

Fishing Skipper interview questions

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What to expect

Fishing Skipper interviews combine technical seamanship, regulatory knowledge and crew leadership. Employers want to know you can run a vessel safely, stay within quota and keep a crew working well together.

- **Technical and navigation:** Questions on chartplotter, radar, sounder use, passage planning and vessel handling in different conditions.
- **Regulatory and compliance:** Questions on quota management, catch reporting, AMSA requirements and state fishing rules.
- **Safety and emergency:** Questions on safety drills, hazard management, and your response to breakdowns or medical incidents at sea.
- **Crew leadership:** Questions on managing deckhands, resolving conflict, training and keeping morale up on long trips.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Questions that put you in a realistic decision point, such as changing weather or approaching quota.

Usually a one-on-one or panel interview with the vessel owner, operations manager or a senior skipper, followed by a practical assessment or sea trial. Some employers hold a separate conversation about safety and compliance with a marine superintendent. Expect questions on your sea time, certificates and specific fishing methods.

1. Walk us through how you plan a fishing trip, from deciding where to go to returning to port.

Why they ask

This tests your operational planning and whether you consider weather, tides, fuel and market demand before leaving the wharf.

How to structure your answer

Process walk-through. Start with how you choose the grounds, then cover preparation, crew briefing, on-ground adjustments, and the return trip.

Example answer

"First I check the long-range forecast and tide charts, then look at recent catch reports and sounder data from previous trips. I decide on a primary ground and a backup, factoring in fuel range and how many days we can fish. Before departure I brief the crew on the plan, safety equipment and our target species. On the grounds I adjust based on sounder readings and bird activity. If the weather turns or the catch mix is wrong, I am ready to move. On the way home I log catch, fuel used and any maintenance issues for the next trip."

2. Tell me about a time you had to manage a crew member who was not pulling their weight or a conflict on board.

Why they ask

Crew leadership and conflict resolution are critical on a small vessel where you cannot avoid each other.

How to structure your answer

STAR. Describe the situation, the task, the action you took and the result.

Example answer

"On a week-long trip, one deckhand kept missing his watch and leaving gear untidy. The rest of the crew was getting frustrated. I sat down with him privately and asked if something was wrong. He was struggling with the long hours. I adjusted the watch roster so he had more consistent sleep and paired him with an experienced hand for the first few days. His performance improved, the tension eased, and we finished the trip with a full catch and no safety incidents."

3. The weather forecast changes quickly while you are on the grounds. How do you decide whether to stay or head back?

Why they ask

Tests judgement under pressure and safety prioritisation.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure. Outline the information you gather, the risk assessment, and the decision criteria.

Example answer

"I check the updated forecast every few hours via the satellite link and compare it to the actual sea state. I look at wind speed and direction, swell height, and how the vessel is handling. I also consider the distance to shelter and the experience of my crew. If conditions are approaching the vessel's limits or the forecast is for worse, I head back early. No catch is worth risking the crew or the boat. I would rather lose a day's fishing than put anyone in danger."

4. How do you keep track of quota limits, species mix and catch size across a multi-day trip?

Why they ask

Regulatory compliance and attention to detail.

How to structure your answer

Technical and compliance explanation. Describe your record-keeping system, use of electronic catch reporting, and how you adjust fishing if you approach a limit.

Example answer

"I use the onboard electronic catch reporting software to log every shot, including species, estimated weight and size range. I keep a running tally for each quota species and check it against the licence conditions. If we are getting close to a limit, I change grounds or gear to avoid overcatch. I also record any interactions with protected species as required. At the end of the trip I submit the report before unloading, so the authorities have accurate data and we stay compliant."

5. Describe your approach to maintaining engines and deck machinery so you avoid breakdowns at sea.

Why they ask

Preventative maintenance and problem solving.

How to structure your answer

Preventative maintenance walk-through. Cover daily checks, scheduled servicing, spare parts, and how you handle a breakdown.

Example answer

"Every morning I do a walk-around: check oil, coolant, belts, fuel filters and hydraulic lines. I keep a maintenance log and stick to the manufacturer's service intervals, doing what I can at sea and booking specialists for bigger jobs between trips. I carry spare impellers, filters and belts. If something fails, I troubleshoot using the manual and my experience, and if it is beyond me I call for assistance. Staying ahead of maintenance means fewer lost days and safer trips."

6. What steps do you take to keep your crew safe when setting and hauling gear?

Why they ask

Safety procedure and leadership.

How to structure your answer

Safety procedure. Identify hazards, describe controls, PPE, communication, and emergency drills.

Example answer

"Before any gear work I hold a toolbox talk. We identify hazards like moving ropes, heavy doors and slippery decks. Everyone wears the right PPE, including gloves, boots and life jackets when on deck. I make sure the crew knows their positions and who is in charge of each winch. We never rush. If someone is unsure, we stop and go through it. I also run regular man-overboard and fire drills so everyone knows what to do in an emergency. Safety is not a box-ticking exercise; it is how we get home."