

Coastal Distress Marine Radio Network

Frequently asked questions

What is the Coastal Distress Marine Radio Network?

In 2002 the responsibility for the VHF/HF marine radio network was transferred to state jurisdictions from Telstra. At that time Telstra operated two coast stations which provided VHF radio communications from the New South Wales border to Fraser Island and an area adjacent to Townsville.

Since 2002, Maritime Safety Queensland has expanded the service to cover all adjacent coastal waters between Cooktown and the New South Wales border, providing a 24 hour listening watch on VHF channels 16 and 67 for distress and urgency calls.

The establishment of vessel traffic service operations in Cairns, Mackay and Gladstone have provided the opportunities to enhance marine safety to the small commercial and recreational boating communities through making available 24 hours monitoring of VHF and HF radio for urgency and distress calls.

What area does it cover?

From Cooktown to the New South Wales border (see map). There are some areas with limited coverage. They are around Hinchinbrook Island, south of Bowen and Broadsound between Yeppoon and Mackay. The radio set up on a vessel will influence coverage.

How does it work?

Volunteer Marine Rescue Organisations (Australian Volunteer Coast Guard and Volunteer Marine Rescue) play an important role in delivering the coastal distress marine radio network service. They maintain a listening watch during their operating hours which is then handed over to Vessel Traffic Service Centres after hours. Volunteer groups involved in the coastal distress marine radio network are:

Seaway Tower — AVCG
Mooloolaba — AVCG
Tin Can Bay — AVCG
Hervey Bay — VMR
Bundaberg — VMR
Yeppoon — AVCG
Mackay — VMR
Airlie Beach — VMR
Townsville — AVCG
Cairns — AVCG

What about the other volunteer organisations?

Volunteer Marine Rescue and Australian Volunteer Coast Guard are located along the Queensland Coast. Information about their hours of operation, channels monitored and contact telephone numbers can be found in the Queensland Recreational Boating and Fishing Guide, Marine Radio brochure, Beacon to Beacon and Queensland Tide Tables publications.

What are the benefits of the Network's operation?

It provides a 24 hour listening watch on VHF channels 16 and 67 for distress and urgency calls along the Queensland coast.

Do I need to carry a VHF marine radio?

It is not a requirement that recreational ships carry a VHF marine radio however it is recommended. With the increase in size (registration of vessels over 4.5 metres) of ships, there is potential for larger ships to be undertaking voyages offshore or along the coast.

Larger vessels are more likely to operate in areas beyond smooth and partially smooth waters and are therefore more likely to have radio equipment installed.

While mobile phones can be used as a back up, it only allows for communication between two parties and other ships in the area that may be able to offer assistance in an emergency can not be alerted. Mobile phones can also be unreliable. Batteries can go flat, they can be out of range and can sustain damage in a marine environment.

The ability of a vessel in distress to communicate with shore based rescue organisations and other vessels in the area considerably improves the likelihood of a positive safety outcome.

Do I need a licence to operate a VHF marine radio?

Yes. A Marine Radio Operator's Certificate of Proficiency (MROCP) is required. Volunteer rescue organisations conduct courses. The advantage of holding a certificate is that it teaches operators correct procedures for using a marine radio and maintenance.

Information

For further information, email Maritime Safety Queensland at msgmail@msg.qld.gov.au or visit www.msg.qld.gov.au.

