

Proposed new approach for recreational boaters operating VHF marine radios

As part of its review of marine radio operator arrangements for recreational boaters in Australia, the ACMA is seeking public comment on a second consultation paper.

A new approach for recreational boaters who operate VHF marine radios outlines a number of proposals the ACMA believes will more effectively achieve its spectrum management objective of enabling the correct use of VHF channels and protocols by recreational boaters.

The key proposals are:

1. To remove the mandatory requirement for recreational boaters to hold a marine radio operator's certificate of proficiency before communicating in the VHF bands within Australian territorial waters.
2. For marine radio operator qualification arrangements to be managed by an organisation with closer ties to the marine community.

The approach preferred by the ACMA would reduce the regulatory burden on the recreational boating community, in keeping with government deregulation policy. Importantly, recreational boaters would continue to be able to voluntarily obtain certificates of proficiency and would still be required to hold a certificate for VHF communications outside Australian territorial waters.

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One of the significant outcomes of the review to date is identifying the need for the recreational boating community to be more aware of the correct radio channels to use and the protocols involved in using them. With only 29 per cent of boaters who operate a VHF radio having a certificate of proficiency, it is important that information about correct radio use and protocols is broadly promoted to recreational boaters.

An information campaign is being developed to provide relevant information. Online and printed material will be distributed through organisations with close links to the recreational boating sector. Members of the ACMA's working party of state marine safety and regulatory bodies, marine volunteer organisations and other key interested bodies are supporting the development of the campaign.

An initial discussion paper was released in September 2009 alerting stakeholders to the issues being considered and seeking submissions from interested parties. Sixty-nine submissions were received. Since then a range of activities have been undertaken, including:

- > commissioning an independent survey to measure awareness and compliance with the marine radio operator's certificate of proficiency
- > examining available marine safety data and regulation of carriage of VHF marine radios
- > analysing the regulatory options available to the ACMA.

Analysis has focused on the ACMA's spectrum management responsibilities, examining and appropriately supporting the needs of the recreational boating community in their use of VHF radio, and promoting the overall efficiency of the relevant regulatory framework. The feasibility of implementing alternative regulatory options in the short to medium term has also been considered. ☎

Submissions

Comments are invited from all interested parties, including recreational boaters who operate VHF marine radios, regardless of whether or not they have a radio qualification. Interested parties may either respond in writing or complete an online survey by **Monday 28 February 2011**.

The consultation paper and submission details are available on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to About ACMA: News & media centre > Issues for comment > IFC 46/2010).

