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| IALA Guideline |

Guideline XXXX

VTS COMMUNICATION PHRASES

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Revisions to this IALA Document are to be noted in the table prior to the issue of a revised document.

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# DOCUMENT PURPOSE

Standardised phrases provide for quick and effective communication allowing us to overcome differences in language and at the same time reducing the opportunity for misunderstanding. Ambiguous or non-standard phraseology is a frequent causal or contributory factor in accidents and incidents.

This document provides standardised phrases for communicating with vessels and allied services to:

* Facilitate clear, concise, and unambiguous communications that are timely and effective.
* Minimise misunderstanding of the intent of messages and reducing the time required for effective communication.
* Assist VTS Training organisations to incorporate the use of standard VTS phraseology into their course curriculums.

It is not possible to provide phrases to cover every conceivable situation which may arise, and the examples contained in this Guideline are not exhaustive, but merely representative of radiotelephony phraseology in common use.

Users may find it necessary to supplement phrases with the use of “plain” language. When it is necessary to use plain language, it should be used according to the same principles that govern the development of phraseologies in that communications should be clear, concise, and unambiguous.

The examples contained in this document are not exhaustive, but merely representative of phraseology in common use.

# DOCUMENT APPLICABILITY

VTS Authorities should adopt the phraseology described in this guideline in their day-to-day operations to demonstrate compliance with IALA Standard 1040 – Vessel Traffic Services.

If it is necessary to use plain language, it should be used according to the same principles that govern the development of phraseologies in that communications should be clear, concise, and unambiguous.

# SYMBOL CONVENTIONS USED

|  |
| --- |
| ( ) brackets indicate that the part of the message enclosed within the brackets may be added where relevant;  [ ] square brackets indicate optional content  / oblique strokes indicate that the items on either side of the stroke are alternatives;  ... dots indicate that the relevant information is to be filled in where the dots occur;  (italic letters) indicate the kind of information requested;  ~ tildes precede possible words or phrases which can be used after/in association with the given standard phrase. |

# PRINCIPLES

The key principles to ensuring of clear, concise, and unambiguous communications that are timely and effective include:

1. Language
2. Message Structure
3. Constant Attention
4. Phonetic Alphabet
5. Closed Loop Communications [Read-Back]
6. Questioning Techniques
7. Terminology
8. Message Markers

## LANGUAGE

English language should be used for all VTS communications with vessels/allied services unless use of an alternative language has been arranged with the VTS.

## MESSAGE STRUCTURE

The use of structure provides consistent message formulation and conveys a professional image to stakeholders. This technique also provides familiarity to the receiver, setting the tone of a safe and efficient VTS. VTS voice communications should therefore be structured in order to give the best chance of understanding to the receiver and to keep the message as concise as possible.

The use of action words (e.g. PROCEED) should come before the condition (e.g. time or location).

Radio communications between coastal stations and vessels have to comply with the ITU Radio Regulations[[1]](#footnote-1). These Regulations prescribe the structure of radio communication messages.

| 1. Establish contact | (Name of vessel/Call sign) this is (name) VTS |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 2. Exchange information | a. Message marker | See message markers |
|  | b. Phrase(s) |  |
| 3. End of message | Over | When expecting a reply |
| 4. End of conversation | Out | When expecting no reply |

## CONSTANT ATTENTION

Constant attention should be given to the correct use of phraseology in all instances in which they are applicable to establish efficient, clear, concise, and unambiguous communications.

VTS Authorities should implement appropriate procedures to ensure the constant and correct use of VTS phraseology in all instances in which they are applicable.

## PHONETIC ALPHABET

The phonetic alphabet is used to distinguish between letters, which sound similar when transmitted over the radio. They are commonly used when transmitting callsigns and in cases where a single letter is used to designate something.

Pronunciation of the phonetic alphabet is as follows:

| Letter | Spelling | Pronunciation |  | Letter | Spelling | Pronunciation |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **A** | Alpha | **al** fah |  | **N** | November | no **vem** bar |
| **B** | Bravo | **brah** voh |  | **O** | Oscar | **oss** cah |
| **C** | Charlie | **char** lee |  | **P** | Papa | pah **pah** |
| **D** | Delta | **dell** tah |  | **Q** | Quebec | keh **beck** |
| **E** | Echo | **eck** ho |  | **R** | Romeo | **row** me oh |
| **F** | Foxtrot | **foks** trot |  | **S** | Sierra | see **air** rah |
| **G** | Golf | **golf** |  | **T** | Tango | **tang** go |
| **H** | Hotel | hoh **tel** |  | **U** | Uniform | **you** nee form |
| **I** | India | in dee a |  | **V** | Victor | **vik** tah |
| **J** | Juliet | **jew** lee **ett** |  | **W** | Whiskey | **wiss** key |
| **K** | Kilo | **key** loh |  | **X** | X-ray | **ecks** ray |
| **L** | Lima | **lee** mah |  | **Y** | Yankee | **yang** key |
| **M** | Mike | **mike** |  | **Z** | Zulu | **zoo** loo |

## PHONETIC NUMBERS [NUMERALS]

Numbers are to be spoken in separate digits. For example:

“One-five-zero” for 150

Pronunciation of numbers shall be in the phonetic form as follows:

| Number | Spelling | Pronunciation |  |  | Spelling | Pronunciation |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **0** | zero | zeero |  |  | Decimal | **day see mal** |
| **1** | one | wun |  |  | Hundred | **hun** dred |
| **2** | two | **too** |  |  | Thousand | **tou sand** |
| **3** | three | **tree** |  |  |  |  |
| **4** | four | **fower** |  |  |  |  |
| **5** | five | **fife** |  |  |  |  |
| **6** | six | six |  |  |  |  |
| **7** | seven | seven |  |  |  |  |
| **8** | eight | ait |  |  |  |  |
| **9** | nine | **Niner** |  |  |  |  |

## CLOSED LOOP COMMUNICATIONS [READ-BACK]

Misunderstandings in messages received may include half-heard words or guessed-at numbers. The potential for misunderstanding increases with the complexity of messages and may cause the bridge team to:

* Accept inadequate information received; or
* Determine for themselves the most probable interpretation.

Closed-loop communication is a technique used to avoid misunderstandings whereby when the sender gives a message, the receiver repeats a received message, or an appropriate part thereof, back to the sender to obtain confirmation of correct reception. The sender then confirms the message; thereby common is using the word “yes”.

When the receiver incorrectly repeats the message back, the sender will say “negative” (or something similar) and then repeat the correct message. If the sender, the person giving the message, does not get a reply back, he must repeat it until the receiver starts closing the loop.

Read back should be used to confirm that messages from VTS operators sent under message markers ‘INSTRUCTION, ADVICE or WARNING’ are correctly received and understood. This can be achieved through the following steps:

* The VTS operator requesting the recipient to repeat back important information. (For example, repeat advice, repeat instruction, repeat back, or Question – do you understand?)
* The recipient reading back or acknowledging in a manner to clearly indicate they have understood the message and will take appropriate action.
* The VTS operator listening to the read-back to ascertain that the message has been correctly acknowledged and take immediate action to correct any discrepancies revealed by the read-back.

Read-back should not be replaced by the use of terms such as “Roger” or “Copied”.

## QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES

Information flow within a VTS is paramount. VTS often gathers and disseminates information based on real time situations within the VTS area. In the computer world the term ‘garbage in, garbage out’ is often used. The same applies to VTS communications, if you ask the wrong questions you will probably get the wrong answer.

To ensure effective questioning the following techniques should be used:

* Closed Questions
* Open Questions
* Funnel Questions
* Leading Questions

### CLOSED QUESTIONS

A closed question usually receives a one word answer, or a short factual statement.

| VTS | QUESTION. How many persons onboard? |
| --- | --- |

| VTS | QUESTION. Can you see the Entrance Beacon? |
| --- | --- |

### OPEN QUESTIONS

Generally open questions deliberately seek longer answers and are the opposite of closed questions. Open questions usually contain terms to elicit further information.

| VTS | QUESTION. What is the nature of your problem? |
| --- | --- |

| VTS | QUESTION. What is your intention? |
| --- | --- |

### FUNNEL QUESTIONS

This questioning technique involves the use of a series of questions. Initially general questions are asked which increase in detail with each subsequent question. With funnel questioning it may be useful to start with one or more closed questions before following up with more open questions.

| VTS | QUESTION. Can you see the Princes Inner Buoy? |
| --- | --- |
| VTS | QUESTION. Is the buoy lit? |
| VTS | QUESTION. Is the buoy in the correct position? |
| VTS | QUESTION. Describe the damage? |

### LEADING QUESTIONS

Asking a leading question can influence the recipients answer, closing off undesirable alternatives and guides the recipient in the desired direction.

| VTS | QUESTION. Is it your intention to pass to north of Buoy One? |
| --- | --- |

## AMBIGUOUS TERMINOLOGY

Some words in English have meanings depending on the context in which they appear. Misunderstandings frequently occur, especially in VTS communications, and have resulted in accidents.

The use of local terminology should be avoided as this can lead to confusion. For example:

**MAY**

**Do not** say: “You may enter the fairway”

Say: “ANSWER. You have permission to enter the fairway”

**MIGHT**

**Do not** say: “You might have permission to depart if the swing basin is clear”

Say: “ADVICE. You have permission to depart when the swing basin is clear”

**SHOULD**

**Do not** Say: “You should anchor in anchorage Z4”

Say: “ADVICE. Anchor in anchorage Z4”

**COULD**

**Do not** say: “You could be running into danger”

Say: “WARNING. You are running into danger”

**CAN**

The word “CAN” describes the possibility, or the capability of doing something.

**Do not** say: “Can you pass North of Prince’s Inner buoy?”

Say: “QUESTION. Is it your intention to pass North of Princes Inner buoy?”

## RESPONSES

When the answer to a closed question is in the affirmative or negative, consider the need to repeat the appropriate phrase or add an explanation in the response.

If information requested is not immediately available, advise the caller to *“Stand by” and consider the need to indicate the time interval within which the information will be available.*

## CORRECTIONS

When an error is made in a message, say:

*“Correction” plus the corrected part of the message.*

| VTS | Your Pilot will board you in 20  CORRECTION - Your Pilot will board you in 30, three zero, minutes. |
| --- | --- |

## REPETITION

If any part of the message is considered sufficiently important, say:

*“Repeat” followed by the corresponding part of the message.*

| VTS | Do not overtake - REPEAT – do not overtake.  The tide is 1.2m – REPEAT – one decimal two meters. |
| --- | --- |

When the message is not properly heard, say:

*“Say again” or “Repeat”*

## POSITIONS

Position may be passed either in latitude and longitude or relative to a mark. In considering which method is most appropriate, the sender should recognise that the recipient will first have to plot a position passed in latitude and longitude on a chart in order to assimilate the information.

When latitude and longitude are used, these shall be expressed in degrees and minutes (and decimals of a minute if necessary), north or south of the Equator, and East or West of Greenwich.

| VTS | WARNING. Dangerous wreck reported in position 15 degrees 34 minutes North, 61 degrees 29 minutes West. |
| --- | --- |

When the position is related to a mark, the mark should be a well-defined charted object.

| VTS | WARNING. Fishing Vessel not under command 120 degrees fairway Buoy 1.2 nautical miles. |
| --- | --- |

## BEARINGS

The bearing of the mark or vessel concerned is the bearing in the 360 degree notation from North (true north unless otherwise stated), except in the case of relative bearings. Bearings may be either FROM the mark or FROM the vessel.

| VTS | Pilot boat is bearing 215 degrees from you. |
| --- | --- |

## Course

Always to be expressed in 360 degree notation from north (true north unless otherwise stated). Whether this is TO or FROM a mark can be stated.

Courses should be ‘course made good’ and should include a distance.

Do not use ‘INSTRUCTION’ as a message marker, only ‘ADVICE’ when giving a course.

| VTS | ADVICE. Recommend course to make good 127 degrees for 2 nautical miles. |
| --- | --- |

## DISTANCES

To be expressed in nautical miles or cables (tenths of a mile), the unit always to be stated.

## SPEED

To be expressed in knots. Speed without any further notation will always be assumed to mean speed through the water. If speed over the ground is intended, then the communication should be specifically annotated “Ground speed”.

## TIME

Time should be given in local time in a 24 hour format. Mariners do not usually add the suffix “hours”.

## GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Place names should be those that are on navigational charts and publications.

Where this is not available then latitude and longitude should be used.

# MESSAGE MARKERS

In order to facilitate shore-to-ship and ship-to-shore communications, message markers should be used to increase the probability of the purpose of the message being properly understood.

The following message markers should be used to increase the effectiveness and urgency of VHF communications as required. The VTSO should apply these depending on the assessment of the situation.

The message marker should be spoken preceding the message or at the corresponding part within the message.

Pro-words complement the message marker and may be used to prepare the receiver for the nature and content of the message that will follow (eg ‘WEATHER’ before ‘INFORMATION’).

## INFORMATION

This indicates that the following message is restricted to observed facts, situations etc.

| VTS | TRAFFIC INFORMATION. Dredger “Goomai” is operating in the Williamstown Channel 30 metres West of the Centreline. |
| --- | --- |

| VTS | NAVIGATION INFORMATION. ‘XXXX’ Light is not operational. |
| --- | --- |

Note: This marker is preferably used for navigational and traffic information, etc. Information is to assist the on board decision making process.

## ADVICE

This indicates that the following message implies the intention of the sender to influence others and may include a recommendation.

| VTS | ADVICE. Container Vessel ‘Maersk Dusseldorf’ is inbound and will take tugs at Swanson Dock swing basin. |
| --- | --- |

Note: The decision whether to follow the ADVICE still stays with the recipient. ADVICE does not necessarily have to be followed but should be considered very carefully.

## WARNING

This indicates that the following message implies the intention of the sender to alert others to potential dangers.

| VTS | WARNING. VTS radar indicates you are heading towards shallow water distance 6 cables. |
| --- | --- |

Note: This means that any recipient of a WARNING should pay immediate attention to the danger mentioned and confirm the vessel’s position, course and speed in relation to the warning. Consequences are up to the recipient.

## INSTRUCTION

This indicates that the following message implies the intention of the sender to direct the action of others by a regulation.

| VTS | INSTRUCTION. Do not proceed. Remain alongside until a further instruction is passed. |
| --- | --- |

| VTS | INSTRUCTION. Do not cross the fairway. |
| --- | --- |

| VTS | INSTRUCTION. Reduce speed [to xx knots]. |
| --- | --- |

Note: The sender (eg VTS) must have the full authority to send such a message. The recipient has to follow this legally binding message unless they have contradictory safety reasons which then have to be reported to the sender.

## QUESTION

This indicates that the following message is of interrogative character.

| VTS | QUESTION. What is your maximum draft. |
| --- | --- |

## ANSWER

This indicates that the following message is the reply to a previous question.

| VTS | ANSWER. You have permission to enter fairway. |
| --- | --- |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| VESSEL | ANSWER. My present maximum draft is zero seven metres. |

Note: An answer should not contain another question.

## REQUEST

This indicates that the following message is asking for action from others with respect to the vessel.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| VESSEL | REQUEST. I require two tugs. |

Note: The use of this marker is to signal that I want something to be arranged or provided. REQUEST must not be used involving navigation, or to modify COLREGS.

## INTENTION

This indicates that the following message informs others about immediate navigational action intended to be taken. Only a vessel would normally use this message marker.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| VESSEL | INTENTION. I will reduce my speed. |

Note: The use of this message marker is logically restricted to messages announcing navigational actions by the vessel sending this message.

# VTS COMMUNICATION PHRASES

## GENERAL COMMUNICATIONS

### GENERAL

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| ALL RECEIEVED | Information has all been received as expected |
| APPROVED | Permission for proposed action granted. |
| CHECK | Examine (something) in order to determine its accuracy, quality, or condition, or to detect the presence of something. |
| CONFIRM | Request verification of something: (e.g. permission, instruction, action, information, intentions). For example, *Confirm you have received the following…?* |
| CONTACT | Establish communications with… |
| CORRECT | That is correct |
| CORRECTION | A change that rectifies an error or inaccuracy |
| DISREGARD | Ignore last message / Consider that transmission as not sent |
| DO NOT | Instruction that an activity may not be carried out |
| GO AHEAD | VTS is ready to receive your information |
| I REPEAT | I will state my message again |
| I SPELL | Phonetic spelling follows |
| MAINTAIN | Continue in accordance with the condition(s) specified or in its literal sense, eg “Maintain your course” |
| NEGATIVE | “No” or “Permission is not granted” or “That is not correct” |
| NOT APPROVED | Advising that approval for an activity has not been granted |
| OUT | End of transmission. No answer is required or expected. |
| OVER | End of transmission. An answer is expected. |
| PERMISSION | Permission given to a vessel underway to continue to a location |
| READ-BACK | Repeat all, or the specified part, of this message back to me exactly as received |
| REPEAT or SAY AGAIN YOUR LAST | A request to retransmit all or a portion of a transmission |
| REPORT | Pass me the following information |
| REQUEST | A request for information or intentions |
| STAND BY | Wait and I will call you |

### Request for additional reports

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| REPORT [AGAIN] AT (location or time) | Request to report [again] when the vessel has reached a specified location or time |
| REPORT LEAVING (location / VTS area) | Request to report when the vessel has left the VTS area or a particular location. |
| REPORT PASSING (location) | Request to report when the vessel has passed the specified location |
| REPORT ETA AT (position) | Request to report the estimated time of arrival at the specified position |

### Call requests

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| CONTACT/CALL (VTS/allied service) [AT (time/position)] ON (channel) | Request to contact [at the specified time or position] the VTS or allied service on a VHF channel |
| CONTACT/CALL (vessel) FOR BRIDGE TO BRIDGE | Request to establish contact with another vessel to discuss information  (eg passing manoeuvres) |
| STANDBY | Wait and I will call you |
| CALL AGAIN (event/time) | Request for the vessel to call VTS again when a specified event occurs  (eg after last line, when pilot boards) or in a specified time period. |

### Use of other VHF channels

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| CHANGE CHANNEL TO (channel) | Request to change VHF channels |
| STANDBY ON (channel ) | Request for a vessel to standby on a VHF channel |
| MAINTAIN LISTENING WATCH ON (channel) | Request for the vessel to maintain a listening watch on a specified VHF channel |

## REPORTING OF VESSEL IDENTIFICATION AND PARTICULARS

When entering the VTS area a vessel’s identity and particulars should have been passed in advance. If not, these may need to be clarified through an instruction to report or a question asking for specific details.

The prefix of “WHAT IS YOUR XXXX” would normally be used prior to these message elements. For example:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| VTS | QUESTION. What is your …   * LAST PORT OF CALL * ROUTE * MAXIMUM DRAFT |

## NAVIGATING IN VTS AREA

### APPROACH / ENTRY INTO VTS AREA

When a vessel enters the VTS area there is an exchange of information, such as:

* Verifying the vessels identity
* Confirm reporting requirements
* Provide relevant traffic information
* Provide navigational / fairway information
* Establishing compliance with IMO requirements (charts and publications, passage plan, mechanical defects, personnel shortfalls)

Example of communications with a vessel approaching or entering into the VTS area.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| VESSEL | [Vessel] ENTERING [VTS area] / AT [Entry Location] |
| VTS | [Vessel] … For example:   * CONFIRM [certain details] * INFORMATION (eg berthing, traffic updates, navigational hazards) * REPORT AGAIN AT (location) * PILOT WILL BOARD AT ….. |

The VTS may also need to provide further instructions for the approach/entry to the VTS area such as:

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| PERMISSION TO ENTER (details) | Permission provided to enter an area such as VTS area, the fairway |
| PERMISSION TO CROSS (details) | Permission provided to cross into an area or line. |
| PERMISISON TO MOVE IN (area) | Permission provided to move within an area (eg fairway channel) |
| DO NOT PROCEED PAST/BEYOND (location) | Instruction not to proceed past/beyond a certain location or point (eg pilot boarding ground without a pilot) |
| DO NOT ENTER (area) | Instruction not to enter into an area or zone. |
| MAINTAIN ETA TO (location) | Request to maintain a specified estimated time of arrival to a location (eg pilot boarding ground) |
| REMAIN IN YOUR CURRENT POSITION | Instruction or Request to remain in a specific position |

## SPEED

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| MAINTAIN (speed) | Instruction or request to maintain a specified speed |
| REDUCE SPEED TO (speed) | Instruction or request for the present speed to be reduced to the specified speed and maintained until further notice |
| PROCEED AT SAFE SPEED or  REDUCE SPEED TO SAFE SPEED | Instruction or request for vessel to proceed at, or reduce speed to, the vessels’ safe manoeuvring speed |
| WHAT IS YOUR SPEED | Request to report the vessels present speed |
| SPEED LIMIT (speed) [IN (area of)] | Instruction or request given to limit the vessels speed in a specified area |
| DO NOT EXCEED (speed) | Instruction that a specified speed is not to be exceeded |

## ROUTE MOVEMENTS

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| PROCEED TO (position / area) [AT (time)]\* | Instruction or request to proceed directly from the present position to the specified position [at a specified time] |
| PROCEED TO (position) WHEN ABLE | Instruction or request to proceed, when able, directly to the specified position |
| EXPECT FURTHER (details) [AT (time / position)] | Advising the vessel that further information would be given at the specified time or position |
| WAIT [for (vessel) TO (details)] | Instruction or request to wait for a specified vessel to complete a task (eg clear berth / enter fairway / get underway / leave berth) or for other reasons specified |
| REMAIN OUTSIDE (area) [UNTIL (time or condition)] | Advising the vessel to remain outside an area [until time, further notice or specific condition is met] |
| DO NOT OVERTAKE [ IN (area)] | Instruction not to overtake [in a specified area] |
| APPROVED TO (activity) | Advising that the vessel has permission to conduct an activity or operate within an area |

\*Messages may be conditional on a time or position which should follow the first part of the message element

## PERMISSION TO PROCEED FROM OR TO ALONGSIDE, A BERTH OR ANCHORAGE

The departure of a vessel from a berth/anchorage or when entering a lock or confined waterway is a critical moment when a vessel’s movements may have a direct influence on other vessels nearby.

When a vessel is ready to depart, it is vital that a request from a vessel to proceed is formalised and that the VTS response is clear, not only to the vessel seeking approval, but also to all other vessel in the vicinity. Prior to departure, a vessel should be informed of other traffic movements in the area that may influence the vessel’s departure. Whilst the request from the vessel will be addressed only to the VTS, approval from the VTS should be in a formal and standard format and addressed to all vessels. A recommended format is shown below.

Permission for a vessel to proceed means that, based on the information available, the VTS assesses that it is safe and gives approval for the vessel to proceed on her intended course of action, subject to the discretion of the Master.

Permission for a vessel to proceed may be subject to conditions (eg details received from the vessel, known fairway and traffic) which may be contained in the message.

It is essential that a clear distinction is made between messages that give permission for a vessel to proceed and those that deny permission for a vessel to proceed.

If the VTS assesses that it is not safe for a vessel to proceed from a berth or anchorage, the response from VTS should be direct to the vessel and the response must be unambiguous and clear. Similar considerations and approvals may be appropriate for berthing.

Example **approving “**Permission to Proceed” from a berth or anchorage when the VTS assesses that it **IS** safe:

There are two elements to this message:

* First Element - Providing details of other traffic that may impinge on the planned movement. The departing vessel should acknowledge before continuing to the second element.
* Second Element - Message to all vessels granting the requesting vessel permission to proceed and notifying all other vessels of the impending movement. The vessel may be subject to other conditions which should be included as appropriate.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| VTS | TRAFFIC INFORMATION (position and intentions of other traffic/conflict avoidance measures) |
| VESSEL | (Vessel) All received. |
| VTS | TRAFFIC INFORMATION (vessel name) HAS PERMISSION TO (enter / depart / proceed) FROM (berth/anchorage/lock/creek) [TO (location and/or subject to condition)] |

Example **denying “**Permission to Proceed” from a berth or anchorage when the VTS assesses that it is **NOT** safe:

There are two elements to this message:

* First Element – Responding to the vessels request. This is to be backed up with a formal instruction.
* Second Element – Message to requesting vessel giving clear instruction to remain alongside and giving the reason. This may also include guidance on request again after a specified time period or after an event has passed.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| VTS | NOT APPROVED |
|  | INSTRUCTION. (Vessel) MUST REMAIN ALONGSIDE (give reason) [CALL AGAIN (in … minutes or after event has passed)] |

Example **approving “**Permission to Proceed” to a berth or anchorage when the VTS assesses that it **IS** safe:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| VTS | PERMISSION TO PROCEED TO (berth name/anchorage designator) [AT (time)] |

Example **denying “**Permission to Proceed” from a berth or anchorage when the VTS assesses that it is **NOT** safe:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| VTS | INSTRUCTION. (Vessel) DO NOT PROCEED TO (berth name/anchorage designator) (give reason) [instructions and/or notification of expected availability] |

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| PERMISSION TO (enter / depart / proceed) FROM (berth/anchorage/ lock/creek) [TO (location and/or subject to condition)] | Permission has been granted to proceed to undertake an activity (eg enter, depart, proceed) from a location (eg berth, anchorage area, lock, creek, fairway, pilotage area). [The vessel may be subject to other conditions which should be included as appropriate.] |
| REMAIN (alongside/berth/anchorage) (give reason) | Advising the vessel to remain at a location (eg alongside, a berth, anchorage) for a specified reason. |
| NOT APPROVED (details) | Response to a vessels request advising that an activity has not been granted. This should be backed up with a formal instruction. |
| DO NOT (details) | Instruction that the permission has not been granted, or activity has been cancelled (eg leave berth) |

## PILOTAGE

Depending on the VTS there may be local differences in terms used such as pilot station, pilot boarding ground. Similarly when referencing the pilot’s activities such as on bridge or on board.

### Pilot boarding instructions

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| PILOT BOARDING TIME IS (time) [AT (location) | Information when the pilot will board the vessel at a specified time [and location] |
| WAIT FOR PILOT at (location) | Instruction or Request for the vessel to wait for a pilot in a specified location |
| PILOT CANNOT BOARD [reason] | Advising that the pilot cannot board the vessel [reason may also be given] |
| PILOT DELAYED | Advising that the pilot will be delayed |

## BERTHING

### General

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| ETA BERTH IS (time) | Notification of a vessel’s estimated time of arrival |
| YOUR BERTH IS (name) [(port / starboard side) TO] | Notification of berth allocation [notification of side to the berth wall] |
| BERTH IS NOT CLEAR [WILL BE CLEAR AT (time)] | Advising that the berth is no longer clear [and time the berth is expected to be available] |
| WAIT UNTIL BERTH IS CLEAR | Instructing or advising a vessel to wait until the berth is clear |
| (Vessel) WILL LEAVE BERTH (name) AT (time) | Information that a (vessel) will leave a berth at a specified time |
| BERTHING DELAYED UNTIL (time / by X hrs) | Advising that berthing will be delayed until a specified time |

### Departure from berth

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| REPORT WHEN SINGLED UP | Request for the vessel to report when they have singled up |
| CALL ON LAST LINE | Request for the vessel to report on last line |
| CALL (time) BEFORE DEPARTURE | Request for the vessel to report a specified amount of time before departing |

## ANCHOR OPERATIONS

### Anchoring instructions

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| ANCHOR TO AWAIT (details) | Request for the vessel to anchor until a specified time or event  (eg tug, berth, pilot) |
| ANCHORING IS PROHIBITED (details) | Advising that anchoring is prohibited. Further details may be provided on specified areas or the entire VTS area. |
| ANCHORED IN WRONG POSITION | Information that the vessel has anchored in a not ideal or wrong location |
| ANCHOR CLEAR OF (details) | Request for a vessel to anchor clear of a specified location (eg fairway / outside port limits) |
| ANCHOR (in position/at location) | Instruction to a vessel to anchor in a nominated position/specified location |
| REPORT ON ANCHORING | Request for a vessel to report when the anchor has been let go |
| REPORT WHEN ANCHORED | Request for a vessel to report when the vessel has “come to” its anchor. |

### Weigh anchor

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| WEIGH ANCHOR (immediately / at time) | Request for a vessel to weigh anchor now or at a specified time |
| CALL BEFORE WEIGHING ANCHOR | Request for the vessel to report before they weigh anchor |

### Dragging

Where a vessel has been identified to be dragging anchor, it may be appropriate, to issue an all ships broadcast to notify all vessels in the area of the developing situation.

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| YOU ARE/APPEAR TO BE DRAGGING ANCHOR | Sensor information indicates the vessel is dragging anchor |
| ARE YOU DRAGGING ANCHOR | Question for the vessel to confirm if they are dragging anchor |
| CHECK YOUR POSITION | Request for the vessel to check their position |

## VESSEL OPERATIONS

### Engine

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| REPORT WHEN ENGINES READY | Request to report when the engines are ready |
| KEEP YOUR ENGINES READY | Request for the vessel to keep their engines ready |
| KEEP ENGINES ON STANDBY | Request for the vessel to keep their engines on standby |
| REPORT WHEN UNDERWAY | Request to report when the vessel is underway |

## PROVISION OF TRAFFIC INFORMATION

Any broadcast of traffic information should be preceded with the message marker of “Traffic Information”. This leaves the receiving vessel in no doubt as to the message which will follow.

To assist the on-board decision making process, it is necessary to pass relevant information which may be of short to medium term navigational significance.

Consideration should also be given to including tailored information to vessels relevant to their immediate movements, or to the planning of their intended passage. The following standard terms should be used as appropriate:

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| NO REPORTED TRAFFIC | Information there is no reported traffic in an area |
| NO TRAFFIC TO REPORT | Information that there is no traffic to report |
| MEET | Information that one vessel will meet another vessel |
| PASS | Information that one vessel is stopped (or slowed down) and the other vessel will pass them |
| OVERTAKING | Information that the vessels are heading in roughly the same direction and are likely to overtake each other |
| INWARD | Information that a vessel is inward bound |
| OUTWARD | Information that a vessel is outward bound |
| EASTBOUND/ WESTBOUND/ NORTHBOUND/ SOUTHBOUND | Directional information about a vessels movements |
| TURNING | Information that a vessel is turning |
| ENTERING | Information that a vessel is entering an area |
| LEAVING | Information that a vessel is leaving an area |
| GETTING UNDERWAY | Information that a vessel is getting underway |
| DEPARTING | Information that a vessel is departing an area |
| ANCHORING | Information that a vessel is getting ready to anchor or has recently anchored |
| CROSSING | Information that a vessel is crossing through an area |
| NOT UNDER COMMAND | Information that a vessel is currently not under command |
| CONSTRAINED BY (details) | Information that a vessel may be constrained by specified conditions (eg draft) |
| DUE TO TRAFFIC | Information that other traffic considerations need to be taken into account |
| INCIDENT IN (location/area) | Advising of an incident in an area/location |
| NAVIGATIONAL HAZARD (details) | Advising of a specific navigational hazard (eg derelict vessel, uncharted rock, pipeline leaking gas) |
| DREDGING IN (area) | Advising of dredging operations in a specified area |
| DIVING OPERATIONS | Advising of diving operations in a specific area |
| FISHING BOATS IN (area/location) | Information about fishing boats operating in a specific area |
| SURVEY OPERATIONS | Advising of survey operations in a specific area |

It is necessary to identify the vessel by name. Occasionally it may be beneficial to identify the vessel by type, for example ***‘****container vessel Maersk Rotterdam’*.

Traffic information may also include other general maritime safety information to facilitate the safe navigation and awareness of activities in the VTS area. For example, to advise that AtoN equipment not available.

Further, a vessel may request traffic information from VTS as required.

An example of traffic information:

| VTS | Traffic Information  (Vessel) is ahead of you  (Vessel) is leaving (VTS/Area)  (Vessel) is entering (VTS/Area)  No reported traffic in your area  Additional Maritime Safety Information  (MSI event eg light, incident, type of operation) in (location/areas/lat,long)  Fishing vessels in (Area)  Proceed at slow speed/caution when passing (location/details eg diving operations) |
| --- | --- |

## PROVISION OF WEATHER AND HYDROGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

VTS may decide to provide vessels with relevant information from their sensor equipment, or reported information to vessels in the VTS area.

Meteorological departments prepare and issue detailed weather and hydrographical information. A VTS authority may determine that this information is useful for vessels in the VTS area and may provide this information as a broadcast.

### Meteorological information

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| WEATHER INFORMATION | Information about impending weather conditions |
| LIGHTNING | Information about lightning activity in the area |

### Visibility

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| RESTRICTED VISIBILITY IN (area) [VISIBILITY AT (location/area) IS (x meters)] | Information about restricted visibility in a specified area |
| VISIBILITY IS EXPECTED TO (increase/decrease) | Future information on how the level of visibility may increase or decrease |

### Wind

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| WIND EXPECTED TO INCREASE TO | Information about the wind conditions in the area |
| IF WIND EXCEEDS (x knots) THEN (details of action) | Information that if the wind conditions exceed a threshold then a level of action will be required (eg vessels will be instructed to leave berths, tug services will be suspended) |
| WIND (at) (degrees/cardinal point) at (knots) | Information about wind conditions in the area |
| STRONG WIND WARNING | Advising vessels in the area about wind warnings |

### Tide

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| TIDE IS (details) | Information about the tidal conditions in the area |
| TIDE AT (location) (meters) | Information about the tidal conditions at a specific location |
| TIDE (meters) above/below prediction | Information about the tidal predictions in the area |

## DEVELOPING SITUATIONS – VTS INTERACTION

The VTS may interact with an individual vessel to provide essential and timely navigational information to:

* Assist with the on-board navigational decision making, and
* Monitor its effects (i.e. the response / actions taken by the vessel to the information provided).

Assistance may be provided when observed or deemed necessary by the VTS, or on request by a vessel. Examples of developing situations where a assistance with navigation may be provided include:

* Vessel deviating from the VTS sailing/passage plan;
* Vessel unsure of its position or unable to determine its position;
* Vessel unsure of the route to its destination;
* Assistance to a vessel to an anchoring position;
* Vessel defects or deficiencies, such as navigation or manoeuvring equipment failure;
* Assistance to a vessel to support the unexpected incapacity of a key member of the bridge team.
* Severe meteorological conditions (e.g. low visibility, strong winds);
* Risk of grounding;
* Risk of collision between vessels;
* Risk of collision with a fixed or floating object.

|  |
| --- |
| Note:   1. In some cases the vessel may respond that it is aware of the situation (e.g. making minor course alterations to avoid fishing vessels) and no further interaction may be required. 2. In other cases it may become evident that a developing situation is emerging and further interaction is required to confirm the vessel is situationally aware and taking appropriate action. |

Where the VTS has observed a developing situation then the phrase “SENSORS INDICATE” or “EQUIPMENT INDICATES” may be appropriate. In time critical situations the VTS may decide to be more direct and simply state the observation to seek the instant attention of the vessel.

### Position

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| [YOUR POSITION] (details) | Advising that the vessel of its current position -  .../ bearing ... degrees, distance ... kilometres /  nautical miles from ... .  ~ in the centre of the fairway.  ~ on / not on the radar reference line (of the fairway).  ~ on the ... (cardinal points) side of the fairway. |

### Course

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| [YOU HAVE] EXITED THE (area) | Advising that the vessel has exited an area (eg fairway / recommended route / track) |
| [YOU HAVE] LEFT THE (area) | Advising that the vessel has left an area (eg fairway / recommended route / track) |
| [YOU ARE] APPROACHING (details) | Advising that the vessel that by going on in the same way the vessel will approach some obstacle / danger (eg submerged wreck) |
| [YOU ARE] RUNNING INTO DANGER (details) | Advising that the vessel that by going on in the same way the vessel will encounter some danger –  ~ shallow water ... bearing 220, distance 1 nm.  ~ submerged wreck ... (cardinal points) of you.  ~ risk of collision (with a vessel bearing ... degrees, distance ... kilometres / nautical miles). |
| SHALLOW WATER (details) | Advising that the vessel is heading towards or has entered shallow water (eg north of route) |
| CRITICAL TURN (details) | Advising about a critical turn (eg the vessel did not alter course as expected) |
| [YOU ARE] DEVIATIED FROM (details) | Advising that the vessel has deviated from something (eg the channel, sailing / passage plan) |
| RISK OF COLLISION WITH (details) | Advising that the vessel is in a risk of collision with something (eg, an object, another vessel, vessel ahead of you) |
| RISK OF GROUNDING (location) | Advising that the vessel is in a risk of running aground with at a location |
| DIVERGING FROM (details) | Advising that the vessel has diverged from an area (eg recommended track) |
| [YOU HAVE] DEVIATED FROM (details) | Advising that the vessel has deviated from an area (eg recommended track) |

## MANAGEMENT OF TRAFFIC

These phrases may follow information of an occurrence or activity or an initial observation statement, such as “SHALLOW WATER”. These phrases indicate a need for a vessel to do something, or follow an instruction to take necessary action.

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| WHAT ARE YOUR INTENTIONS | Question requesting the vessel to advise of their intentions |
| KEEP CLEAR OF (details) | Request to keep clear of something (eg area, location, object) |
| AVOID (details) | Request to avoid something (eg area, location, object) |
| CHECK YOUR POSITION | Request for the vessel to check their position |
| RETURN TO (details) | Request for the vessel to return to something (eg area, location, route) |
| WAIT FOR (details) | Request for the vessel to wait for an event (eg vessel leaving berth, vessel ahead of you, improvement in visibility) |
| NAVIGATE WITH CAUTION | Request for the vessel to navigate with caution |
| WIDE BERTH REQUESTED | Request for the vessel to give the area a wide berth |
| PASS TO (details) | Request for the vessel to pass to a relative direction or area (eg NW of location) |
| KEEP A SAFE DISTANCE | Request for the vessel to maintain a safe distance |
| PROCEED WITH CAUTION | Advising that the vessel to proceed with caution |
| REDUCE SPEED | Instructing or Advising a vessel to reduce their speed |
| REMAIN OUTSIDE (area) AND STANDBY | Advising the vessel to remain outside an area until further notice |
| DO NOT PROCEED | Instruction for the vessel not to continue or proceed |
| DO NOT ENTER | Instruction for the vessel not to enter |
| DO NOT OVERTAKE | Instruction for a vessel not to overtake |
| DO NOT CROSS FAIRWAY | Instruction for a vessel not to cross the fairway |
| RESTRICTED AREA (name) | Information provided about a restricted area |
| HAZARDOUS ACTIVITES IN (area). | Information provided about hazardous activities being conducted |
| AREA TO BE AVOIDED (name) | Information provided about an area to be avoided |

## RESPONDING TO EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

No two emergencies will ever be the same. The same situation can develop and be resolved in an entirely different way as there are so many variables that can affect the eventual outcome. It is possible that the vessel may give certain pieces of information normally associated with an emergency but may not prefix the message with “MAYDAY” or “PAN PAN”. It may be sometime after before an emergency is declared.

Indications of a potential emergency situation:

* Emergency situations start with a statement of a problem and will often follow with a request for ‘STANDBY’. The request for ‘STANDBY’ could indicate a problem.
* Where the vessel is not responding to transmissions, this may indicate they are pre-occupied trying to diagnose and confirm the situation.
* Once the situation and its implications are understood, then a “MAYDAY” or “PAN PAN” may be issued. However, there may be a reluctance to acknowledge the extent of the problem and declare the appropriate emergency.

The pitch/tone of the communications may not necessarily reflect the seriousness of the situation. Further, language and communication difficulties may be experienced as these are often exacerbated when under stress.

Resist the urge to ‘throw information’ at the vessel. A common response in the need to ‘do something’ is to pass on as much information as possible. This can have the effect of overloading at a time when they have other priorities. Anticipate this urge and take a few seconds to consider the amount, relevance and timing of the information to determine what is really useful before transmitting. Keep additional information on hand and ready in case the vessel requests it or circumstances change.

Time distortion – the VTS operators perception of time is expanded so that it appears more time has elapsed between communications than is actually the case. Jot down the times of communications to keep this in check.

### Types of emergency messages a vessel may provide

There are two classes of emergency messages:

* **DISTRESS** – ‘MAYDAY’ is used to indicate the vessel is in grave and imminent danger to life or the vessel, and require immediate assistance. Upon receipt of a MAYDAY, the VTS operator should acknowledge the distress message with the vessel concerned.
* **URGENCY** - ‘PAN PAN’ indicates the vessel is not in grave and imminent danger, but requires urgent assistance. All urgency messages should be broadcast to all stations or a specific station.

The vessel may upgrade from an Urgency to Distress, when:

* The situation of a vessel deteriorate from a threat to grave and imminent danger requiring immediate assistance.
* The incident is considered to be major in nature

### Other considerations

Other considerations when handling an emergency situation:

**Initial Actions**

* Acknowledge the call and understand the nature of the emergency. Observe any request for standby
* Consider the local area. For example, traffic in area, other dangers, anchorage areas etc
* Reduce workload as much as possible:
  + Call for help – alert supervisors/managers, and/or colleagues
  + Consider waterway management such as managing traffic in the area
  + Consider using another radio frequency or clearing the frequency of other traffic
  + Consider imposing radio silence
* Make use of pauses in communications to consider the actions required:
  + Options to whether the vessel should continue or consider alternate action to manage traffic in the waterway such as:
    - potential anchorage locations
    - areas where there is safe water
  + Any other further measures required to manage traffic in the waterway
  + Time may be required in order to resolve, contain or improve the situation
  + Potential effects of resultant damage

Always remember that the master may not be aware of the full situation (eg the extent of the damage or the full effect on the vessels operations).

**Subsequent actions**

On receipt of further information, the VTS should be able to establish the exact nature of the emergency and any effects it may have on the operation or manoeuvrability of the vessel.

**Assistance from other agencies**

Where practical the VTS operator should delegate tasks to other competent people in order to concentrate on communications and providing assistance to the vessel as required. This may involve engaging other agencies such as search and rescue agencies etc.

## EMERGENCY BROADCASTS

Emergency Broadcasts may be made in the event of a major marine, environmental, security incident or on suspension of any VTS services, advising of any special restricted / safety areas and any communication restrictions or changes. In particular:

* All vessels should be requested to maintain current communication watch, minimise all VHF radio traffic and be ready for vessel traffic instructions.
* Any vessel requiring emergency assistance within the VTS area should contact

For example:

| VTS | All Ships, All Ships, All Ships  (position and name of vessel)  (nature of Incident)  (intentions of the vessel / details of assistance required)  (any other useful information) |
| --- | --- |

### Securite

The call ‘Securite’ indicates there is an important message regarding navigational warnings or serious weather reports. All safety messages should be broadcast to all stations or a specific station.

For example:

| VTS | SECURITE, SECURITE, SECURITE  ALL SHIPS, ALL SHIPS, ALL SHIPS  THIS IS PORT HEDLAND VTS, PORT HEDLAND VTS, PORT HEDLAND VTS  WARNING  A STRONG WIND WARNING IS CURRENT FOR PORT HEDLAND AND SURROUNDING AREAS. EXPECTED WIND STRENGTH MAY EXCEED 45 KNOTS, FOUR FIVEKNOTS. ALL VESSELS ARE ADVISED TO TAKE EXTRA PRECAUTIONS INROUGH WEATHER AND ENSURE ANCHORS ARE HOLDING FAST.  I SAY AGAIN …  THIS IS PORT HEDLAND VTS OUT |
| --- | --- |

### Cancellations

When the incident is over, an appropriate message should be broadcast to all stations.

## IMPACTS ON NORMAL VTS OPERATIONS

### Issues with VTS operations

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| (VTS) AT REDUCED CAPACITY UNTIL (time) | Notification that the VTS is operating at reduced capacity |
| OPERATIONS OFFLINE UNTIL (time) | Notification that the VTS will be offline until a specified time |

Examples of phrases which a VTS may use to advise that their VTS operations have been impacted:

|  |
| --- |
| Message Phrases |
| Port Hedland VTS has been evacuated and will be operating in a reduced capacity until further notice. |

### Radio checks

General phrases used when replying to radio check requests:

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| READ YOU LOUD AND CLEAR | Information that the radio check was received loud and clear |
| Your Transmission is weak and unreadable | Information that the message had not been received and understood (may require response as a general address to “station calling” if identity is not evident). |
| READ YOU (signal strength eg poor) | Information on the signal strength received. See table below |
| SIGNAL IS (details eg too weak) | Information on the signal strength received. See table below |
| (there is /I have) (a lot of /too much) NOISE | Information to the vessel on the level of noise observed on the VHF radio |

Signal strength is expressed in the following manner:

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| UNREADABLE  (Alternatively BAD / ONE) | Information that the message is “unreadable”. Alternatively may also be expressed as one (ie barely perceptible) |
| READABLE NOW AND THEN  (Alternatively POOR / TWO) | Information that the message is “readable now and then”. Alternatively may also be expressed as two (ie weak) |
| READABLE BUT WITH DIFFICULTY  (Alternatively FAIR / THREE) | Information that the message is “readable but with difficulty”. Alternatively may also be expressed as three (ie fairly good) |
| READABLE  (Alternatively GOOD / FOUR) | Information that the message is “readable”. Alternatively may also be expressed four (ie good) |
| PERFECTLY READABLE  (Alternatively EXCELLENT / FIVE) | Information that the message is “perfectly readable”. Alternatively may also be expressed five (ie excellent) |

This may also provide an opportunity to reciprocate the radio check with the vessel to ensure VTS transmissions are clear.

| Message Element | Message Intent |
| --- | --- |
| HOW DO YOU READ ME | Question to the vessel on the clarity of the VTS signal strength |

# DEFINITIONS

The definitions of terms used in this Guideline can be found in the International Dictionary of Marine Aids to Navigation (IALA Dictionary) at <http://www.iala-aism.org/wiki/dictionary> and were checked as correct at the time of going to print. Where conflict arises, the IALA Dictionary should be considered as the authoritative source of definitions used in IALA documents.

# ACRONYMS

[Acronym] [Acronym]

[Acronym] [Acronym]

… …

1. Volume IVE, Recommendation ITU‐R, M117 and following [↑](#footnote-ref-1)