

4 July 2025

Community Media Alert

Serious breach of marine safety by a large cargo ship on the Great Barrier Reef

Vigilant monitoring by vessel traffic officers at the Maritime Safety Queensland REEFVTS (Reef Vessel Traffic Service) centre in Townsville helped prevent a potentially serious maritime safety breach in the Great Barrier Reef.

Like air traffic controllers of the sea, Maritime Safety Queensland's vessel traffic officers work around the clock to keep Queensland's waters—and our precious marine environments—safe.

On 8 June 2025, REEF VTS officers identified that the 200-metre bulk carrier *MV Leyla Aksoy* had entered the Hydrographers Passage Compulsory Pilotage Area. This is some 130km off the coast of Mackay in the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). They entered without permission and without a marine pilot on board - contravening mandatory pilotage rules in the World Heritage-listed marine park, which are in place to protect the Great Barrier Reef and the Queensland coast. Marine pilots are highly skilled maritime professionals who guide ships through specific pilotage areas, ensuring safe and efficient navigation, on board.

Maritime Safety Queensland's REEFVTS officer instructed the vessel to immediately alter course and return to a safe position outside the restricted zone in the Coral Sea, which the vessel complied with. REEFVTS monitored the vessel closely and ensured it remained well clear of the outer edge of the Great Barrier Reef. MSQ reported the breach of safety protocols to both the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA). The vessel eventually embarked a marine pilot and was granted permission to enter the GBR compulsory pilotage area and REEFVTS monitored its passage to the port of Townsville.

Thanks to swift action, the situation was contained without incident. Maritime Safety Queensland gathered and shared key evidence—including radio transmissions and vessel tracking data—with GBRMPA and the AMSA. AMSA detained the vessel in Townsville for serious safety breaches under international maritime law and the GBRMPA successfully prosecuted the ship's Master in the Federal Court for failing to comply with compulsory pilotage requirements.

This incident underscores the critical role Maritime Safety Queensland plays in protecting the Great Barrier Reef and ensuring navigational safety in some of the world's most sensitive marine waters.



Cargo ship – Leyla Aksoy, berthed at Port of Townsville.

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