

Key messages for recreational boaters

Know how to use your VHF marine radio

There are many places to go for information on how to use your marine radio:

- > The ACMA VHF [marine radio webpage](#) has information and links to other organisations' marine radio information.
- > The AMC VHF [Marine Radio Operators Handbook](#) gives you information on channels and protocols to use your marine radio correctly.
- > Volunteer marine rescue groups around Australia provide help and support for all boaters, including training courses on how to use your marine radio. Check with your local marine rescue group.

Watch a short ACMA video, [VHF marine radio—How to use it](#), or our [quick tips](#) on *Hook, Line and Sinker*.

Know which channels to use and when

- > Always listen on Channel 16.
- > If you need to make a call, use Channel 16 first, then switch to a working channel:
 - > use channel 72, 73, or 77 to call and work with other vessels
 - > use channel 73 to call and work with a coast station.
- > When the call is finished, resume listening on channel 16.

Watch a quick video showing you how to [call and switch](#).

Using Channel 16—the distress, safety and calling channel

- > If you're in distress and grave and imminent danger—start your message with *Mayday, Mayday, Mayday* three times.
- > If you need to send an urgent message but you're not in imminent danger—start your message with *Pan Pan, Pan Pan, Pan Pan*, three times.
- > If you need to broadcast a safety message about an important navigational or weather warning—start your message with *Securite, Securite, Securite*, three times.

Watch a quick video on [distress protocols](#).

Using dual watch function

- > Dual watch (DW) allows you to pre-program two different channels into your radio and monitor both by hitting the DW button.
- > The first channel programmed should always be channel 16.
- > The second channel programmed can be your local working channel.
- > Once these are programmed, it's easy to select each for use—there's no need to dial up, just press the right button.

Watch a quick video on [dual watch](#).

Digital Selective Calling

- > Digital Selective Calling (DSC) enables you to store and send your boat's information digitally at the touch of a button.
- > Your boat's information is broadcast to all vessels and coast stations within range of your radio.
- > If you also link a GPS with your marine radio, your vessel's position will be broadcast at the same time. This enables AMSA search and rescue to get a good fix on your location, improving your chances of being located at sea.

Watch a quick video on [DSC](#).

Logging on and off

It's a good idea to use your marine radio to log on with your local coast station before you leave and to ensure your radio is working properly—if this facility is available in your local area.

You should:

- > tell them where you are going, your estimated time of return, vessel details and how many people are on board
- > leave your details with a responsible contact person
- > report in if the trip is extended or altered in any way.
- > log off when you return.

Radios trump mobiles on the water

Mobile phones are an excellent way to communicate on land or at sea. However, because they are for one-to-one communications, they aren't a substitute for a marine radio—which is a one-to-many communications device. For boating safety, mobiles should not be solely relied upon in distress situations—your radio is a safer alternative.

Remember, mobile phones:

- > are excellent for personal communication when within range of a mobile cell
- > provide person-to-person communication, but are not suitable for broadcasting distress
- > can suffer from network or battery issues
- > operate at much lower power than VHF marine radios.

VHF marine radios are supported by a whole safety system where every user can respond to a distress call and relay a message. The AMSA Search and Rescue arrangements are based on receiving distress calls and messages principally via radio signals.

You can watch a quick [video](#) on this topic.

Weather on the water

Check the weather before you go. Most weather broadcasts are on Channel 67 but check with your local marine authority or volunteer coast station for your local weather channel and schedule times.

Use your VHF radio to access:

- > today's forecasts and warnings for your local coastal area
- > latest wind readings.

You need to monitor five things:

1. new weather or wind warnings
2. rain or thunderstorms that might affect safe navigation
3. changing direction of tide
4. increasing wave heights
5. changes in the wind:

Warning category	Wind speeds (knots)
Strong wind	26 to 33
Gale	34 to 47
Storm force	48 to 63
Hurricane force	Over 64

For more weather information check out [BOM's web pages](#).

