**GUIDELINES FOR A VESSEL TRAFFIC SERVICE (VTS)**

[…]

[…]

[…]

HAVING CONSIDERED the recommendation made by the Maritime Safety Committee at its one hundredth session,

1. ADOPTS the revised Guidelines for a Vessel Traffic Service set out in the Annex to the present resolution;

2. INVITES Governments to take account of the annexed Guideline when planning, implementing and operating a vessel traffic service in accordance with SOLAS regulation V/12;

3. RECOMMENDS Governments to encourage masters of ships navigating in an area for which a vessel traffic service is provided to make use of such a service;

4. REVOKES resolution A.857(20).

ANNEX

**GUIDELINES FOR A VESSEL TRAFFIC SERVICE (VTS)**

**1 PREAMBLE**

These guidelines are associated with SOLAS regulation V/12 and should be complied with by Contracting Governments when implementing and operating a vessel traffic service under national law**.**

They provide a common framework for the delivery of VTS globally in a realistic, consistent and harmonized manner.

**2 DEFINITIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS**

The following terms are used in connection with a vessel traffic service:

* 1. ***Vessel traffic service (VTS)*** - a service implemented by a Government/Competent Authority with the capability to interact with the traffic and to respond to traffic situations developing in the VTS area to improve the safety and efficiency of vessel traffic and to protect the environment
  2. ***VTS functions*** – The functions a VTS provides to achieve its purpose.
  3. ***Competent authority*** - the authority made legally responsible by the Government for SOLAS Chapter V Regulation 12 Vessel Traffic Services.
  4. ***VTS provider***- the organization / entity legally empowered by the Government / Competent Authority for the provision of VTS.
  5. ***VTS area*** -the delineated, formally declared area for which the VTS provider is legally empowered to deliver a VTS.
  6. ***Allied services*** - services actively involved in the safe and efficient passage of the vessel through the VTS area.

**3 GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

**3.1 International / Legal Framework**

3.1.1 Vessel traffic services are recognised internationally as a navigational safety measure through the International Convention on the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), Chapter V (Safety of Navigation) Regulation 12.

3.1.2 Under the general provisions of treaty law and of IMO conventions, States are responsible for promulgating laws and regulations and for taking all other steps which may be necessary to give those instruments full and complete effect so as to ensure safety of life at sea and protection of the marine environment.

3.1.3 These Guidelines are associated with SOLAS, Chapter V (Safety of Navigation) Regulation 12 and describe the principles and general operational provisions for the operation of a VTS and participating vessels.

3.1.4 The use of VTS may only be made mandatory in sea areas within the territorial seas of a coastal State[[1]](#footnote-1).

Recognising VTS may also significantly contribute to the safety of life at sea, safety and efficiency of navigation and protection of the marine environment from possible adverse effects of maritime traffic beyond the territorial seas of a coastal nation, VTS may be established:

* In association with an IMO adopted Ship Reporting System[[2]](#footnote-2) or a Ship Routeing System[[3]](#footnote-3), or
* On a voluntary basis.

3.1.5 Contracting Governments should take account of these Guidelines when planning, implementing and operating vessel traffic services.

3.1.6 These Guidelines should also be used in conjunction with applicable IMO instruments and IALA Standards.

**3.2 Purpose of VTS**

3.2.1 The purpose of vessel traffic services is to improve the safety and efficiency of navigation, safety of life at sea and the protection of the marine environment and/or the adjacent shore area, worksites and offshore installations from possible adverse effects of maritime traffic in a given area.

3.2.2 The purpose of a VTS is achieved through the delivery of VTS functions (Refer Section 3.4).

**3.3 Responsibilities**

**Contracting Governments**

3.3.1 The Contracting Government should:

* + - 1. Promulgate laws and regulations to establish a legal basis for VTS that gives effect to international law and SOLAS Chapter V Regulation 12; and
      2. Appoint and authorise a Competent Authority for VTS.
      3. Take appropriate action against a vessel flying their flag that is reported to have committed an alleged violation of a VTS.

**Competent Authority for VTS**

3.3.2 The Competent Authority should:

1. Establish a regulatory framework for establishing and operating VTS in accordance with relevant international conventions and IMO instruments, national law and IALA Standards;
2. Authorise a VTS Provider to operate a VTS within a delineated VTS area in accordance with national and international law;
3. Ensure that VTS training and certification is accredited and approved in accordance with IALA Standards;
4. Establish a compliance and enforcement framework with respect to violations of VTS regulatory requirements.

**VTS Provider**

3.3.3 The VTS Provider should:

1. Ensure the VTS conforms with national law and the requirements set by the Competent Authority for VTS;
2. Set operational objectives for the VTS that are consistent with improving the safety and efficiency of vessel traffic and protection of the environment. The objectives set should be routinely evaluated to demonstrate they are being achieved;
3. Ensure that information regarding the requirements and procedures of the VTS are promulgated in appropriate navigational publications.

**Participating Vessels**

3.3.4 Participating vessels in VTS areas should:

1. Provide reports or information required by the VTS;
2. Take into account the advice provided by the VTS;
3. Comply with instructions for the movement of the vessel given to the vessel by the VTS unless contradictory safety reasons exist which then should be reported to the sender.

Decisions concerning the actual navigation and the manoeuvring of the vessel remain with the master.

**3.4 General Considerations for VTS**

**Functions of a VTS**

3.4.1 To achieve the purpose of Vessel Traffic Services, a VTS should manage the safe and efficient transit of vessels within the VTS Area and mitigate the development of unsafe situations. Functions of a VTS to achieve this include:

1. *Information -* The provision of timely and relevant information on factors that may influence the vessel's transit and to assist onboard decision making. This may include, but is not necessarily restricted to:

* The position, identity, intention and movements of vessels;
* Maritime Safety Information
* Limitations of vessels in the VTS area that may impose restrictions on the navigation of other vessels (e.g. manoeuvrability), or any other potential hindrances;
* Other information such as reporting formalities and ISPS details; and
* Support to Allied Services such as pilot allocation, pilot exemptions, berthing information, waste handling, fuel and water supply arrangements and customs and immigration requirements.

1. *Management –* The operational monitoring and management of traffic to ensure the safety and efficiency of vessel movements. Traffic management may include, but is not necessarily restricted to:

* Organising the allocation of space;
* Forward planning of vessel movements
* Establishing a system of traffic clearances or sailing plans, or both;
* Organisation of vessels with hazardous or polluting cargo that may affect the flow of other traffic;
* Providing route advice:
* Incident management; and
* Compliance with and enforcement of regulatory provisions for which they are empowered.

1. *Response* – The initiation of interaction in response to developing unsafe situations to assist the decision-making process on board. This may include situations such as:

* A vessel unsure of its position or unable to determine its position;
* A vessel unsure of the route to its destination;
* A vessel requiring guidance to an anchoring position;
* Vessels deviating from the VTS sailing/passage plan;
* A vessel that has defects or deficiencies, such as navigation or manoeuvring equipment failure;
* Severe meteorological conditions (e.g. low visibility, strong winds);
* A vessel at risk of grounding;
* Vessels at risk of collision or allision; and
* Emergency response or support to emergency services.

3.4.2 It should be recognised that there may be differences in the detailed functions provided by VTS due to national law, geographical characteristics, traffic density/diversity, accessibility and environmental conditions.

3.4.3 It should be recognised that measures taken by a VTS may contribute in reducing the adverse effects of maritime traffic on the environment.

**3.5 IALA Standards**

3.5.1 IALA has, through harmonized international cooperation developed Standards related to the implementation, development and operation of Vessel Traffic Services. Competent Authorities / VTS Providers should refer to the following IALA standards:

**S1040 - Vessel Traffic Services**

* Implementation
* Operations
* Data and Information Management
* Communications
* Technologies
* Auditing and Assessing
* Additional Services

**S1050 – Training and Certification**

* Training and assessment
* Accreditation, competency, certification and revalidation

**S1010 - Marine Aids to Navigation Planning and Service Requirements**

* Risk Management
* Quality Management

**S1070 - Information Services**

* Data models and data encoding

3.5.2 To ensure the harmonized implementation and provision of Vessel Traffic Services worldwide, Competent Authorities should implement the provisions of the IALA Standards and associated documentation[[4]](#footnote-4) (such as Recommendations, Guidelines, Manuals and Model Courses) applicable to VTS by:

* Giving effect in national legislation; and
* Establishing a framework for VTS Providers to demonstrate compliance.

|  |
| --- |
| **Note:**  IALA be requested to give consideration as to determining an appropriate mechanism to reference the Standards and their accessibility.  For example, SOLAS Ch5 Regulation 12 states – “*Contracting Governments planning and implementing VTS shall, wherever possible, follow the guidelines developed by the* ***Organization****\**” and refers to A.857(20) as a **footnote**. |

**3.6 Other applicable IMO references**

These Guidelines should be used in conjunction with the applicable IMO documentation.

1. SOLAS Chapter V Regulation 12 (Vessel Traffic Services) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. General Principles for Ship Reporting Systems and Ship Reporting Requirements - Resolution A.851(20) and Guideline and Criteria for Ship Reporting Systems - Resolution MSC.433(98) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. General Provisions on Ships’ Routeing - Resolution A.572(14) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [e.g. web link such as http://www.iala-aism.org] [↑](#footnote-ref-4)