



# Review report

## Confirmation of vessel tracking unit polling status

### 1. Background

This report responds to items raised under section 5 in the Queensland Ombudsman's preliminary observations and proposed actions. It provides an overview of the vessel tracking unit polling status confirmation text messaging service, improvements applied to enhance the text messaging service, and alternative options available to commercial fishers to confirm their unit is polling correctly outside of business hours.

**Table 1:** Extracts from Ombudsman's preliminary observations and proposed actions

No.	Observations	Proposed actions
5.1	The department's text messaging service is one of three options currently available to the industry to use to confirm the correct operation of vessel tracking units. Fishers have reported inconsistent receipt of text messages from this service. This includes messages being significantly delayed in receipt or not being received at all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Investigate the performance of the department's text messaging service. Identify the extent and reasons for reported problems and develop strategies to minimise the continuation of these problems (where practicable).</li></ul>
5.3	<p>Fishers have reported difficulties in contacting the department outside of its business hours to confirm the operation of their vessel tracking unit. It is commonplace for fishers to leave port at times that are outside of the department's office hours.</p> <p>The department has advised this Office that it is developing the Automated Interactive Voice Response System (AIVRS) which will provide a text message confirmation should the vessel tracking unit be correctly polling.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Expedite the implementation of the AIVRS.</li><li>Provide informative updates to industry about the development of the AIVRS and a realistic date that it will be available.</li><li>Assess how the department can provide confirmation of vessel tracking unit polling outside of its business hours. Where issues are identified, implement measures to address the problems</li></ul>

Source: [Ombudsman's preliminary observations and proposed actions](#)

## 2. Vessel tracking confirmation text messaging service

### 2.1 How the text messaging service works

The vessel tracking confirmation text messaging service was introduced in 2019 to provide an automated positive confirmation to commercial fishers when their vessel tracking units are polling (working properly).

The text messaging service runs 24-hourly from 7am. In this 24-hour cycle, as soon as the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) receives positions from a vessel tracking unit at the required polling frequency, a confirmation text message will be sent to the nominated boat contact within approximately 30-45 minutes. Only one text message is sent for a specific vessel tracking unit in the 24-hour cycle.

If a unit has not polled for a period greater than 24-hours, a text message will be sent to the nominated boat contact within approximately 30-45 minutes after the unit commences polling at the required frequency. This can occur outside of the 7am text messaging service.

Table 2 outlines the prerequisites for the text messaging service. If the prerequisites are met, the nominated boat contact will be sent the vessel tracking confirmation text message.

**Table 2:** Prerequisites for the text messaging service to operate correctly

Scope	Prerequisites
Outside of DPI (PCFL holder's responsibility)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The authority holder has registered their vessel tracking unit/s against a boat mark on FishNet Secure correctly.</li> <li>The vessel tracking unit sends positions to DPI at the required polling frequency of 5 min or 15 min, depending on fishery.</li> <li>Contact information including the authority holder, nominated boat contact and Commercial Fisher in Control (CFIC) are correct.</li> </ul>
Within DPI (DPI to confirm)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Correct assignment of vessel tracking unit in DPI internal vessel tracking platform must match the vessel tracking registration details supplied in FishNet Secure.</li> <li>A minimum of three polls, reporting at the correct interval, are received and stored in DPI database.</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Text message delivery and outages

For many users, text message confirmations are reliably received without issues. However, on the rare occasion that there is a delay or failure to receive a confirmation message, it is usually due to vessel tracking data not being received or stored in the DPI's database for various reasons, which is referred to as an "outage."

These outages, which affect the text messaging service, are typically resolved quickly, usually within a few minutes to a few hours. In exceptional cases, it may take up to 48 hours to resolve.

It's also important to note that in some instances, although rare, telecommunications network issues outside of DPI's control can impact the delivery of text messages.

## 2.3 Strategies to minimise delay of text message

In response to a small number of industry concerns regarding delays or inconsistent receipt of text messages, DPI has introduced additional systems to verify vessel tracking status, including the AIVR system in October 2020 and the Qld eFisher app in December 2021.

Unlike the SMS service, both the AIVR system and the Qld eFisher app (the App) directly verify vessel tracking with the tracking system itself. These options are available 24/7, providing greater flexibility and highlighting the expanded support available beyond the original text messaging service.

While the AIVR and the App generally provide reliable verification, occasionally these systems can also be impacted by outages. Outages can be specific to the AIVR/App or related to broader vessel tracking system issues, such as data/system outages or network/satellite disruptions.

To minimise impacts, DPI has implemented alert systems that continuously monitor for outages or issues that may affect vessel tracking verification. If an issue does arise that cannot be resolved immediately, DPI promptly notifies affected commercial fishers with details of the issue, alternative verification options, and reassurance regarding the continuity of fishing operations during the outage.

### 3. Systems to confirm vessel tracking unit polling status

DPI provides multiple options to commercial fishers to verify their vessel tracking unit status and support should a preferred method fail. Each commercial fisher can choose the most suitable option for their operation.

**Table 1** Options to verify vessel tracking unit status

Current options	Availability	Details
Automatic SMS service	24/7	Daily confirmation SMS sent to nominated phone number when polling data has been received by DPI.
Automated Integrated Voice Response (AIVR) (07) 3031 8283	24/7	Commercial fishers to call AIVR. After licence number is verified the AIVR system will provide verification of vessel tracking unit status based on units assigned to the relevant licence. There is an option at the end of the call to receive a SMS confirmation.
Commercial Fishing App – Qld eFisher	24/7	The application includes functionality that allows commercial fishers to check vessel tracking unit status based on relevant licences and assigned units.

In addition to the above options provided by DPI, providers (of the vessel tracking units) offer online tracking platforms that commercial fishers can access to confirm the vessel tracking unit status. Access can be arranged by the fisher with their provider. Providers can also confirm vessel tracking unit status for and directly to fishers.

#### 3.1 Automated Integrated Voice Response (AIVR)

The AIVR service for vessel tracking status checks became operational in October 2020.

On 2 October 2020, industry was informed of this new option by electronic mail (email). The email included relevant numbers and instructions for industry to follow. The DPI website was also updated with information in relation to AIVR including fact sheets and quick guides.

As the AIVR system has evolved overtime, industry continue to be kept up to date via email, newsletters and the DPI's website.

## 3.2 Queensland commercial fishing app – Qld eFisher

The commercial fishing app, Qld eCatch was first released on 6 December 2021, and included the functionality to verify your vessel tracking unit status. The name was later changed to Qld eFisher in April 2022.

DPI have a dedicated team providing guidance on the App. This includes creation of guidelines, self-help guides and videos - including a significant number of one-on-one training sessions provided to date for fishers statewide. DPI will continue to provide this service to support fishers transitioning to digital reporting. A request for support by fishers can be raised via the phone by contacting 13 25 23 to arrange a suitable time with the team.

New functionality and changes to the Qld eFisher app are routinely provided to industry via email and web updates. DPI are committed to providing regular updates through presentations at industry working groups.

## 4. Addressing outages and other issues

Although DPI have made every effort to ensure authority holders (PCFL and commercial fishers in control) are able to verify vessel tracking status at all times, there are occasional circumstances that may cause issues/delays. To minimise disruptions, DPI has a range of processes in place to quickly resolve issues that arise and ensure minimal impact on operations.

**Table 3** Possible issues and resolutions

Issue	Timeframe	Resolution
Delay in processing vessel tracking unit registration/movements from FishNet Secure to the vessel tracking system (vessel tracking cannot be verified until movements are processed).	12-24 hours	<p>During business hours these updates are made immediately once DPI is notified of the change made in FishNet Secure.</p> <p>Outside of business hours DPI have a technical officer assigned to check daily and make relevant updates.</p> <p>Once relevant updates are made, if the unit is working properly, the AIVR and Qld eFisher app will be available for verification and a SMS should be received.</p> <p>DPI routinely investigate emerging technologies to continually improve systems and enhance overall efficiency.</p>
DPI system outage	Dependant on issue	<p>DPI have improved processes to ensure system outages are identified and resolved quickly.</p> <p>Improvements and further development of internal systems have ensured outages are less frequent.</p> <p>A monitoring and alert system ensures DPI are proactively notified of any issues, and they can be addressed and resolved quickly.</p>

		Depending on the system outage and duration, DPI will notify industry and include other working options to verify their vessel tracking unit status.
Vessel tracking system outage/unit provider issue	Dependant on issue	<p>DPI has a process in place with providers and the vessel tracking system administrators to be notified of any issues that may affect vessel tracking for Queensland commercial fishers.</p> <p>Investigation into issues is triaged and risk assessed. If there are identified flow on effects (whether the issue affects vessel tracking verification systems) or is expected to be for an extended period (duration), DPI will advise industry as soon as practical.</p> <p>Some circumstances are outside the control of DPI – such as provider or satellite network issues. However, DPI hosts regular meetings with providers and encourages open feedback and collaboration to ensure there are processes to minimise impacts and industry are notified.</p>

## 5. Recommendations

Where necessary, DPI makes every effort to notify commercial fishers of any issues that may affect their ability to verify vessel tracking unit status. The Vessel Tracking team works closely with various business units, collaborating with compliance officers across the state to ensure that any potential impacts on fisheries are well communicated. This proactive approach helps ensure that fishers are informed of any issues that might affect their ability to verify vessel tracking status in a timely and reasonable manner.

DPI acknowledges the feedback received from a small number of industry stakeholders regarding the vessel tracking confirmation SMS service. While the SMS system continues to serve its purpose, DPI has introduced additional verification options, to offer fishers more reliable and flexible tools for vessel tracking. These newer options provide enhanced accuracy and accessibility, ensuring that fishers have a range of dependable methods to choose from, while the SMS service remains a viable option as well.

DPI remains committed to providing reliable, accessible verification options to industry, continually refining our services to meet the evolving needs of fishers. Our ongoing engagement and support ensure that we continue delivering high-quality service and uphold the trust of the fishing community.

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