

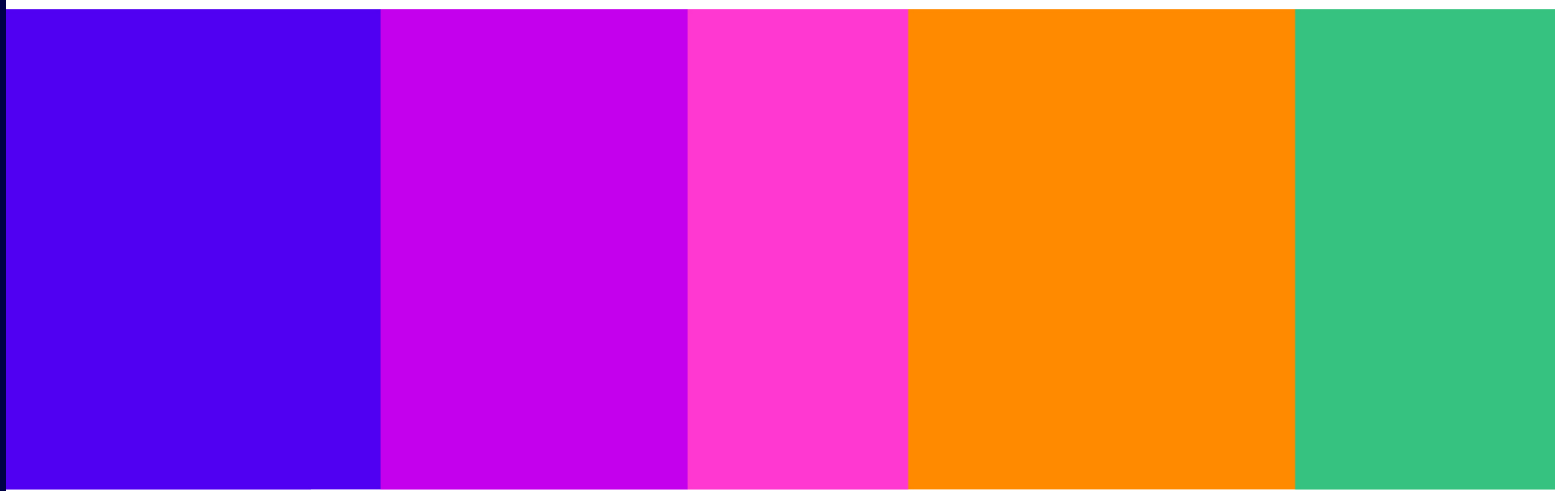
Review of UK Maritime Spectrum Licences

Decisions to update Maritime Spectrum Licences

Statement

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1. Overview

- 1.1 The primary purpose of maritime radiocommunications is to ensure safety at sea. It enables vessels to share their position, identify other vessels, navigate and coordinate operations. It also supports the reporting of weather conditions, distress alerts, emergency situations and other communications. Ofcom manages the spectrum to prevent harmful interference, and to safeguard the reliability of maritime radiocommunications on board UK registered vessels and within UK waters and territorial seas.
- 1.2 The maritime sector is important to the UK economy – around 85% of international freight traded with the UK is moved by sea, and in 2024, shipping was estimated to have enabled £957.3 billion in UK trade.¹ Maritime is a specialised, highly technical sector with evolving spectrum requirements and a strong international linkage.
- 1.3 This document sets out Ofcom’s decisions to update the UK’s maritime spectrum licensing framework. The changes implement internationally agreed spectrum arrangements, support new maritime technologies, and simplify some existing licences. Together, they will continue to support and promote the safe, efficient use of radio communications at sea and along the coast.
- 1.4 The decisions in this document take account of responses to our March 2026 consultation ‘[Review of UK Maritime Spectrum Licences](#)’.

What we have decided – in brief

We have decided to make the following changes to the UK maritime spectrum authorisation framework:

Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio licences

We are phasing out UK authorisations for legacy Man-Overboard Automatic Identification System (MOB AIS) devices², with the following timetable:

- From **31 January 2027** we will not authorise new use of legacy MOB AIS devices; equipment authorised before 31 January 2027 will continue to be authorised until 31 December 2031.
- From **1 January 2032**, use of this equipment will no longer be authorised. Instead, licensees should be using modern Class M compliant Digital Selective Calling (DSC) MOB devices, in line with updated international rules.

We will update the Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio licence terms and conditions to clarify that the use of Autonomous Maritime Radio Devices (AMRD)³ is permitted under the licence; and

¹ [New report reveals UK shipping industry’s vital role in powering global trade and delivering a more prosperous nation](#) – UK Chamber of Shipping, 2025.

² MOB AIS devices are Man-Overboard devices that utilise Channels AIS1 and AIS2 but do not have Digital Selective Calling (DSC) capabilities.

³ Group A: devices that enhance safety of navigation.

We are also adding VHF Data Exchange (VDE)-Terrestrial and VDE-Satellite⁴ (VDE-TER and VDE-SAT) channels to the Ship Radio licence terms and conditions and equipment lists, explicitly confirming their authorised use for VHF data exchange, to enable use overseas in early 2027.

Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) licence

We plan to add new channels (ASM1: 161.95 MHz and ASM2: 162.00 MHz) and the associated conditions, to enable Application Specific Messaging (ASM)⁵ under the AIS licence; and;

We plan to enable the use of Mobile Aids to Navigation (MAtoNs) under the AIS licence and make some editorial changes to the AIS licence terms and conditions.

We plan for these changes to take effect in February 2027, subject to the outcome of the licence variation process.

Coastal Station Radio (CSR) International licence

We will improve channel availability under the Coastal Station Radio (International) Licence by making available the lower frequency portion of channels 27 (157.350 MHz) and 28 (157.400 MHz) for simplex assignments in early 2027.

Differential Global Positioning System (DGPS) licence

We are decommissioning the DGPS licence, as the service is no longer operated in the UK.

Maritime Radio (Suppliers and Demonstration) Licences

We plan to remove outdated information and modernise the Maritime Radio (Suppliers and Demonstration) licence terms and conditions, subject to the outcome of the licence variation process.

The overview section in this document is a simplified high-level summary only. The decisions we have taken, and our reasoning, are set out in the full document.

- 1.5 To implement the changes to existing AIS and Maritime Radio (Suppliers & Demonstration) licences, we must vary all of the licences in accordance with the process set out in the Wireless Telegraphy Act 2006 (the “WT Act”). As provided for in the licences, we will do this by publishing a General Notice on our website. This will set out the proposed licence variations and permit a period of 8 weeks for licensees to make any representations. We aim to publish this General Notice in November 2026 with the intention of setting out our final decision on the variation no later than February 2027.

Future phases of work

- 1.6 The decisions set out in this statement represent the first phase of our maritime modernisation programme. Following the implementation of these changes, we plan to develop further proposals to streamline and modernise the Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio Licences. We expect to publish our consultation on these proposals in 2027.

⁴ VDE-Terrestrial (157.200 – 161.925 MHz) is currently used for analogue communications in the UK. VDE-Satellite (157.300 MHz) provides large area coverage cost effectively, reaching beyond the range of terrestrial VDES, or to places where VDES infrastructure does not exist.

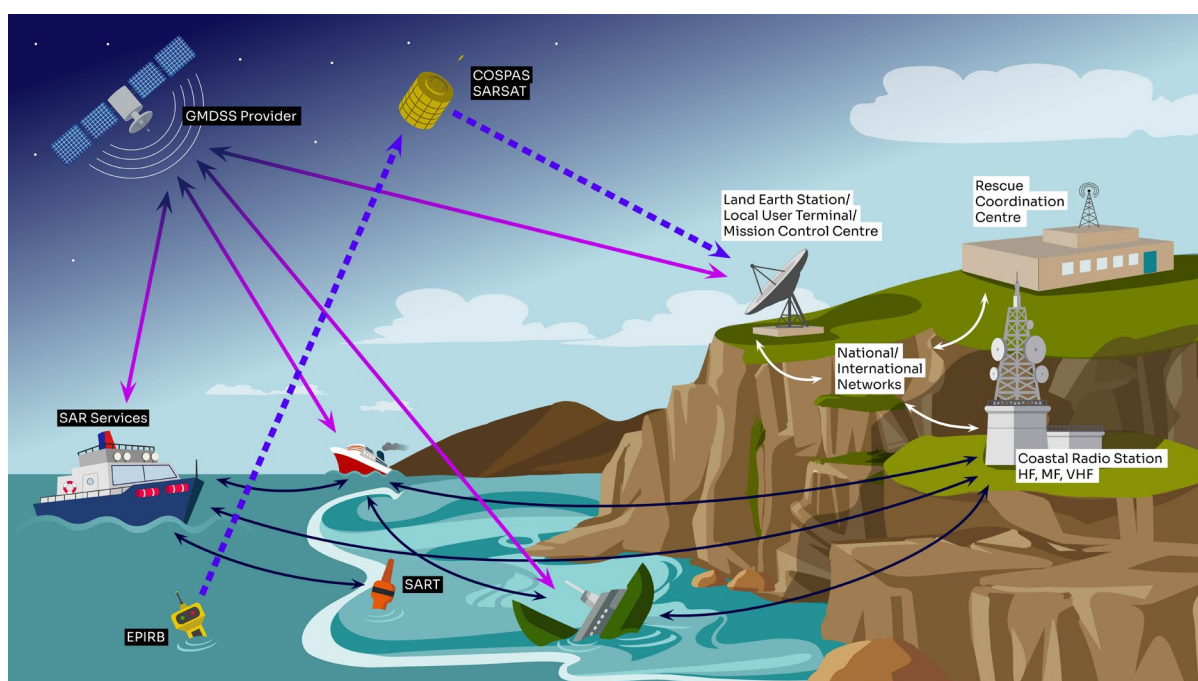
⁵ ASM is a message format used to enhance the capabilities of AIS by allowing the exchange of information beyond standard AIS data formats.

2. Background

Maritime Radio

- 2.1 Maritime radio⁶ is primarily used for the safety of human life, safe navigation, and the protection of vessels. It covers coast station to ship station communications, ship-to-ship communications, or on-board ship communications, and covers a range of UK-specific and international frequency channels. In addition to maritime radiocommunications equipment, a range of other radio equipment can be used for more general communication purposes, such as onboard connectivity and the transmission of operational information.

Figure 1: the different components of Maritime Radio



Ofcom's role in Maritime Radio

- 2.2 Ofcom is responsible for spectrum management in the UK. Section 8(1) of the [Wireless Telegraphy Act 2006](#) ("WT Act") makes it an offence to establish or use a wireless telegraphy station, or to install or use wireless telegraphy apparatus without a licence granted by Ofcom. Under Section 8(3) of the WT Act Ofcom also has powers to make regulations to "licence-exempt" the establishment, installation or use of wireless telegraphy stations or wireless telegraphy apparatus either absolutely or subject to terms, provisions and limitations as may be specified.
- 2.3 As per Section 119 of the WT Act, the territorial extent of the Section 8 offences applies to:
- wireless telegraphy stations and apparatus located in or over the UK or UK territorial sea;

⁶ For brevity, when we refer to Maritime Radio, we mean both Coastal Maritime licences (e.g., Coastal Station Radio, Automatic Identification Systems, DGPS) and Ship Radio licences (Ship Radio, Ship Portable Radio).

- b) wireless telegraphy stations and apparatus on board UK-registered ships and aircraft, even when they are outside the UK or its territorial waters; and
 - c) wireless telegraphy apparatus not itself in or over the UK or UK territorial sea but released from within the UK or UK territorial sea or from a UK-registered ship or aircraft.⁷
- 2.4 Separately, section 120 of the WT Act enables the territorial scope of the WT Act to be expanded, by Order in Council, to specified offshore areas. This ensures that spectrum regulation applies to offshore energy platforms and nearby waters.⁸

International context

- 2.5 The ITU's [Radio Regulations](#) define frequency allocations, operational procedures, and channel arrangements for maritime communications (such as distress signalling, navigation, and ship-to-shore links). They ensure the harmonised use of spectrum worldwide by setting out the necessary technical parameters and preventing harmful interference.
- 2.6 The World Radiocommunications Conference (WRC) in 2019 (WRC-19) agreed changes to maritime VHF channel arrangements in Appendix 18 of the Radio Regulations.⁹ Following WRC-19, [European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations \(CEPT\)](#) adopted ECC Decisions [\(19\)03](#) and [\(22\)02](#), providing a regulatory implementation framework for the decisions made at previous WRC.
- 2.7 This work is carried out via liaison with the [International Maritime Organization](#) (IMO). The IMO is the United Nations agency responsible for the safety, security and environmental performance of international shipping. Working together, the ITU and IMO help ensure that maritime radiocommunications support safe navigation and operate consistently across national borders.

March consultation

- 2.8 In light of the decisions outlined above, we published our consultation [Review of UK Maritime Spectrum Licences](#) in March 2026. In the consultation, we set out proposals to update and simplify our maritime radio policy and processes and sought feedback from stakeholders on emerging technologies in the maritime industry and their associated spectrum requirements.

⁷ By Order in Council, the Section 8 offences were extended to the Bailiwicks of Guernsey, and Jersey, and to the Isle of Man. The WT Act also permits their further extension to other UK-administered territories.

⁸ Under section 120, the territorial extent of Section 8 offences can be extended to offshore installations and the 500-metre zones around them, including areas beyond the UK territorial sea, where an Order in Council deems those installations and waters to form part of the UK for WT Act purposes

⁹ Articles 5, 30 and 31, along with Appendix 18 of the Radio Regulations, define the frequency allocations, operational procedures, and VHF channel arrangements for maritime mobile and maritime mobile-satellite services.

Table 1: Summary of proposals

Summary of March 2026 consultation proposals

We proposed a number of changes to existing licences (acronyms are defined in the relevant sections of this document):

Authorising new technologies and updating our rules

- Add new ASM channels to the AIS licence;
- Ensuring that the authorisation of the use of AMRD Group A devices is clear, by clarifying the language in the Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio licence terms and conditions;
- Phase out the authorisation of legacy MOB AIS devices under the Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio licences by 1 January 2031, aligning with international frameworks;
- Enable the use of M-AtoNs under the AIS licence;
- Add VDE-TER and VDE-SAT channels to the Ship Radio Licence, to enable use overseas; and
- Review and update the AIS terms and conditions.

Improving access to frequencies for Coastal Stations

- Address congestion on Coastal Station Radio (International) licence simplex channels by reassigning the lower frequency portion of channels 27 and 28 as simplex channels.

Differential Global Positioning System

- Decommission the DGPS licence as the service is no longer operated in the UK.

Maritime Radio (Suppliers & Demonstration) licence

- Remove outdated information and modernise the terms and conditions.

We also asked for stakeholder input on:

- Potential demand for the VDES on UK coastal stations;
- Autonomous vessels and the associated communication and spectrum requirements; and
- Any further reforms to our maritime spectrum frameworks that may be beneficial.

2.9 We received 6 responses to our consultation: five non-confidential and one partially confidential. We have included a high-level summary of the responses throughout the rest of the document. We recommend reading the full text of the non-confidential responses for more detail, these can be found on our [website](#).

Structure of document

2.10 The structure of this document is as follows:

- a) **Section 3** outlines our decisions to update AMRD authorisations.

- b) **Section 4** sets out our decisions to (a) add ASM channels to the AIS licence and (b) enable the use of VDES channels on board vessels.
- c) **Section 5** addresses our decision to add two additional simplex channels to the Coastal Station Radio (International) licence.
- d) **Section 6** outlines our decision to decommission the Differential Global Positioning System licence.
- e) **Section 7** summarises our decision to update the Suppliers and Demonstration licence terms and conditions.
- f) **Section 8** covers the stakeholder feedback received following our request for input, and actions we will take following this.
- g) **Section 9** outlines our next steps.

2.11 The statement also includes the following annexes:

- i) Legal framework;
- ii) Impact assessments;
- iii) A draft copy of the changes to the Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio licence terms and conditions footnotes.

3. Updating Autonomous Maritime Radio Device (AMRD) authorisations

Background

- 3.1 AMRDs are mobile devices that operate at sea independently of a ship station or a coastal station. They are used for various maritime applications, including communication, navigation, and monitoring. This includes equipment such as Class-M¹⁰ MOB DSC devices, Mobile Aids to Navigation (M-AtoNs), diver location devices, creel markers, and MOB Devices not using DSC. Most AMRD Group A devices (excluding M-AtoNs) are already authorised under the Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio Licences. The intention of this proposal is to update those authorisations in line with relevant international decisions.
- 3.2 There are two different categories of AMRD:
- a) **Group A:** Devices that enhance the safety of navigation.
 - b) **Group B:** Devices that do not enhance the safety of navigation but are used for other purposes.¹¹

Ofcom proposals

- 3.3 Given the decisions made on the rules on using AMRDs in international forums (WRC-19 and CEPT (ECC Decision 22/02)), we proposed to update the UK spectrum rules in line with the approach set out in ECC Decision 22/02.
- 3.4 We proposed to:
- a) Update the terminology on the application form and licence equipment lists to specify whether a piece of equipment is AMRD Group A;
 - b) Clarify the language in the Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio licence terms and conditions around the use of AMRD Group A equipment;
 - c) Phase out the existing authorisation for legacy MOB AIS devices, operating on channels AIS1 and AIS2; and
 - d) Enable the use of M-AtoN transponders under the AIS licence.
- 3.5 In relation to proposal (c), to phase out existing authorisation for legacy devices operating on channels AIS1 and AIS2, the consultation proposed the following initial timeline for the phasing-out of the authorisation:
- a) We proposed to cease permitting new applications for the use of these devices from **31 January 2027**; approximately three months from the publication of this statement.

¹⁰ Class M refers to a new European standard, set out in ECC Decision 22(02) for AIS Man Overboard (MOB) devices. It ensures devices can reliably signal emergencies using Digital Selective Calling (DSC) to alert nearby vessels without facing congestion or interference from non-essential devices.

¹¹ Group B AMRDs are now covered under a Licence Exemption, more information about this can be found on the [Ofcom Website](#).

- b) Following this, we proposed that there would be a **three-year** period in which the equipment could be retained on existing licences. At the end of this three-year period on **31 December 2030**, the authorisation of this equipment would cease, and the equipment would be removed from all licences on which it was authorised. The use of this equipment after the proposed date would be unlawful.

Stakeholder responses

- 3.6 All respondents who provided comment on this proposal supported the proposed updates to the application materials and terms and conditions of the Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio licences, to provide certainty to stakeholders on the use of AMRDs.¹² Both the Port of London Authority (PLA) and the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) highlighted that these changes will align with international regulations.
- 3.7 Most respondents highlighted support for our proposal to phase out the authorisation of legacy MOB AIS devices.¹³ However, both the Cruising Association and the UK Chamber of Shipping expressed concerns with the proposed timeline for phase two of the approach;¹⁴ the Chamber of Shipping said it was commercially aggressive and could create capital burden on stakeholders. Both responses suggested extending the timeline by 1-2 years, to align more closely with the lifespan of these devices.
- 3.8 Respondents also agreed with our intention to enable the deployment of M-AtoNs under the AIS licence. The General Lighthouse Authorities (GLA) highlighted the need to ensure that deployments are restricted only to organisations that have a recognised need to deploy them, and licensing should remain flexible to enable rapid deployment when required – similar to the licensing framework that supports rapid deployment of emergency AIS wreck markers.
- 3.9 The PLA noted that the proposal has the potential to unlock additional operational and safety use cases, supporting more responsive risk management and improving the overall resilience of navigation safety systems. Its response said that the effectiveness of this will depend heavily on the governance and control mechanisms associated with deployment. The PLA also recommended improvements to the existing AtoN administrative process, highlighting that it can be complex and time-consuming.

Ofcom decisions and implementation

AMRDs

- 3.10 We have decided to implement our proposals, largely in line with what was set out in the consultation document but allowing an additional year for the final phase out of legacy MOB AIS devices.
- 3.11 We are going to:

¹³ One response provided no comments on this proposal.

¹⁴ We proposed that phase one (to cease permitting new applications for use of these devices) would be implemented from early 2027 – or 3 months after the publication of this statement. Phase two (cease the authorisation of these devices) would be implemented from 2030).

- a) update the existing licensing materials and terms and conditions to make it clear that AMRD Group A devices are authorised under the existing Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio licensing framework. Draft copies of the updated terms and conditions can be found in Annex 3 of this document.
- b) Progress with phasing out the authorisation of legacy MOB AIS devices, with an extension to the proposed timeline for phasing out existing authorisations, as set out below.

Revised timings for phasing out MOB AIS devices

- 3.12 Our original proposal was to cease the authorisation of these devices by 2030; in two phases. Phase one (the deadline for allowing new applications for use of MOB AIS devices) will remain the same. However, based on the responses received, we have decided to extend phase two of the timeline by another year. Instead of removing the authorisation of MOB AIS equipment in December 2030 it will now be 31 December 2031.
- 3.13 The new timeline will be as follows:
- a) A **3-month** notice period from the date of this statement in which we will continue to allow new applications for the use of MOB AIS equipment. **The deadline for new applications will be 31 January 2027.** From this point, we would no longer allow the equipment to be added to new and existing licences.
 - b) Following this, **licensees can use existing MOB AIS equipment until 31 December 2031.** From **1 January 2032, use of this equipment will no longer be authorised.** At this point, continued use of these devices would be a breach of the licence terms and conditions.

Implementation changes to the Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio licence

- 3.14 We will implement these changes in several steps:
- a) We will be updating the Ship Radio and Ship Portable licence terms and conditions, by adding a footnote under the relevant clause, to make it clear that AMRD Group A is authorised under the licence. This will be updated in early 2027, to align with the date at which we stop new authorisations.
 - b) We will phase out the authorisation of MOB AIS devices in two ways:
 - i) **New applications:** At the end of the three-month period we have allowed for new applications, we will remove all reference to these devices from our application materials. New licences will also include the date that the use of the equipment will need to stop.
 - ii) **Existing licensees:** All Ship Radio licences containing this equipment will be varied to include the expiration date of the authorisation. We set out the licence variation process in more detail in Section 9.

M-AtoNs

- 3.15 We have decided to enable the use of M-AtoNs via the AIS licence. M-AtoNs must utilise an appropriate MMSI number when deployed; this will be in the format of **'99MID8XXX'**.¹⁵ Individual M-AtoNs must have a unique MMSI number assigned by Ofcom.
- 3.16 As with other AtoN applications, deployment is subject to prior approval by the [Maritime and Coastguard Agency \(MCA\)](#). To ensure that a licence is in place before the equipment is

¹⁵ In accordance with [ITU-R Recommendation M.585](#) and [ECC Decision 22\(02\)](#).

deployed, please apply for the licence in advance, maintaining the authorisation for future temporary deployments. Following deployment, licence holders are required, as a condition of the licence, to notify both Ofcom and the MCA.

- 3.17 We recognise that the current application process for AtoNs can be lengthy and complex, and plan to examine how we might simplify this in future.

Implementation M-AtoNs via the AIS licence

- 3.18 For the changes outlined above to apply to existing licences we must vary all the licences we have on issue. Subject to the outcome of the licence variation process, we plan to enable the deployment of M-AtoNs under the AIS licence. We set out the process for how Ofcom will vary the licences in more detail in Section 9.

4. Introducing the VHF Data Exchange System (VDES)

Background

- 4.1 VDES is an enhanced maritime radiocommunication system designed to build on and extend the capabilities of AIS. It enables higher-capacity data exchange between ships, coastal stations and satellites – supporting a range of new maritime applications.
- 4.2 VDES operates within the maritime VHF band (156.025–162.025 MHz), in accordance with Appendix 18 of the Radio Regulations. It comprises four components, that sit under the umbrella term ('VDES'): of AIS, Application Specific Messaging (ASM), VHF Data Exchange-Terrestrial (VDE-TER), and VHF Data Exchange-Satellite (VDE-SAT).
- 4.3 Potential uses for VDES channels include:
- a) Search and rescue (SAR) communications;
 - b) Vessel route exchange;
 - c) Disaster response and maritime incident coordination;
 - d) Autonomous collision-avoidance support; and
 - e) Situational awareness functions for both conventional vessels and Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships (MASS).

Ofcom proposal

- 4.4 In our March Consultation, we proposed to:
- a) Authorise the use of Channels ASM 1 (161.95MHz) and ASM 2 (162.00 MHz) under the existing AIS licence; updating the terms and conditions of the AIS licence to reflect the introduction of new channels and any operating restrictions.
 - b) Authorise VDE-TER and VDE-SAT channels¹⁶ for operation on vessels under the Ship Radio Licence, to enable vessels travelling internationally to utilise these channels where available.
- 4.5 We also sought stakeholder input on:
- a) Whether there is a near-term demand for VDES use by UK coastal stations;
 - b) How Ofcom could authorise this use, and whether Ofcom should individually assign and coordinate VDES frequencies, or if they should be self-coordinated by users; and
 - c) The potential impact of wideband VDES channels on spectrum availability in congested UK waters, and steps Ofcom could take to manage this.

¹⁶ 157.300 – 161.925 MHz

Stakeholder responses

ASM and AIS updates

ASM

- 4.6 Stakeholders broadly supported the addition of two ASM¹⁷ channels to the AIS licence. Some stakeholders provided further comments on the specifics of the proposal.
- 4.7 The PLA recognised that ASM capability is likely to form an important part of future maritime digital communications; enhancing the usefulness, flexibility, and timeliness of maritime information exchange. The response noted that, in practice, the challenge is less the ability to transmit information, and more the ability to verify that messages are consistently received and understood by the broad range of commercial and non-commercial River Thames users. It advised Ofcom to provide additional clarity for operators on the governance and assignment of ASM identifiers, including DAC numbering.¹⁸ Overall, the PLA considers the proposal to be a positive and proportionate step toward supporting future maritime digital communications capability.
- 4.8 The GLA agreed with the proposal, highlighting that two additional channels will help divert non-safety traffic from AIS channels, leaving them free for navigational safety use. The UK Chamber of Shipping also made this point but noted that Ofcom must ensure that [ITU Recommendation M.2092](#) is strictly enforced, with AIS transmissions taking priority over ASM transmissions.

AIS updates

- 4.9 Stakeholders raised no objections to the proposed clarification changes to the AIS terms and conditions, with all stakeholders either agreeing or not commenting on the proposal. The PLA noted that there are no current issues it can identify with the terms and conditions but support the clarification if Ofcom are careful not to unintentionally introduce new restrictions or ambiguities.

VDES

VDE-TER and VDE-SAT on ships

- 4.10 All respondents agreed with the authorisation of VDE-TER and VDE-SAT under the Ship Radio licence. The GLA said that allowing use of these channels will assist with the phase-in of VDES nationally and internationally. The PLA, who broadly supported the proposal, recognised that VDES represents a logical and forward-looking evolution of maritime digital communications, and called the proposal a ‘sensible, future-proofing measure’. Its response asked for greater clarity regarding likely implementation timelines and transitional expectations, and noted that clear forward planning, realistic adoption horizons, and transparent expectations will be important to avoid fragmentation between legacy and emerging systems.

¹⁷ ASM (Application Specific Messaging) is a message format used to enhance the capabilities of AIS by allowing the exchange of information beyond standard AIS data formats.

¹⁸ [DAC numbering](#) refers to ‘designated area codes’ for AIS transmissions, used to identify regions, and are based on a country’s MID numbers.

VDES on Coastal Stations

- 4.11 We received mixed responses regarding the near-term demand for VDES on coastal stations and the relevant timing considerations. The GLA highlighted the ongoing international work, specifically amendments to [SOLAS Chapter 5](#) and the introduction of VDES equipment as an alternative to AIS onboard vessels from January 2028. It said that VDE-TER could see rapid adoption in the years following this.
- 4.12 The UK Chamber of Shipping said it sees major potential for high demand in major ports and maritime gateways, due to the high-capacity, low-latency digital loops required to manage complex arrival schedules. It considered that delaying authorisation until there is global uptake could create a barrier to UK innovation and prevent UK ports from leading.
- 4.13 The PLA noted that the adoption of VDES is likely to be gradual rather than immediate and therefore did not consider there to be near-term demand. It cited several factors that will shape the uptake of VDES, including international regulatory alignment and the maturity of global standards, spectrum allocation decisions and coordination across jurisdictions, supplier readiness and equipment availability, and commercial drivers and cost considerations.

Future licensing framework for VDES on Coastal Stations

- 4.14 Different views were expressed regarding the future licensing framework for VDES on coastal stations. The RYA advised that individual channels should be assigned by Ofcom, whereas the UK Chamber of Shipping said that Ofcom-led assignment and coordination may add unnecessary complexity to the process, citing technology that allows stations to scan the band and find a free channel, enabling an easier self-coordinated process.
- 4.15 The GLA advised that Ofcom should take account of the outcome of upcoming international meetings concerning VDES. The matter is currently under consideration by VDES research groups, with active discussions ongoing at International Organisation for Marine Aids to Navigation (IALA¹⁹). Following these discussions, a clearer picture may emerge of the best approach to VDES use. However, the GLA also suggested that some form of self-coordination, perhaps similar to AIS, will be essential to allow the broadcast of VDE-TER messages, whilst offering the most efficient use of spectrum.
- 4.16 The PLA suggested that a degree of structured coordination by Ofcom will be necessary and further advised that a coordinated assignment with governance would be most appropriate. It commented that known challenges with interference and congestion in the maritime VHF environment suggest that similar issues could arise within VDES if deployments were left entirely to self-coordination without clear governance, however, a fully centralised model could also introduce administrative burden or reduce operational flexibility. Therefore, the PLA advised that a proportionate approach is more appropriate, balancing the need for interference protection with the need to support scalable deployment.

Impact of VDES on spectrum availability

- 4.17 Respondents were neutral, or presented no comments, on the potential impact of wideband VDES channels on spectrum availability in congested UK waters. The PLA said it

¹⁹ [The IALA](#) is the International Organisation for Marine Aids to Navigation (previously named International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities). It works to ensure Marine Aids to Navigation work is harmonised worldwide.

does not anticipate significant VDES related congestion, though its response highlighted that active coordination through Ofcom could help to manage any congestion issues that do arise. The GLA, as above, advised Ofcom to wait for the outcome of international discussions before making a decision on this topic.

Ofcom decisions and implementation

- 4.18 We have decided to implement the following proposals:
- a) Authorising the use of two channels (ASM1 (161.95 MHz) and ASM2 (162.00 MHz)), via the AIS licence, to enable ASM;
 - b) Update the terms and conditions of the AIS licence; and
 - c) Adding reference to VDE-TER and VDE-SAT equipment to the Ship Radio Licence.

ASM and AIS licence update

- 4.19 To enable the use of channels ASM1 (161.95 MHz) and ASM2 (162.00 MHz) and ensure the priority of AIS messages, we will add the following conditions to the licence:
- a) Include Channels ASM1 (161.95 MHz) and ASM2 (162.00 MHz) to the list of frequencies on the licence;
 - b) State that Channels ASM1 (161.95 MHz) and ASM2 (162.00 MHz):
 - i) must only be used for Application Specific Messaging (ASM), and operation must be in accordance with ITU-R Recommendation [M.2092-2](#); and
 - ii) Operation on Channels ASM1 and ASM2 are restricted to priority 2.
- 4.20 We are also going to update the terms and conditions of the licence to make a small number of administrative changes to align the terms and conditions with other licences Ofcom issues. We have sought to remove any unnecessary provisions from the licence to improve its clarity to licensees. These are editorial changes and have no impact on use under the licence.
- 4.21 A copy of the licence terms and conditions, setting out these conditions and other editorial changes will be published alongside the General Notice. As highlighted in paragraph 4.5, we proposed that all existing AIS licences will be varied to reflect the addition of the two new channels. We set out the process for doing this in section 9.
- 4.22 In its response the PLA raised concerns over ASM indicators and DAC numbering. These sit outside of Ofcom's remit as they are managed by IALA and the GLC; we will pass these comments onto the MCA.

VDES

VDE-TER and VDE-SAT on ships

- 4.23 We want to ensure that UK-flagged vessels can utilise a wide range of equipment to support positioning and navigation as they travel globally – particularly when entering ports. Adding new equipment categories and clear reference to VDE-TER and VDE-SAT to the Ship Radio Licence terms and conditions will allow UK registered vessels travelling internationally to use these channels for VDES – enabling a range of use cases.
- 4.24 Operation of these channels must be in accordance with [ITU-R Recommendation M.2092-2](#):

- a) **Channels 1024, 1084, 1025 and 1085** are identified for ship-to-shore, shore-to-ship and ship-to-ship VDE, but may be used for VDE-SAT without imposing constraints on VDE-TER.
 - b) **Channels 2024, 2084, 2025 and 2085** are identified for shore-to-ship and ship-to-ship VDE, but may be used for VDE-SAT without imposing constraints on VDE-TER.
 - c) **Channels 1026, 1086, 2026 and 2086** are identified for ship-to-satellite and satellite-to-ship VDE and are not used by the terrestrial component of VDE.
- 4.25 The Ship Radio licence application materials will be updated to reflect these changes. We will also add a reference to VDES systems in the relevant frequency table within the Ship Radio Licence terms and conditions.

VDES on Coastal Stations

- 4.26 Stakeholders provided mixed views on how Ofcom should authorise VDES for coastal stations. Given this and preferences for us to await the outcome of ongoing international work²⁰, we have decided to not proceed with any formal proposals at this time. We will continue to monitor international developments and work with the MCA and other UK stakeholders to develop our approach.
- 4.27 We plan to publish a further consultation setting out detailed proposals regarding the use of VDES channels on coastal stations, once IALA guidelines and standards have been agreed. We expect this will not be until at least 2027 as the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) timeline set out that the next stage of discussions on VDES will take place in late 2027.

²⁰ At its 111th session (MSC 111), the IMO Maritime Safety Committee adopted amendments to SOLAS Chapter 5, recognising VDES as an alternative to AIS for fulfilling minimum carriage requirements. The amendments are set to enter into force on 1 January 2028.

5. Addressing congestion on Coastal Station Radio (International) channels

Background

- 5.1 The Coastal Station Radio (CSR) (International) licence enables coastal stations²¹ to communicate with ship stations using a range of internationally agreed channels. This is mainly for the support of port operations and vessel movement, to enable the safe and efficient management of shipping.
- 5.2 The licence authorises a range of frequencies operating on 25 kHz bandwidths, including both simplex and duplex channels:
- a) **'Simplex'** channels allow two-way communication on a single frequency.
 - b) **'Duplex'** channels offer two-way communication, receiving and transmitting on different frequencies.
- 5.3 Increasing demand for simplex frequencies in certain parts of the UK has resulted in localised congestion that, due to the limited number of internationally agreed simplex frequencies, can result in a shortage of accessible simplex channels for maritime users. In some cases, this has resulted in users facing congestion, and conflict, on communications channels in some parts of the UK.

Ofcom proposal

- 5.4 To address the congestion issue, we proposed to update the CSR (International) Licence to enable two additional simplex channels which should help reduce the risk of interference in congested areas. We consulted on three options, setting out that option three was our preferred way forward:
- a) **Option one:** Authorise all the additional simplex assignments which are available internationally by splitting each of the current duplex channels 19, 20, 78, and 79 into two separate simplex channels;
 - b) **Option two:** Take no action now; instead, reserve these duplex channels for a potential future move towards digital maritime communication systems, which could enable more efficient use of the existing channels; or
 - a) **Option three:** Authorise two additional simplex channels – the lower frequency portions of Channels 27 (157.350 MHz) and 28 (157.400 MHz).

²¹ An onshore station that provides communications between ship and land (ship-to-ship, ship-to-shore, and shore-to-ship). They can monitor distress signals and provide updates on weather, medical situations and navigational warnings.

- 5.5 Alongside our proposal, we asked stakeholders for any alternative suggestions which may help to address the issue of spectrum scarcity of VHF simplex channels under the CSR (International) Licence.
- 5.6 We also sought feedback from stakeholders on potential timelines for the transition from analogue to digital VHF maritime radiocommunications.

Stakeholder response

Addition of simplex channels to Coastal Station (International) licence

- 5.7 Most respondents either agreed with our proposal option three – to add two simplex channels to the CSR (International) Licence – or had no comments. The PLA supported the proposal and said that the availability of additional simplex channels is likely to provide greater operational flexibility. However, it noted that a longer-term reduction in duplex channel availability could introduce unintended operational impacts and urged Ofcom to consider a broad balance of simplex and duplex availability. The UK Chamber of Shipping supported this proposal on the condition that current licensees using duplex channels 27 and 28 are properly coordinated and compensated by Ofcom, and must be given seamless access to equivalent, clean duplex assignments with no administrative backlogs or equipment modification penalties. The RYA supported the proposal and commented that creating additional simplex channels would be beneficial for small craft.

Timeline for digital VHF transition

- 5.8 We received three responses to our request for views on the timeline for digital VHF transition. The PLA suggested that a long-term timeline for digital VHF transition is more likely than near-term change; large-scale adoption is therefore unlikely in the immediate future. It stated that it was not aware of any clear or imminent pathway toward widespread implementation of digital VHF voice communications. Its response also set out that any transition will need to account for equipment replacement cycles, interoperability requirements, variable technical readiness, and the maintenance of reliable and universally understood communications.
- 5.9 The UK Chamber of Shipping recommended a unified transition after the WRC in 2031 and stated that a ‘piecemeal transition to digital voice will compromise safety at sea’; a synchronised transition window between 2031 and 2035 would ensure that hardware updates are deployed globally and protect international interoperability.

VHF simplex scarcity

- 5.10 To help resolve the issue of VHF simplex scarcity, the PLA suggested a broader combination of improved coordination, smarter spectrum management, gradual technical modernisation, and clearer differentiation between licence types. It also recognised the benefit of improved guidance for users, enabling them to identify the most appropriate licence type for their use. Overall, it supported the exploration of proportionate and practical measures to improve spectrum utilisation, as long as maritime safety and service resilience remain the primary considerations.

Ofcom decisions and implementation

Addition of simplex channels to CSR (International) Licence

- 5.11 We have made the decision to move forward with our preferred option:
- Authorising two additional simplex channels – the lower frequency portions of Channels 27 (157.350 MHz) and 28 (157.400 MHz).
- 5.12 This will make available two additional simplex channels for use under the CSR (International) Licence. These channels will be available to stakeholders on a first-come, first-served basis. Should existing licensees wish to use these channels, they should contact Ofcom to request a licence variation.
- 5.13 Further, if stakeholders continue to experience congestion, or difficulty obtaining simplex channels in their intended deployment area, we will look to enable more simplex channels at a later date. By enabling two channels rather than the potential six, we are broadly maintaining the current balance between simplex and duplex channels, whilst also addressing localised congestion.
- 5.14 We consider that as there is only one licensee that currently holds an authorisation for the channels under these decisions, we believe the appropriate approach is to engage directly with the licensee to provide alternative frequency arrangements. We are currently undertaking this process.
- 5.15 Once we have added these two new simplex channels to the CSR (International) Licence, they will no longer be available for duplex mode assignments.

Timeline for digital VHF transition

- 5.16 We will continue to monitor and actively engage in international discussions and work towards the digitalisation of maritime VHF communications. We will look to bring forward formal proposals once we have more information on an agreed digital VHF transition plan and harmonisation opportunities.

VHF simplex scarcity

- 5.17 In response to the PLA comments, we will publish an updated guidance document to aid applicants in the authorisation process, we will aim to do this before the end of the year. Additionally, in the coming years, alongside the development of international frameworks for VHF digitisation and our wider simplification work, we plan to look in detail at further modernising our maritime licensing processes and will take into account the comments provided here.

6. Decommissioning the Differential Global Positioning System licence

Background

- 6.1 The DGPS licence authorises the DGPS service, designed to enhance data received from Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS) to improve its accuracy from around 50m to 5m. UK DGPS services were provided by the GLA and were operational from 1997 until 2022, when they were officially discontinued. GNSS are now considered able to meet most of the necessary accuracy requirements without the need for enhancement.

Ofcom proposal

- 6.2 In our March Consultation, we proposed to decommission the DGPS licence from our portfolio – that is, to no longer accept new applications and propose to revoke any licences which remain on issue (and are not surrendered).
- 6.3 We considered that other stakeholders may want to apply for the use of maritime frequencies authorised under the DGPS licence, such as to trial and/or experiment with new technologies. In these cases, stakeholders would apply for an Innovation and Trial Licence.

Stakeholder response

- 6.4 All respondents agreed with, or had no comments on, our proposal to decommission the DGPS licence.
- 6.5 The GLA recommended that DGPS frequencies (~300 kHz) are still given protection from harmful interference, as vessels in the UK, Irish, and wider European waters may still make use of DGPS signals from the continent.
- 6.6 The PLA noted that DGPS has not formed a meaningful part of its operational activity for many years, and now that the service has been discontinued, there is no practical justification for maintaining a dedicated licensing framework. It considered the proposal to be reasonable, proportionate, and aligned with current operational reality.

Ofcom decisions and implementation

- 6.7 We have decided to decommission the DGPS licence in line with our proposal. We currently have no plans to authorise other users in these frequencies and will continue to protect DGPS use for foreseeable future.

Implementation

- 6.8 The existing licensees have agreed to surrender the licences, and alternative arrangements are being developed to enable the frequencies to continue to be used for experimenting and testing. We plan to issue separate spectrum authorisations for this activity.

7. Updating the Suppliers and Demonstration Licence Terms and Conditions

Background

- 7.1 The Maritime Radio (Suppliers and Demonstration) Licence allows a business to test, repair, and/or demonstrate maritime radio equipment. Specifically, licensees can:
- a) Install, demonstrate and make test transmissions during the service and repair of maritime radio equipment; and
 - b) Install and demonstrate maritime radio equipment during the course of the licensee's retail business.
- 7.2 As part of the Maritime Radio (Suppliers and Demonstration) Licence, the testing of safety and distress frequencies is permitted under specific conditions to ensure there is no undue interference to the priority use of safety channels (e.g. Search and Rescue).

Ofcom proposal

- 7.3 Upon reviewing the terms and conditions, we found that the contact details for the list of authorities – that must be contacted before testing on safety and distress frequencies can begin – were out of date. Additionally, as part of our wider work to modernise and streamline our spectrum licensing products, we identified a number of areas where we could make improvements to the licence.
- 7.4 We therefore proposed several changes to the licence to enhance clarity and ease of use, and to update the contact details of the third-party testing authorities. Specific proposals included:
- a) Removing the condition requiring licensees to contact Ofcom, if a temporary location was being used, replacing it with a requirement to keep a record of the location for a period of six months.
 - b) Expanding the provisions relating to the use of equipment in an emergency; allowing operation in the case of safety of life, safety of a ship, or safety of an aircraft.
 - c) Moving several conditions to a more appropriate accompanying guidance document.

Stakeholder response

- 7.5 Stakeholders provided no comments on our proposals to update the Maritime Radio (Suppliers and Demonstration) Licence.

Ofcom decisions and implementation

- 7.6 Given we received no comments or objections to our proposals, we have decided to go ahead with our proposal to update and modernise the Licence terms and conditions as set

out in the consultation. This will make the conditions associated with testing and demonstrating equipment clearer and simpler.

- 7.7 As part of this, the contact details that licensees must reach out to when testing distress signals will be updated – no further operational changes will be made. The updates to the terms and conditions will remove outdated information, clarify existing language and liberalise the licence where possible.
- 7.8 A draft copy of the new Maritime Radio (Suppliers and Demonstration) licence template will be published alongside the General Notice.

Implementation

- 7.9 As set out in sections 3 and 4, to implement these changes we will need to vary existing Maritime Radio (Suppliers and Demonstration) licences. This variation will be taken forward via the publication of a General Notice on our website, with a view to varying all 64 licences currently on issue will be. We set out the process for doing this in more detail in section 9.

8. Summary of responses to our request for input on the future of Maritime Communications

Background

- 8.1 As the UK's spectrum regulator, Ofcom must ensure that our authorisation framework remains fit for purpose and does not create unnecessary barriers to innovation. We aim to future-proof our licensing products and ensure that regulatory arrangements continue to support safety, efficiency, and the growth of the maritime sector.
- 8.2 In the consultation, we identified three maritime sector developments which could be of particular relevance to Ofcom's future spectrum management and authorisation functions:
- a) the VHF Data Exchange System (VDES) (discussed in section 4);
 - b) a potential move from analogue VHF to digital VHF communications (discussed in section 5); and
 - c) Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships (MASS).

Call for input

- 8.3 We sought input from stakeholders on a range of issues to help inform future policy making and Ofcom's ongoing approach to maritime radiocommunications authorisation:
- a) The future spectrum needs associated with increased autonomy, including MASS;
 - b) Any other emerging technologies Ofcom should be aware of; and
 - c) Any other reforms to the maritime licensing framework that would be beneficial to the sector.
- 8.4 We also asked if stakeholders had any other comments on the proposals set out in our consultation.

Stakeholder response

MASS

- 8.5 The PLA considered that future autonomous operations (including Maritime Autonomous Surface Vessels and Uncrewed Surface Vessels) will increase demand for communications bandwidth, resilience, and redundancy. It expects autonomous and remotely operated systems to become more common on the River Thames. However, its response also noted that maritime spectrum will remain important, particularly where interoperability with conventional vessels and safety communications is required. Due to the immature regulatory model for MASS, it encouraged Ofcom to maintain flexibility within future spectrum planning and to continue monitoring developments closely. Over the long-term, they stated it will drive additional spectrum demand, and any licensing framework should therefore remain adaptable and aligned with evolving operational and safety needs.

- 8.6 Telenor Maritime AS observed that increased autonomy fundamentally changes the maritime connectivity profile, with MASS concepts depending on continuous data exchange to support remote supervision, control, and automated decision making, whilst traditional maritime communications were optimised around voice, low-rate data, and crew-centric operational needs. It also wrote that the increasing use of MASS in the future will rely on broadband connectivity technologies that sit outside of the traditional Maritime Mobile Service framework. It expects that existing maritime bands will play a limited role in the future, encouraging Ofcom to ensure that we are not burdening these bands with requirements better served by broadband technologies.
- 8.7 Telenor Maritime AS also considered it essential that future spectrum frameworks account for cross border MASS models, where a vessel may operate in UK waters or under a UK flag, but the Remote Operations Centre and staff are located in another country. Its response suggested a role-and-responsibility based authorisation principle, pointing to Ofcom's Shared Access and Local Access licences for Ofcom to use when developing maritime autonomy framework. It commented that these frameworks show that Ofcom already supports layered and shared spectrum access, provided interference risks are managed through defined authorisation conditions.
- 8.8 Telenor Maritime AS also suggested that Ofcom could consider recognising the concept of "a vessel-centric, moving local authorisation area" to enable moving private networks at sea; building on the logic of existing Shared Access and Local Access frameworks. It said that a regulatory approach that manages risk could include:
- a) Authorisation limited to defined maritime areas;
 - b) Conservative technical parameters; and
 - c) Explicit conditions allowing Ofcom to require modification, suspension, or cessation of operation in the event of coexistence issues.
- 8.9 In reference to specific licensing for MASS, Telenor Maritime AS provided input on multiple areas. It said that operator competence should be associated with defined roles such as remote operator or system supervisor, who may be located onshore and outside of the UK, provided responsibilities are clearly assigned. Its response also emphasised that vessel identification remains essential, and call signs and MMSIs should continue to be associated with vessels regardless of their autonomy level. Lastly, where no person is physically present on board a vessel, Telenor recommended that responsibility for interference, emergency response, and shut down should rest with the licensee, ship owner or another designated entity.
- 8.10 Telenor Maritime AS also provided further MASS licensing suggestions, including:
- a) Modified Ship Radio licence;
 - b) MASS-specific licence; or
 - c) Hybrid approach.
- 8.11 It concluded that any licensing approach should remain technology neutral, internationally harmonised, and compatible with cross border operational models.

Licensing framework

- 8.12 The RYA suggested that a beneficial reform to the maritime licensing framework would be for Ofcom to enable handheld VHF to be licensed internationally under the Ship Portable Radio licence. This is to allow owners with VHF handheld radios to use the equipment in another country without the need to obtain a licence.

- 8.13 The PLA suggested a number of improvements, including improved accuracy and currency of licence data, including licensee contact details. It also suggested improvements to the accessibility and clarity of licensing information, modernising the licence application and management process, and continued simplification efforts.

Other comments

- 8.14 The UK Chamber of Shipping emphasised Ofcom's statutory duty to promote growth under the Deregulation Act. The PLA welcomed the direction of Ofcom's consultation, and emphasised the importance of maritime applications in complex, high-density areas like the River Thames. It noted that innovation and spectrum efficiency must be carefully balanced with operational safety and resilience.

Ofcom response

- 8.15 We received several useful comments on Ofcom's future spectrum management and authorisation functions for maritime radiocommunications. We also noted that some of the issues raised concern wider discussions relating to international maritime operation and safety for MASS. Whilst the operational and regulatory context for MASS, as a platform, is a matter for IMO, through the liaison processes mentioned earlier it will be a matter for ITU to consider the spectrum environment this use case. Given the feedback and the wider consideration of work ongoing at an international level, we will continue to engage with, and monitor, the development of the international regulatory frameworks for MASS, its integration into global shipping, and the digitalisation of maritime radiocommunications.
- 8.16 As part of our wider work on innovation and modernisation of the maritime licensing framework, we will consider all suggestions made in response to our consultation. However, any such approach would need to take account of the wider communications ecosystem at sea, which is becoming more complex owing to the increasing number of licensed offshore mobile deployments in the coastal waters of the UK and the potential for interference to those services. We also note that the use of mobile base stations on board vessels is already permitted under the terms and conditions of the ship radio licence, however we note this is for onboard connectivity only.
- 8.17 In response to the suggestion to authorise UK licensed handheld VHF equipment internationally, we recognise the attraction to such an arrangement. However, UK authorisations only apply to UK jurisdiction, and operators must adhere to the rules set by the relevant authorities in the territory they are visiting. Whilst mechanisms exist to cover certain frequency bands and associated equipment on a UK ships radio licence, we do recognise that certain jurisdictions may not recognise ownership and use of VHF maritime handheld devices. As a UK licence cannot usurp national requirements for other administrations, we would recommend that the local requirements for ownership and use of maritime handheld requirements are explored by users, for the jurisdictions they intend to visit.
- 8.18 In future phases of the Maritime Review, we will consider how to keep maritime licensing frameworks and data flexible, accurate and suitable for emerging needs.

9. Next steps

- 9.1 In the section below we provide an overview of the decisions we have taken and how we intend to implement them. We also outline our plans to further update maritime-related spectrum licensing in the coming years.

Summary of decisions

Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio licences

- 9.2 We are phasing out UK authorisations for legacy MOB AIS devices, with the following timetable:
- a) From **31 January 2027** we will not authorise new use of legacy MOB AIS devices;
 - b) Equipment authorised before 31 January 2027 may continue to be used until **31 December 2031**. From **1 January 2032**, use of this equipment will no longer be authorised. Instead, licensees should be using modern Class M compliant DSC MOB devices, in line with updated international rules.
- 9.3 We will update the Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio licence terms and conditions to clarify that the use of AMRD Group A devices is permitted under the licence, a copy of these can be found in Annex 5; and
- 9.4 We are also adding VDE-TER and VDE-SAT channels to the Ship Radio licence terms and conditions and equipment lists, explicitly confirming their authorised use for VHF data exchange, to enable use overseas in early 2027.

Implementation

- 9.5 To implement the changes to our Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio Licence we need to publish an updated version of the [Licence Terms and Conditions booklet](#). As part of this process, we will also be looking to include our recent [decision on making more spectrum available for Earth Stations in Motion \(ESIM\)](#). This provides a new authorisation for maritime ESIMs connecting to:
- GSO satellites in 12.75-13.25 GHz and 27.8185-28.4545 GHz and 28.8265-29.4625 GHz.
 - NGSO satellites in 27.8185-28.4545 GHz and 28.8265-29.1 GHz.
- 9.6 These changes will be available to all new licences in **early 2027**, to align with the date at which we stop authorising new MOB AIS devices. Existing licensees wishing to benefit from this new equipment can request a variation to their licence which can be done online.

Improving Coastal Station Radio (CSR) International

- 9.7 We will address congestion on simplex channels under the Coastal Station Radio (International) licence by making available the lower frequency portion of channels 27 (157.350 MHz) and 28 (157.400 MHz) for simplex assignments in early 2027.

Implementation

- 9.8 For making the additional simplex channels available we will need to update our licensing system. Once available, applicants will be able to apply for them via the standard

application procedure. Details on when this will occur will be published on our [Spectrum Licensing updates](#) page on the Ofcom website but we expect to be in a position for these changes to be available to applicants in **early 2027**.

DGPS

9.9 We are decommissioning the DGPS licence, as the service is no longer operated in the UK.

Implementation

9.10 The DGPS Licence is no longer available on our website. Existing licensees have agreed to surrender their licence, and we will issue alternative licences as needed.

AIS

9.11 We plan to add new channels (ASM1: 161.95 MHz and ASM2: 162.00 MHz) and the associated conditions, to enable ASM under the AIS licence; and

9.12 We plan to enable the use of M-AtoNs under the AIS licence and make some editorial changes to the AIS licence terms and conditions. A draft copy of the updated terms and conditions will be published alongside the General Notice.

Maritime Radio (Suppliers and Demonstration) licences

9.13 We plan to remove outdated information and modernise the Maritime Radio (Suppliers and Demonstration) licence terms and conditions, varying existing licences. A draft copy of the updated terms and conditions will be published alongside the General Notice.

Implementation of AIS and Suppliers and Demonstration licence changes

9.14 For us to implement the changes to the AIS and Maritime Radio (Suppliers and Demonstration) licences we will need to vary all licences currently on issue. To do this we must follow the process set out in Schedule 1 of the WT Act. As provided for in the licences, we will do this by publishing a General Notice on our website. Once the General Notice is published, licensees will have a period of time (no shorter than 30 days) to make representations to Ofcom. Once the representation period has ended Ofcom has 30 days to make the decision as to whether to vary the licences or not.

9.15 We expect to publish the General Notice in November 2026 – it will be open for comment for 8 weeks. We will make our final decision on whether to vary the licences in February 2027.

Information improvements

9.16 In response to some of the comments to the consultation, we have decided to improve the information that we provide on our website concerning maritime use. Over the next couple of months, we plan to update the current [Ofcom maritime webpage](#) to provide clearer information and guidance to licensees.

Future phases of work

9.17 The decisions set out in this statement represent the first phase of our maritime modernisation programme. Following the implementation of these changes, we plan to

develop further proposals to streamline and modernise the Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio Licences. We expect to publish our consultation on these proposals in 2027.

A1. Legal framework

The legislative framework

- A1.1 Ofcom's statutory powers and duties in relation to spectrum management are set out primarily in the [Communications Act 2003](#) (the "2003 Act") and the [Wireless Telegraphy Act 2006](#) (the "WT Act").
- A1.2 Amongst our functions are the making available of frequencies for use for particular purposes and the granting of rights of use of spectrum through wireless telegraphy licences and licence- exemptions.
- A1.3 Our principal duties under the 2003 Act, when carrying out our functions and exercising our powers, are to further the interests of citizens and consumers, where appropriate by promoting competition. In doing so, we are also required (among other things) to secure the optimal use of spectrum and the availability throughout the United Kingdom of a wide range of electronic communications services.
- A1.4 We must also have regard to: a) the desirability of promoting competition in relevant markets; b) the desirability of encouraging investment and innovation in relevant markets; c) the different needs and interests, so far as the use of the electro-magnetic spectrum for wireless telegraphy is concerned, of all persons who may wish to make use of it; and d) the different interests of persons in the different parts of the United Kingdom, of the different ethnic communities within the United Kingdom and of persons living in rural and in urban areas.
- A1.5 In performing our duties, we are required under section 3(3) of the 2003 Act to have regard in all cases to the principles under which regulatory activities should be transparent, accountable, proportionate, consistent and targeted only at cases in which action is needed, and any other principles appearing to Ofcom to represent the best regulatory practice. Furthermore, in exercising our regulatory functions, we are also required to have regard to the desirability of promoting economic growth.
- A1.6 Additionally, in carrying out our spectrum functions we have a duty under section 3 of the WT Act to have regard in particular to: a) the extent to which the spectrum is available for use, or further use, for wireless telegraphy; b) the demand for use of that spectrum for wireless telegraphy; and c) the demand that is likely to arise in future for such use. We also have a duty to have regard to the desirability of promoting: e) the efficient management and use of the spectrum for wireless telegraphy; f) the economic and other benefits that may arise from the use of wireless telegraphy; g) the development of innovative services; and h) competition in the provision of electronic communications services.

Ofcom's licensing framework

- A1.7 Ofcom is responsible for authorising use of the radio spectrum. We permit the use of the radio spectrum either by granting wireless telegraphy licences under the WT Act or by making regulations exempting the use of particular equipment from the requirement to hold such a licence. It is unlawful and an offence to install or use wireless telegraphy

apparatus without holding a licence granted by Ofcom, unless the use of such equipment is exempted.²²

- A1.8 The decisions set out in this document concern (among other things) our approach to existing maritime radio licensees and the licence conditions to be included in any future licence. Below we explain the legal framework under which we can impose conditions in new spectrum licences and revoke or vary existing licences.

Licence conditions

- A1.9 A wireless telegraphy licence may be granted subject to such terms, provisions and limitations as Ofcom think fit (WT Act, s. 9(1)). However, this power is subject to certain constraints. In particular:
- a) The terms, provisions and limitations of a spectrum licence must not duplicate the obligations already imposed on the licensee by the general conditions set by Ofcom under section 45 of the Communications Act 2003 (WT Act, s. 9(6));²³ and
 - b) Ofcom may only impose terms, provisions and limitations which are: a) objectively justified in relation to the network and services to which they relate; b) not unduly discriminatory; c) proportionate to what they are intended to achieve; and d) transparent in relation to what they are intended to achieve (WT Act, s. 9(7)).
- A1.10 Section 9(4) of the WT Act sets out a non-exhaustive list of the terms, provisions and limitations that Ofcom may impose.
- A1.11 Examples of conditions that we may impose in spectrum licences under s.9 WT Act include:
- a) limitations as to the position and nature of a station (s.9(2)(a));
 - b) limitations as to the apparatus that may be installed or used (s.9(3)); and
 - c) terms, provisions and limitations as to strength or type of signal, as to times of use and as to the sharing of frequencies (s.9(4)(a)).

Ofcom's powers to vary or revoke licences granted under the WT Act

- A1.12 Ofcom has broad discretion under paragraph 6 of Schedule 1 of the 2006 Act to vary or revoke licences, subject to certain limitations. Specifically, the legislation provides that Ofcom may not vary or revoke a licence unless the proposed variation or revocation is objectively justifiable (WT Act 2006, para. 6A of Sch. 1). We also have a general duty not to discriminate unduly between operators and to ensure that our interventions are proportionate, consistent and targeted only at cases in which action is needed (2003 Act, s.3(3)). Ofcom must act in accordance with its statutory duties and general legal principles, including the duties to act reasonably and rationally when making decisions and to take account of any legitimate expectations.²⁴
- A1.13 Schedule 1 of the WT Act sets out the process which Ofcom must follow where it proposes to vary or revoke a wireless telegraphy licence. In summary, Ofcom is required to take the following steps (WT Act, para. 7 of Sch. 1):

²² Section 8 of the WT Act.

²³ See Ofcom's [General Conditions of Entitlement](#).

²⁴ Further potential limitations may derive from (i) any UK obligations under international agreements, particularly where use of spectrum has been harmonised, and (ii) any ministerial direction under section 5 of the 2003 Act or section 5 of the WT Act.

- a) notify the licensee of the reasons for the proposed variation or revocation;²⁵
 - b) specify a period of at least 30 days in which the licensee may make representations about the proposal; and
 - c) decide whether or not to vary or revoke the licence within one month of the end of that period.
- A1.14 Where a proposal to vary or revoke a wireless telegraphy licence is made with the consent of the licensee, Ofcom is not required to follow the above process.
- A1.15 Ofcom may include in a wireless telegraphy licence terms restricting the exercise of its power to revoke or vary licences (WT Act, para. 8 of Sch. 1), such as requiring a certain notice period for revoking a licence for spectrum management reasons. However, Ofcom may at any time revoke or vary a licence if it appears to be necessary or expedient in the interests of national security, or for the purpose of securing compliance with an international obligation (WT Act, para. 8(5) of Sch. 1).

UK Government's Statement of Strategic Priorities

- A1.16 Under section 2B(2) of the Communications Act, when exercising our functions relating to telecoms, management of radio spectrum and postal services, we are required to have regard to the UK Government's [Statement of Strategic Priorities \(SSP\)](#) that has been laid before Parliament and designated by the Secretary of State (or any subsequent amended or replacement SSP that has been so laid and designated). The current SSP for telecommunications, the management of radio spectrum, and postal services was designated on 26 April 2026, having been laid in draft before Parliament on 11 February 2026. See section 2 for how we have taken account of the SSP in developing our proposals.

The desirability of promoting economic growth

- A1.17 In exercising our regulatory functions, we are also required to have regard to the desirability of promoting economic growth (the "growth duty").³⁶ In particular, we must consider the importance for the promotion of economic growth of exercising the regulatory function in a way which ensures that regulatory action is taken only when it is needed, and any action taken is proportionate. Section 110(3) of the Deregulation Act 2015 requires us to have regard to the "[Growth Duty: Statutory Guidance](#)" (revised by Government in May 2024).

²⁵ We may do this by writing to all licensees, or by publishing a general notice on our website setting out the proposed variation. Licensees would have a period of no less than one month to provide any representations to us.

A2. Impact assessments

Impact assessment

- A2.1 Section 7 of the [Communications Act 2003](#) requires us to carry out and publish an assessment of the likely impact of implementing a proposal which would be likely to have a significant impact on businesses or the general public, or when there is a major change in Ofcom's activities.
- A2.2 More generally, impact assessments form part of good policy making and we therefore expect to carry them out in relation to a large majority of our proposals. We use impact assessments to help us understand and assess the potential impact of our policy decisions before we make them. They also help us explain the policy decisions we have decided to take and why we consider those decisions best fulfil our applicable duties and objectives in the least intrusive way. Our [impact assessment guidance](#) sets out our general approach to how we assess and present the impact of our proposed decisions.
- A2.3 In exercising our regulatory functions, we are also required to have regard to the desirability of promoting economic growth (the "growth duty").²⁶ In particular, we must consider the importance for the promotion of economic growth of exercising the regulatory function in a way which ensures that regulatory action is taken only when it is needed, and any action taken is proportionate. Section 110(3) of the Deregulation Act 2015 requires us to have regard to the "[Growth Duty: Statutory Guidance](#)" (revised by Government in May 2024).
- A2.4 When preparing this document, we have considered the citizen and consumer interests relating to our decisions. In particular, we have looked at the impact on licensees, manufacturers/ equipment providers as well as the wider benefits to citizens and consumers. We believe the benefits that we have identified will promote economic growth. We have taken into account our statutory duties, including our statutory duties in Annex 1²⁷ and section 6 of the WT Act.

Our proposals and decisions

- A2.5 Respondents generally supported the proposals on which we sought views in our March 2026 consultation. We have decided to proceed with our proposals as planned subject to minor amendments and the outcome of the statutory process to vary affected licences. The proposed amendments are below:
- a) Extend the deadline for removing the authorisation of MOB-AIS devices, by a year, to 31 December 2031; and

²⁶ See section 108 of the Deregulation Act 2015, which was extended to Ofcom's regulatory functions by The Economic Growth (Regulatory Functions) (Amendment) Order 2024.

²⁷ In particular, but not exclusively, Ofcom's duty to have regard to the extent to which spectrum is available for use or further use for wireless telegraphy; and Ofcom's duty to have regard to the desirability of promoting the efficient management and use of spectrum; the economic and other benefits that may arise from the use of wireless telegraphy and the development of innovative services.

- b) Addition of two new licence conditions to the AIS licence, to enable Application Specific Messaging (ASM).²⁸

A2.6 Generally, the intent of the decisions set out in this document are to align the UK regulatory framework with relevant international decisions.

The appropriate use of maritime frequencies for Autonomous Maritime Radio Devices (AMRD)

A2.7 In 2019, the IMO identified specific criteria for distinguishing the two categories of AMRD:

- a) AMRD Group A: devices that enhance the safety of navigation (E.g., Man-overboard devices using VHF DSC (Class M), and Mobile Aids to Navigation.
- b) AMRD Group B: Devices that do not enhance the safety of navigation but are used for other purposes (e.g., fishnet markets, diver location markers, MOB without DSC etc.).

A2.8 In 2019, WRC also agreed changes to the global radiocommunications rules on using AMRD equipment. It decided that only AMRD Group A are permitted to use Radio Regulations Appendix 18 frequencies which are allocated for DSC (Channel 70, 156.525 MHz) and for AIS.

A2.9 Our decisions to (a) update the language in the Ship Radio Licence terms and conditions, clarifying that AMRD Group A can be used on the authorised frequencies, and (b) to phase out the authorisation of MOB-AIS devices, will ensure the UK aligns with international frameworks. Legacy MOB-AIS devices do not meet the Class M DSC standard identified by the IMO for safety-related AMRD operation and are therefore no longer considered appropriate users of AIS channels reserved for safety-of-navigation applications. Phasing out these devices will help reduce the risk of causing interference to safety-related transmissions on these channels and support the transition to more capable and internationally harmonised safety equipment.

A2.10 The addition of M-ATONs to the AIS licence will further enhance the safety of navigation, as deployment of these will be to aid navigation of vessels in areas with emerging or temporary hazards.

The introduction of dedicated channels for Application Specific Messaging (ASM)

A2.11 WRC-19 allocated dedicated frequencies for ASM, after the IMO and the International Organisation for Marine Aids to Navigation (IALA) published guidelines providing a consistent and coordinated framework for the use of ASM within the existing AIS channels. By setting out harmonised rules for message formats, coding structures and operational use, the guidelines were intended to enable early, safe, and interoperable delivery of navigation-related information over AIS channels. They also introduced clear expectations on how ASM transmissions should be managed to avoid undue load on AIS channels.

A2.12 The introduction and allocation of ASM channels was agreed at WRC-19 through an amendment to Appendix 18 of the Radio Regulations. In 2024, ECC Decision 19(03) was published, setting out the harmonised use of the ASM channels across Europe.

²⁸ We proposed the addition of operational conditions in March 2026. We have since set those conditions out, explicitly, in the draft licence terms and conditions document that will be published alongside the General Notice.

- A2.13 Two channels were allocated for ASM use by WRC-19, by splitting two existing VHF duplex channels and assigning the upper frequency portion to ASM (Channel 27 (157.350 MHz/ 161.95 MHz) and Channel 28 (157.4 MHz /162 MHz)).
- A2.14 In addition to aligning with international regulatory frameworks, enabling ASM will support non-safety-critical information exchange such as weather updates, lock/bridge status and Aids to Navigation monitoring. By automatically including these new channels under the AIS licence, licensees won't be required to take extra steps to gain access to them.

The addition of VDE-TER and VDE-SAT channels to the Ship Radio Licence

- A2.15 At WRC-15, the Conference approved and designated the VHF spectrum and specific channel plans for the terrestrial components of VDES. This included splitting legacy marine VHF channels to create dedicated bands for ASM and terrestrial VHF Data Exchange (VDE-TER). At WRC-19, the Conference finalised the spectrum allocations for VDES by allocating specific channels for the satellite component (VDE-SAT) of the system.
- A2.16 Following these decisions, CEPT implemented ECC Decision (19)03 in 2024, setting out the harmonised use for both the terrestrial and satellite components of VDES.
- A2.17 Some administrations have begun to implement VDES into national authorisation frameworks. Given that UK-flagged vessels travel internationally, the decision to enable the use of these channels by VDES-capable equipment will enable those vessels to make use of the technologies globally, where they are in use.

Addressing congestion on simplex frequencies

- A2.18 We considered three options to address the availability of simplex channels, authorised under the Coastal Station Radio (International) licence. We recap these here:
 - a) **Option one:** Authorise all the additional simplex assignments which are available internationally by splitting each of the current duplex channels 19, 20, 78, and 79 into two separate simplex channels;
 - b) **Option two:** Take no action now; instead, reserve these duplex channels for a potential future move towards digital maritime communication systems, which could enable more efficient use of the existing channels.
 - c) **Option three:** Authorise only the lower frequency portions of Channels 27 (157.350 MHz) and 28 (157.400 MHz). Alongside proposals to make editorial and contact updates to the Maritime Suppliers and Demonstration licence, we are also proposing to decommission the DGPS licence as the service is no longer operational in the UK.
- A2.19 We received majority support from stakeholders for our preferred approach (option 3). We continue to consider that option three represents the most effective, balanced approach and will mitigate further congestion on available simplex channels in some areas, supporting more reliable and resilient operations.

Call for input

- A2.20 Separately, we sought input from stakeholders on the emergence of new technologies and their potential future spectrum requirements. This included:
 - a) The operation of VDES on UK coastal stations; and
 - b) The increasing move towards autonomous vessels.

- A2.21 We did not make any proposals on these topics, and so we are not making any decisions regarding our future approach in these areas at this time. We will continue to actively engage with, and monitor, the development of the international frameworks alongside considering how best to enable these new technologies in the UK.

Impacts on stakeholders

- A2.22 We consider the impact of these decisions on:

- a) Licensees (i.e., equipment users);
- b) Manufacturers/ equipment providers; and
- c) Citizens and consumers.

Licensees

- A2.23 To implement some of our decisions, we must update the terms and conditions of the AIS licence, Maritime (Suppliers and Demonstration) licence, and the Ship Radio Licence. To update the Ship Radio Licence terms and conditions, we intend to publish an alternative terms and conditions booklet that contains the updated language, on the website. This will be an interim measure as we plan to undertake a full variation of the Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio Licences at a later date.
- A2.24 There are 521 AIS licences and 64 Maritime (Suppliers & Demonstration) licences that will require a variation in order for our decisions to be implemented. To that end, we will be publishing a General Notice to begin the statutory variation process. Subject to any comments received, if we decide to move ahead with the variation we will issue new licence documents to all licensees, via their preferred communication method. Licensees will not be required to do anything.
- A2.25 Overall, we do not expect that there would be any significant costs to licensees as a result of our decisions. We do however recognise that licensees who have non-compliant legacy MOB devices using AIS channels will need to replace their equipment, at a relatively low cost.²⁹ To help with this transition, we have decided to phase in the changes over a five-year period. We will stop new authorisations of MOB AIS devices from 31 January 2027. Existing equipment may continue to be used until 31 December 2031. As much of this equipment should be replaced after its expiration date (normally around five years), or after any emergency use or if the unit fails self-tests, we believe much of this equipment would be replaced as part of its natural life cycle during this period. In addition, we expect that stakeholders have been aware of potential changes to licensing which may affect equipment they purchase. The ITU decision to change the global rules on using AMRD equipment was made in 2019, and in December 2024 we confirmed that these changes would be coming and advised that stakeholders take account of the forthcoming changes when developing or purchasing new equipment. We think this decision is likely to affect only a small percentage of Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio licensees.³⁰
- A2.26 Most of the decisions in this document aim to align the UK with the wider international framework for maritime use, ensuring harmonisation with international rules. These changes will enable the use of more up-to-date technologies, such as VDES, ASM and AMRD Group A devices, while supporting the transition away from legacy technologies,

²⁹ The cost of a Class M compliant MOB device is between £200 to £400.

³⁰ [Ofcom Licensing updates](#) Ofcom policy update on AMRD 18 December 2024.

such as MOB AIS devices. Collectively, these changes are expected to deliver several benefits:

- a) Reduction of congestion on maritime VHF channels dedicated to the safety of life;
- b) More efficient use of the radio spectrum allocated to maritime use; and
- c) Increasing data capacity, enabling better data transfer and, in turn, enhancing safety of navigation.

A2.27 The decision to introduce channels for ASM, under the AIS licence, will result in the loss of two existing duplex channels. This impacts a single licensee who is currently authorised to use these channels. We expect the impact to be small as there are several other duplex channels available for use. We are engaging with the licensee to discuss appropriate alternative arrangements and will provide notice of our intention to vary the affected licence, in line with our statutory duties.

A2.28 The decisions we set out in relation to congestion on existing international simplex channels, as set out in the UK, should help ports and other stakeholders to access the spectrum easily. We consulted on three options, two of which (options 1 and 3) would reduce existing congestion in the near-term, whereas option 2 (waiting for digitalisation of the Maritime VHF band) focused on the long-term. We continue to consider option three as the most appropriate approach because it offers a balance between addressing immediate congestion; enabling stakeholders to access the spectrum easily so they can continue to expand their operations or set up potential new sites and maintaining some duplex channels to support the transition to digital communications in the future.

A2.29 We have decided to change the structure and some of the wording in the AIS Licence (section 4, paragraphs 4.20 – 4.22) and the Maritime Radio (Suppliers and Demonstration) Licence (section 7). We consider these changes to be presentational and administrative in nature, so we do not expect the new conditions to require licensees to take any additional steps to ensure compliance. If licensees are complying with all the current terms and conditions of their licence, then they will continue to be compliant with the new terms and conditions of their licence. The benefit of these changes is that they provide greater clarity for licensees, represent a more proportionate regulatory framework – removing unnecessary provisions – and provides for a more futureproofed authorisation framework, reducing the barriers to deployment of new technologies.

A2.30 We do not expect that the decommissioning of our DGPS licence would impact on licensees, given that the service is no longer deployed in the UK. Additionally, the frequencies will continue to be protected, given the continuation of DGPS services in neighbouring administrations. As set out in section 6, licensees have agreed to surrender their licences, and we are currently engaging with them directly to finalise alternative arrangements that will allow them to continue testing.

Manufacturers and equipment providers

A2.31 In general, we believe that aligning our maritime authorisations with other countries will provide certainty and thereby promote investment and allow manufacturers to benefit from economies of scale.

A2.32 The decision to phase out the use of legacy MOB equipment using AIS channels may mean some manufacturers have non-compliant products which can no longer sell in the UK. As we have indicated, the decision to ban the use of these devices on channels AIS 1 and AIS 2 internationally was taken in 2019, by the ITU. In Europe, ECC Decision (22)02 set out that,

starting from 2025, all AIS MOBs must be Class M compliant to be sold in a number of European countries. As of October 2026, 16 CEPT countries had implemented the decision and a further 9 had plans to.³¹ Given this, alongside our statement in December 2024 and our decision to phase in the implementation of this decision as set out in Section 3, we believe our decision is objectively justifiable because manufacturers and equipment providers have had sufficient notice of the decision to phase out the use of this equipment.

Consumers and citizens

- A2.33 Although the decisions do not have an easily measurable direct benefit on consumers and citizens, we consider that the overall effect is likely to be positive given the anticipated benefits of a modernised maritime sector with updated safety of navigation technologies. As more countries introduce these regulations, the range of equipment available will increase.

Other impacts

Efficient use of spectrum

- A2.34 The decisions we set out in this document should make more efficient use of the radio spectrum. Our decision for repurposing some existing maritime channels should help to make more efficient use of the spectrum and resolve spectrum scarcity issues in parts of the UK. The improvement in spectrum efficiency should have an overall positive effect and enable future users to get access to more useable spectrum.

Equality impact assessment

- A2.35 We have given careful consideration to whether our decisions will have a particular impact on persons sharing protected characteristics (broadly including race, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership and religion or belief in the UK and also dependents and political opinion in Northern Ireland), and in particular whether they may discriminate against such persons or impact on equality of opportunity or good relations. This assessment helps us comply with our duties under the [Equality Act 2010](#) and the Northern Ireland Act 1998.³²
- A2.36 When thinking about equality we think more broadly than persons that share protected characteristics identified in equalities legislation and think about potential impacts on various groups of persons (see paragraph 4.7 of our [impact assessment guidance](#)).
- A2.37 In particular, section 3(4) of the Communications Act also requires us to have regard to the needs and interests of specific groups of persons when performing our duties, as appear to us to be relevant in the circumstances. These include:
- a) the vulnerability of children and of others whose circumstances appear to us to put them in need of special protection;
 - b) the needs of persons with disabilities, older persons and persons on low incomes; and
 - c) the different interests of persons in the different parts of the UK, of the different ethnic communities within the UK and of persons living in rural and in urban areas.

³¹ [ECO Implementation status](#) of ECC Decision (22)02.

³² [Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998](#)

- A2.38 We do not consider that our decisions will affect any specific groups of persons (including persons that share protected characteristics under the 2010 Act or the 1998 Act) differently to the general population.

Welsh language assessment

- A2.39 Ofcom is required to take Welsh language considerations into account when formulating, reviewing, or revising policies which are relevant to Wales (including proposals which are not targeted at Wales specifically but are of interest across the UK).³³
- A2.40 We do not consider our decisions would have any impact on opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language or treat the Welsh language less favourably than the English language. We also do not think there are ways in which our decisions could be formulated to have, or increase, a positive impact, or, not have adverse effects or decrease any adverse effects.

³³ See Standards 84 – 89 of [Hysbysiad cydymffurfio](#) (in Welsh) and [compliance notice](#) (in English). Section 7 of the Welsh Language Commissioner’s [Good Practice Advice Document](#) provides further advice and information on how bodies must comply with the Welsh Language Standards.

A3. Draft copy of the Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio Licence updates

- A3.1 The draft of the proposed Ship Radio and Ship Portable Radio Licence terms and conditions updates can be found [here](#).