

Standardised Tug Orders – port of Melbourne

V 0.2 - DRAFT DOCUMENT FOR CONSULTATION

Revision history

Date	Version	Name	Reason
26 May 2026	0.1	David Tilsley	Initial draft. Reviewed at Towage Forum May 2026. Not approved.
4 June 2026	0.2	David Tilsley	Revised draft based on Pilot and Tug Masters feedback. Not approved.

Approval history

Date	Name and title	Signature

DRAFT

Contents

1. Terminology	1
2. Tug placement identification	1
3. Tug power settings	2
4. Utilising Tug as a brake	2
5. Releasing Tug	3
6. Emergency procedure – loss of communication between Tug and Vessel	3

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1. Terminology

STAND BY TO	Position the tug in readiness for action and power order Use the term STANDBY TO in conjunction with the appropriate ACTION to position the tug(s) in readiness for the intended manoeuvre
SLACK LINE	No weight on the line
OFF THE HULL	No weight on hull / tow line
RUN WITH ME	Run with the vessel – no weight on hull / tow line
PUSH	Push at 90 degrees to vessel (unless specified points abaft beam etc.)
LIFT OFF	Pull at 90 degrees to vessel (unless specified points abaft beam etc.)
LAY FLAT	Stay parallel to the vessels side
LAY FLAT	Prepare to act as brake - lay out the line directly astern of the vessel (or ahead if towing over bow) to assist in reducing vessels speed

2. Tug placement identification

The standardisation of calling tugs is crucial to safe engagement and manoeuvring within the port area. It is imperative that the Pilot and Tug master are cognisant of naming sequence when tugs are made fast.

The standard terms to be used are as follows:

TUG FORWARD

TUG AFT

TUG CENTRELEAD (C/L) AFT

(if utilising a Tug C/L forward, provided there is only 1 tug forward in attendance, the Tug C/L forward may be referred to as TUG FORWARD.)

The use of the prefix “Tug” before naming position of tug should alleviate any issue of VHF radio lag with the appropriately positioned tug hearing the order. If any Tug is in doubt as the order given by the Pilot, immediate clarification is to be sought by the Tug with the Pilot.

3. Tug power settings

LEAN ON	Pods 5-10 degrees
BAREWEIGHT	Pods 45 degrees clutched In
MINIMUM	Pods directly ahead clutched In
EASY	Pods directly ahead - power setting halfway between Minimum and Quarter
QUARTER	Increase RPM to quarter power (25% of full power)
HALF	Increase RPM to half power (50% full power)
THREE QUARTER	Increase power to three quarters (75% full power)
FULL	Increase power to full (100% full power)

Note: power settings should be prefixed by **increase to...** or **reduce to...** to ensure no confusion between what the Pilots desired reactions (it is sometimes possible for a Pilot to have forgotten the last power setting given to Tug and the use of this prefix should alleviate this).

4. Utilising Tug as a brake

Request the Tug either lay flat alongside or stretch line to act as a brake.

Tugs can be requested to either utilise a power setting or give a speed the Pilot would like vessel reduced to (latter option gives the Tug master more flexibility in power utilisation whilst assisting in the shared mental model).

Example:

TUG C/L AFT, INCREASE TO QUARTER Tug to assist in reducing vessel's speed with power

OR

TUG C/L AFT, REDUCE SHIPS SPEED TO X KNOTS Tug to use variation of pod settings and power to reduce ship's speed as requested

5. Releasing Tug

When releasing Tug, to ensure crew safety, Pilot to advise:

TUG COME IN AND STANDBY TO RECOVER LINE

When Tug in position, Pilot to be advised.

The Pilot is to request Master to advise the Duty Officer that the crew is to “lower the line slowly” at Tug crew’s direction.

On completion of recovering line, Tug Master to advise if there were any issues with recovery. If the recovery went well, Tug Master's should pass on to Pilot so they can inform Master, who can pass on to crew (positive reinforcement).

6. Emergency procedure – loss of communication between Tug and Vessel

If radio communication is lost by the Pilot, then the emergency signal is to make **7 or more short blasts on the ship’s whistle**. Upon hearing this signal, the attending Tugs are to arrest the current movement of the vessel and try to maintain its position until communications are re-established.

If radio communication is lost on the VHF working channel, then the Pilot and Tug are to revert to VHF Ch 12 to re-establish contact. Should no contact be made on VHF Ch 12, contact Melbourne VTS to advise.

All Tugs monitor the VHF working channel and VHF Ch 12 (Melbourne VTS).