

MUTUAL SUPPORT VIA DSC CAPABLE HF/SSB RADIO when beyond the range of the excellent marine VHF and S&R services around Europe, the UK & North America

Most cruising and racing sailors know the value of the safety net created by closely integrated professional, 24/7, S&R capabilities and centralised maritime distress communication services around the UK, Europe and coastal North America. But once we move away from the protection of these services, sail and engine powered yachts need to rely on each other, and other nearby mariners. Especially in the Pacific and Indian oceans, around most of Australia's coast and in SE Asia.

1. Modern marine HF/SSB radios with DSC provide the convenient means to link together yacht crews in races, rallies, cruise-in-company groups or cruising independently, to create a quick response and nearby mutual support network. There is no need to wait till the next sked to get helpful advice, a dinner recipe, warnings about floating hazards, or info to plan a landfall. The DSC radio maintains a silent, 24/7 watch for Individual, Group or Distress calls, with a muted speaker, so crews can enjoy the anchorage, sunset or ocean passage. The radio only becomes noisy – ringing like a phone – when a call is received. And all voice calls – for general or distress purposes – are free.
2. Hong Kong, New Zealand and Australian MRCC websites highlight the very limited availability of S&R resources on their side of the world. This means that other shipping – including fishing trawlers, live-aboard surf/dive charter boats, merchant ships and yachts – are likely to be the closest and quickest source of assistance. Marine HF/SSB radio with DSC is the convenient and no-call-cost common communications link. A single DSC distress alarm can alert any and all similarly equipped vessels nearby. It is not necessary to know who is there or their number.
3. MRCC Australia's latest website revision highlights yet again that a 24/7 watch on a marine HF/SSB radio is the most effective communication option for a prompt response in regions without quick response, dedicated, 24/7 S&R services. “While satellites and satellite-compatible distress beacons have significantly improved the effectiveness of SAR operations, the system is NOT a substitute for carrying appropriate marine radio ... your initial distress alert should still be made by radio if possible ... communication should first be attempted with others close by using radios. ... The basic concept of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) is that search and rescue authorities ashore, as well as shipping in the immediate vicinity of a ship in distress, will be rapidly alerted. ... The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has strongly recommended that non-SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea - SOLAS) vessels (under 300 tonnes) to be fitted with GMDSS-compatible equipment.”
4. Yachting Australia and Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club now require installation of DSC capable HF/SSB radios. The combination of radio's unique broadcast feature with the silent speaker and DSC calling system makes a 24/7 watch for DSC calls practical. This 24/7 watch by other nearby yachts underpins the mutual support and prompt response capability during events – races or rallies – or recreational cruising.
5. Enhanced vessel-to-vessel DSC calling is achieved by adopting the amended General receiver scanning strategy recommended by Terry Sparks. Enhancing vessel-to-vessel DSC calling capability is now the topic of an official GMDSS amendment; to increase mutual support and nearby assistance.
6. MRCC Australia recommends the use of Group Call MMSI IDs – using the same GroupCall ID creation technique promoted by Terry Sparks – to simultaneously and conveniently call all yachts in a race, rally or cruising group; eg, for advice, to warn about hazards, or to start a voice sked,. See <http://www.amsa.gov.au/search-and-rescue/distress-and-safety-comms/mmsi/> .

Mutual support and helpful assistance from like-minded and resourceful yachties has proven on many occasions to be critical to enhancing the cruising lifestyle, resolving problems, preventing distress situations or ensuring a quick response to a distress situation. The modern marine HF/SSB radio with DSC (quietly) links everyone together – despite distance or geographic obstructions – to create this mutual support network. Via radio, all calls to request/provide advice, spare-parts, support or rescue are FOC.

And the same radio is the basis of low-cost email on-board using the not-for-profit SailMail Association's 20 linked stations around the world. Request no-cost METAREA forecasts, GRIB weather charts or SPOT forecasts. Submit free Yotreps position reports, and organise shore arrangements, spare-part shipments, crew arrival/departures, shore excursions, marinas, entry/exit formalities, cruising permits etc. Maintain contact with family, manage work or investments, and communicate directly with race or rally organisers ashore.