

Deckhand Job Description

A free job description template for the Maritime industry

Company Name: _____

Location: _____

Employment Type: _____

Reports To: _____

Date: _____

DISCLAIMER

This deckhand job description template is designed to reflect Australian workplace standards and maritime industry practices at the time of publication. Confirm the applicable modern award for your business and ensure compliance with all relevant employment laws.

1. Position overview

A deckhand is a general-purpose vessel crew member responsible for mooring and line handling, deck maintenance, and safely moving cargo and equipment on and off the vessel. The role combines hands-on seamanship and physical fieldwork with watchkeeping duties, safety drills and supporting the marine engineer and deck officers.

In Australia, deckhands on offshore supply and support vessels are typically covered by the Maritime Offshore Oil and Gas Award 2020 (MA000086) as an integrated rating or vessel crew member. This award is unusually complex — it uses eight vessel schedules and expresses pay as aggregate annual salaries with overtime rolled in rather than a simple hourly ladder.

This template provides a foundation for creating clear, compliant job descriptions that attract reliable crew while setting appropriate expectations for the role. Once hired, manage your vessel crew and swing rosters efficiently with rostering software.

2. Key responsibilities

Mooring and line handling

Securing and releasing mooring lines, handling ropes and wires during berthing, casting off and towing operations, and rigging gangways safely.

Deck maintenance

Cleaning, chipping, painting and preserving the vessel's decks, fittings and equipment to keep the vessel seaworthy and presentable.

Cargo and equipment handling

Loading, securing, stowing and unloading cargo, stores and equipment on deck, following lifting and lashing procedures.

Assisting deck operations

Supporting crane, winch and deck operations, connecting slings and tag lines, and assisting during supply transfers and anchor handling.

Watchkeeping

Standing lookout and bridge or deck watches as directed, monitoring conditions, and reporting hazards or changes to the officer on watch.

Safety drills and duties

Participating in emergency drills, muster stations and safety inspections, and using personal protective equipment and safety systems correctly.

3. Skills and attributes

- Seamanship: Practical knowledge of ropes, knots, mooring and deck work, and confident handling of lines and equipment at sea.
- Physical fitness: Capacity for heavy, physical work on a moving deck for extended shifts, in all weather and sea conditions.
- Safety awareness: Constant alertness to deck hazards, lifting risks and man-overboard dangers, and consistent compliance with safety procedures.
- Teamwork: Ability to work closely with a small crew in confined conditions over long swings, following instructions clearly and reliably.
- Communication: Clear verbal and radio communication during deck and mooring operations, plus accurate reporting of faults and incidents.
- Attention to detail: Careful lashing, securing and equipment checks to prevent shifting loads, damage or safety incidents at sea.

4. Qualifications and requirements

The qualifications for deckhand positions depend on the vessel type and operating area. Some are mandatory, while others are preferred or desirable.

- AMSA certification (required) — A valid AMSA seafarer or crew certificate of competency appropriate to the vessel and operation is required
- Offshore survival and sea-safety training (required) — Current offshore survival, sea-safety and basic safety training certificates for offshore work
- Working rights (required) — Eligibility to work in Australia
- Physical fitness (required) — Ability to perform heavy physical deck work on a moving vessel for extended shifts
- Previous vessel experience — Experience as a deckhand or integrated rating on offshore or marine vessels is advantageous but not always essential
- First aid certificate — Current first aid or medical certification is desirable for offshore crew

5. Working conditions

- Work at sea on a moving vessel in all weather and sea conditions
- Swing or even-time rosters with extended periods away from home
- Heavy physical deck work, mooring and cargo handling
- Shift and watchkeeping arrangements, including nights and weekends
- Confined shared living and working conditions with a small crew
- Strict compliance with safety procedures and personal protective equipment requirements

6. Award information

Maritime offshore oil and gas award 2020

Most deckhand positions on offshore supply and support vessels in Australia are covered by the Maritime Offshore Oil and Gas Award 2020 (MA000086). This modern award sets minimum pay, allowances and conditions for integrated ratings and vessel crew working in the offshore oil and gas sector.

The award is unusually complex — it uses eight vessel schedules and expresses pay as aggregate annual salaries with overtime rolled in, rather than a simple hourly ladder. Because of this, refer to the Maritime Offshore Oil and Gas Award guide for current figures rather than quoting hourly rates. Use award interpretation software to apply pay accurately.

Rostering, tickets and the right award

Offshore deckhands generally work swing or even-time rosters, alternating set periods offshore with equal time onshore, and must hold current AMSA certification plus offshore survival and sea-safety training. Confirm the tickets and roster pattern that apply to your vessel and operation.

Note that the rig or production side of offshore oil and gas is covered by a different instrument — the Hydrocarbons Industry (Upstream) Award 2020 (MA000062) — so check which award applies to each role. Also check whether an enterprise agreement applies in place of the award.

7. Frequently asked questions

About the role

Q: What does a deckhand do?

A deckhand is a general-purpose vessel crew member responsible for mooring and line handling, deck maintenance, and safely moving cargo and equipment on and off the vessel. They assist crane and deck operations, stand watch, take part in safety drills, and support the marine engineer and deck officers. It is a hands-on, physical role that combines seamanship with strong safety awareness.

Q: What award covers deckhands in Australia?

Deckhands on offshore supply and support vessels are generally covered by the Maritime Offshore Oil and Gas Award 2020 (MA000086) as integrated ratings or vessel crew. The rig or production side of offshore oil and gas is covered by a different instrument, the Hydrocarbons Industry (Upstream) Award 2020 (MA000062). Some businesses may instead be covered by an enterprise agreement, so always confirm which instrument applies.

Q: How is deckhand pay structured under the offshore award?

The Maritime Offshore Oil and Gas Award is unusually complex — it uses eight vessel schedules and expresses pay as aggregate annual salaries with overtime rolled in, rather than a simple hourly ladder. Because of this, it is best to refer to the Maritime Offshore Oil and Gas Award guide for current figures rather than quoting a single hourly rate. Use award interpretation software to apply pay accurately.

Q: Do I need to include pay rates in a job description?

It's not legally required, but including indicative pay information can attract more applicants and set clear expectations. Because the offshore award uses aggregate annual salaries rather than a simple hourly rate, you can reference the applicable schedule or use phrases like 'Aggregate salary in line with the award' or 'Competitive offshore package based on experience.' See the Maritime Offshore Oil and Gas Award guide for guidance.

Qualifications

Q: What tickets and certificates does a deckhand need?

Offshore deckhands generally need a valid AMSA seafarer or crew certificate of competency appropriate to the vessel, plus current offshore survival and sea-safety training. Employers also require working rights in Australia and the physical fitness for heavy deck work. Prior vessel experience is advantageous but not always essential for entry-level ratings.

Q: Is AMSA certification required for a deckhand?

Yes, an appropriate AMSA certificate is typically required for crew working on Australian commercial vessels, and offshore roles also require offshore survival and sea-safety training. Confirm the exact certificates of competency and safety tickets needed for your vessel type and operating area before recruiting.

Q: What qualifications should I require vs prefer for a deckhand?

Mandatory requirements usually include valid AMSA certification, offshore survival and sea-safety training, working rights in Australia and physical fitness for deck work. Preferred qualifications include previous experience as a deckhand or integrated rating and a current first aid certificate. Be clear about which tickets your operation cannot compromise on to keep your crew safe and compliant.

Q: Can I hire deckhands without offshore experience?

Yes, in some cases. Entry-level ratings can start with the required AMSA and safety certificates and build experience on the job, though many offshore operators prefer prior vessel time. Focus on reliability, physical fitness, teamwork and a strong safety attitude. Clear job descriptions help candidates understand the demands of swing rosters and offshore life and self-select appropriately.

Employment

Q: Should I hire casual or permanent deckhands?

This depends on your vessel schedule. Casual deckhands offer flexibility for short charters or variable workloads, while permanent full-time or part-time crew provide continuity on swing rosters and stronger retention. Many offshore operators use a mix — permanent crew for core vessels and casuals to cover peaks and relief. Confirm how the offshore award treats each employment type before deciding.

Q: How do swing or even-time rosters work for deckhands?

Offshore deckhands typically work swing or even-time rosters, alternating a set period offshore with an equal period onshore. The exact pattern depends on the vessel and operation and is often built into the aggregate salary under the Maritime Offshore Oil and Gas Award. Confirm the roster pattern that applies and set it out clearly in the job description and contract.

Q: How does overtime work under the offshore award?

The Maritime Offshore Oil and Gas Award generally rolls overtime into an aggregate annual salary rather than paying it as a separate hourly loading, which is part of what makes the award complex. Because arrangements vary by vessel schedule, refer to the award guide and use award interpretation software to confirm how overtime applies to your crew.

Q: What should I include in a deckhand employment contract?

Key elements include: position title and classification, employment type (casual, part-time or full-time), the applicable award and vessel schedule, aggregate salary or pay arrangement, roster pattern, reporting structure, main duties, and required tickets such as AMSA certification and offshore survival training. Confirm the correct instrument — vessel crew versus rig or production — before finalising the contract.

Rostering

Q: How far in advance should I provide rosters to deckhands?

Award and agreement rosters rules vary, so confirm the notice period and swing pattern that apply to your operation. As a general practice, giving crew clear visibility of their swing dates well in advance helps them plan time onshore. Using rosters software helps manage crew changes and reduces last-minute disruption.

Q: How do I roster deckhands across swing rosters and multiple vessels?

Plan crew changes around each vessel's schedule, swing pattern and required tickets, balancing time offshore with equal time onshore. Use rosters tools to track hours, certifications and availability, and to fill relief positions when crew are on leave or when tickets expire. This keeps vessels crewed and compliant.

Q: What rest and breaks are deckhands entitled to?

Rest and watchkeeping requirements are set by the applicable award, agreement and maritime safety rules, and are especially important offshore where fatigue is a serious risk. Set clear watch and rest policies and ensure crew record their hours accurately. Use time and attendance tools to support compliance and fatigue management.

Q: How do I manage deckhand availability and certifications for rosters?

Collect availability and swing preferences during onboarding and update them regularly. Use HR software and rosters tools to track when each deckhand can work and to monitor AMSA and safety certificate expiry dates. Setting clear policies about availability and ticket renewals simplifies crew planning and avoids gaps or compliance issues.