

Dear Torres Strait Bêche-de-mer Fishery Traditional Inhabitant Boat Licence holder,

**Reminder notice in relation to requirement for the use of Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) for the 2026 Black Teatfish fishing season**

I am writing to remind you of the updated conditions of your Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) Licence, for the 2026 Black Teatfish fishing season opening, to give effect to the trial Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) requirements.

At their meeting in July 2025, the Protected Zone Joint Authority Standing Committee (PZJA SC) agreed to the trial implementation of mandatory vessel monitoring systems for the 2026 black teatfish fishery opening.

The PZJA SC decision was in recognition of the need to meet Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) conditions on monitoring for localised depletion and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of current monitoring of the BDM fishery.

Additional reasons for trialling VMS include:

- keeping the black teatfish fishery sustainable for future generations of Torres Strait Islanders
- reducing compliance costs, so more resources can be used in other areas
- providing better data to help manage the fishery – the more we know, the better chance the fishery can grow
- ensuring that black teatfish caught in the Torres Strait Bêche-de-mer Fishery can be traded internationally and get the best prices possible to support local communities.

Enclosed is a VMS Information Booklet and VMS Flyer with more information on the VMS trial. Further information about the VMS trial is also available on the [PZJA website](#), or by contacting the VMS team at [ausvms@afma.gov.au](mailto:ausvms@afma.gov.au) or by calling on (02) 6225 5500 and following the VMS prompts.



Tod Spencer  
Senior Manager  
National Compliance Operation



# Protected Zone Joint Authority

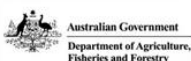
## 2026 Black Teatfish Season

Vessel Monitoring System Trial

Information Booklet



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## Vessel Monitoring Systems

A vessel monitoring system (VMS) is a device that is attached to a fishing vessel and used to monitor its location. They are used in nearly all fisheries in Australia.

## PZJA agreement

In July 2025, the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) Standing Committee agreed to a trial of VMS for the 2026 black teatfish season. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) will manage the trial.

## Reasons for the 2026 VMS trial

Monitoring and compliance during black teatfish season are important for keeping the black teatfish fishery sustainable. This ensures the fishery keeps its trade approval, so the long-term benefits of black teatfish keep flowing to Torres Strait Islander communities.

In past seasons, AFMA has used patrol vessels for monitoring and compliance, with funding support from the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA). These vessels are extremely expensive – 2 patrol boats in the 2025 season cost more than \$100,000.

AFMA and TSRA do not have ongoing funding to cover these costs. Using VMS is much cheaper than patrol boats.



## VMS rules for 2026 black teatfish season

All licences to fish in the 2026 black teatfish season will include VMS conditions.

These conditions will set the rules of the VMS trial:

- ALL licenced boats operating in the 2026 black teatfish fishing season must have a VMS unit.
- The VMS units must be fixed to the nominated boat using a tamper-evident seal.
- Fishers must not interfere with the VMS unit or the seal unless authorised.
- Fishers will be able to move the VMS unit to a replacement boat (for example, if the first boat breaks down).
- AFMA will be able to exempt a licence holder from the requirement to fit a VMS to their boat.
- AFMA will be able to have a mid-season closure and partial fishing days (in bad weather, for example).

AFMA will contact existing licenced fishers in the days leading up to the black teatfish season opening date and supply VMS units.

New fishers will need to apply for their licence at **least 3 weeks before the 2026 black teatfish season opens** to ensure they receive their VMS unit in time.

## Better fisheries management with VMS

AFMA believes there are lots of benefits of using VMS to manage the black teatfish fishery.

With VMS, AFMA can collect better catch and effort data, and estimate catch and fishing activity rates more accurately.

Some of the benefits include:

- VMS enables more flexibility in season opening and closing dates. For example, the fishery could close for a day during the season, if bad weather makes fishing risky. This is because VMS allows AFMA to ensure there is no fishing in the closed period.
- VMS enables flexibility in season duration and should allow more of the TAC to be taken.
- Fishers do not have to report catch locations.
- VMS will reduce the cost of ensuring compliance, allowing AFMA to divert resources to other areas, like addressing illegal foreign fishing in the Torres Strait.
- VMS provides spatial data to monitor for localised depletion and support transition to middle-tier harvest strategy management. Higher quality data provides a pathway to improve and grow the fishery.



## No cost to licence holders

The implementation of VMS will be **at no cost to fishers**. TSRA and AFMA will fund the purchase and operating costs of the units.

## Data and privacy

AFMA stores VMS data securely in its VMS system. Only authorised AFMA officers can access the data. All data is private and confidential and subject to the provisions of the Commonwealth *Privacy Act 1988*.

Fishers can obtain their own boat's VMS data by request to AFMA.

## VMS device type and installation

The VMS units that will be used are **Iridium Edge® Solar** devices. These units are fully self-contained and solar powered. They only need to be attached to the vessel.

AFMA VMS and Compliance Officers will assist in the installation of the units (at no cost) or operators can simply attach the units themselves.

Several Torres Strait fishers volunteered to trial the units during the 2024 and 2025 black teatfish seasons with great success.



## After the 2026 VMS trial

The trial is only for the 2026 black teatfish season.

Afterwards, AFMA will prepare a report to the PZJA on the trial outcomes. The units will be removed (and returned to or collected by AFMA) after the close of the 2026 black teatfish season.

**VMS will not automatically become mandatory for Torres Strait fishers or fisheries on an ongoing basis.**

Any future decisions on the use of VMS in the Torres Strait Beche-de-mer Fishery are in the hands of the PZJA and Torres Strait communities.

## Contact AFMA if your VMS stops working or gets damaged

Please call 1300 723 621 (follow prompts for AFMA VMS team) as soon as possible.




## Contacts

### AFMA Thursday Island office

<b>Street address</b>	Level 1 Pearls Building 38 Victoria Parade Thursday Island QLD 4875 Australia
<b>Postal address</b>	PO Box 376 Thursday Island QLD 4875 Australia
<b>Business hours</b>	9am to 5pm – Monday to Friday
<b>AFMA Direct phone</b>	1300 723 621
<b>Thursday Island Office phone</b>	(07) 4069 1990
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:FisheriesTI@afma.gov.au">FisheriesTI@afma.gov.au</a>
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.pzja.gov.au">www.pzja.gov.au</a>

### AFMA VMS

<b>Business hours</b>	9am to 5pm – Monday to Friday
<b>Phone</b>	1300 723 621 (follow prompts for AFMA VMS team)



AFMA VMS	
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:ausvms@afma.gov.au">ausvms@afma.gov.au</a>
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-management/monitoring-tools/vessel-monitoring-systems">www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-management/monitoring-tools/vessel-monitoring-systems</a>

Illegal fishing	
<b>CRIMFISH hotline</b>	Free call on 1800 274 634 (1800 CRIMFISH)
<b>AFMA Duty Officer (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)</b>	0428 196 114 or (02) 6275 5818
<b>Thursday Island Office phone (business hours)</b>	(07) 4069 1990
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:intelligence@afma.gov.au">intelligence@afma.gov.au</a>
<b>Online report</b>	<a href="http://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-management/compliance/report-illegal-fishing">www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-management/compliance/report-illegal-fishing</a>



# Protected Zone Joint Authority 2026 Black Teatfish VMS Trial

## Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS)

Devices, used in most Australian fisheries, fitted to fishing vessels to track location.

All licensed boats must have a VMS unit installed.



## VMS Devices, Installation and Rules

The 2026 Black Teatfish VMS trial will use Iridium Edge® Solar units

AFMA will supply VMS units to existing fishers before the season start.

Fishers must secure the VMS unit to their boat, using a tamper-evident seal, with the solar panel facing the sky. AFMA can assist in installation at no cost.

Do **NOT** place anything over or cover the VMS unit as it can disrupt signal transmission and solar charging.



Cover artwork: © Laurie Nona, Zenardh<sup>1</sup>Zes'aw Malu



# VMS Operator Instructions

## Do

- Attach to the outside of the boat with the solar panel facing the sky
- Contact AFMA if you need any assistance installing
- Clean any dirt, grime or salt off of the solar panel using fresh water

## Don't

- Install the unit under cover, under a canopy or indoors
- Drop, hit or throw the unit as this can damage it
- Submerge in water
- Cover the unit in any way. This includes with fishing gear, ropes, tarps, buckets, clothing or paint.
- Tamper with the Tamper-Evident seal

Cover artwork: © Laurie Nona, Zenardh-Zes'aw Malu

