

Boating Radio Services

Coastal Patrol Sydney's Radio Services help boat owners stay in touch and enjoy safer boating. Since Telstra closed its marine radio service in 2002, the only marine radio network service for recreational boat owners is provided by volunteers.

Marine Radio Frequencies Monitored: 27MHz Channel 88; VHF Channel 16; MF/HF 2182kHz*.

Marine radios are compulsory in NSW on all vessels operating more than 2 nautical miles (3.7km) offshore and are strongly recommended for anyone using a boat inside that limit or in enclosed waters. Every day Coastal Patrol radio bases help hundreds of boat owners get more enjoyment and greater safety from their boating. With twenty six bases located along the NSW coastline, the Coastal Patrol provides a comprehensive range of free radio services for the boating community.

These include Radio Checks, Logging On, Offshore Tracking, [Weather Forecasts and Warnings](#). If an emergency arises, trained Coastal Patrol rescue crews that can make a life-saving difference are deployed. Remember, calls on marine radios are heard by others and someone closer to your position may be able to help you faster in an emergency.

Coastal Patrol also offers its [Marine Radio Safety Service](#) (MRSS) for boat owners. This is a Coastal Patrol initiative that will save skippers a great deal of time when logging on and is available for a nominal fee.

27MHz marine radios are relatively cheap and widely available for general use, however they are short-range radios due to low power output. A licence is not required to use a 27MHz radio but training in how to use one correctly will give you a very useful skill. Coastal Patrol Sydney offers short courses in 27MHz use. Contact [Coastal Patrol Sydney](#) or see [Education](#).

VHF marine radios use a different frequency band, have higher power output and are in very wide use within the boating community. Some vessels are also fitted with MF/HF (Medium Frequency/High Frequency) marine radios for long distance communications during lengthy coastal and blue water yacht racing and cruising.

A Marine Radio Operator's Certificate of Proficiency (MROCP) is required to use both MF/HF and VHF radios and a Marine Radio Operator's VHF Certificate of Proficiency (MROVCP) is required to use VHF radios only. Coastal Patrol Sydney at Terrey Hills offers comprehensive courses at moderate cost to obtain these certificates.

The Coastal Patrol strongly recommends that anyone who goes boating obtain their MROCP or MROVCP. It's not difficult and it's a valuable competency to have.

Most Common Marine Radio Channels to use on your Pleasure Boat

Channel	Who I can talk to?	For what purpose?
27.880MHz (Ch 88)	Limited coast stations & boats	Distress, urgency, safety and calling
27.860 MHz (Ch 86)	Limited coast stations & boats	Distress, urgency, safety and calling (supplementary to Ch 88)
27.900 MHz (Ch 90)	Limited coast stations only	Calling and working
27.910 MHz (Ch 91)	Limited coast stations only	Calling and working
27.940 MHz (Ch 94)	Limited coast stations & boats	Calling and working (clubs)
27.960 MHz (Ch 96)	Boats	Calling and working
27.980 MHz (Ch 98)	Limited coast, boats and mobiles	Calling and working by safety organisations (eg Surf Lifesavers)
VHF Channel 16	Limited coast & boats or ships	Distress, urgency, safety and calling
VHF Channel 67	Limited coast & boats or ships	Distress, urgency, safety and calling (supplementary to Ch 16)
VHF Channel 72	Ships or boats	Calling and working (shared with professional fishermen, commercial vessels and port operations)
VHF Channel 73	Limited coast & boats or ships	Calling and working
VHF Channel 77	Ships or boats	Calling and working (shared with professional fishermen)
VHF Channel 80	Limited coast & boats or ships via repeater (Central Coast to Port Stephens)	Movement of vessels, safety of vessels and persons
VHF Channel 81	Limited coast & boats or ships via repeater (Sydney area)	Movement of vessels, safety of vessels and persons

Key

For calling and working

For distress & calling

For distress & calling (supplementary)

Boat to boat

Above tables based on *Marine Radio Operators Handbook 2006*. Published by Office of Maritime Communications, Australian Maritime College, PO Box 986 Launceston, Tasmania 7250. Appendix 3 pp 105-107.

Radio Check The Coastal Patrol can advise how well your boat's marine radio signal is being received. Just call up the Coastal Patrol on your marine radio and a trained operator will report the strength and clarity of the marine radio signal at their base. The result is given by strength and clarity of signal from "5 x 5" for maximum strength/clarity to "1 x 1" for very poor strength/clarity.

Signal Strength and Clarity

STRENGTH		CLARITY	
5	Excellent	5	Excellent
4	↓	4	↓
3	Fair	3	Fair
2	↓	2	↓
1	Poor	1	Poor

Weather Forecasts and Warnings All Coastal Patrol stations receive weather forecasts from the Bureau of Meteorology and many broadcast this information regularly on 27 MHz and VHF. You can also radio your local Coastal Patrol division for current official weather forecasts.

Logging On and Offshore Tracking Boat owners should log on (register) with the Coastal Patrol for day trips and coastal passages so if an emergency occurs, someone who is trained can alert Search & Rescue services. Before starting a day out or an overnight or longer coastal voyage, log on with your local Coastal Patrol radio base. This costs nothing when you do, but could cost dearly if you don't. When a skipper logs on, the Coastal Patrol radio operator takes the following details as required by the NSW State Rescue Board. Smart skippers are Coastal Patrol MRSS members whose details are already recorded on a secure Coastal Patrol data base so only their current voyage details will be required. This save a lot of time.

What we need when you log on:

Boat name and/or radio call sign

Boat registration number

Where you are

Description of your boat, including:- Type of boat (runabout, cruiser, sloop, cutter, dinghy, etc),

- Length,
- Hull colour,
- Superstructure colour (the colour of any structure above the deck line)

What radios you have on board

Mobile phone number on board*

Number of people on board

Where the vessel is normally kept (mooring, berth, yacht club, marina, etc) or where the vessel was launched (trailer boats)

A shore contact name and number in case of an emergency

Where you embarked

Where you're going

What time you'll be back

** We try your mobile because it is an alternative means of communication but it is always only ever a lesser choice. Never depend totally on a mobile for emergency help. They can be useful if carried, but reception on the water is not dependable. The other benefit of using your marine radio to call for assistance is that other people can also hear your call for help and they may be closer to you when time is critical.*

When you return after your day out, call up the Coastal Patrol base again and log off by advising you've returned safely. If the fishing is great and you decide to stay out, call up and revise your planned return time.

Offshore Tracking The same principle applies for coastal voyages. For the safety of the boat and people on board, skippers can log on before starting their voyage and provide their details and ETA at the next port. These details are recorded on an Offshore Tracking Sheet (OTS) and scheduled contact times are agreed ('skeds'). This is passed on to the next relevant radio bases up or down the coast until you reach

your destination and you stay in touch throughout your journey according to the agreed 'sked'. The radio operators at those bases will know to expect a call from the vessel concerned.

If no call is received at the scheduled time the radio operators will call the vessel. If no contact is made preparations for an emergency response will be made as required by the regulations of the NSW State Rescue Board.

Mutual obligation: There is a mutual obligation in these arrangements.

Our obligation is to know you're out there somewhere and to check on you if you haven't called in at the agreed 'sked'. If we can't reach you by radio, we follow the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) set down in law by the State Rescue Board and commence the Search and Rescue process. We'll try your mobile phone and the home number you've provided. If necessary we will alert the Water Police.

Remember, it's better to have a false alarm than a tragedy.

Your obligation is to keep your radio and mobile phone switched on and contact us at the agreed 'sked' times until completion of your trip or voyage. If we don't hear from you, we must follow the SOPs outlined above.

For vessels that do not wish to have offshore tracking done throughout the duration of their voyage, State Rescue Board regulations require that we send an OTS to the vessel's destination so an appropriate authority knows to expect the vessel at its planned time of arrival. Skippers are obliged to inform the destination of any change in plans. If the vessel is out of range of the destination, this can be done by contacting a coast station that is in range and requesting advice be sent to the destination.

For real convenience in logging on and offshore tracking contact your nearest Coastal Patrol Division now and join your local Coastal Patrol Marine Radio Safety Service ([MRSS](#)).