

**Fishing Vessel Circular Letter No. 054**  
**06 December 2023**  
**Series: GEN-2023**

To: All Ship Owners, Operators, Deputy Registrars, Resident Agents, Representatives, and other Stakeholders

Subject: **VMS REQUIREMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF VESSEL OWNERS**

Reference: Issued in accordance with Part VIII, Section 50(1)(c) of the High Seas Fishing Act, 2013

Circular Superseded: FVC-006/2013, Issued 14<sup>th</sup> March 2013

**BACKGROUND:**

A vessel monitoring system (VMS) is a crucial tool for maritime authorities, fisheries management, and vessel operators. It plays a significant role in ensuring the safety and security of maritime activities, as well as in promoting sustainable fishing practices. The importance of a vessel monitoring system can be understood from various perspectives. In the context of fisheries management, VMS provides valuable data on fishing activities, including the location and duration of fishing operations. This information is instrumental in enforcing fishing quotas, monitoring the impact of fishing on marine ecosystems, and combating IUU fishing. By promoting transparency and accountability in fisheries, VMS contributes to the sustainable management of marine resources.

**AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MONITORING OF FISHING VESSELS**

1. The Fisheries Monitoring Centre, established under the structure of the BHSFU is responsible for the 24-hour monitoring of all vessels regardless of their geographic location.
2. The FMC through coordination with its service providers, ensure that the VMS installed on the vessel functions normally and it is not tampered with.
3. The FMC shall ensure that it receives at least one report every hour and has the authority to require VMS reports at shorter intervals and request other information as may be necessary.
4. The FMC shall closely monitor the activities of the vessel, from date and time of entry to the date and time of exit for the following areas:

- Any maritime areas where specific rules on access to water and resources apply.
- The regulated areas of the regional fisheries management organizations of which Belize is a party.
- The jurisdictional waters of another country.
- Any other area, restricted or otherwise, which may be designated by Belize.

## **VMS REQUIREMENT ON BOARD BELIZE FLAGGED FISHING VESSELS**

1. All vessels licensed to fish or carry out fishing related activities under the Belize flag shall be required to have an operational VMS.
2. A vessel will not be allowed to leave port or carry out fishing activities until an operational VMS has been installed on board the vessel.
3. The vessel monitoring system shall remain active even when vessel is at port and shall only be switched off under the following conditions:
  - Prior notification has been given by this Administration.
  - Providing that the next position report shows that the vessel has not changed its position in relation to the previous report
  - That a letter of confirmation from the port authorities attesting to the vessel position at port is submitted.
4. In the event of a technical failure or malfunction with the equipment, the operators, starting from the time the event was detected, communicate every 4 hours to this Administration, the up-to-date geographical coordinates of the fishing vessel by appropriate and agreed means of communication.
5. If a technical failure which cannot be immediately resolved occurs while the vessel is in the high seas, the vessel must immediately stow its fishing gear and return to port and report to this administration that the vessel is returning to port with stored geared.
6. Following any equipment failure, the vessel may only be allowed to leave port once the equipment is fully functional and to the satisfaction of the FMC. The vessel may be authorized to leave port for repairs or replacement of Unit.
7. The removal of the equipment for repair and replacement shall be subject to the approval of the FMC.

## **COMPONENTS OF THE VESSEL MONITORING EQUIPMENT**

The VMS installed shall always ensure the automatic transmission of information to the FMC relating to:

- The fishing vessel identification

- The most recent geographical position of the vessel, with a position error which shall be less than 500 meters with a confidence level of 99%
- The date and time, expressed in universal time coordinated (UTC), of the fixing of the said position of the vessel.

## **RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM**

The operator and/or master of a vessel shall ensure the VMS is always fully functional and that the relevant data is transmitted. The master shall ensure that:

- No person tampers or interferes with the equipment and it is not altered, damaged, sabotaged, disabled, or otherwise interfered with.
- The information required to be submitted is not altered in any way.
- The antenna connected to the device is not blocked in any way.
- The power supply is not interrupted in any way.
- The equipment is not removed from the required or agreed installed position on the vessel or removed without the prior written authorization from the FMC.
- That any instruction from the FMC regarding the functionality of the equipment are complied with until such time that the equipment is functioning to the satisfaction of the FMC.
- The VMS is not removed from the vessel.

## **APPLICABILITY**

Circulars setting out mandatory requirements shall be construed to have the same effect and applicability of rules and policies under the provisions of the HSFA 2013. Each circular is applicable to all Belize flagged fishing vessels engaged in fishing and related activities. The owner, operator and master of every Belize flagged fishing vessel shall be familiar with all applicable Circulars applying to their vessel and it shall be no defense that any person in breach of any Circular was not aware of it or has not been advised of it.

## **MAINTENANCE**

Ship owners, and operators shall ensure that all Circulars are disseminated to their master and crew as well as any other person affected by or having an interest in the subject matter in a language understood by all. A Circular one issued shall be disseminated electronically to all stakeholders and a listing of ALL Circulars shall be published on the BHSFU website [www.bhsfu.gov.bz](http://www.bhsfu.gov.bz).

## COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

Failure to comply with any Circular shall result in disciplinary actions taken in accordance with Belize's Sanction Regulations S.I. 32 of 2014

## IMPLEMENTATION

All previously issued Circulars issued by the Belize Fisheries Department and the International Merchant Marine Registry as it relates to fishing vessels shall remain valid. These circulars shall have the same effect and applicability of rules and polices promulgated under the provision of the High Seas Fisheries Act 2013 unless repealed and/or superseded.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information direct all inquiries about this Circular to the Director of High Seas Fisheries of the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit, Ministry of Finance, Government of Belize.

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Issued by

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