Chatham Islands Navigation Safety Operating Guidelines

2026 - 2027 Cruise Season

chatham islands council

Introduction

This document sets out the operating requirements for any vessel entering into the Chatham Islands Area of Restricted Access ("the Area") as defined in "Harbourmasters Direction 21-2"

Requirement of Harbourmaster's Direction 21-2

The Chatham Islands are very remote, sparsely populated, have only a small number of navigation aids, and have little in the way of infrastructure to deal with any possible shipping incident. These are the primary reasons for denying general entry to the area around the islands to larger vessels. While entry for a vessel wishing to visit the islands would normally be granted, transiting vessels on longer passage taking them past the islands must not do so through the Area, but rather avoid the Area entirely by transiting outside the restricted zone.

The Requirement of the Direction is: "No large vessel shall enter into, or remain within, the Chatham Islands Area of Restricted Access without the prior approval of the Harbourmaster".

Time

The Chatham Islands maintain a time zone 45 minutes ahead of NZ time.

Weather and sea conditions

The Chatham Islands is an exposed location and subject to rapid and violent changes in weather. Masters should obtain up to date weather information at all times.

The rapid change in weather means changes in sea conditions also occur rapidly. Such changes in conditions may dictate a vessel is required to depart the Chatham Islands and make passage to the next port with no opportunity to allow passengers to re-embark prior to departure.

Use of vessel tenders

Operation of tenders and RIBs to any site must be carefully managed. The exposed location of the areas and almost constant swell conditions can make the operation of boats difficult. The landing points can be subject to significant surge making embarkation and disembarkation of passengers difficult.

The passage to and from each landing point can be through narrow, rock bordered channels. The channels require the use of experienced and competent boat masters. The boat master must be suitably experienced to be able to follow lead marks and to manoeuvre a boat in surge conditions among kelp and rocks.

A rapid change of weather could mean that boats are unable to return to the ship safely and may have to be left at Chatham Islands. All operators must have a suitable plan in place to allow tenders to be returned to the ship at a later time.

Onshore facilities

While tourism is of course catered for on the islands, facilities are what should be expected of such a remote location, and what there is exists primarily to serve the (small, 610 at 2024 census) local population. Any requirements or bookings for sightseeing and/or shore transport should be communicated well in advance. Some contacts may be found at the end of this document.

Cover photos, clockwise from top left: Owenga and Waitangi harbours

Commercial and leisure users

Throughout the year, but particularly during the summer months (November to May) there can be numerous small fishing vessels operating from the Chatham Islands. This can sometimes lead to busy periods at launching ramps and docks throughout the islands. These busy periods may make it difficult for ship tenders to approach or berth at a wharf, jetty or pontoon. Small cargo vessels (up to about 70m LOA) call several times per month to Waitangi and Pitt Island. These vessels are a vital lifeline for the islands and will be given priority by the Harbourmaster for any wharf space. Shipping schedules are available on the websites of companies servicing the Chathams, or from the Harbourmaster. Leisure vessels are rare around the Chatham's but may still be encountered occasionally.

With the approach of a significant change in weather a ship may find that the number of fishing vessels attempting to return from sea and be returned via the ramps to their trailer, could prevent tenders from collecting their passengers from ashore.

Crayfish and cod pots

The Chatham Islands economy is based largely around fishing. Because of this, numerous steel pots for crayfish (NZ lobster) and cod, both for catch and storage purposes, will be encountered all around the coasts of the Chathams, often in areas that those not familiar with these fishing operations may not be expecting them – including very close to many anchorages, landing areas, and wharves. **It is therefore advisable to expect these to be anywhere and proceed with caution. They are generally marked with coloured fishing floats, but in rough seas they may be difficult to spot.**

Royal New Zealand Navy

Vessels of the Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZN) often navigate within the area. RNZN vessels may be involved in operations that preclude them from making VHF radio reports or that mean they may be in an unusual location or may not be making an Automatic Identification System (AIS) transmission. RNZN vessels carry a copy of these operating requirements and are aware of your operational limitations and requirements. All mariners should observe the common practice of good seamanship when navigating within the waters around the Chatham Islands.

Reviews

The Harbourmaster or a delegated representative may review the operation of any vessel entering the Area.

Fishermen's wharf at Kaingaroa

Limiting Requirements

Under Keel Clearance

The coasts of the Chathams are frequently exposed to large swells, the weather and sea conditions are highly changeable often with little or no notice, there are numerous shoals reefs and isolated rocks, and several areas with sparse or no recent survey data (or in some cases, no data at all). Extra caution must therefore be exercised when navigating within the Area. The master of every vessel (excluding tenders) shall ensure a minimum under keel clearance of 4 metres is maintained at all times, although 2 metres outside Waitangi is allowable and 2m may be allowable for small vessels calling at Port Hutt with Harbourmaster's permission.

Visibility

No vessel may enter into the Area when visibility is less than 0.5 nautical miles.

Navigation during hours of darkness

While remaining at anchor overnight will usually be permitted, it is not advisable to navigate close by or around the coasts of the Chatham Islands at night. Tender and RIB operations should normally be conducted during daylight hours, although exceptions may be allowed by the Harbourmaster.

Maximum wind speed

Given the variety of vessel and tender types used there is no limit on the maximum wind speed for vessel operation in the Area. The exposed location means a moderate wind will quickly render the seas too rough for tender operations. A vessel master is reminded to ensure their ship and tenders are operated within their design capability and the experience and capability of the tenders' crew.

Automatic Identification System (AIS)

Every vessel entering the Area must be fitted with operational AIS of class A or B. This AIS system must remain switched on and transmitting at all times

Navigation with inoperative equipment

Where any navigational, manoeuvring or communication equipment is inoperative the master must report this to the Harbourmaster immediately, and may not enter into or remain within the Area without the express permission of the Harbourmaster.

Fuel oil transfers

The internal transfer of oil within the vessel whilst within the Area is prohibited. This prohibition does not apply to the normal transfer of fuel directly from storage tanks to settling/daily service tanks. Vessels should ensure prior to arrival in the Area that for the duration of stay in the Area sufficient fuel will be able to be pumped directly to settling/daily service tanks without the need for internal transfer between storage tanks.

Any transfer of fuel oil to a tender must be completed in an appropriate manner. It is preferable that a tender is removed from the water, or is in calm conditions during any transfer operation.

The use of a refuelling system where the tender's fuel tank filling pipe is sealed to the tank filling point, and the tank's vent pipe is connected to a hose back on board the ship, is recommended.

Hot work

Under CIC Navigation safety Bylaws 2013, permission of the Harbourmaster is required for any hot work conducted on an oil tanker, and any vessel in Waitangi Harbour.

Contact:
Harbourmaster on +64 3 305 0315 or 027 305 0123 or email harbourmaster@chathamislands.govt.nz

Accidents, incidents and near miss

Any accident or incident involving the cruise ship, or its tender operation, must be reported to Maritime New Zealand - report an incident and should also be reported to the Harbourmaster immediately and followed up with a written report with 48 hours.

Harbourmaster's Office
Joss Thomas
Phone (CIC office) +64 3 305-0033 or 305-0034
Phone (after hours) +64 3 305 0315 or 027 305 0123
Email harbourmaster@chathamislands.govt.nz

www.cic.govt.nz

Wrecks, old and not so old, at Port Hutt

Operational Requirements

Charts and publications

A vessel must have all necessary charts and pilot books pertaining to Chatham Islands. These charts and publications are to be in accordance with SOLAS V and/or Maritime Rule 25.
Masters must ensure that all charts are corrected up to date from New Zealand Notices to Mariners. Some NZ charts are not corrected within the Admiralty notice to mariners system and must therefore be checked to ensure they are up to date with New Zealand Notices to Mariners

Passage plan

A vessel master must ensure a comprehensive passage plan is produced for the vessel's entry, stay, and departure from the Area. The plan must contain all pertinent information, and all bridge team members must be briefed on the passage plan prior to arrival at the Area. This plan must include:

- Proposed course,
- Anchorage or drift location,
- Wind and sea condition limits,
- Areas of hazard
- No go areas

Passage plans must be provided to the Harbourmaster on request.

Manoeuvring and navigation equipment to be ready for immediate use

The vessel's manoeuvring equipment must be maintained ready for immediate use at all times the vessel is at anchor or underway or within the Area or when required by the Harbourmaster.

Movement of multiple vessels

Where two or more cruise ships visit the Chatham Islands on the same day the vessel masters must ensure the operation of their ship or tenders does not adversely affect the second vessel or the safety of any person or vessel. It is expected there will be a high degree of communication and cooperation between the bridge teams of each vessel.

Communications

There is no harbour control VHF station at the Chatham Islands.

The Harbourmaster is located at Waitangi. Contact with the Harbourmaster should be made via telephone. There is provision for after-hours contact.
Phone (CIC office) +64 3 305-0033 or 305-0034
Phone (after hours) +64 3 305 0315 or 027 305 0123
Email: harbourmaster@chathamislands.govt.nz

Chatham Islands Maritime Radio operates on VHF channel 16 and channels 60 (Chatham Island) and 62 (Pitt Island, and overlapping with the southern portion of Chatham Island). It is advisable to call all stations on one or both of the latter two channels prior to approaching an anchorage or shelter. Chatham Islands Maritime Radio coastal VHF stations transmit weather forecasts simultaneously on their working channels 60 and 62 at 0603, 1403, 1803, 2203 (Chatham Islands Local Time). VHF channels 60 and 62 are also known and operated locally as "Waitangi Fishermen's Radio" or "Chatham Islands Fishermen's Radio".

Emergency response procedures

Every vessel must have comprehensive emergency response plans in place. These must include:

- Medical evacuation
- When conditions make it impossible to re-board passengers and or tenders
- Earthquake
- Oil spill
- Tender incident (breakdown, grounding, sinking, collision)
- Tsunami

These plans must be available to the ship's agent (and the Harbourmaster on request) and contain contact details for each person or organisation mentioned.

It must be noted that emergency services, medical facilities, air transport and the like on the Chathams are very limited (for example there is no helicopter stationed at the Chathams and only one general practitioner) and any augmentation of them that might be required in the case of a shipping emergency will likely take days rather than hours to arrive from mainland NZ. Emergency procedures will need to take this into account.

Operation of Tenders

There are three (possibly four) options that may be suitable for the landing of passengers:

- Waitangi (the inner part of the wharf, the boat ramp, and the beach east of Nairn River);
- Owenga (the beach, as the wharf is generally not suitable);
- Flower Pot (Pitt Island wharf) for tender/RIB operations;
- Port Hutt (the beach) may be a possibility.

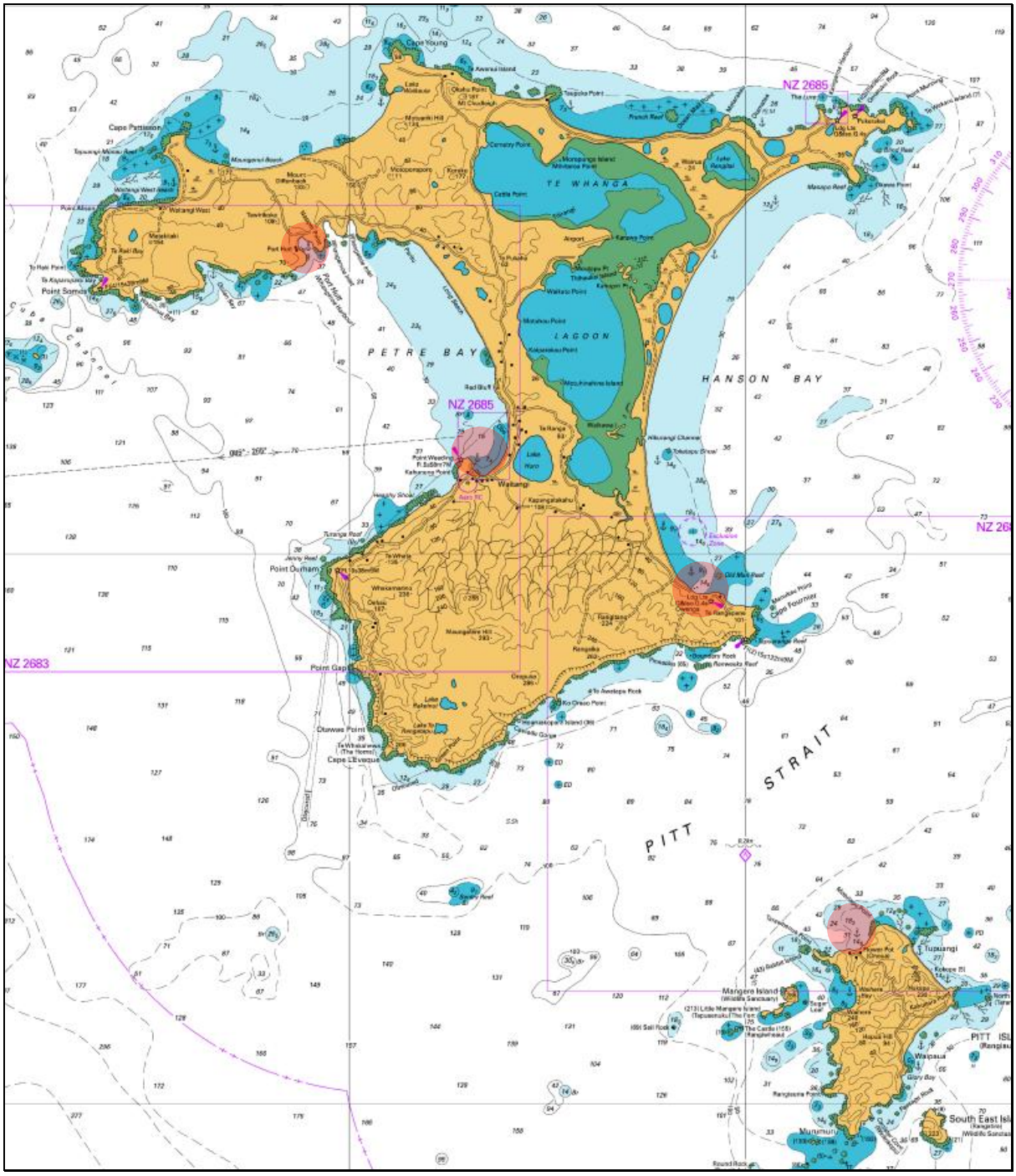
All locations are approached close to reefs and/or via channels through extensive rocky areas except Waitangi which is relatively open. These approaches are liable to have areas of kelp which may be thick in places. The exposed nature of the Area means a swell is almost always present. Because of this, under keel clearances can be quickly reduced when the trough of a swell is experienced.

There are several off-lying obstructions at all locations, as indeed there are around the entire coast of the Chathams, that may further restrict both anchorage options for vessels and the approaches to landing sites for tenders.

The swell conditions can also mean a tender is liable to surge alongside the landing point. This can create issues for both the people embarking/disembarking, and also for the structure and integrity of the vessel itself.

Several cruise ships that operate "Expedition Cruises" in high latitudes manage the tender operations effectively and have well trained and practiced tender crews. A vessel master may be able to obtain pertinent safety information from others who operate in the Area. Where a vessel master (or tender crew) is unsure, or is not familiar with the Area then the operation of tenders is not recommended.

Anchorages and landings locations



Possible anchorage/shelter locations indicated by

The anchorages indicated above are those that are considered suitable by the Harbourmaster for visiting large vessels, provided conditions allow. While holding ground at all sites is generally good (most of the bays around the Chathams coast have sandy seabeds), as can easily be seen on the chart all are significantly exposed and shelter will only exist at any particular anchorage within a narrow range of conditions.

None of the anchorages is good in all weathers - all should be considered temporary and be treated with caution. Masters must be prepared to vacate an anchorage at short notice given the sudden weather changes that are common for the Chathams. While other anchorages are marked on charts and described in Admiralty sailing directions NP51 they should only be used by those with detailed recent local knowledge.

Upon a request for entry to the Area being granted by the Harbourmaster, vessels may be permitted to anchor near Waitangi, Owenga or Flower Pot (Pitt Island) for tender/RIB operations or at Port Hutt (generally for shelter, although landing by RIB may be possible). Because none of these anchorages can be considered completely reliably sheltered in any condition, so rather than state which conditions they are suitable in the list below indicates in which conditions each anchorage is definitely not suitable.

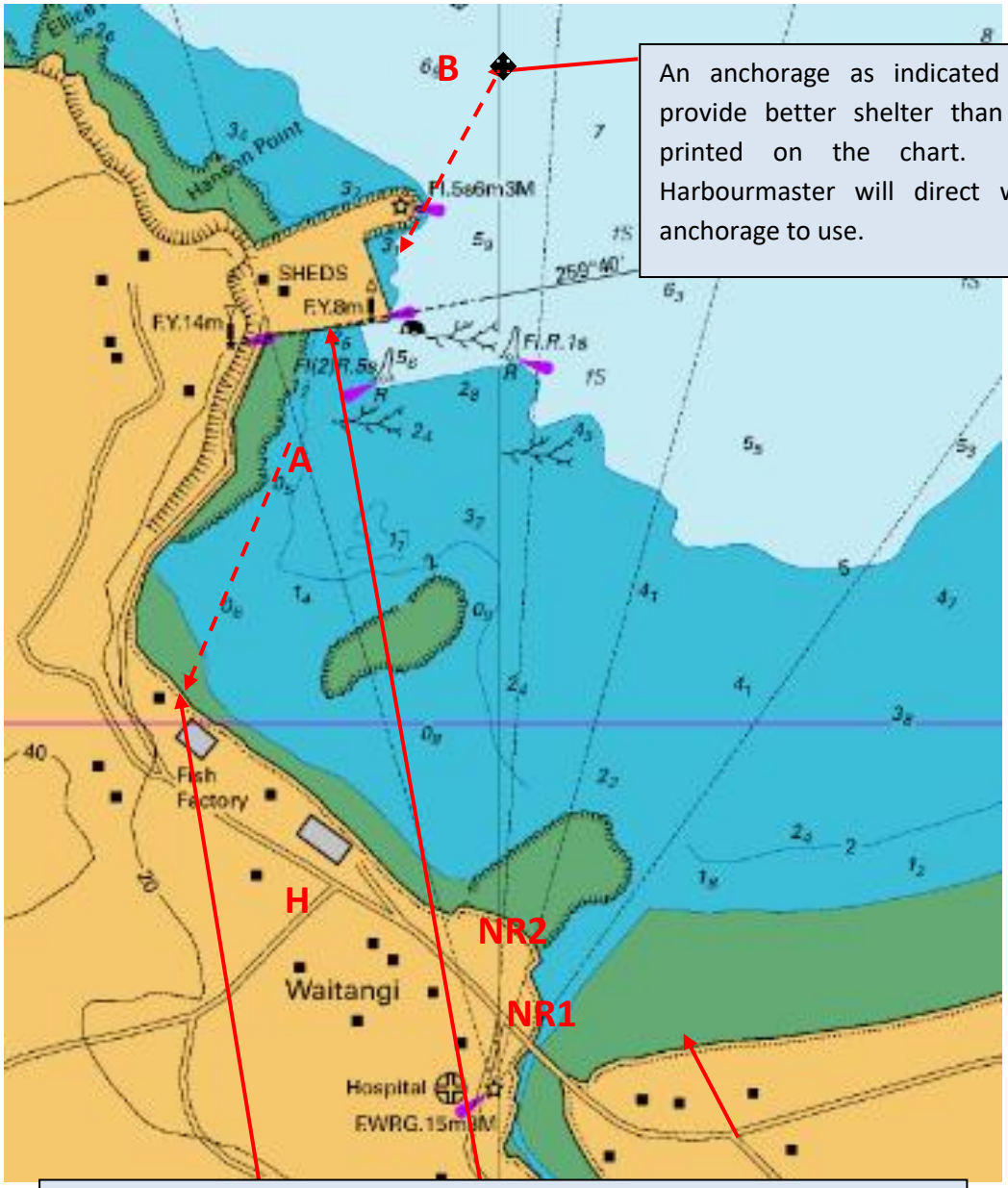
- Waitangi is exposed to westerly, particularly NW conditions.
- Owenga is very exposed to anything from N through SE, particularly NE through E.
- The anchorage near north of Flower Pot while generally good in calmer weather is considered otherwise very exposed, particularly from W through NE.
- Port Hutt is directly exposed to SE winds and swell. Some swell is likely at/near the entrance in any southerly.

Port Hutt is unusual amongst Chatham's anchorages in that it is generally sheltered in most weather, and except for conditions above is considered the closest to an all-weather shelter that the Chatham Islands has. It is however constrained as an anchorage because of its size (marked anchorages are only 150m from the 5m depth contour) and unlikely to be suitable for any but small vessels. Anchoring outside the entrance may be possible for larger vessels in northerly conditions, such as may make Waitangi unsuitable.

A master may choose to slow steam or drift rather than anchor at any of these sites. The advice of the Harbourmaster should be sought in any event. The Harbourmaster may direct a vessel to or away from a particular anchorage, or to remain underway, or to depart the Chatham's waters.

Reefs, such as these at the entrance to Kaingaroa, are common around the Chatham Islands' coasts

Waitangi anchorage and landings



An anchorage as indicated may provide better shelter than that printed on the chart. The Harbourmaster will direct which anchorage to use.

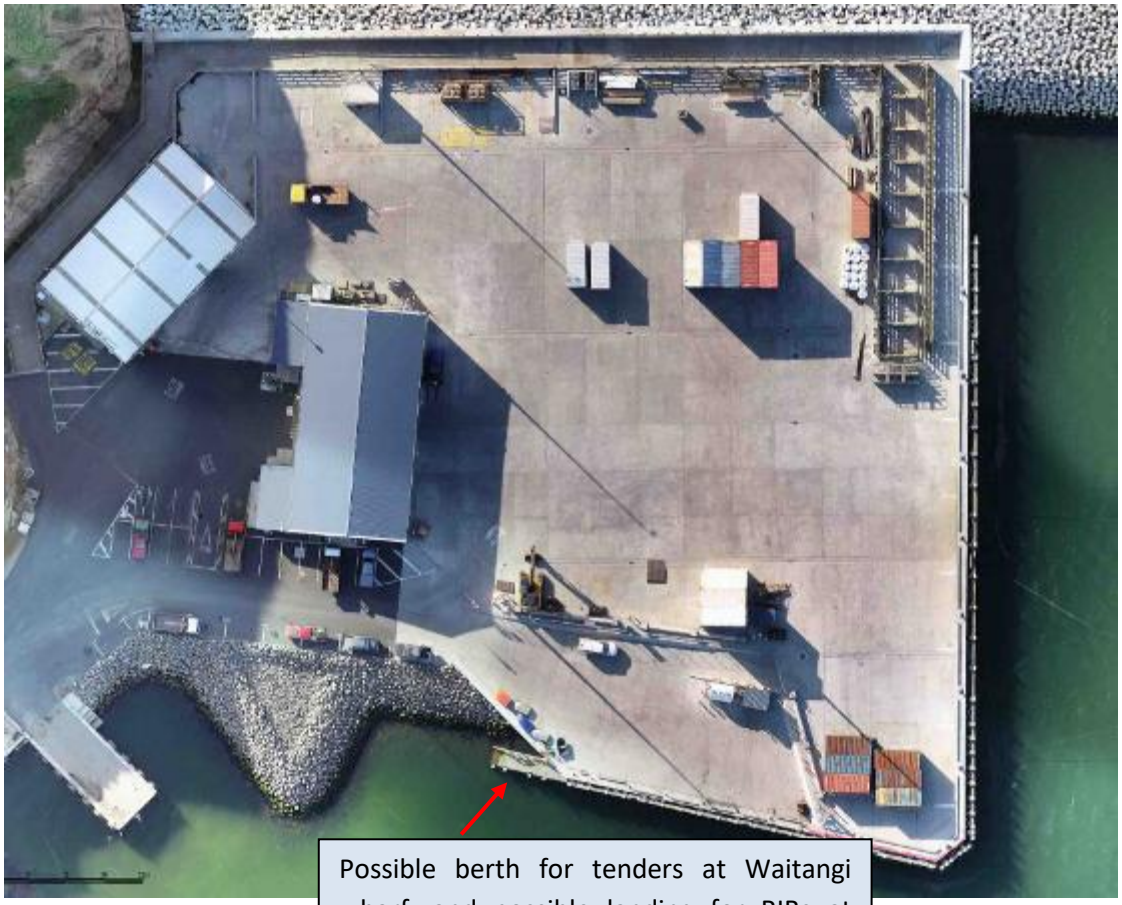
The launching ramp (RIBs), wharf (tenders), the beach to the east of Nairn River (RIBs). Use of the wharf requires permission from the Harbourmaster.

Tenders may be allowed (with Harbourmaster's and Port Manager's permission) to go alongside the wharf. RIB landing is possible, given suitable conditions, at the haul-out ramp and at the beach east of the Nairn River mouth (the number of obstructing reefs to the west of the river mouth make landing unadvisable).

Above: View of Waitangi wharf from the alternate anchorage (point B on chart).

Photo locations and orientations are shown on preceding chart.

Below: View of the haul-out ramp (taken from Waitangi Wharf



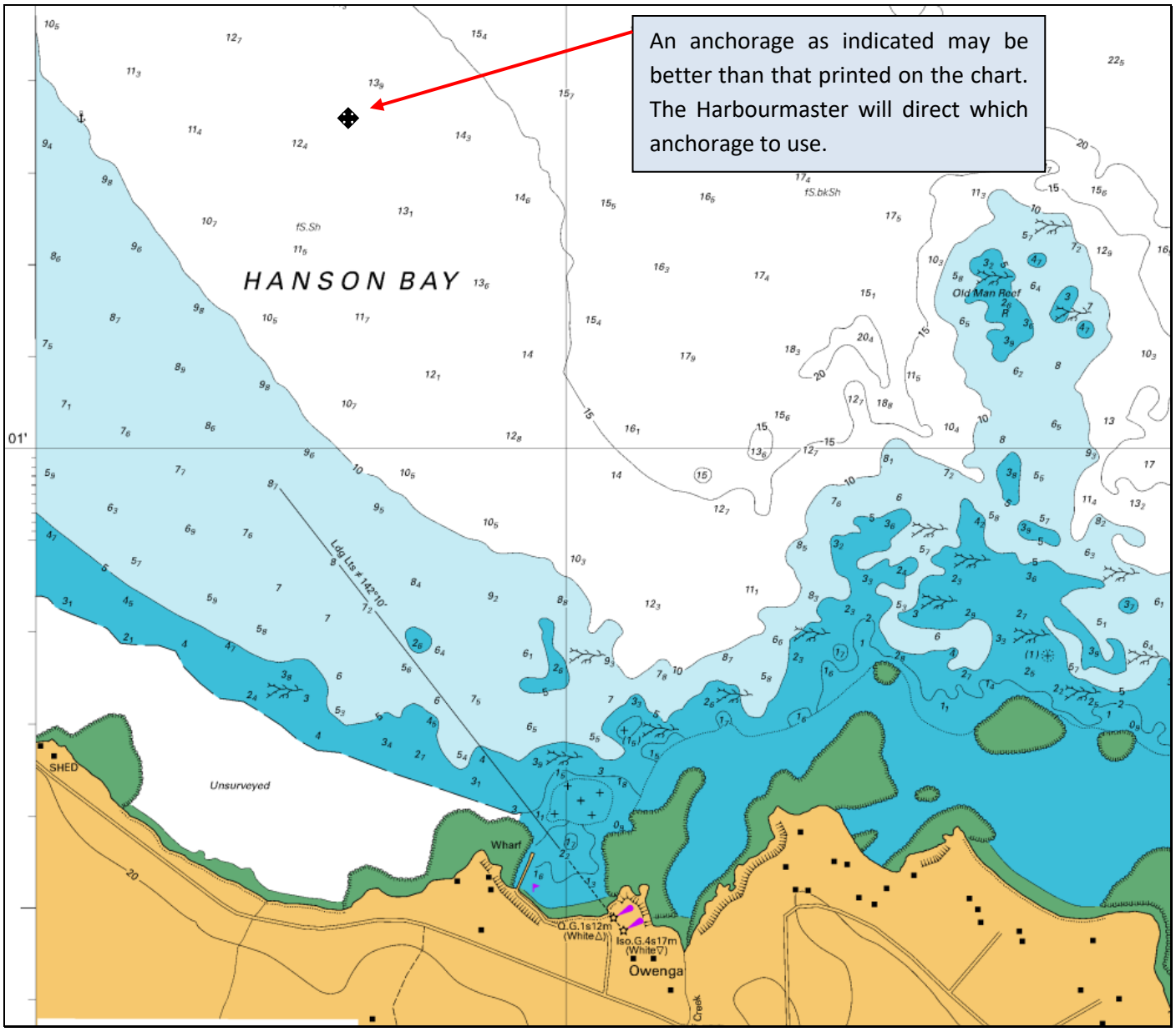
Possible berth for tenders at Waitangi wharf, and possible landing for RIBs at concrete haul-out ramp

Above: Looking towards the possible tender berth at the base of the Waitangi wharf (*from Position H*).
Below: A wider view (*from Position H*) showing the inshore reefs and the fishing vessel moorings.

Above: Looking towards the possible tender berth at the base of the Waitangi wharf by the steps. (*looking down from above the port*).
Below: A view (*from Position B)* of the haul-out ramp.

Above: View of the Nairn River mouth (*from position NR1*).
Below: A view (*from position NR2)* of the Nairn River mouth showing the extent of the beach to the east, and some of the obstructing reefs to the west of the river mouth.

Owenga anchorage and landings

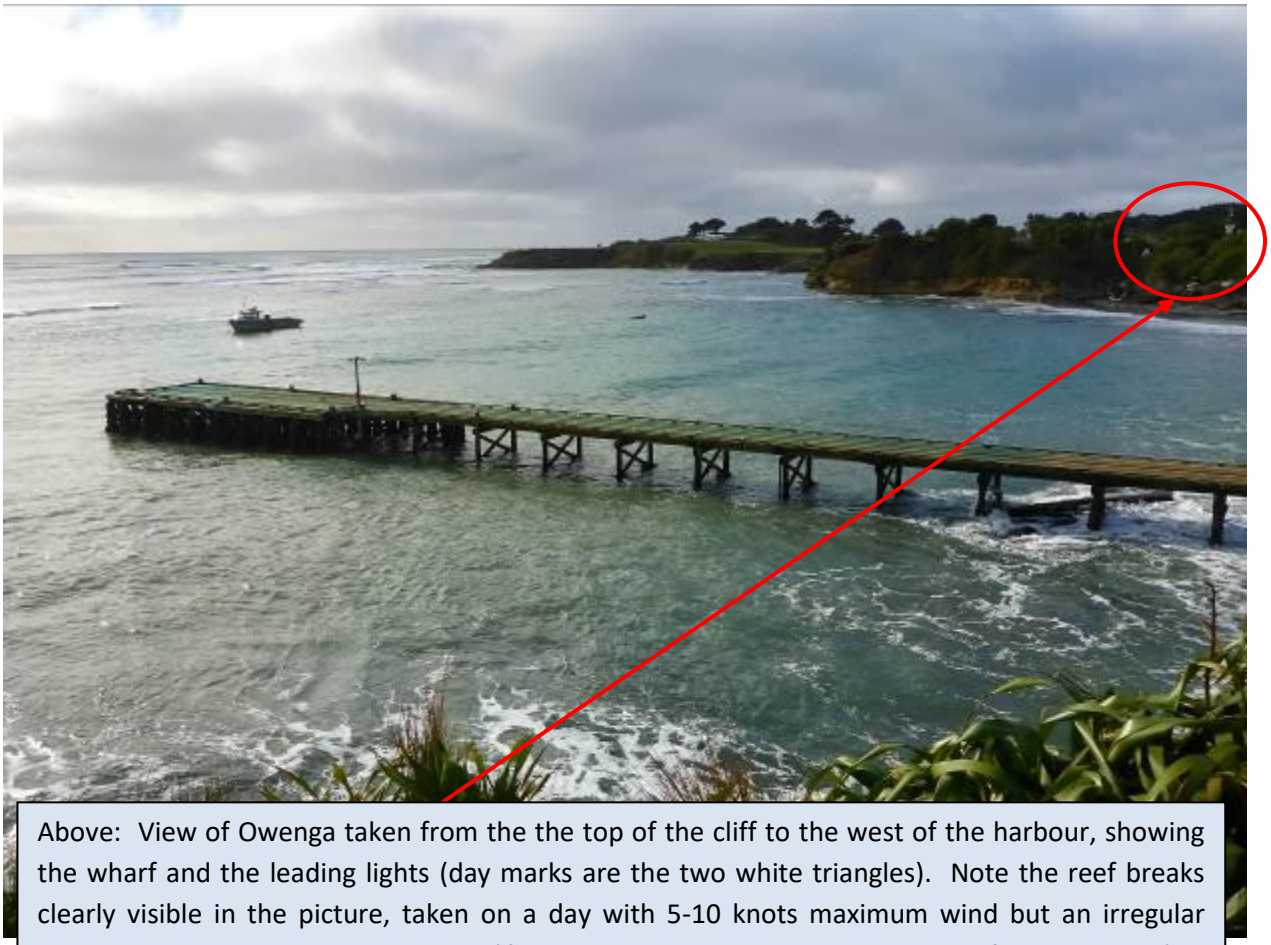


Landing may be possible on the beach (about 100m of sand between rock riprap at the western end and limestone cliffs at the eastern end) in Owenga harbour, which has road access.

Be aware that this beach is used to store large fishing boat haul-out trailers which may restrict the space available for landing.

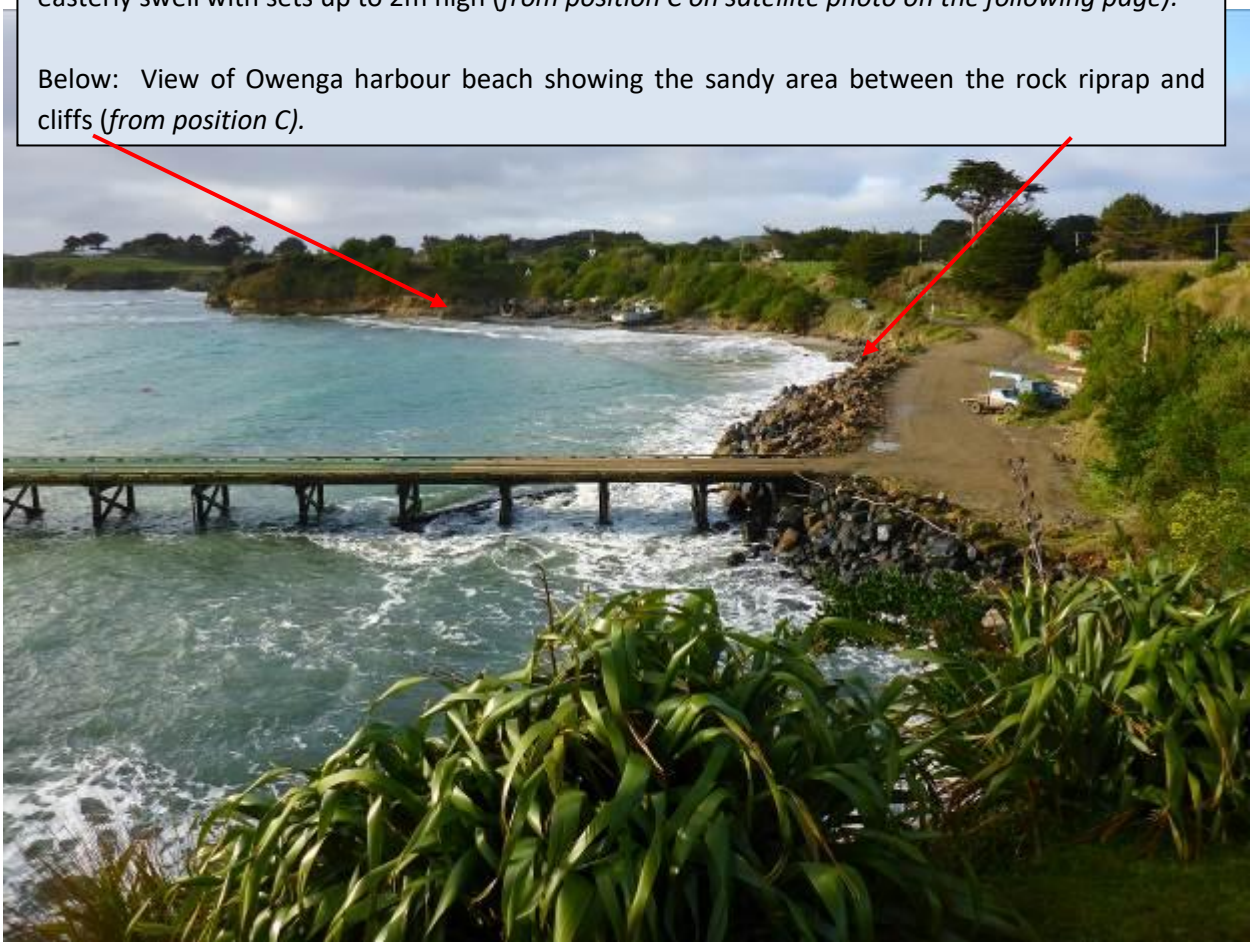
Use of the wharf requires permission from the Harbourmaster but is not normally allowed or advised.

Steps at the end of Owenga wharf.

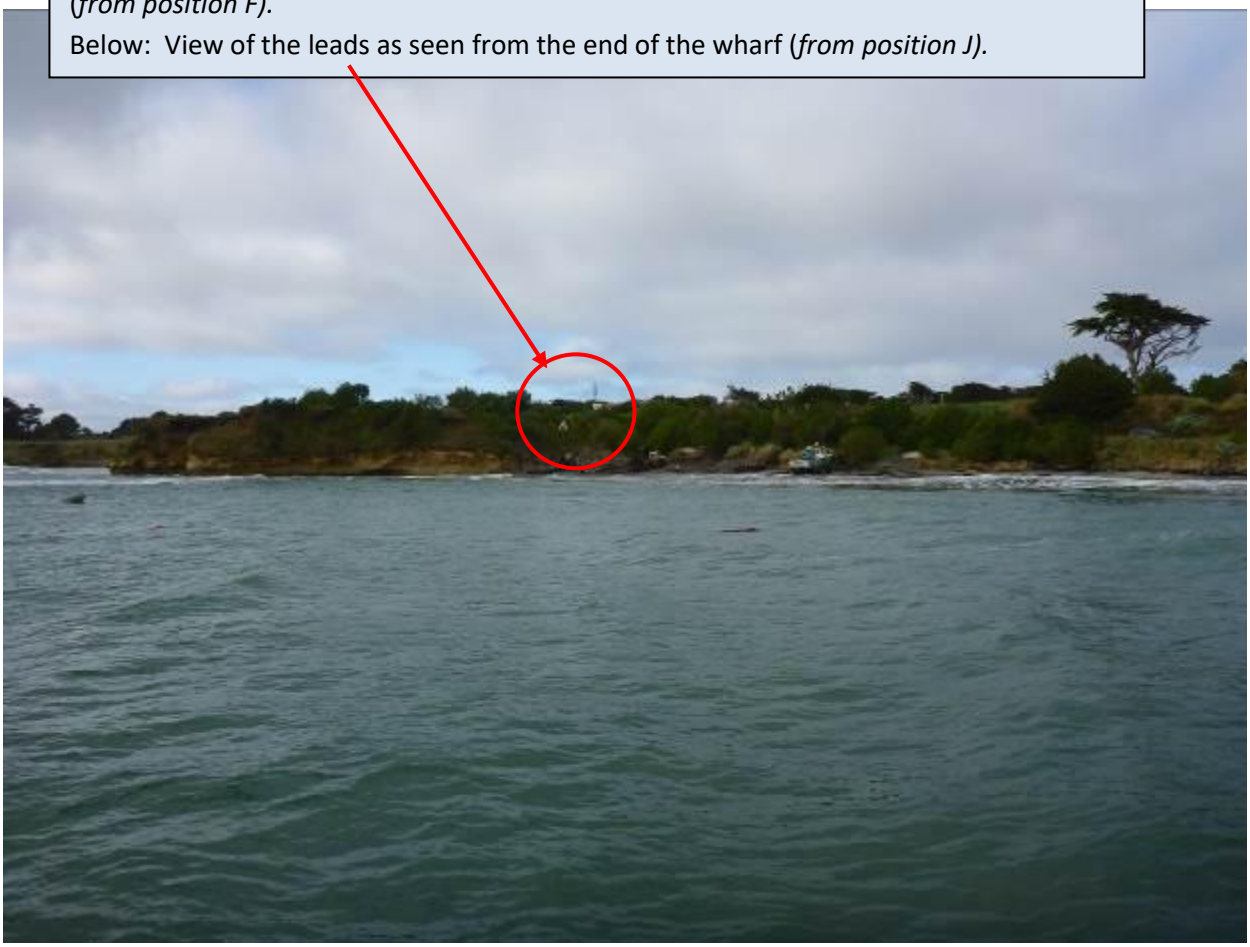


Above: View of Owenga taken from the the top of the cliff to the west of the harbour, showing the wharf and the leading lights (day marks are the two white triangles). Note the reef breaks clearly visible in the picture, taken on a day with 5-10 knots maximum wind but an irregular easterly swell with sets up to 2m high (*from position C on satellite photo on the following page).*

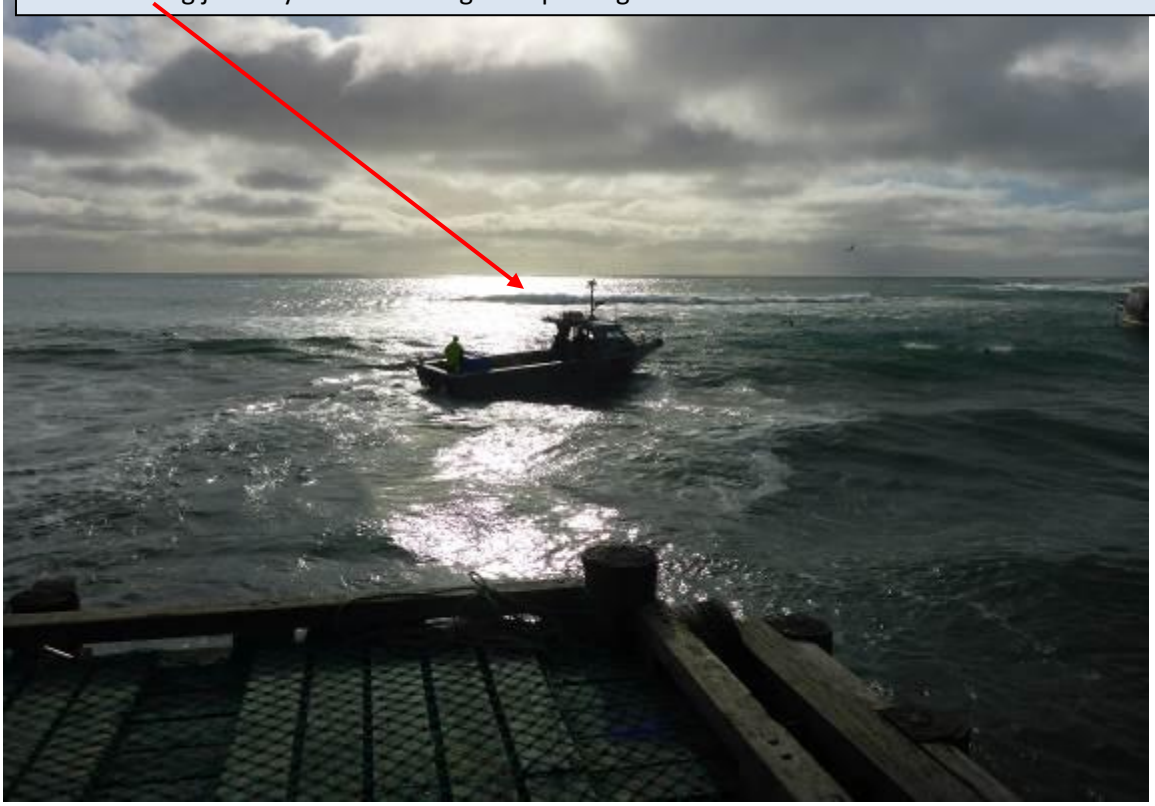
Below: View of Owenga harbour beach showing the sandy area between the rock riprap and cliffs (*from position C).*



Above: View of Owenga from the leading line (top of front lead visible in foreground) (*from position F).*
Below: View of the leads as seen from the end of the wharf (*from position J).*



Owenga harbour showing the entrance reef breaks and the position of the front lead and an approximation of the leading line (not a substitute for that shown on the chart). The photograph below clearly shows the central reef breaking just beyond the fishing boat passing the wharf.



Above: View of Owenga wharf and beach landing area (*from position L1*).

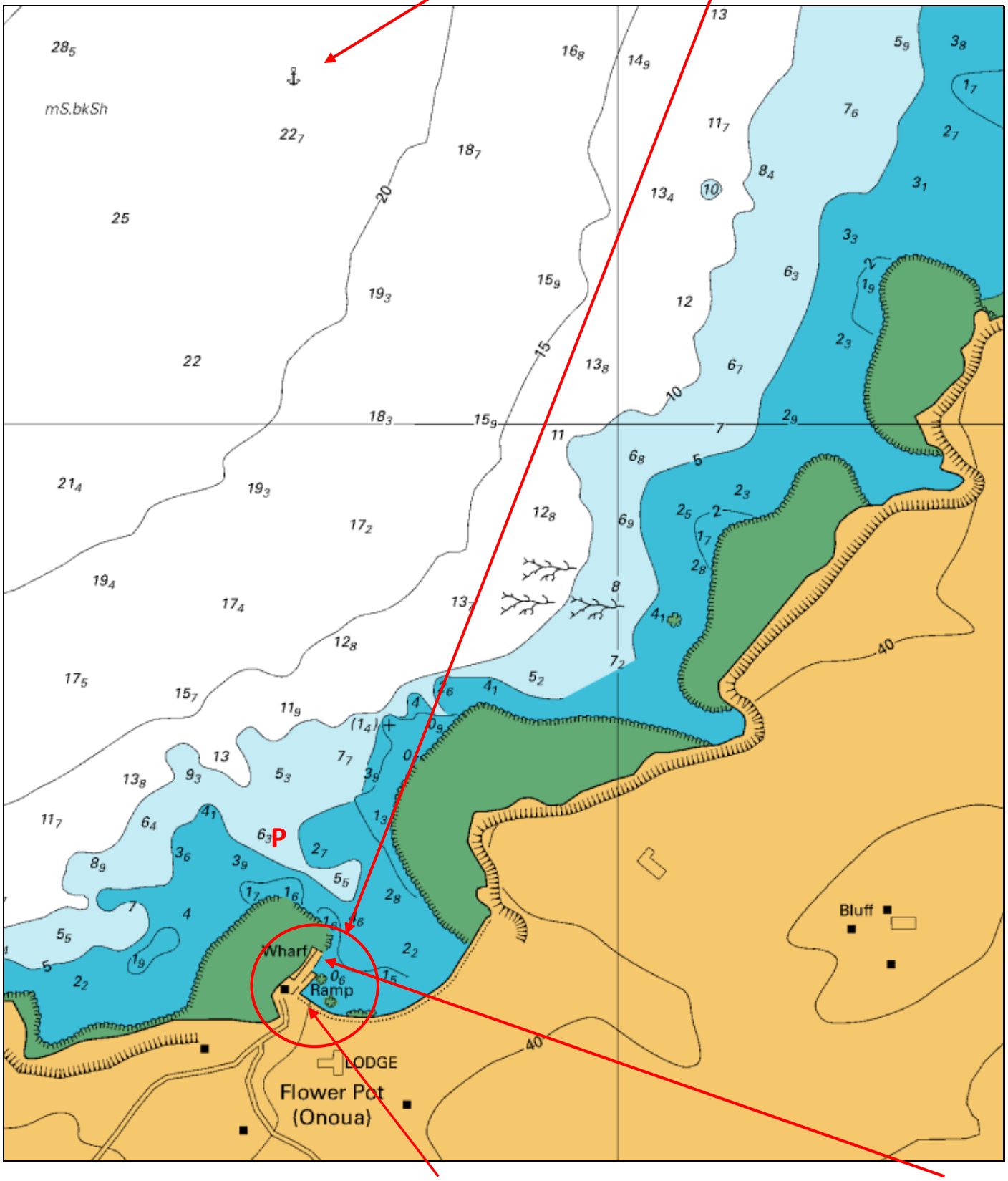
Below: Owenga wharf (*from position L2*), showing steps. Harbourmaster's permission is required to use this wharf.

Above: Western end of Owenga beach (*from position L3*), showing the eastern end of the rock riprap

Below: Owenga beach west of the riprap (*from position L3*).

The new ramp to the west side of the Owenga wharf

Flower Pot (Pitt Island) anchorage and landing sites



If conditions allow, landing is possible on the beach adjacent to the ramp for RIBs or <u>possibly</u> alongside the wharf for tenders. Harbourmaster's permission is required for the use of the wharf.

The satellite image above is of Flower Pot Bay prior to a wharf upgrade that occurred not long before the storm that unfortunately severely damaged it. Boat access to the beach is via a narrow channel between two rock outcrops.

Flower Pot Bay and Wharf viewed from near the eastern headland (*from position K, above*). Flower Pot Lodge is in the centre left of the photograph. The channel that provides boat access to the beach and the two rock reefs can be seen clearly. Photo was taken prior to wharf upgrade and subsequent storm damage.

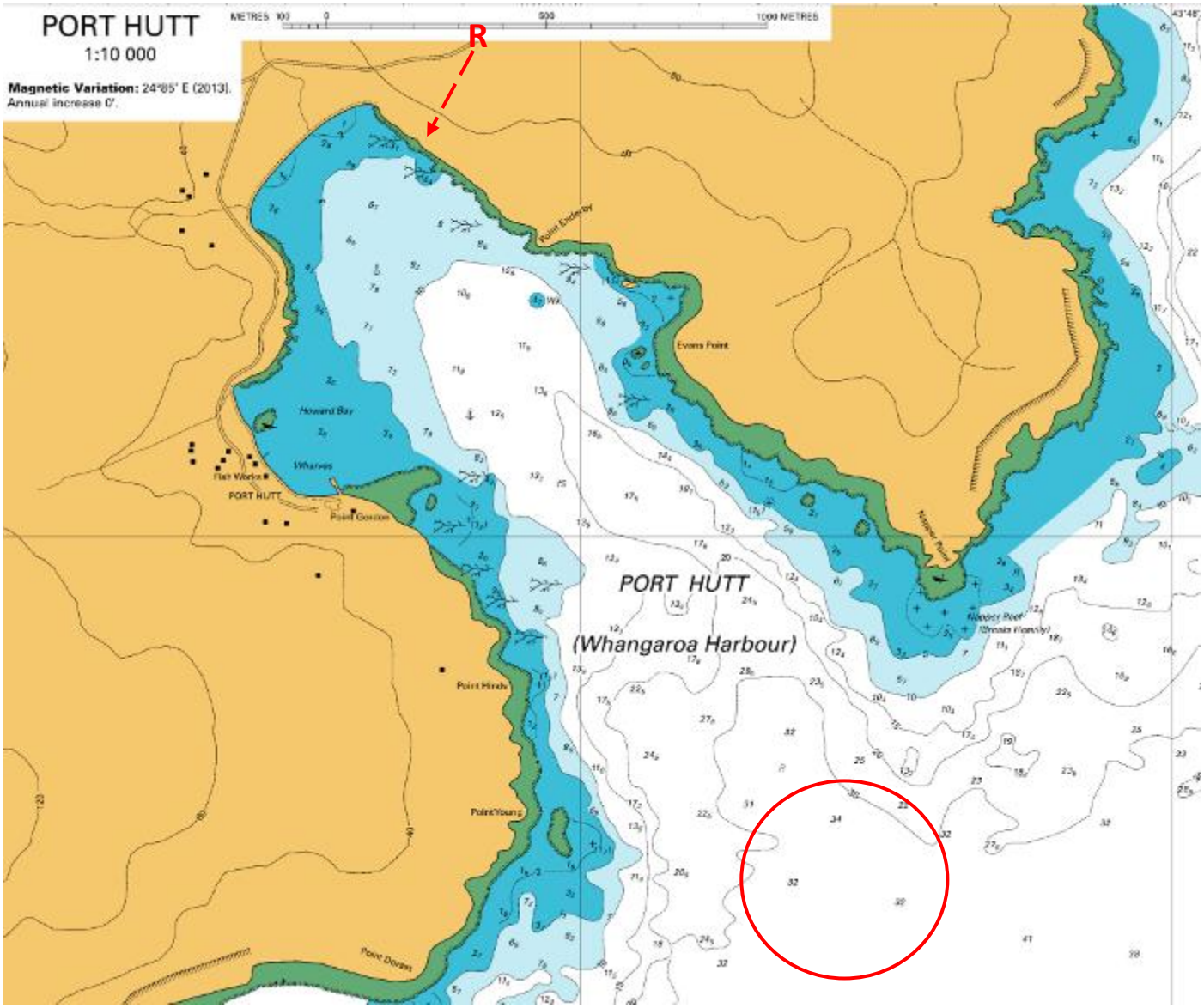
Above: Approaching Pitt Island wharf (*from Position P on the chart*).

Below: Alongside Pitt Island wharf, looking toward the narrow channel leading to the fishing boat beach.

Above: From Pitt Island wharf, looking toward the narrow channel, between the breakwaters, leading to the fishing boat beach.

Below: Landward end of Pitt Island wharf, and the breakwaters.

Port Hutt anchorage and landings



The recommended anchorage for small vessels at Port Hutt is to anchor as far into the harbour as is safely possible. Swing room is likely to be limited and anchors may have to be reset according to conditions.

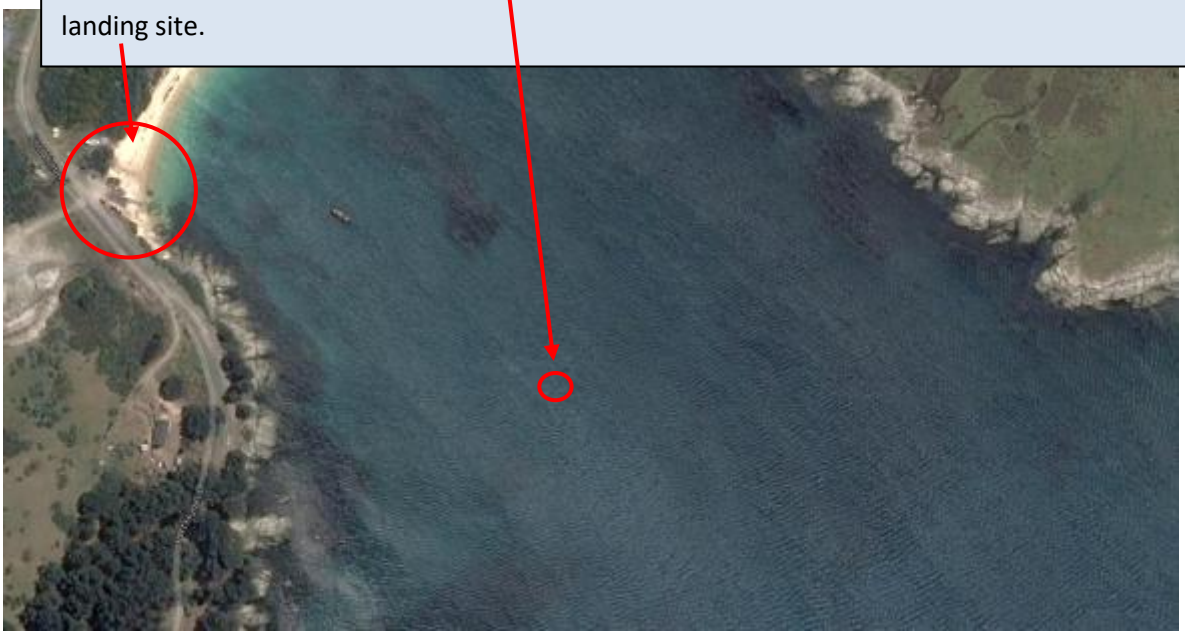
The head of the harbour is sandy, and landing for RIBs is possible in good conditions. Road access may be possible nearby the beach in the NW corner via a bulldozed track maintained by a local fisherman. Use of this track may be requested via the Harbourmaster.

As previously stated: Port Hutt is unusual amongst Chatham's anchorages in that it is generally sheltered in most weather, and except for conditions previously mentioned is considered the closest to an all-weather shelter that the Chatham Islands has. It is however constrained as an anchorage because of its size (marked anchorages are only 150m from the 5m depth contour) and unlikely to be suitable for any but small vessels.

Anchoring outside the entrance (indicated possible area shown by the large red circle on the chart) <u>may</u> be possible for larger vessels in northerly conditions.

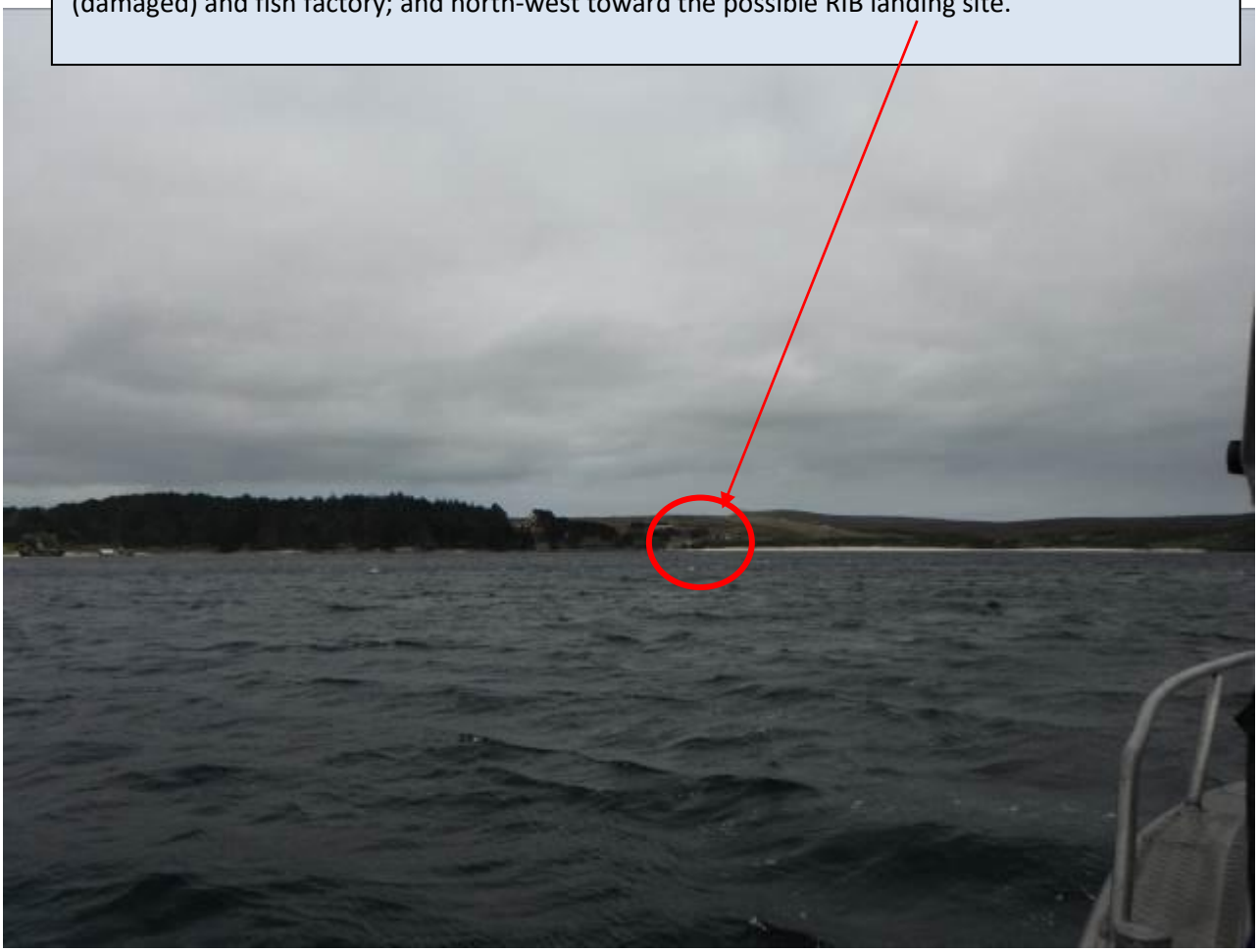
NB: The Port Hutt jetty has significant damage and is unlikely to be safe for putting tenders alongside. Contact the Harbourmaster for latest information.

Port Hutt, indicating the charted inner anchorage (suitable for small vessels only) and the possible RIB landing site.



Views of Port Hutt, taken from the road NE of the harbour (from *position R, on the chart*). The anchorage, as shown on the chart, is in the upper part of the harbour mid-way between the shores and is approximately indicated by the arrows.

Views of Port Hutt, taken from the central harbour (*position V*), looking west toward the jetty (damaged) and fish factory; and north-west toward the possible RIB landing site.



Facility and Asset Owners

The wharf at Waitangi is owned by the Dept. of Internal Affairs. Flower Pot wharf is owned by Chatham Islands Port Ltd and Pitt Island is owned by the Chatham Islands Enterprise Trust. The wharf at Owenga is owned by the Chatham Islands Council. Permission for the use of any of these wharves must be gained prior to use from the Chatham Islands Harbourmaster.

Chatham Islands Council

Phone +64 3 305-0033 or 305-0034
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Joss Thomas
Phone (after hours) +64 3 305 0315 or 027 305 0123
Email: harbourmaster@chathamislands.govt.nz

Chatham Islands Ports Ltd

Phone +64 3 305 0585
www.chathams.co.nz
Email portmanager@CIETrust.co.nz

Fees

A fee set by the Chatham Islands Council may be payable by large vessels entering into the Area. Details of the fee are available in the Chatham Islands Navigation Safety Bylaw.

Liability

The Chatham Islands Council shall not, in any case, be responsible for any loss or damage arising from the negligence of the master or crew of any vessel to which this direction applies, or for any loss, damage or incident involving the vessel.

Joshua Thomas
Harbourmaster
Chatham Islands Council
August 2013

Amended June 2026

This document was produced with the assistance of:

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Images:
Charts - LINZ online
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