Provision 1 - Defence Seaworthiness (MCS1) in the 2025 Defence Instruction is issued under the Defence Act 1903.

The MCS1 vests in the **Defence Seaworthiness Authority** (DSWA) the power to establish, manage and review the efficacy of the DSWP and appoints:

- Australian Naval Flag Administrator
- Assistant Secretary of the Australian Naval Classification Authority
- Director General of the Australian Naval Seaworthiness Authority.

The **Australian Naval Flag Administrator (ANFA)** is responsible for the **Australian Naval Flag (ANF) Framework** and **Requirements**.

The ANFA may also recognise the compliance arrangements of other authorities (i.e. the Australian Maritime Safety Authority; an Australian State or Territory; or an international jurisdiction like the United Kingdom or United States) to be used, in part or in full, to authorise naval vessel operations or to satisfy naval class.

Australian Naval Flag obligations related to seaworthiness are assured through the **Australian Naval Classification Authority (ANCA)** and the **Australian Naval Seaworthiness Authority (ANSA)**.

The ANCA is responsible for administering naval classification through the **Australian Naval Classification (ANC) Framework** and **Rules**.

The ANSA is responsible for regulating the operation of naval vessels, and promulgating the **Australian Naval Seaworthiness (ANS) Framework** and **Regulations**.

The **Naval Vessel Owner (NVOw)** is the person or organisation with overall control and management of a naval vessel over its lifetime, including responsibilities for:

- a. determining the capability of the naval vessel
- b. defining and formally articulating the specified operational effect for the vessel through an Operational and Support Intent (OSI)
- c. determining the timing and extent of upgrades and updates to the vessel throughout its life
- d. engaging organisations to acquire and sustain the vessel throughout its life.

In Defence, the NVOw will generally be at the three-star level and may appoint representatives to discharge their functions.

The **Naval Vessel Operator (NVO)** is the person or organisation with control and management of the day-to-day operation of the naval vessel. Within Defence, the NVO will generally be at the one-star level.

A person or organisation providing naval services regulated under the ANS Regulations is a **Naval Service Provider (NSP)**. This includes the operation of naval ports and facilities, the management of designated naval waters and the provision of naval diving operations.



Figure 3: Appointments under the Defence Seaworthiness Program

Overview of the Defence Seaworthiness Program

The DSwP frameworks encompass:

1. **Naval Flag** provides independent and justified confidence that naval vessels operated by Defence are identifiable, registered and seaworthy in compliance with international obligations and Australian legislation.
2. **Naval Classification** ensures naval vessels attain and maintain naval class to provide justified confidence they are safe to operate in accordance with their approved OSI.
3. **Seaworthiness Regulation** authorises naval vessel operations to provide justified confidence that a vessel within naval class can be operated safely in accordance with the OSI for the vessel.

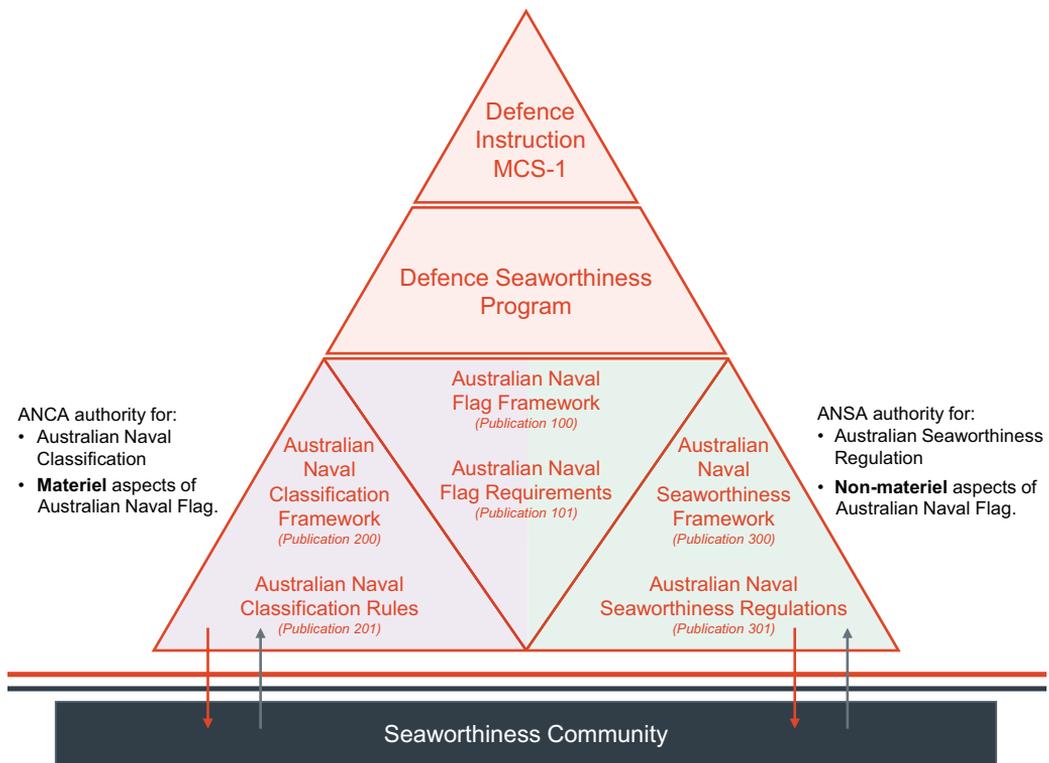
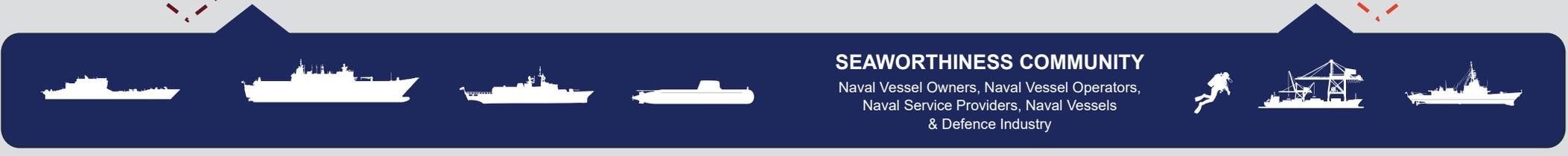
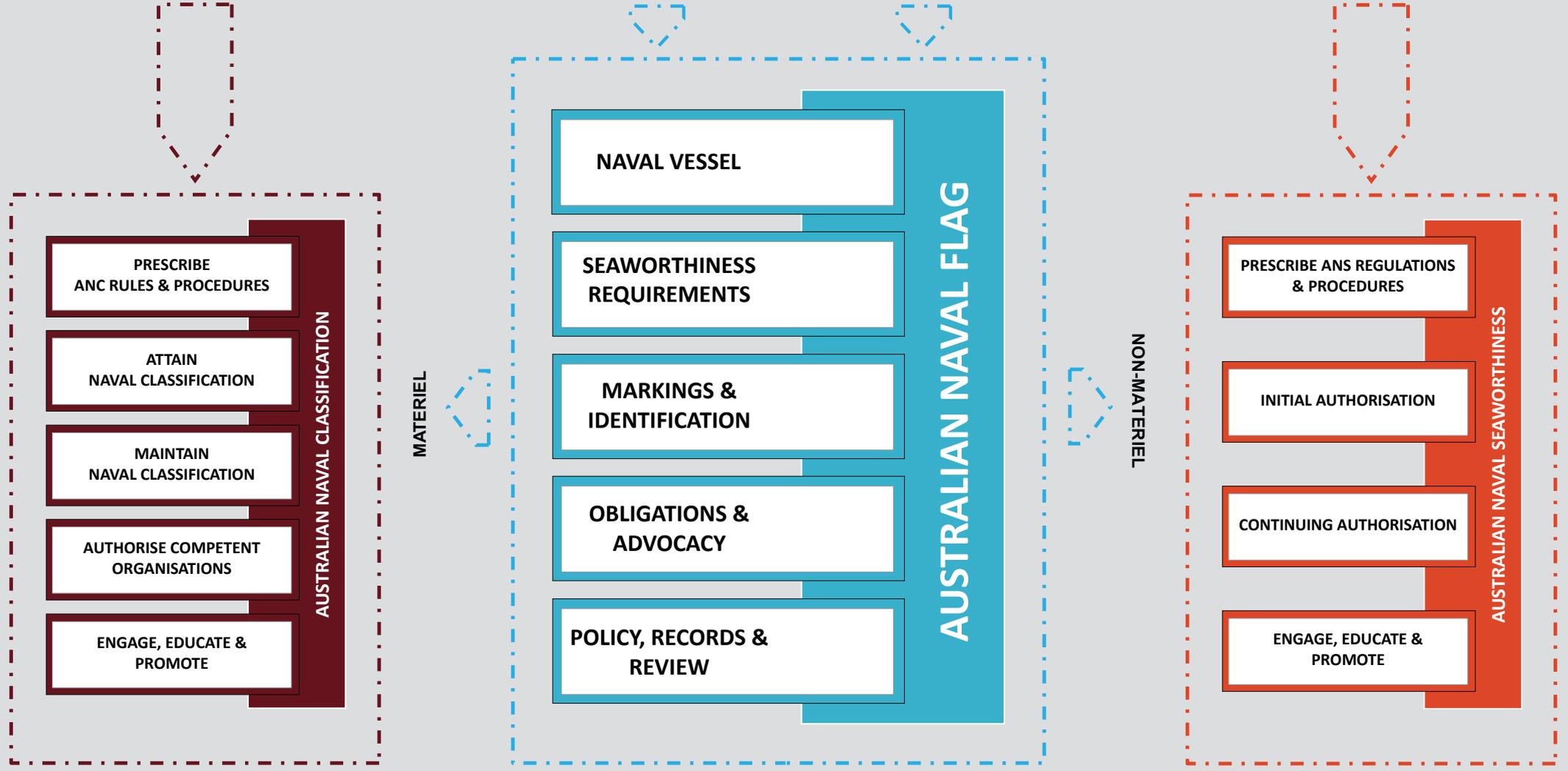


Figure 4: Overview of the Defence Seaworthiness Program

SECDEF / CDF



Independent Review Board



1. Naval Flag

The ANFA, appointed by the DSWA, administers naval flag.

The administration of Naval Flag provides a mechanism for Defence to:

- determine that a maritime vessel is a naval vessel
- confirm that naval vessels are on an Australian Naval Vessel Register or another register recognised by ANFA
- confirm that a naval vessel displays the appropriate flag
- confirm that naval vessels are designed, constructed and maintained

to appropriate classification rules and are in naval class

- confirm that a naval vessel is authorised to operate in accordance with the appropriate regulations
- facilitate reviews and investigations which support continuous improvement of the DSWP.

The naval flag requirements also support Defence in the discharge of flag state administration obligations that are imposed on naval vessels through international law.

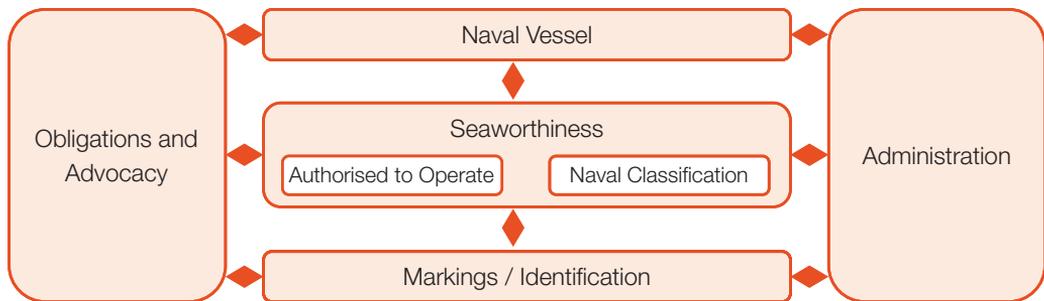


Figure 5: Naval Flag arrangements

The Australian Naval Flag Framework

The ANFA is responsible for administering naval flag and the ANF Framework, which is established by the policy, requirements, and procedures contained in the following Defence Seaworthiness Publications (DSP). These

publications are currently under development and will be released progressively:

- DSP 100 – Australian Naval Flag Framework
- DSP 101 – Australian Naval Flag Requirements
- DSP 102 – Australian Naval Flag Procedures.

2. Naval Classification

The ANCA is responsible for administering naval class.

All naval vessels must be in naval class. In order to meet the requirements for naval class, the vessel must be designed, constructed and maintained in accordance with the ANC Rules.

The approved rules for the naval vessel will depend on the vessel's specific OSI and may leverage civilian and/or foreign military compliance arrangements.

Satisfying naval class provides justified confidence that a naval vessel is safe to operate.

The Australian Naval Classification Framework

Naval Classification is the process of baselining the materiel compliance (design, construction and maintenance) of a naval vessel against established rules, to ensure the vessel meets relevant legislative, statutory, safety and environmental obligations.

ANCA is responsible for both implementing and administering the ANC Framework. The framework encompasses the policy and rules which are contained within the following DSP. These publications are currently under development and will be released progressively:

- a. DSP 200 - Australian Naval Classification Framework
- b. DSP 201 - Australian Naval Classification Rules
- c. DSP 202 - Australian Naval Classification Design Notes

The ANC Framework is applied through an operating model comprising of two distinct phases shown in Figure 6.

1. Attaining Naval Classification

This is the process of applying the ANC Rules in the context of the vessel's OSI to develop an approved ANC Basis. Verification of permissible

evidence against the ANC Basis is documented in an ANC Record. This record is used to demonstrate compliance and support the issuance of the ANC Certificate or other ANC document.

2. Maintaining Naval Classification

This is the process of ensuring the ANC Certificate remains valid throughout the life of the naval vessel's operation.

The Australian Naval Classification Rules

The ANC Rules include processes, goals, functional objectives and performance requirements for defined technical areas, which can be applied to any naval vessel within the context of its OSI.

The ANC Rules are published and managed by the ANCA and are applied through seven divisions:

Division 1: ANC Rules defines how the ANC Rules are applied and enforced.

Division 2: Core Design Rules is a common division and applies to all naval vessels.

Division 3: Ships Rules applies to surface naval vessels > 24m length overall.

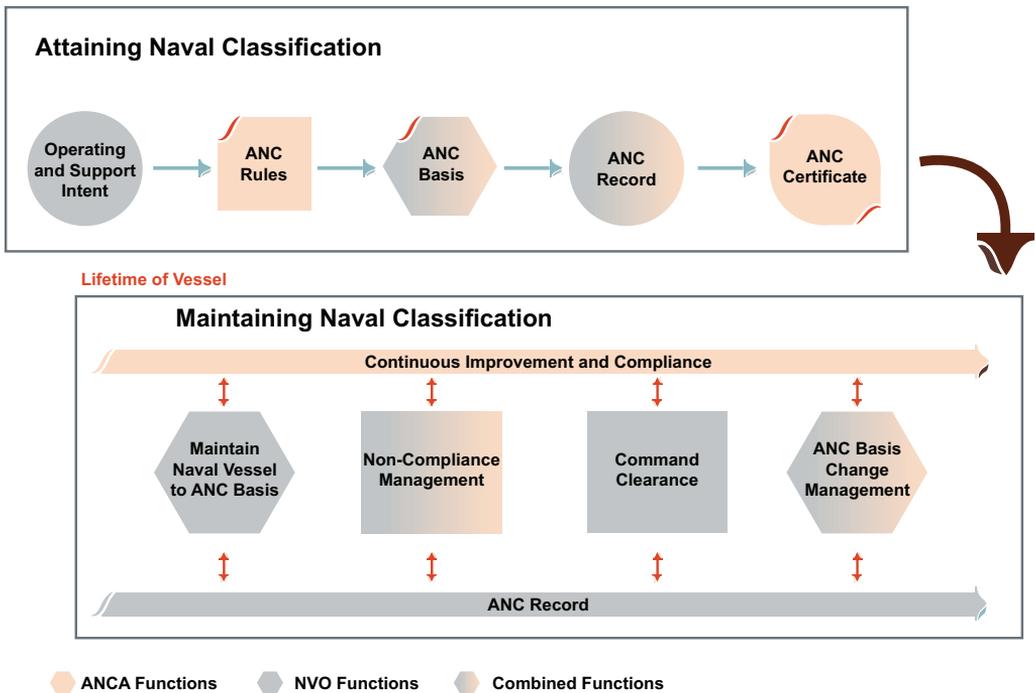


Figure 6: Australian Naval Classification (ANC) Framework Operating Model

Division 4: Small Craft Rules applies to surface naval vessels < 24m length overall.

Division 5: Remote and Autonomous Systems (RAS) Rules applies to surface or sub-surface autonomously-operated (including remotely) uncrewed naval vessels.

Division 6: Support and Deployable Subsystem Rules applies to naval support and deployable subsystems.

Division 7: Submarines and Submersible Craft Rules applies to crewed submarines and submersible craft.

Structure of an ANC Rule

Each of the ANC Rules is structured in three parts:

Part 1: Rules specifies the mandatory requirements that must be applied in the design and construction of a naval vessel. They are high-level, goal-based requirements which incorporate goals, functional objectives and performance requirements.

Part 2: Solutions satisfy the requirements of Part 1 Rules. The solutions may comprise of national or international standard, other prescriptive requirements or a Design Note issued by the ANCA. Alternative solutions may be used where approved by the ANCA.

Part 3: Guidance provides information on the development of alternative solutions or variances to the ANC Basis. This guidance is informative only.

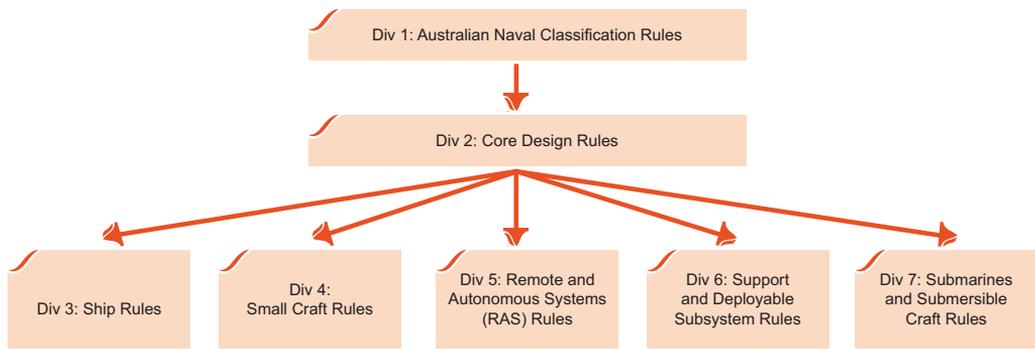


Figure 7: ANC Rules Division Structure

The Australian Naval Classification Design Notes

ANC Design Notes consist of detailed design requirements for use in the application of the ANC Rules within the Australian context. Design notes embody the sovereign codes of practice for a naval vessel.

3. Seaworthiness Regulation

The authorisation of naval vessel operations is administered by the ANSA.

Naval vessel operations by Defence must be authorised and aligned with the OSI for the vessel and within naval class. Naval vessel operations will generally be conducted under an **Australian Naval Vessel Operator Certificate (ANVOC)** by an accountable officer, nominally at the one-star level.

Authorisation for the operation of a naval vessel will depend on the vessel's specific OSI.

The authorisation provides justified confidence that appropriate operating conditions and limitations are specified and applied to the naval vessel, including that the vessel operates with the appropriate complement of qualified, competent, current and medically fit crew.

The Australian Naval Seaworthiness Framework

The ANSA is responsible for administering the ANS Framework which is established by the policy, regulations, and procedures contained within the following DSP. These publications are currently under development and will be released progressively:

- a. DSP 300 - Australian Naval Seaworthiness Framework
- b. DSP 301 - Australian Naval Seaworthiness Regulations
- c. DSP 302 - Australian Naval Seaworthiness Procedures.

The Australian Naval Seaworthiness Regulations

The ANS Regulations are applicable to:

- the design, construction, test and evaluation, maintenance, operation and crewing of naval vessels
- naval services, facilities and waters.

The ANS Regulations aim to:

- enhance the safety of naval vessels, NVO and naval services, facilities and waters, with particular emphasis on preventing naval accidents and incidents and on protecting the environment
- recognise the unique nature of Defence operations and maintain the ability of Commanders to respond to urgent and compelling operational imperatives.

Structure of the ANS Regulations

The ANS Regulations comprise six series of regulations:

- 1. 100 series – General:** contains the application provisions, definitions and the objects of the ANS Regulations. Establishes naval flag and vessel registration requirements, and command clearance arrangements. Contains safety obligations for operators of naval vessels, designers, builders and suppliers of naval vessels, crew and NSP, maintenance, upkeep and upgrade requirements.
- 2. 200 series – Naval class:** contains the requirement for naval vessels to be in naval class and provides guidance for achieving this. Contains maintenance, upkeep and upgrade requirements.
- 3. 300 series – Naval vessel operations:** contains the requirements and pathways for naval vessel operations to be authorised. Applies conditions to the operation of naval vessels, in accordance with the

OSI. Contains autonomous vessels, test and evaluation, naval permits to operate, sea release, cargo and dangerous goods management.

- 4. 400 series – Naval crewing and crew competencies:** contains requirements for crewing and crew competency, maximum loading and the management of persons on board.
- 5. 500 series – Naval facilities and services:** contains certification requirements for operators of naval facilities and providers of naval services. Applies standards and requirements for the operation of naval diving, ports and facilities, and to the management of naval waters.
- 6. 600 series – Common:** contains the management system and standard requirements for organisations designing, constructing, operating and maintaining naval vessels, and those operating naval facilities or providing naval services.







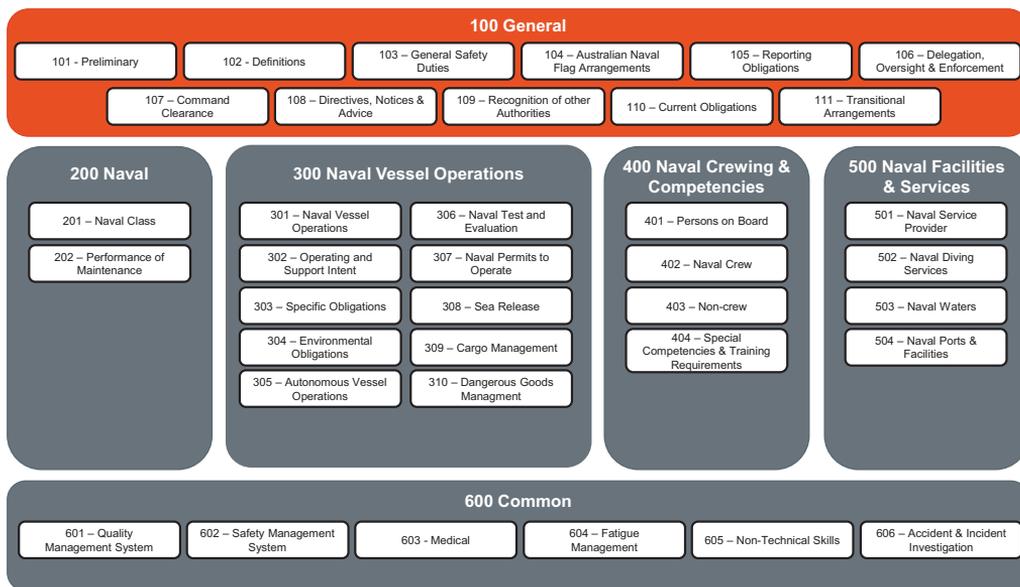


Figure 8: Australian Naval Seaworthiness Regulations

Each ANS Regulation includes the following:

- **Purpose:** an explanation of the reason for the regulation and an overview of the content of the regulation.
- **Regulation:** an outcome-based statement of requirements.
- **Acceptable means of compliance:** a means of complying with the requirements. An alternative means of compliance may be used providing it is approved and is at least as acceptable as the means of compliance it replaces.
- **Guidance material:** non-binding explanatory and interpretation material. Provides information and examples to assist with understanding of the requirements.

In addition to providing the acceptable means of compliance and guidance material, ANSA and ANCA will apply a graduated and proportionate enforcement approach and may issue:

- **Seaworthiness Directives:** where there is a safety risk or hazard that requires appropriate action.
- **Seaworthiness Notices:** to promulgate matters relevant to the application and interpretation of the ANS Regulations and ANC Rules.
- **Seaworthiness Advice:** to promote awareness of safety issues and facilitate understanding of the ANS Regulations and the ANC Rules, and the obligations they impose.

Vessels Subject to the Defence Seaworthiness Program

All **naval vessels** are subject to the DSwP. This includes any maritime vessel that is both:

- a. operated for government purposes
- b. operated by, or on behalf of Defence, whether owned, leased, borrowed, or otherwise appropriated by Defence.

Maritime vessels include ships, small craft, support and deployable sub-systems, autonomous (including remotely operated) vessels, submarines and submersible craft.

Naval vessels include any maritime vessel operated, or intended for operation, for government purposes by or on behalf of Defence, irrespective of legal ownership; including whether a vessel is owned, leased, borrowed, or otherwise appropriated by Defence.

Vessels operated by Defence contractors

Authorisation can be given to commercial organisations where the DSwP has been called out as a contracted provision by Defence.

Defence vessel used for training and recreational purposes

Defence vessels used for training and recreational purposes are naval vessels. These vessels are typically smaller and their operation carries lower risk. They may not require operation under an ANC Certificate or an ANVOC, on the

condition they meet the appropriate approved standard, for example state and territory legislation or regulation.

Broad definition of Naval Vessel

The definition of naval vessel under the DSwP is intentionally broad and intended to capture and support the diverse range of vessels and vessel operations undertaken by Defence.

While vessels being used in these operations may fall within different legal jurisdictions, all will fall within the scope of the DSwP policy framework where they meet the definition of naval vessel.

The characterisation and categorisation of naval vessels under the DSwP supports Defence's obligation to comply with various international maritime conventions and Commonwealth and State legislation.

Flexibility Mechanisms and Centrality of Command

No element of the DSWP is intended to constrain the ability of Defence to employ naval power in its role to defend Australia and its national interests.

The operational effect for a naval vessel is approved through an evolving OSI, which provides a basis for determining the applicable naval flag, classification rules and seaworthiness regulations.

In addition, the DSWP empowers the NVO to temporarily deviate from the OSI in order to deliver intended capability effects. These flexibility mechanisms require the risk of the deviation to Defence personnel, the public and the environment to be considered and eliminated or minimised, so far as reasonably practicable.

The flexibility mechanisms of the DSWP include:

- a. **Naval Permits** to operate, which allow naval vessels to operate under defined conditions in the absence of other certificates, or outside of the terms of the certificate.
- b. **Command Clearances**, which is a mechanism within the DSWP that allows naval vessels to operate outside of their approved certificates where there is an urgent or compelling operational requirement, and there is insufficient time to seek a naval permit.



The Last Word on Seaworthiness

Seaworthiness is not merely a regulatory obligation — it is the foundation upon which naval capability is built. A vessel that is safe, reliable, and fit for purpose enables its crew to operate confidently in all conditions, maximising mission effectiveness while minimising risk. By maintaining robust seaworthiness standards, Defence ensures that its vessels, systems, and people remain prepared to respond to national security challenges at any time. This commitment protects lives, safeguards assets, and preserves operational availability.

Ultimately, seaworthiness underpins naval power. A fleet that cannot sail, fight, and sustain operations at sea is no fleet at all. Ensuring seaworthiness is therefore essential to sustaining Australia's maritime advantage, projecting power where needed, and fulfilling Defence's mission. By embedding seaworthiness in every aspect of planning, maintenance, and operations, Defence guarantees its ability to act decisively — today and into the future.

For further information contact:

ANCA email: anca.communications@defence.gov.au

ANSA email: seaworthiness.correspondence@defence.gov.au

