



9 February 2017

Dear Torres Strait primary and/or carrier vessel operator,

Re: Introduction on Vessel Monitoring Systems for Primary and Carrier vessels

I am writing to inform you that from **1 July 2017** a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) will be **mandatory on all commercially licensed primary and carrier vessels** operating under the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984*. This includes where a primary boat is the boat from which tender boats are authorised to operate, and/or boats operating using a Carrier Boat Licence Class A, B, or C. Vessels operating for freight shipping are exempt from installing VMS. Exemptions may also be provided for carrier vessels that are six meters or less in length.

The Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) has made the decision to implement VMS following consultation with the tropical lobster working group, the hand collectables working group and the finfish working group. All working groups supported the introduction of VMS. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) is managing the implementation and management of VMS.

VMS has been used in Australian fisheries, such as the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery, since 1992 and has been mandatory in all Commonwealth managed fisheries since 2007. The introduction of VMS in the Torres Strait will improve our ability to monitor fishing boat movements which can in turn lead to more flexible management arrangements.

The cost of purchasing and maintaining the units will be the responsibility of the licence holder. A list of approved VMS units are listed on the AFMA website www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-services/vessel-monitoring

Important information regarding the installation and operation of a VMS unit is shown in **Attachment A** to this letter. A list of answers to frequently asked questions is shown at **Attachment B**. The precise wording of the licence condition which will be printed on your licences is shown at **Attachment C**. Please note that these arrangements are separate to those already in place for VMS in the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery.

Remember, it is the licence holder's responsibility to ensure all the rules and conditions are complied with.

If you have questions about VMS please ring AFMA on (02) 6225 5474 or email vmsinfo@afma.gov.au or;

Myself (Selina Stoute) on (07) 4069 1990 or email Selina.Stoute@afma.gov.au

Yours sincerely,



Selina Stoute

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Attachment A

Important Information Regarding the Installation and Operation of VMS on Primary and Carrier Boats in the Torres Strait.

Note: This information does NOT relate to the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery

What you need to know

- all VMS units installed must meet AFMA approved standards
- a VMS unit must be fitted and working on the boat nominated to your fishing licence at all times
- your VMS must stay on at all times – even if the boat is tied up in port, or out fishing under a state fishing permit/concession, or if you are doing repairs on your boat
- you can only switch off your VMS if you have prior written approval from AFMA
- it is your responsibility to fit and maintain a working VMS
- failure to have a working VMS is an offence.

Make sure you

- seek approval from AFMA before switching off a VMS
- check with AFMA if you have any concerns with your VMS unit before you go fishing
- include your VMS unit in routine maintenance programs.

You must not

- switch off your unit for any reason without prior approval from AFMA
- leave port if your VMS is not working.

Additional information can be found on the AFMA website here:

<http://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-services/vessel-monitoring/>

This information includes all the relevant forms and information sheets which can be downloaded.

If you have questions about VMS please ring AFMA on (02) 6225 5474 or email vmsinfo@afma.gov.au

Attachment B

Frequently asked questions: VMS on Primary and Carrier Boats in the Torres Strait.

Note: This information does NOT relate to the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery

What is a Vessel Monitoring System?

A Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) unit is fitted to a boat and utilises a combination of Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS) and satellite communications to transmit and receive information such as the boat's location, course and speed.

How was this decision made?

The Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) has made the decision to implement VMS following consultation with the tropical lobster working group, the hand collectables working group and the finfish working group. All working groups supported the introduction of VMS. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) is managing the implementation, monitoring and management of VMS.

What are the benefits of a VMS?

A VMS unit also allows for better management of the marine resources of the Torres Strait by allowing AFMA to monitor the location, speed and course of a boat. Fisheries managers will now be able to tell if a vessel is carrying out actions such as fishing in a closed area, or fishing outside season.

Who will see my position data?

VMS data is received by AFMA via a secure transmission system. The data is held on a secure server at AFMA. There are stringent processes in place for the use of VMS data. The main uses for the VMS data is for compliance and research purposes.

VMS data for individual boats is not made public.

Who needs a VMS?

The licence holder must have an approved VMS unit fitted to the boat if it is conducting commercial fishing in the Torres Strait Protected Zone using a primary boat and/or operating with a Carrier Boat License (Class A, B, or C). Vessels operating for freight shipping are exempt from installing VMS. Exemptions may also be provided for carrier vessels that are six (6) meters or less in length.

When do I have to have the system installed and working by?

A VMS unit must be fitted and operational by **1 July 2017**. No primary boat or boat using a Class A, B, or C License will be able to commercially fish or operate after **1 July 2017** if an AFMA approved VMS unit is not installed, operational and signed off by AFMA.

Can I choose any VMS?

Any VMS unit purchased for fitting to a Torres Strait licenced fishing boat must meet AFMA type approved standards. A list of approved units can be found on the AFMA website here:

<http://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-services/vessel-monitoring/>

How much does it cost and who pays?

The cost of a VMS unit starts at approximately \$1,350 to purchase and install, ranging as high at approximately \$3,500. Individual licence holders are responsible for the cost of purchasing and fitting a VMS unit.

How do I install it?

AFMA recommends that you engage a qualified marine technician to have your VMS unit correctly installed.

Do dinghies (tender fishing boats) need a VMS if I tow them with my primary boat and they fish too?

No

Is there any paperwork?

Yes. There are a number of forms you, or your technician must complete and submit to AFMA. These can be downloaded from the AFMA website here.

<http://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-services/vessel-monitoring/>

Hard copies of these forms can also be picked up from the Thursday Island AFMA office

What happens if it breaks down?

AFMA requires VMS units to be operational at all times, even when it is in port. The licence owner **MUST** contact AFMA immediately if the unit breaks down. AFMA has procedures to allow a boat to continue fishing and report manually when if the VMS unit has broken down. You **MUST** get written approval from AFMA before you can switch to manual reporting. Should you need to switch off your VMS for any reason you need to apply for a Temporary Switch Off.

Who do I contact to learn more?

If you have any questions about VMS please contact AFMA's VMS team on (02) 6225 5555 or email vmsinfo@afma.gov.au. More information is available on the AFMA website here:

<http://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-services/vessel-monitoring/>

Attachment C – New Torres Strait Licence Conditions: VMS

Note: This information does NOT relate to the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery

Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) Licence Conditions

1. The Licence holder must ensure that:
 - a) the boat nominated to this Licence has a vessel monitoring system that is capable of being operational at all times
 - b) the vessel monitoring system on the nominated boat is operational at all times.
 - c) If the vessel monitoring system stops operating, the licence holder must ensure that AFMA is informed as soon as practicable after the licence holder becomes aware that the VMS has stopped operating.