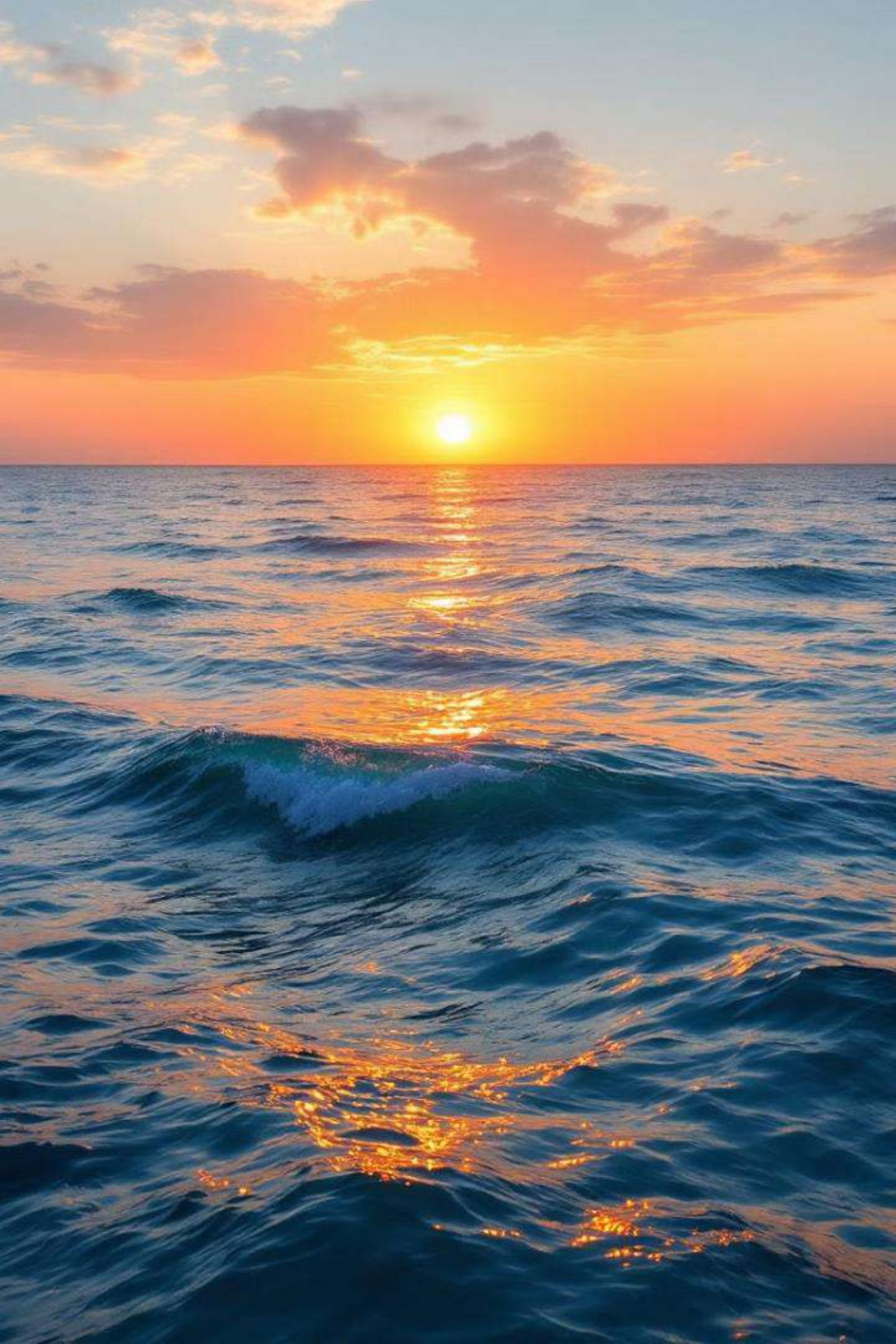# VHF Radiotelephony Best Practices

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What is VHF?

VHF is the primary means of communication between ships, VTSs, RCCs and coast stations. In order to obtain clear and effective communications mariners and VTS personnel need to be up to standard in VHF radio telephony usage. Correct VHF communications avoid tragic situations which could end with loss of life and environmental disasters which can have catastrophic effects and also help for timely and expedient information which reduces costs and loss of time.

VHF Communication adopts the 'Line of Sight Principle' limited by Earth's curvature and obstacles.

Phonetic Alphabet

To obtain clarity and correct phraseology all stakeholders making use of VHF must use the phonetic alphabet.

Phonetic Alphabet

A - alpha	N - november
B - bravo	O - oscar
C - charlie	P - papa
D - delta	Q - quebec
E - echo	R - romeo
F - foxtrot	S - sierra
G - golf	T - tango
H - hotel	U - uniform
I - india	V - victor
J - juliet	W - wiskey
K - kilo	X - x-ray
L - lima	Y - yankee
M - mike	Z - zulu

Alpha Bravo Charlie Delta Echo

Foxtrot Golf Hotel India Juliet

Kilo Lima Mike November Oscar

Papa Quebec Romeo Sierra Tango

Uniform Victor Whiskey X-RAY Yankee

Zulu

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VTS Centres - Malta

Locally we have two VTS centres:

- The coastal VTS whose callsign is Malta VTS and is managed by the Armed Forces of Malta and,

- The national VTS which caters for traffic within the territorial waters and ports which is managed by Transport Malta.

Malta VTS primarily uses VHF channel 69 whereas the national VTS uses VHF channel 12 (**Valletta VTS**), VHF channel 14 (**Marsaxlokk VTS**) and VHF channel 10 (**Mgarr LPS**).
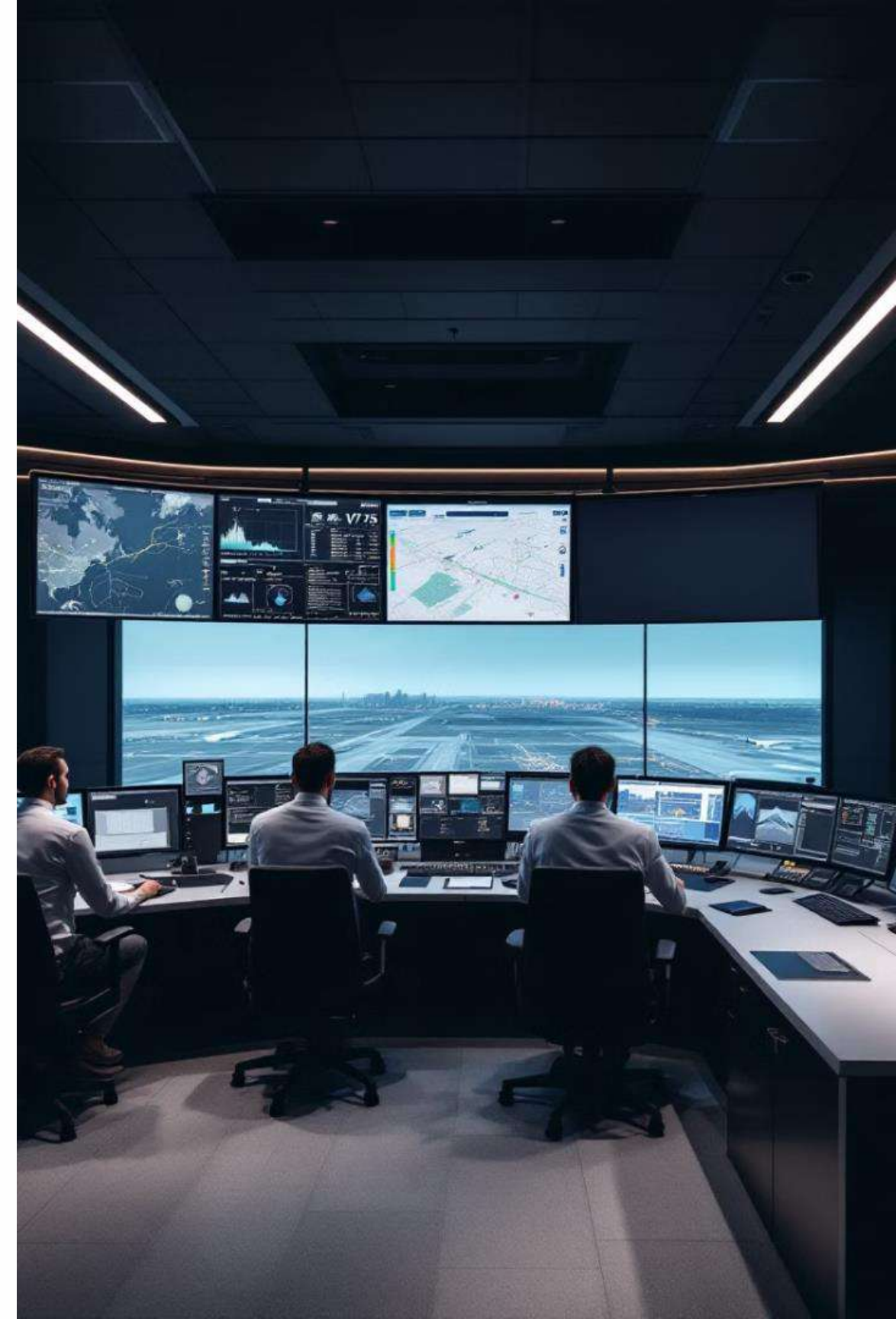
Bulletins #1

Malta VTS transmits weather forecasts and navigational warnings bulletins on VHF channel 4 at:

Time (hrs)	Content
0803	Weather only
1203	Weather & Nav Warnings
1803	Weather & Nav Warnings
2303	Weather & Nav Warnings

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Bulletins #2

Valletta VTS and Marsaxlokk VTS broadcast weather forecasts on **VHF channel 11** at:

- 0803hrs
- 1203hrs
- 1803hrs
- 2303hrs

Navigational warnings and Sécurité messages are also broadcast on channels 12 and 14 when deemed necessary.

Need to Know

Key VHF channels for maritime operations:

- Valletta VTS: Channel 12

- Marsaxlokk VTS: Channel 14

- Mgarr LPS: Channel 10

- Malta VTS: Channel 69

- Weather / Nav Warns: Channel 4 / 11

- Emergency: Channel 22

- Pilotage / Mooring: Channel 9

- Terminals / Marinas: Channel 13

IALA

VTS providers are members of IALA (International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities) which is now an inter-governmental organisation.

VTS communications are based and conducted as defined in IALA guideline G1132:

VTS Voice communications and phraseology

SMCP #1

The **standard marine communications phrases** in maritime VHF or other spoken communications are:

SMCP include:

- QUESTION
- ANSWER
- INFORMATION
- INSTRUCTION
- ADVICE
- REQUEST
- INTENTION
- WARNING

SMCP #2

Using SMCP helps avoid misunderstandings. It provides a common language for maritime communication.

Familiarize yourself with these standard phrases to enhance safety and efficiency.

Ensure clear, concise communication using SMCP.
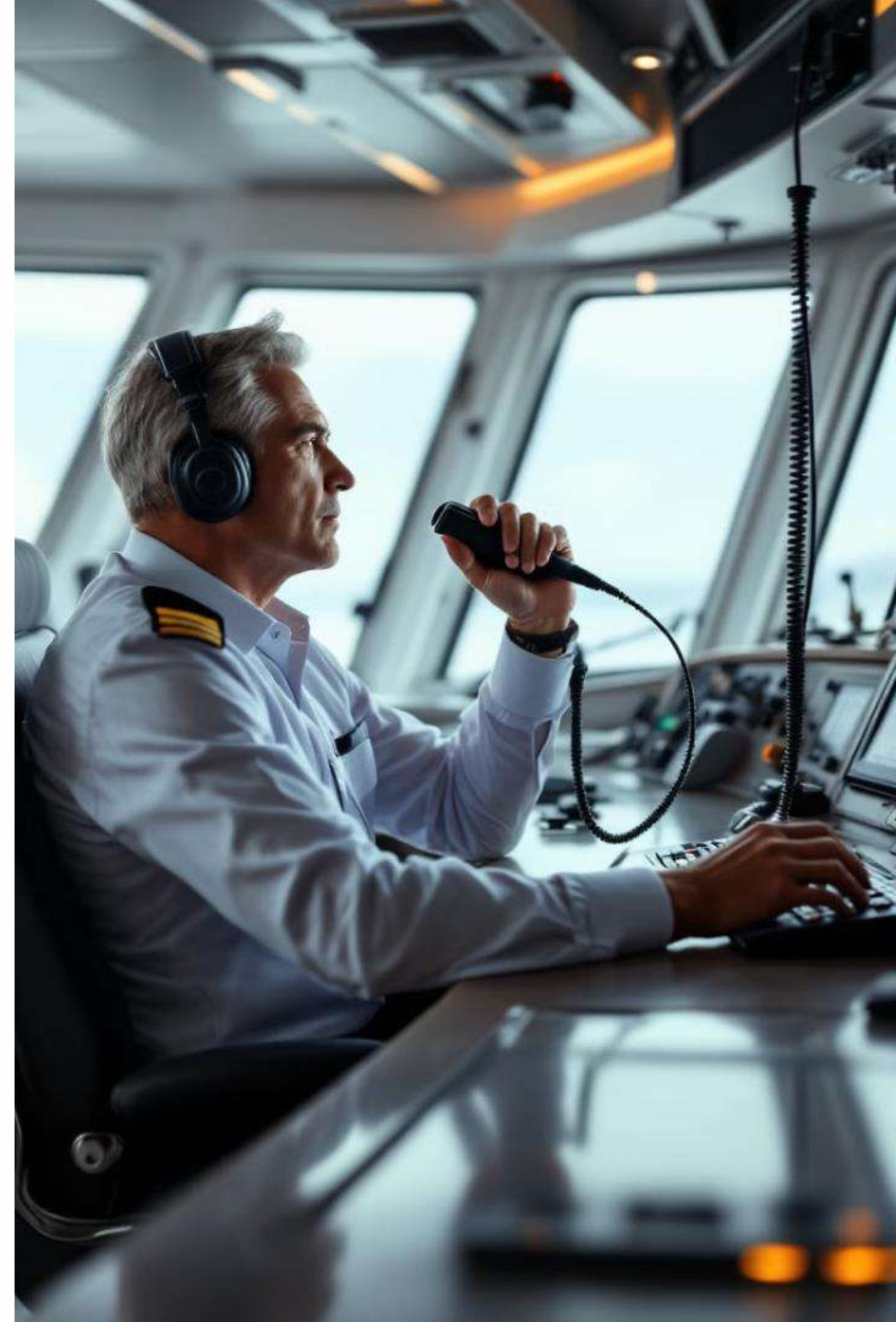
INFORMATION

This indicates that the message is restricted to observed facts, situations and so on.

INFORMATION, Water level at breakwater is 4 metres.

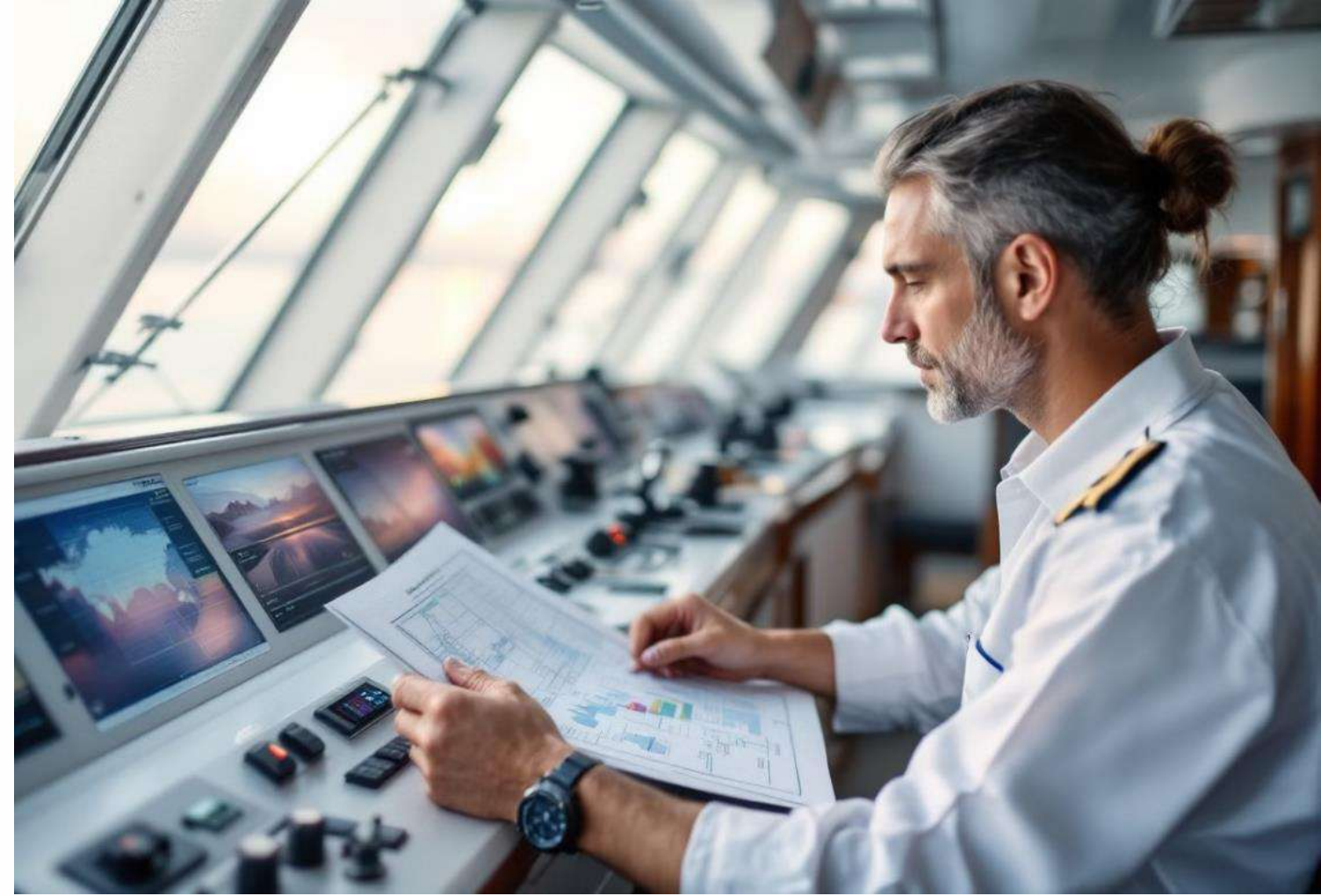**INFORMATION**, Container Ship [name] [position] inbound and will take 2 tugs at Fairway buoy.

This marker is normally used for navigational and traffic information. Information is to assist on-board decision-making process.

ADVICE

This indicates that the message implies the intention of the sender to influence others and may include a recommendation.

ADVICE, Reduce to safe speed.

The decision whether to follow the ADVICE still stays with the Master.

ADVICE does not necessarily have to be followed but should be considered.

WARNING

This indicates that the message implies the intention of the sender to alert others to potential dangers.

WARNING, You are approaching shallow water; distance 5 cables.

When receiving a **WARNING**, immediate attention must be given to the danger mentioned.

Confirm the ship's position, course, and speed relative to the warning.

It's up to the receiver to determine the appropriate response for which action is to be taken.

INSTRUCTION

The sender's intention to direct the action of others.

INSTRUCTION, Remain West of No. 1 Buoy until ship [name] is clear.

In territorial waters, ships should comply with **INSTRUCTIONS** given by a VTS, unless safety and/or marine environment protection reasons exist. Mariners must report their actions if they disregard any instruction.

Thus, instructions must have appropriate regulatory status and authority.

QUESTION

The following message is of interrogative character.

QUESTION, What is your maximum draft?

A **QUESTION** is used when seeking information. To ensure complete and clear communication, questions should be followed by a relevant and accurate **ANSWER**.

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ANSWER

The message is the reply to a previous question.

ANSWER, Pilot boarding time 0800 hours.

Response, without including additional questions used to reply to a previous question, providing necessary information to the questioning party.

An answer should not contain another question.

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REQUEST

The message is asking for action from others with respect to the ship.

REQUEST, Wait for pilot and tugs at [location].

The **REQUEST** marker is used to ask for specific actions or provisions related to the ship's needs. It should not involve navigation or modify the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972 (COLREGs).

INTENTION

Informs others about immediate navigational action that is intended to be taken.

Ship: [VTS name] this is [Ship's name] **INTENTIONS**, I will proceed to Flagstone Wharf.

This message marker is used by ships to inform others, particularly VTS, about their immediate navigational intentions.

INTENTION is logically restricted to ships; it is not to be used by VTS.

VHF Message Prefixes

Navigational Warning:

NAVIGATIONAL WARNING

Safety Message:

SECURITE

Urgency message:

PAN PAN

Distress message:

MAYDAY

NAVIGATIONAL WARNINGS FOR MARINERS

Navigational warnings are crucial for mariners.

Navigational warning is issued by VTS or coast stations to inform mariners about hazards which they might encounter during their passage.

These warnings inform mariners of potential hazards.

All stations x3

This is [VTS name]

Navigational warning

Uncharted wreck in position [position]. Hazard for navigation

This is [VTS name]

OUT

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SAFETY MESSAGE #1

Safety messages may be issued by VTS, coast stations and even by ships.

Ship:

SECURITE x3

This is **[Ship's name]** in position **[position]** currently engaged in towing operations.

All ships to give a wide berth of not less than 2nm to my vessel

SECURITE x3

This is **[Ship's name]**

Out

SAFETY MESSAGE #2

Securité: *For safety broadcasts (e.g., navigational hazards).*
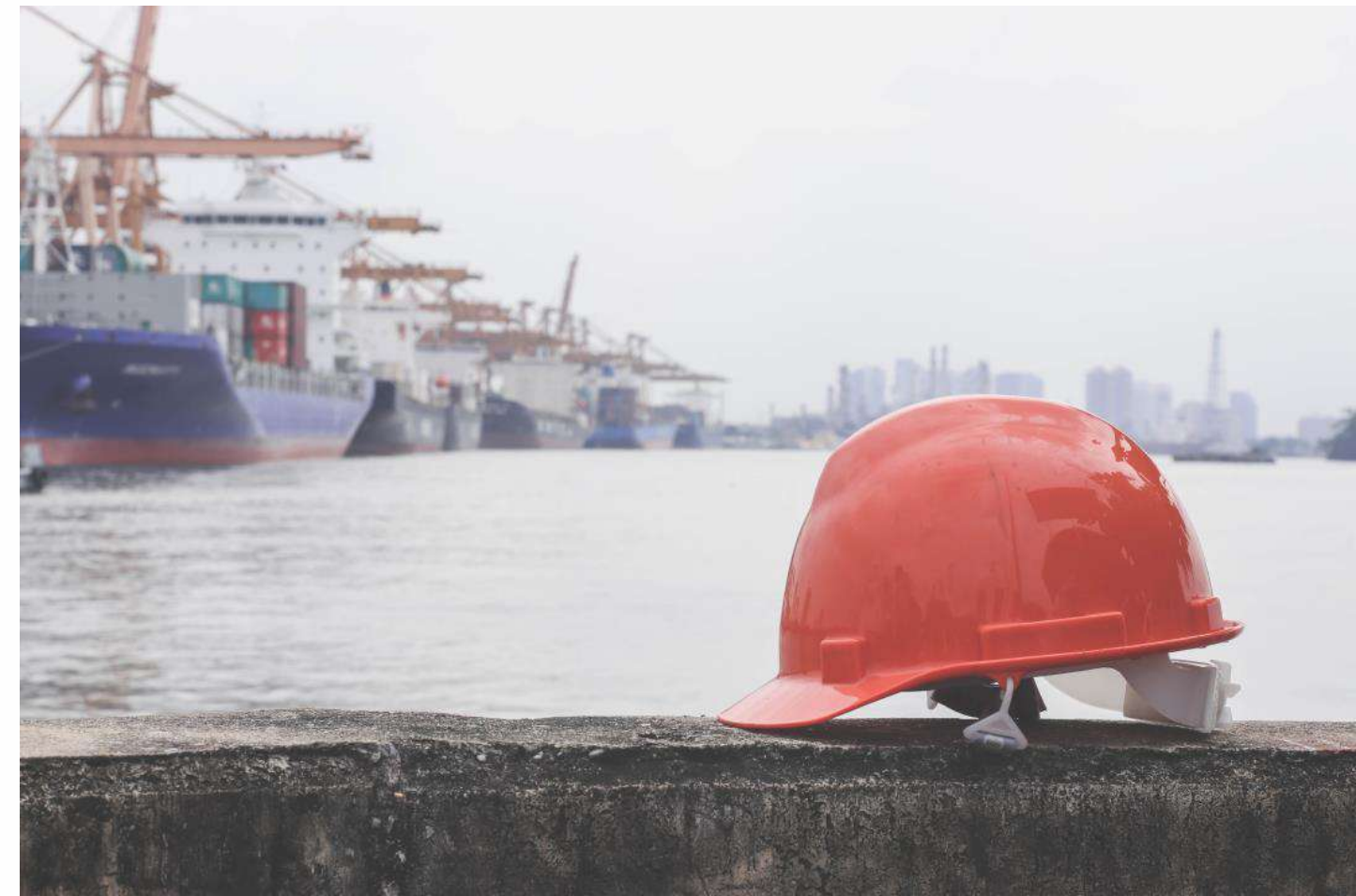
SECURITE x3

This is [**VTS name**]

[**Ship's name**] in position [position] is constrained by her draught.

All ships to give a wide berth.

SECURITE x3.

This is [**VTS name**].

Out.

URGENCY MESSAGE #1

Urgency messages may be issued by VTS, coast stations and even by ships.

Pan-Pan: *For urgent but non-life-threatening situations (e.g., mechanical failure).*

PAN PAN x3

This is [**Ship's name**] in position [**position**]

I have lost my rudder and cannot steer. I request tug assistance

PAN PAN x3

This is [**Ship's name**]

Out

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URGENCY MESSAGE #2:

VTS can relay an urgency message.

PAN PAN x3

This is [**VTS name**]

[**Ship's name**] in position has lost her rudder and requests tug assistance

PAN PAN x3

This is [**VTS name**]

Out

DISTRESS MESSAGE #1:

Mayday: *Use only for grave and imminent danger (e.g., sinking, fire).*

Distress messages may be issued by VTS, coast stations and even by ships.

MAY DAY x3.

All ships x3.

This is [**ship's name**] x3 [**callsign**] in position [**position**].

I have fire on board and require immediate assistance.

Over.

DISTRESS MESSAGE #2:

VTS / Coast station / RCC:

MAY DAY RELAY x3

This is [**VTS name**]

[**Ship's name**] [callsign] in position has fire on board and requires immediate assistance

All ships in area are to proceed and report back to VTS/RCC

Over

IPI's

When establishing communications by VHF it is important to make use of IPI's.

- **I**DENTITY
- **P**OSITION
- **I**NTENTIONS

VTS Services via VHF

VTS through VHF offers the following services:

1. Meteorological and navigational information.

2. Traffic services: organizing traffic and providing information.

3. Providing navigational support in specific waterways or when requested by vessels. Navigational support is a service to assist on-board navigational decision-making and to monitor its effects.

https://dashboards.ocean.mt/tm/

	Mġarr	Ċirkewwa	Qammieħ	Msida	Elmo	Kordin	Delimara	Marsaxlokk
	Altitude 5m	Altitude 5m	Altitude 128m	Altitude 64m	Altitude 36m	Altitude 62m	Altitude 36m	Altitude 7m
	07/05/2025	07/05/2025	07/05/2025	07/05/2025	07/05/2025	25/04/2025	22/04/2025	07/05/2025
	13:17:00	13:17:00	13:17:00	13:15:00	13:17:00	11:45:00	06:47:00	13:17:00
WIND DIRECTION (°N)	CUR 217 AVG 346	CUR 109 AVG 352	CUR 9 AVG 7	CUR 352 AVG 339	CUR 328 AVG 324	CUR 348 AVG 304	CUR 338 AVG 320	CUR 354 AVG 339
WIND SPEED (knots)	CUR 3.7 MAX 19.8	CUR 5.2 MAX 19.6	CUR 4.7 MAX 13.4	CUR 9.5 MAX 14.6	CUR 12.6 MAX 17.5	CUR 15.9 MAX 27.2	CUR 5.1 MAX 8.9	CUR 10.7 MAX 22.2
WIND GUST (knots)	CUR 4.1 MAX 21.6	CUR 6.2 MAX 21.8	CUR 5.2 MAX 15.6	CUR 10.7 MAX 16.5	CUR 12.8 MAX 19.4	CUR 18.9 MAX 29.4	CUR 5.6 MAX 10.1	CUR 12.1 MAX 24.1
AIR TEMPERATURE (°C)	CUR 26.0 MAX 26.1	CUR 25.4 MAX 26.6	CUR 28.5 MAX 28.5	CUR 24.6 MAX 24.9	CUR 20.6 MAX 21.6	CUR 18.1 MAX 18.7	CUR 16.0 MAX 17.6	CUR 24.1 MAX 24.1

Interreg Italia-Malta Calypso South   L-Università ta' Malta Faculty of Science | Department of Geosciences   tm Transport Malta

Common ProWords

"**Over**"   =   I'm done speaking.

"**Out**"   =   Conversation ended.

Positive

- Indicates affirmation, agreement, or confirmation.

- Example:
    - *"POSITIVE, your request to anchor is authorised."*

- Ensures clarity and reduces ambiguity in critical communications.

Negative

- Indicates refusal, disagreement, or denial.

- Example:
    - *"NEGATIVE, do not proceed until pilot arrives."*

- Helps avoid misunderstandings in safety-critical situations

Best Practice:

Use these markers to confirm or reject instructions clearly.

Always follow with a brief reason if required (e.g., *"NEGATIVE due to traffic congestion"*).

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Repetition: Say Again & Readback

When communication is difficult, phrases or words may be repeated. If any part of a message is considered sufficiently important, the message should be repeated using the appropriate phrase.

- VTS; The tide is 1.2m – **REPEAT** – The tide is 1.2m

When the message is not properly heard, say: **SAY AGAIN**

When confirmation is needed say: **READ BACK**

- VTS; **[Ship's name]** this is VTS, you will take 2 tugs **READ BACK**

Port Notices, Local Notice to Mariners (LNTM), and Notice to Mariners (NTM)

*Accessed via **Transport Malta's website** under "Official Notices" section.*

1. Port Notices:

- Issued by Port Authorities for temporary changes (e.g., dredging or port closure).

2. Local Notice to Mariners (LNTM):

- Published by Transport Malta for regional updates (e.g., buoy repositioning, hazards).

- Example: *"LNTM 25/2023: New wreck marked at position 35°54'N 14°31'E."*

3. Notice to Mariners (NTM):

- Global or national updates (e.g., chart corrections, regulatory changes).

Why They Matter:

➢ Ensure compliance with latest regulations.

➢ Prevent accidents by highlighting hazards.

➢ Updated frequently – mariners must check regularly.

tm **Maritime**

🔍 | **Home** | **FAQ** | **Contact**

Local waters

Recent Notices:

- **Port Notices**

- **Local Notice to Mariners**

- **Coastal Notice to Mariners**

- **Current Warrants of Arrest**

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Best Practices for Mariners

- Speak slowly and clearly

- Confirm instructions with VTS

- Practice phonetic alphabet drills

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Thank you

Radio communication isn't about speaking -- it's about being understood.

Questions?

Transport Malta

www.transport.gov.mt