

# Guideline: Vessel monitoring system – temporary switch off

<b>Document title</b>	Guideline: Vessel monitoring system – temporary switch off
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<b>Document review</b>	As required

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1.0	16 June 2016	Will Bowman	Created
1.1	6 December 2019	Blake Taylor	Revision to include reporting for additional fisheries.
1.2	17 July 2019	Lianos Triantafillos	Revision to streamline approval process
1.3	19 December 2019	Lianos Triantafillos	Revision to allow operators to contact NT Fisheries as well as the Water Police to move vessel
1.4	19 May 2020	Blake Taylor	Revision to align with AFMA fee for service arrangements.
1.5	30 August 2021	Eliza Kimlin	Updated AFMA contact details

Acronyms and initialisms	
AFMA	Australian Fisheries Management Authority
NT	Northern Territory
VMS	Vessel monitoring system

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## Guideline

### VMS purpose

All commercial vessels required to have a vessel monitoring system (VMS) as part of their fishing operation must have their VMS running at all times. If an operator needs to switch off their VMS unit(s), for any period, they must first apply to the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA).

Situations such as fishing season closures or periods of lengthy vessel repairs or maintenance mean that from time to time it may not be necessary to have vessels reporting on VMS. This guideline provides operators with the process to apply to temporarily switch off their VMS unit(s).

### When a temporary switch off will be permitted

Approval to switch off a VMS unit is not an automatic right. It is a privilege afforded operators on the basis that they have a genuine cause not to operate on VMS and that they are approved to do so by AFMA.

A temporary switch off will **only** be permitted where an operator has a genuine or exceptional cause that prevents the need for continuous operation of their VMS, including:

- a nominated vessel is undergoing maintenance or repair-type activity and electrical equipment on board the vessel will be shut down
- a nominated vessel is not undertaking any fishing activity for an extended period because it:
  - is in a berth in port
  - is stored at a residential premises
  - or is not operating due to a seasonal closure.

### How to apply for a temporary switch off

To make an application to switch off a VMS unit, contact the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) at [ausvms@afma.gov.au](mailto:ausvms@afma.gov.au) or on 02 5225 5555 (Option 5) during business hours.

### Obligations when approved to switch off

An operator granted permission to switch off their VMS unit(s) is still legally responsible for complying with fisheries management arrangements and licence conditions, and must:

- not undertake any fishing activity, as defined under section 4 of the *Fisheries Act 1988*
- ensure the vessel remains stationary at an elected point while the VMS unit is switched off unless they contact AFMA and confirm the vessel can be moved
- ensure the VMS unit is operational prior to leaving port or recommencing any fishing activity.

### Non-compliance with the temporary switch off requirements

If an operator is found to have not complied with the temporary switch off requirements, the vessel will be ordered to return to port immediately and the operator/concession holder may face further enforcement action.

## Switching on the VMS unit

It is the operator's responsibility to ensure their vessel is reporting on VMS after the switch off arrangement has finished. This can be done by contacting AFMA at [ausvms@afma.gov.au](mailto:ausvms@afma.gov.au) or on 02 6225 5555 (Option 5) during business hours.

## Relevant legislation

The guideline for VMS temporary switch off has been developed to ensure operators remain consistent with the requirements of the *Fisheries Act 1988*.

## Further information

For further information in relation to this guideline please contact NT Fisheries at [fisheries@nt.gov.au](mailto:fisheries@nt.gov.au) or on 08 8999 2144.