

The AWQ has launched!

Get on board with the Australian Waters Qualification

Are you a boater who uses a VHF marine radio in Australian Territorial Waters (within 12 nautical miles of the coast)? You're now able to apply for a more appropriate marine radio qualification—the Australian Waters Qualification (AWQ)—which the ACMA recently approved for inclusion in the marine radio class licence.

While all marine radio users (except those operating 27 MHz marine radio stations) must be qualified, until now boaters had to obtain a Certificate of Proficiency or an equivalent overseas qualification. But the approval of the AWQ gives a more streamlined option to relevant boaters.

Why do I need a qualification at all?

A marine radio can save lives. So it's important that:

- > you know the correct channels to use, and how and when to use them
- > you know distress and safety procedures, including how to access search and rescue facilities
- > you know how to respond to an emergency call
- > your messages are understood and others know how to respond
- > you know what DSC is and the benefits of connecting a GPS to your radio
- > you know when and how to operate an EPIRB in a distress situation.

In an emergency, knowledge of distress and safety procedures helps everyone involved in the rescue.

Marine radiocommunications can also provide a variety of services to small vessels, including weather and navigational information.

So, the more you know about how to operate a marine radio, the more benefit you'll get from yours.

Anyone operating a VHF marine radio without an appropriate qualification, or not under the supervision of an appropriately qualified person, may be breaching the *Radiocommunications Act 1992*. Significant penalties apply. So get qualified!



How do I obtain the AWQ?

The AWQ is a unit of competency (MARC019) included in the Maritime Training Package, which was approved by the Department of Industry on 27 February 2015.

A copy of the syllabus is available at <http://training.gov.au/Training/Details/MARC019>.

The AWQ is available from any registered training organisation (RTO) that has included it on its scope. Most volunteer marine rescue groups are either an RTO in their own right or have a relationship with an RTO, so they can test boaters for the AWQ and issue a statement of attainment. A list of RTOs who have included the Maritime Training Package on their scope is available at <http://training.gov.au>.

What does sitting for the AWQ involve?

It should take no more than two to three hours to obtain the AWQ. Once the RTO has assessed that you know how to operate a VHF marine radio, what channels to operate on and how to access search and rescue facilities, you will be issued with a Statement of Attainment for the AWQ. The assessment will include both a theory (for example, questions about frequencies and protocols) and practical component (actual use of a radio). Costs for the assessment are determined by each individual RTO.

Help! Is there any training available before I attempt the AWQ?

To help you easily learn about correct VHF marine radio procedures and protocols, an online training package has been developed—this series of lessons teaches you the right information in your own time and at your own pace. The package assesses what you've learned and advises when you're ready to sit the actual exam.

A computer-based VHF marine radio simulator is also included, so you can learn and test your marine radio skills in a simulated hands-on environment. The training package is available at www.anzsbeg.com.au.

What happens to my existing certificate?

The ACMA's internationally recognised marine radio qualifications—the Marine Radio Operator Certificate of Proficiency (MROCP) and Marine Radio Operator VHF Certificate of Proficiency (MROVCP) have had a name change.

Now known as the Long-Range Operator Certificate of Proficiency (formerly MROCP) and Short-Range Operator Certificate of Proficiency (formerly MROVCP), these certificates remain unchanged and are issued for life. So, if you already have one of these qualifications, you don't need to do anything. However, if you're looking to get qualified and you operate a VHF marine radio only within 12 nautical miles of the coast, this new domestic qualification may be easier, cheaper and quicker to obtain.

More information

- > For more information on marine radio qualifications, go to: www.acma.gov.au/marineradioqualifications
- > The ACMA VHF marine radio webpage at www.acma.gov.au/vhfmarine has great information and tips. You can also subscribe to our e-bulletin to get the latest news, straight to your inbox.
- > If you want one of the international qualifications, then check out the Australian Maritime College website at www.amc.edu.au/omc for more information about obtaining either the short- or long-range certificate of proficiency.

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