

# NAABSA

The Standard Club regularly receives queries regarding NAABSA, its implications for cover and what to consider when putting it into practice.



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## What is NAABSA?

NAABSA is an abbreviation for the term:

*'Not always afloat but safely aground'*

It refers to the practice whereby ships visiting a particular port lie safely aground at low water, rather than remaining afloat with under-keel clearance throughout their visit.

## What can go wrong?

Whilst NAABSA is a common occurrence for some ships, there are still risks associated with the operation. For example, damage can happen when the quality of the seabed is right for NAABSA (flat, soft consistency), but there is debris on the seabed. An excellent example of such a claim was the *Charlotte C*, which suffered damage to her hull due to a submerged obstruction that was judged to have probably been a steel coil (steel coils were regularly loaded at the berth). In this case, the port operator was found liable for failing in its duty to keep the allocated berth free from obstructions.

The quality of information relating to the seabed will vary from port to port. In the case of the *Charlotte C*, the master was unaware of the presence of the obstruction and the hazard it posed to the ship. The responsibility to mitigate these hazards may vary depending on the ownership of the jetty. In circumstances where a jetty is privately owned, the responsibility for ensuring that the seabed remains suitable for NAABSA operations may lie with the private owner.

However, it is the member's responsibility to ensure that its vessel is technically suitable to lay aground prior to conducting NAABSA (if never previously attempted).

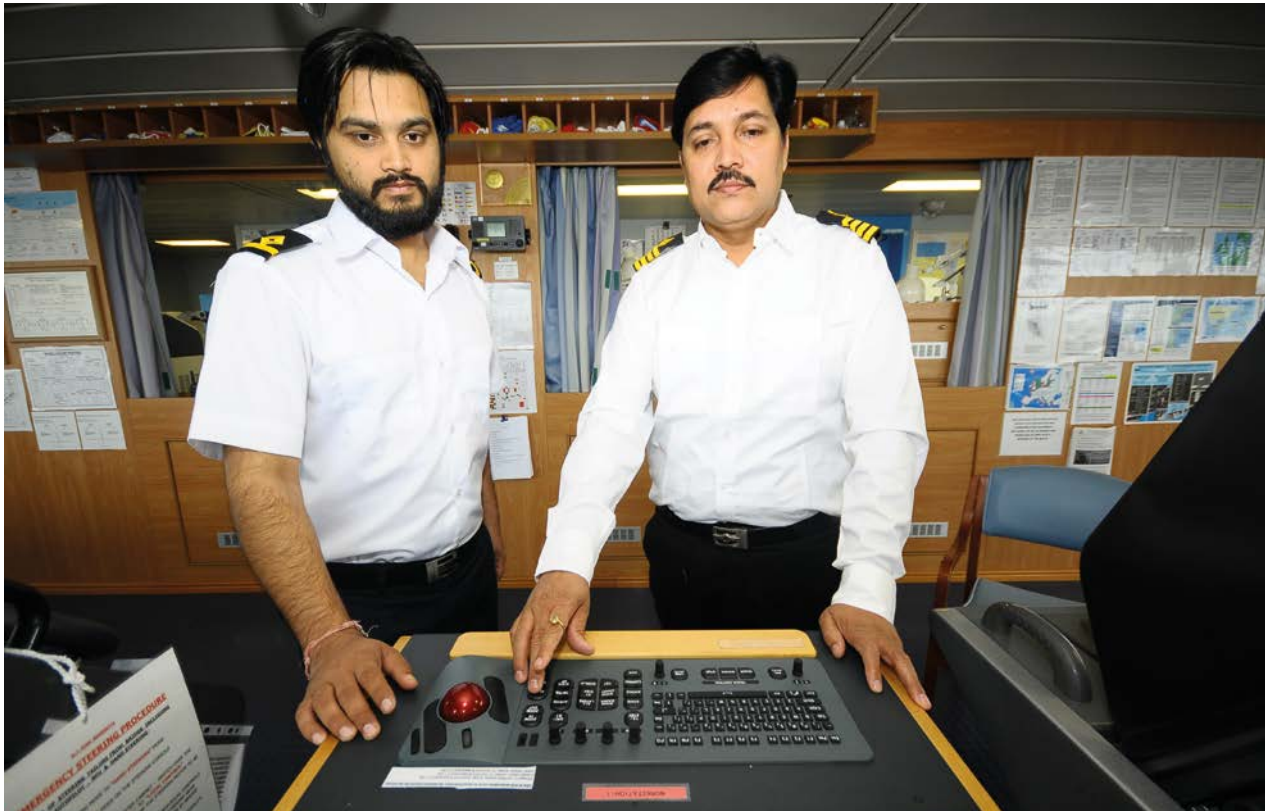
## Mitigation of risk

BIMCO has developed NAABSA charterparty wordings, which may be obtained from its website. BIMCO's approach is to avoid free-standing clauses and instead provide wording that can be added to the berthing provisions in an existing charterparty. Its wordings include the following points:

- the right for charterers to request the ship to lie safely aground for the purposes of loading/discharging operations, subject to the owner's approval
- a qualification addressing the scope of the owner's approval, in the form of an obligation for charterers to confirm in writing that ships using a particular berth can do so safely, ie without suffering damage
- the requirement for charterers to indemnify owners for any loss, damage, costs or expenses, etc that may result from the ship lying aground.



For full details, visit the [BIMCO NAABSA charter-party wording page](#).



#### Practical advice for masters:

- Ensure that all navigation charts are up to date.
- Ensure that the ship has adequate tidal information in the form of tide tables, etc. This information can be obtained from local sources such as agents if it is not carried on board.
- Obtain as much knowledge about the port as possible, prior to arrival.
- Check soundings of double-bottom tanks at the times of grounding and refloating.
- Engineers to ensure there is no damage to the rudder. This includes checking the bearings distances at the first opportunity.
- Check operation of the rudder and rudder angles visually after refloating.
- Ensure steering gear is not running when aground.
- Be aware of possibility of listing caused by the seabed being not uniformly level.
- Include pilots and harbour authorities. Information required by the master includes (but is not limited to):
  - the permitted draft whilst alongside
  - nature of the seabed at the exact berth the ship will be visiting
  - details of any obstructions that may pose a hazard to the ship
  - loading and discharge rates of the facilities that will be visited
  - the strength of the bollards at the berth.

#### Conclusion

For many shipowners/operators NAABSA can seem an unnatural operation, when one considers the time and effort devoted to trying to prevent the vessel from making contact with the seabed during normal operations. However, like all maritime activities, the hazards can be mitigated with a proper assessment of the risks and thorough preparation. The master must consider the state of the vessel, local tidal conditions and the hazards presented by the seabed in the vicinity of the berth, including the age and accuracy of the local survey data, to ensure success.