



VHF-DSC Radio Communications

Some frequently asked questions

Fact Sheet

What is VHF DSC?

The letters DSC stand for Digital Selective Calling.

DSC is a semi-automated means of establishing initial contact between stations. Once contact has been made, communications on a nominated VHF voice channel should be used to pass messages.

What is the status of VHF DSC coverage in Australia?

In Australian waters, VHF DSC is for ship-to-ship alerting. There is no official shore based infrastructure for VHF DSC in Australia. There are, however, a number of volunteer marine rescue stations that have installed VHF DSC and a check with the VMR in your local operating area should be made.

VHF DSC for small craft is primarily for distress, urgency and safety purposes.

How should I use my VHF DSC?

In Australian waters, Channel 70 should be used for DSC distress alerts only. Once an alert has been sent the party in distress should monitor Channel 16, the distress and calling voice channel. Parties receiving the DSC distress alert should switch to Channel 16 and acknowledge the MAYDAY call by voice giving their identity and signalling "Received MAYDAY".

Channel 16 is the distress and calling frequency and should only be used to raise another party for routine traffic. Once contact has been made messages should be passed on another nominated VHF channel.

Do I need a callsign or MMSI?

The letters MMSI stand for Maritime Mobile Service Identity and is a unique nine-digit code set into your DSC terminal to identify your vessel. You need one of these if you have a DSC radio. The Australian Maritime Safety Authority allocates MMSIs.

Because VHF Radios are now operated under a class license there is no requirement for official callsigns.

What qualifications do I need to operate VHF DSC radio?

The minimum qualification to operate a VHF radio with or without DSC is a Marine Radio Operators VHF Certificate of Proficiency (MROVCP). VHF radios are covered by a class license so an individual station license is no longer required.

The Marine Radio Operators Handbook provides further information about qualifications, licensing and DSC operations.

Where can I find out more?

Information is available from your State or Territory maritime safety authority or from the AMSA Website: http://www.amsa.gov.au/search_and_rescue/Distress_and_Safety_Communications/

The Marine Radio Operator's Handbook produced by the Australian Maritime College also contains valuable information. It is available at: <http://www.amcom.amc.edu.au/>

Make the switch to 406

