

To Commissioners David Robertson and Neil Byron:

As a Senior Search and Rescue Officer with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, I am concerned that the impending changes to maritime communications in Australian waters may adversely affect the facilities for distress and safety communications for non-SOLAS vessels. In particular for those ocean going sailors that venture beyond the range of the yet to be determined State and Territory non-SOLAS vessel communications arrangements.

You maybe aware that from 1 July 2002 new arrangements will be introduced for maritime communications in Australian waters. These arrangements include:

- (1) The Federal Government through AMSA will provide GMDSS Satellite and HF DSC distress and safety communications for SOLAS vessels and those non-SOLAS vessels equipped and licensed for GMDSS operations.
- (2) State and Territories Governments will provide distress and safety communications for non-SOLAS vessels.

Services once provided by AMSA via Telstra Maritime Radio Stations that will cease from 1 July 2002 include:

- (1) Aural monitoring of HF voice distress frequencies
- (2) The broadcast of navigation warnings on HF voice
- (3) HF Public correspondence and Radphone communications (a limited service will be continue to be available for emergencies such a medical advice to masters).

It is not unreasonable to expect that States and Territories will be limited in their provision of HF communications for non-SOLAS vessels operating in remote areas and certainly will not be planning on oceanic coverage of the Australian SAR region between 75E to 163E extending to below India at 02S and along the Indonesian Archipelago and down to the Antarctic region. Clearly vessels voyaging in such remote and distant seas should be fitted for HF DSC distress as provided by the new AMSA network.

The practical problem with this arrangement for cruising vessels is that of equipment limitation. The decision whether to fit the vessel with a HF DSC radio to join a network which provides no or limited public correspondence and no broadcast of maritime safety information, or to fit a HF radio with a facility that allows correspondence with shore authorities/organisations, business, families and friends. Such equipments exist, using modern techniques to access the internet and

email over HF radio via International networks, such as WINLINK 2000. Australia lags behind the rest of the world in providing such a facility for own and visiting cruising yachtsmen, without any longer providing a viable alternative network.

I believe such a system as WINLINK 2000 will provide an important safety net for the reporting of emergencies at sea and will enhance the already close and effective relationship that SAR organisations, such as AMSA, already has with the HAM networks throughout the world. It will also provide an alternative and more useful means of communications to that available by the restricted network offered by AMSA and the limited and potentially confusing networks being introduced by the States and Territories.

I wish to support any recommendation that will assist with the safe and timely communications for Australian and foreign yachtsmen and women sailing our oceans.

A.J. Hughes
Senior Search and Rescue Officer
Australian Maritime Safety Authority
Canberra