



Maritime &
Coastguard
Agency

Consultation Document:

Consultation on the draft of The Merchant
Shipping (EPIRB and PLB Registration)
(Radiocommunications) (Amendment)
Regulations 2026

October 2025

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Section 1: Overview of this consultation

Aim

- 1.1. This consultation seeks your views on the draft of The Merchant Shipping (EPIRB and PLB Registration) (Radiocommunications) (Amendment) Regulations 2026 (“the new regulations”) (Annex A).
- 1.2. The new regulations have six aims. These are:
 - a) To update the governing legislation by replacing the existing instrument: The Merchant Shipping (EPIRB Registration) Regulations 2000;
 - b) To reflect changes in technology by updating the registration requirements for Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRBs);
 - c) To introduce the requirement to register Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) used on ships, hovercraft and watercraft to enable His Majesty’s Coastguard (HMCG) to take Search and Rescue (SAR) action more efficiently;
 - d) To strengthen sanctions for breach of the registration requirements;
 - e) To introduce these changes for UK flagged ships and hovercraft (and to include watercraft falling within the scope of the Merchant Shipping (Watercraft) Order 2023);
 - f) To make amendments to other Statutory Instruments.

Views Sought

- 1.3. Consultees are invited to comment on any aspect of this consultation. However, you are specifically invited to respond to the following questions:
 - Whether the proposed new Regulations and accompanying Merchant Shipping Notice give effect to the changes to the registration requirements which are clear and appropriate.
 - Whether the proposed offences and penalties act as an effective deterrent for non-compliance.
 - Whether the proposed guidance in Marine Guidance Note 665 (M+F) Amendment 1 (Annex C) is adequate.
- 1.4. A full list of consultation questions is contained in Section 5 of this consultation.

Deadline for responses

- 1.5. Responses are welcomed from **13 October 2025 (09:00) until 7 November 2025 (23:59)**. For an overview of the timetable please refer to section 4 of this document.

Section 2: Areas for consideration

Introduction

2. The Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) recognised in 2006 the importance of registering 406MHz EPIRBs in an international database to aid SAR situations.
 - 2.1. As a result of the MSC decision, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) has an international obligation to ensure that EPIRBs on UK flagged vessels are registered. However, it is a decision for the UK only to ensure that PLBs are registered. The requirements for EPIRB registration are currently governed by the Merchant Shipping (EPIRB Registration) Regulations 2000, but this legislation requires updating to reflect changes in technology relating to EPIRBs and to give effect to the UK decision to register PLBs.
 - 2.2. Both EPIRB and PLB registration will ensure that HMCG SAR is more efficient. In parallel with any SAR response being initiated, the process of alert validation is performed by HMCG. Registering beacons expedites the mission as the search target will be known plus further amplifying information could be gained through the emergency contacts, further assisting search efforts.
 - 2.3. To strengthen the UK's maritime safety framework, the proposed new Regulations will amend EPIRB registration requirements and introduce new PLB registration requirements.
 - 2.4. The provision for enforcement has also been updated to reflect the new, more comprehensive registration requirements with appropriate offences and detention powers (for which see below the specific text under "Penalties and Offences").

Proposed Changes

- a) The existing legislation governing the registration of EPIRBs will be replaced and updated to reflect changes in technology and, for the first time, will require the registration of PLBs. The new regulations will apply the additional registration requirements to UK flagged ships and hovercraft, and to watercraft falling within the scope of the Merchant Shipping (Watercraft) Order 2023.
- b) The new regulations do not require purchase of equipment, but rather they require registration of equipment which has already been purchased. Registration is free and can be accessed online.
- c) The amendments to the Merchant Shipping (Radiocommunications) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 will implement discrete changes to international safety requirements under SOLAS Chapter IV (radiocommunications), while the amendment to the Merchant Shipping (Radio Installations) Regulations 1998 will update the definition of EPIRB for the purposes of that instrument and reinstate the application of domestic radio regulations to ships operating in category A, B, C and D waters. The further provision in the new regulations will make minor

consequential amendments to one other statutory instrument.

- d) The proposed new Regulations will make provision for the changes described above in respect of UK flagged ships and hovercraft, and also to watercraft falling within the scope of the Merchant Shipping (Watercraft) Order 2023. The proposed new Regulations will therefore make consequential amendments to the Merchant Shipping (Watercraft) Order 2023 to ensure the 2023 Order makes the corresponding changes to the requirements for watercraft.

Penalties and Offences

- 2.5. The MCA, as the UK's maritime regulatory and enforcement authority, has responsibility for both delivering and enforcing the Government's maritime regulatory objectives relating to ships, seafarers and the seas around the UK. The MCA's approach to breaches of maritime legislation relies on a range of civil and criminal remedies in which, like many other regulatory regimes in the UK, civil and criminal sanctions sit alongside each other to enable the MCA to take the most proportionate action in relation to a particular breach. The decision on what is the most proportionate approach is determined by matters such as the importance of the requirement being breached, the gravity of the contravention, the effect of the contravention on third parties etc.
- 2.6. MCA surveyors have enforcement and sanction powers which can be applied locally to ships calling at UK ports. The MCA's powers to use civil sanctions are primarily contained in the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 ("MSA"). These powers, including improvement and prohibition orders, are limited in scope and available only for specific purposes. Other than the power to detain a ship, it is not possible to replicate all the civil sanctions in the MSA in secondary legislation implementing international obligations or other regulatory objectives as there is no power to do so in the MSA. Because these civil sanctions are contained in primary legislation (the MSA), if they are needed, the sanctions will be enforced directly under the MSA. The general regulatory approach, in line with the MCA's published enforcement regulations, is to use these civil sanctions whenever possible before using criminal offences.
- 2.7. The new regulations use civil penalties where it is possible to do so. This includes the ability to detain ships or issue improvement and prohibition notices if the prohibitions or requirements in the draft regulations are breached.
- 2.8. Maritime regulatory requirements govern both safety and pollution prevention. As such, their purpose includes the prevention of loss of life or injury to persons and the protection of the marine environment and adjoining coastlines. These very compelling objectives necessitate the availability of criminal sanctions in the more serious cases and provide a vital deterrent.

- 2.9. All of the offences are triable either way (as either a summary offence or an indictable offence). The maximum penalties are:
- on summary conviction, a fine of a maximum up to the statutory maximum, which in England and Wales is unlimited, and in Scotland or Northern Ireland a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum; and
 - on indictment, an unlimited fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years.
- 2.10. A ship, hovercraft, or watercraft which does not comply with the applicable requirements of the new Regulations may be detained.
- 2.11. The enforcement arrangements are set out in Part 3 of the proposed new Regulations. The offences are summarised in the table below. It is a defence for a person charged with an offence to prove that they took all reasonable steps to avoid the commission of the offence.

Provision/offence	Subject matter	
Regulation 7(1)	If the owner or master enables a ship to proceed, or attempt to proceed, to sea or on any voyage, or arrive within United Kingdom waters, in breach of any of the requirements in these Regulations applicable to or in relation to that ship, other than a matter to which regulation 7(2) or (3) applies, the owner and the master are each guilty of an offence in respect of each case of non-compliance	<p>On summary conviction, a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum/ on indictment, a fine.</p> <p>On conviction on indictment, a fine or a sentence of imprisonment of up to 2 years, or a fine, or both.</p> <p>Applies to owner and master.</p>
Regulation 7(2)	An owner of a PLB in breach of a requirement in regulation 6(1) or (5)(a) is guilty of an offence.	<p>On summary conviction, a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum/ on indictment, an unlimited fine.</p> <p>On conviction on indictment, a fine or a sentence of imprisonment of up to 2 years, or a fine, or both.</p> <p>Applies to PLB owner.</p>
Regulation 7(3)	A holder of a PLB in breach of a requirement in regulation 6(3) or (5)(c) is guilty of an offence.	<p>On summary conviction, a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum/ on indictment, an unlimited fine.</p> <p>On conviction on indictment, a fine or a sentence of imprisonment of up to 2 years, or a fine, or both.</p> <p>Applies to PLB holder.</p>

Merchant Shipping Notice (MSN) 1924 (M+F) – EPIRB and PLB registration requirements

- 2.12. A Merchant Shipping Notice (MSN) 1924 (M+F) (Annex B) has been drafted to supplement the new regulations. It will contain enforceable requirements and therefore is included in this consultation package. The purpose of the MSN is to:
- a) specify the registration requirements for EPIRBs;
 - b) specify the registration requirements for PLBs.

Section 3: Responding to this consultation

- 3.1. There are specific questions highlighted in section 5 of this document and information on how to respond to this consultation document.

Audience

- 3.2. Anyone may respond to this consultation and consideration will be given to all responses. We will be particularly interested to hear from ship owners, shipping companies, protection and indemnity clubs, port and terminal operators, individuals, leisure users and other parties with an interest in shipping and the marine environment.

Duration

- 3.3. This consultation is open for **4 weeks** from 13 October 2025 (09:00). The deadline for responses is 7 November 2025 (23:59).

Submitting your response

- 3.4. The response form is available at Section 5 of this document. Consultation responses should be emailed to Radio@mcga.gov.uk
- 3.5. Any questions should be received prior to the end date of the consultation as mentioned above. It may not be possible to consider comments received after the closing date.
- 3.6. When responding, representative groups are asked to give a summary of the people and organisations they represent, and where relevant who else they have consulted in reaching their conclusions.

Freedom of Information

- 3.7. Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.
- 3.8. If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence.

- 3.9. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information, we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department/MCA.

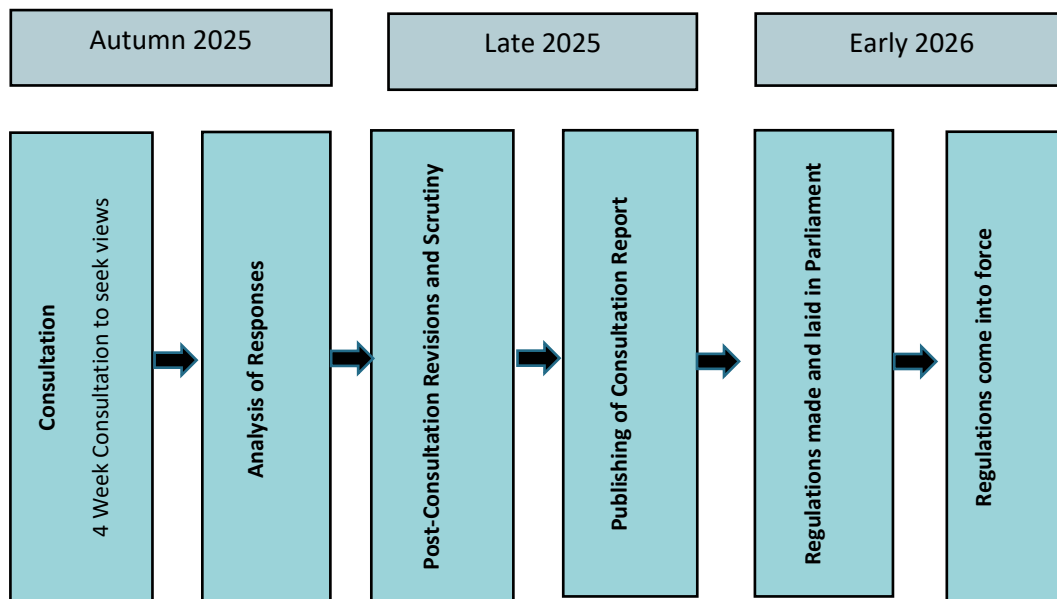
Data Protection

- 3.10. The MCA is carrying out this consultation to gather evidence to inform the development and implementation of regulations and legislation in accordance with section 86(4) of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 and section 117(2)(c) of the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003. If your answers contain information that allows you to be identified, under data protection law, the MCA, as an Executive Agency of the Department for Transport, will be the Controller for this information.
- 3.11. The MCA will use your contact details to send you information about the consultation, for example if we need to ask follow-up questions. You do not have to give us this personal information but if you do choose to provide it, it will not be used for any other purpose without your permission.
- 3.12. Details about how the MCA looks after personal data, your rights, and how to contact our Data Protection Manager can be found on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)^[1].
- 3.13. Your information will be kept securely on the MCA's IT system and any written responses will be held in a secure file and kept for up to five years.
- 3.14. If you do not wish to remain on this list, please reply and let us know at Radio@mcga.gov.uk

^[1] <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/maritime-and-coastguard-agency/about/personal-information-charter>

Section 4: Outline of plans beyond this consultation

- 4.1. Once this consultation closes, we will review all responses. In considering the responses we will apply appropriate weight to those from organisations and individuals with specialist knowledge of the subject area.
- 4.2. Responses will be analysed in November 2025 with the aim to publish an overview of the responses and the MCA's comments by February 2026. This will be available from: www.gov.uk/government/publications
- 4.3. Where appropriate the draft of the proposed new Regulations, the draft MSN, accompanying guidance and De Minimis Options Assessment (DMOA) (Annex D) will be revised to take into consideration the consultation responses.
- 4.4. Our aim is for the Merchant Shipping (EPIRB and PLB Registration) (Radiocommunications) (Amendment) Regulations 2026 to come into force on 3 April 2026. The Regulations will be published on www.legislation.gov.uk
- 4.5. Every effort will be made to publish the revised accompanying guidance on GOV.UK in advance of the Regulations coming into force.
- 4.6. An overview of the timetable is below for reference:



Section 5: Response form

What is your name? _____

What is your email address? _____

What is your job title? _____

When responding please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation:

- I am responding as an individual
- I am responding on behalf of an organisation

(name of organisation) _____

Please check the box that best describes you as a respondent and the size of your organisation:

Respondent Type

- Classification Society
- Government Agency/Department
- Individual
- Legal representative
- Protection & Indemnity
- Seafarer
- Ship Operator
- Ship Owner
- Trade Union
- Other

(please describe) _____

Size of Organisation

- Large business (over 250 staff)
- Medium business (50 to 250 staff)
- Micro business (up to 9 staff)
- Small business (10 to 49 staff)

Consultation Questions

Section 5.1

- a) We are proposing that the responsibility for registering a PLB lies with the PLB owner. Do you agree that the PLB owner should have primary responsibility to register the PLB?

- Yes, I agree
 No, I don't agree

If no, please add further details in the comment box below.

Section 5.2

- a) Do you consider the division of responsibility for PLB registration between the PLB owner, ship owner/master, and PLB holder to be clear and practical in operational contexts?

- Yes
 No

Please add further details in the comment box below.

Section 5.3

- a) Do you think that the proposed new regulations and accompanying Merchant Shipping Notice will implement the requirements of both EPIRB and PLB registration clearly and in a way which is effective?

- Yes
 No

If no, please add further details in the comment box below.

Section 5.4

- a) Do you foresee any challenges in ensuring compliance with the requirement to notify the Secretary of State of changes to registered particulars? E.g. access to internet; technological restrictions; lack of information; lack of beacon owner details.

- Yes
 No

If yes, please add further details in the comment box below.

Section 5.5

- a) Does the updated MGN 665 (M+F) (Amendment 1) provide enough information and guidance to meet your needs?

- Yes
 No

If no, please add further details in the comment box below.

Section 5.6

- a) Do you feel that the proposed penalties will act as an effective deterrent for non-compliance with the requirements of the proposed new regulations?

- Yes
 No

If no, please provide a brief explanation.

b) Do you consider that you have received sufficient notification of the requirements with which you will have to comply?

- Yes
- No

If No, please provide relevant details and evidence.

Section 5.7

Do you have any additional comments to add to the response?

Please return completed response forms to Radio@mcga.gov.uk

Alternatively, responses may be posted to:

UK Technical Services – Navigation (Radio)
Maritime & Coastguard Agency
Spring Place,
105 Commercial Road,
Southampton,
SO15 1EG

Section 6: Conduct of this consultation

- 6.1. This consultation has been conducted in accordance with the Cabinet Office Consultation Principles.

Consultation principles

- 6.2. The Cabinet Office Consultation Principles can be found at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/691383/Consultation Principles 1 .pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/691383/Consultation_Principles_1.pdf)

Feedback on conduct of consultation

- 6.3. If you have any comments regarding the conduct of this consultation, please contact the Consultation Co-ordinator at consultation.coordinator@mcga.gov.uk.
- 6.4. We are continually trying to improve the way in which we conduct consultations and appreciate your views. We would be grateful if you could complete and return the attached feedback form. These should be submitted to the Consultation Co-ordinator and are not affected by the deadline for this consultation.
- 6.5. If you require this consultation in an alternative format, please contact either the Consultation Co-ordinator or the named official conducting this consultation.

MCA CONSULTATION FEEDBACK FORM

1. Please indicate on which Consultation you are providing feedback:

.....

2a. Please indicate whether you are responding on behalf of:

- Yourself as an Individual
- A Trade Association
- A Company
- A Government Organisation
- A Trade Union
- Other
(please specify) _____

2b. If you are representing a company, please indicate the size of your company:

- Micro (1-9 employees)
- Small (10-49 employees)
- Medium (50-249 employees)
- Large (250+ employees)

2c. Please indicate whether you accessed this consultation package through:

- Post
- email
- Website

3. Please rate the quality of this consultation regarding accuracy, good English and spelling:

- Very good
- Good
- Average
- Poor
- Very Poor

4. Please rate the format of the consultation presentation (layout, Annexes etc.):

- Very good
- Good
- Average
- Poor
- Very Poor

5. Please rate the consultation in terms of how clear and concise you felt it was:

- Very good
- Good
- Average
- Poor
- Very Poor

6. Did you feel that the consultation was conducted over a sufficient period of time?

- Yes
- No

7. Were any representative groups, organisations or companies not consulted who you felt should have been?

- Yes
- No

If yes, who? _____

8. Please let us have any suggestions for improvement or other comments you wish to make about this consultation below:

Thank you for your time. Please return this form to:

Consultation Co-ordinator,
Maritime and Coastguard Agency,
Spring Place, Bay 3/26, 105 Commercial Road
Southampton SO15 1EG
Or e-mail it to: consultation.coordinator@mcga.gov.uk

If you are happy to supply your name, in case we need to contact you to discuss your views further, please enter it below (this is optional, and your feedback will still be taken into account if you wish to remain anonymous):

Name _____

Tel. No. _____

Please note that the deadline for responses to the Consultation itself does not apply to the return of this form.