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## Boat owners to check they are equipped to operate **VHF** marine radios



ACMA is calling on boat owners and users to double-check that they hold a certificate of proficiency to operate their very high frequency (VHF) marine radio.

VHF marine radios provide a valuable means of keeping in contact with other vessels and coast stations, particularly at times when the weather changes or when help is needed. The number of vessels on Australian waterways is increasing, and with more competitive prices on equipment, so is the proportion of boats and other craft that are fitted with marine radios.

ACMA has received complaints about poor procedures used by operators of VHF marine radios, particularly their effect on access to emergency channel 16. In addition, some operators who get into difficulties are not using the internationally accepted procedures that were developed to ensure that calls for help convey essential information to receive a rapid response.

'The stark warning is simply this—many boat owners who do not hold an operator's certificate may not realise they are breaking the law when they operate their VHF marine radios,' said Chris Chapman, ACMA Chair.

'VHF International Maritime Mobile (IMM) channels are internationally harmonised and are

used for gaining assistance during emergency situations and for general working purposes.'

Channel 16 is designated internationally as the emergency and calling channel for ships and small craft. A vessel's crew may use channel 16 to call other vessels and coast stations but once communication has been established, the operators must change to a working channel to continue the conversation. This ensures channel 16 remains available for emergency situations and other calls.

'Operators who hold an appropriate operator's certificate of proficiency know about calling protocols and how the channels are used. Unfortunately, there are operators who are not qualified and not familiar with correct operating procedures and, as a result, are disrupting communications. That simple behaviour further threatens safety of life,' said Mr Chapman.

Operation of radio transceivers, on the VHF IMM channels, is governed by conditions set by ACMA that specify that operators must be qualified and hold an appropriate certificate. Two grades of qualification are

relevant: either the Marine Radio Operators VHF Certificate of Proficiency (MROVCP) or the more comprehensive Marine Radio Operators Certificate of Proficiency (MROCP). Licence conditions, operating requirements and technical parameters for the operation of VHF radiocommunications and navigation equipment on small vessels are set out in the Radiocommunications (Maritime Ship Station—27 MHz and VHF) Class Licence 2001.

Information about how to obtain an operator's certificate and other requirements is available on the ACMA website [www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au). Go to About ACMA > For licensees & industry: Licensing & regulation > Radiofrequency spectrum: Radiocommunications licensing > Apparatus licensing: Types of licences > Maritime Ship > Maritime radio—choices and changes.

For information about the Radiocommunications (Maritime Ship Station—27 MHz and VHF) Class Licence 2001, go to About ACMA > For licensees & industry: Licensing & regulation > Radiofrequency spectrum: Radiocommunications licensing > Radiofrequency class licensing > Maritime Ship Station—27 MHz and VHF.