

Marine Surveyor interview questions

careertips.com.au: common questions and what they're really testing

What to expect

Marine surveyor interviews focus on your regulatory knowledge, practical survey skills, and your judgement when vessels do not meet standards. Employers want to know you can apply AMSA rules and international conventions consistently, communicate findings clearly, and stay calm when an owner pushes back.

- **Technical and regulatory:** Questions on AMSA Marine Orders, the National Standard for Commercial Vessels, SOLAS, MARPOL and how you apply them during a survey.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Situations where you find a defect or non-compliance and must decide on seaworthiness, conditions or detention.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of how you handled serious findings, difficult owners or incident investigations.
- **Process and documentation:** Walk-throughs of how you prepare for a survey, conduct inspections and produce reports and certificates.
- **Client and stakeholder:** How you deal with vessel owners, operators, class societies and regulators when findings are disputed.

Interviews for marine surveyor roles usually begin with a phone screen covering your qualifications, sea-going experience and ticketing. The main interview is often a panel with a technical lead and a survey manager. It includes technical questions on regulations and survey methods, one or two scenario problems, and behavioural questions about past inspections. You may also be asked to review a sample survey report or explain how you would handle a specific defect.

1. How do you apply AMSA Marine Orders and the National Standard for Commercial Vessels when surveying a domestic commercial vessel?

Why they ask

This checks whether you can translate written regulations into a practical survey plan and a clear compliance decision.

How to structure your answer

Start with the relevant Marine Order, explain how you check the vessel against NSCV requirements, then describe how you document any gaps and issue a certificate or recommend conditions.

Example answer

"I begin by identifying the vessel's operations and the Marine Orders that apply. For a domestic commercial vessel, I check the NSCV requirements for structure, machinery, safety equipment and pollution prevention. During the survey I inspect each area, take measurements where needed, and note any item that does not meet the standard. If I find a gap, I record it in the survey report with a clear description and a timeline for correction. If the vessel meets all requirements, I issue the certificate. If not, I recommend conditions or a follow-up survey before the certificate is granted. I also make sure the owner understands what needs to change and why, so there are no surprises."

2. You are surveying a vessel and find significant corrosion in a ballast tank. The owner needs the vessel to sail tomorrow. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests your judgement under pressure and whether you will hold the line on safety.

How to structure your answer

State your immediate safety assessment, then the options you consider, then the decision you make and how you communicate it to the owner.

Example answer

"My first step is to assess the extent of the corrosion and whether it affects the vessel's structural integrity. I take ultrasonic thickness readings and compare them with the minimum requirements. If the corrosion is beyond allowable limits, I cannot pass the vessel for its intended voyage. I explain to the owner that the vessel is not seaworthy for that trip and that sailing would breach the regulations. I offer a practical pathway: a repair plan, a temporary condition if the rules allow it and a re-inspection before departure. I document everything in the survey report. I understand the owner's commercial pressure, but safety and compliance come first. I would rather delay a sailing than risk a crew or the environment."

3. Tell me about a time you identified a serious non-compliance during a survey. How did you handle it?

Why they ask

This looks for evidence of your technical judgement and your ability to communicate difficult findings.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation and vessel, the task you had to complete, the action you took to confirm and report the non-compliance, and the result for the owner and the regulator.

Example answer

"I was surveying a commercial fishing vessel when I found that the fire detection system had been disabled and not repaired. The crew had not logged the fault. My task was to complete the survey and determine whether the vessel could continue operating. I tested the system, confirmed it was not working, and reviewed the maintenance records. I documented the finding as a serious non-compliance and explained to the owner that the vessel could not sail until the system was fixed. I also reported it to the regulator as required. The owner arranged repairs within two days, and I returned to re-inspect and issue the certificate. The result was a safer vessel and a clearer maintenance process for the operator."

4. Walk me through how you prepare for and conduct a periodic survey of a commercial vessel.

Why they ask

This assesses your organisational skills and whether you follow a consistent, defensible method.

How to structure your answer

Outline the preparation steps, the on-board inspection sequence, and how you compile the report.

Example answer

"Before the survey I review the vessel's previous survey reports, certificates, maintenance records and any outstanding conditions. I check the applicable Marine Orders and the survey interval. On board, I start with a safety brief and then inspect the hull, decks and superstructure for structural defects. I move to machinery spaces, testing main engines, generators, electrical systems and navigation equipment. I check safety equipment, life-saving appliances and pollution prevention arrangements. I take measurements and photographs where needed. After the inspection I compile a report, listing any deficiencies, their severity and the required actions. I then issue a certificate if the vessel complies, or recommend conditions and a follow-up. I keep the owner informed at each stage."

5. How do you handle a disagreement with a vessel owner who disputes your survey findings?

Why they ask

This checks your communication skills and whether you can stay firm but fair.

How to structure your answer

Acknowledge the owner's position, explain the regulatory basis for your finding, offer a clear pathway to compliance, and document the conversation.

Example answer

"I start by listening to the owner's concern and asking them to explain their view. Often there is a misunderstanding about the regulation or the condition of the vessel. I then take them to the specific item and show the evidence, whether that is a measurement, a photograph or the relevant Marine Order. I explain that my finding is based on the standard, not on personal opinion. I offer a clear pathway: what needs to be fixed, how it can be fixed, and when I can re-inspect. If the owner still disagrees, I let them know they can seek a review through the regulator. I document the conversation and the outcome in the survey file. My goal is to get the vessel to a compliant state safely, not to win an argument."

6. What tools do you use to assess hull thickness and machinery condition, and how do you interpret their readings?

Why they ask

This confirms your hands-on competence and your understanding of the limits of each tool.

How to structure your answer

Name the tools, describe how you use them, and explain how you decide whether readings indicate a defect.

Example answer

"For hull thickness I use an ultrasonic thickness gauge. I take readings at set points along the hull and in ballast tanks, then compare them with the original thickness and the allowable wastage limits. If readings are close to the limit, I increase the number of measurement points and may use a borescope to look inside tanks. For machinery I use a vibration meter to check bearings and rotating equipment, and a thermal imaging camera to spot overheating in electrical panels. I also use a borescope to inspect internal components without dismantling. I interpret each reading in context: a single high vibration reading might be a loose mount, but a trend over time suggests wear. I record all readings and use survey management software to track them against previous surveys."