

Review report

Improved Provider Management

1. Background

This report is prepared in response to items raised under section 4.1 in the Queensland Ombudsman's preliminary observations and proposed actions. It provides an overview of the Department of Primary Industries, Fisheries Queensland's experience with managing issues associated with vessel tracking providers and strategies for improved management of the vessel tracking framework.

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

No.	Observations	Proposed actions
4.1	<p>The problems about Option Audio's involvement in vessel tracking unit provision and service is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It's extent of marine experience and competency• Changing terms and scope of charges (e.g. YB3i 'installation' charges).• The availability of 50 installers across the state, but installations of vessel tracking units were not performed in a timely manner.• Option Audio's YB3i battery specification was substantially greater than as described by the manufacturer. It appears that there had been no modification of the YB3i battery provided in Queensland despite Option Audio's assurance.• The brackets supplied by Option Audio were not as had been specified in its specifications and advertising. The brackets provided were poorly made, had sharp edges and made of unsuitable material.• The wiring looms provided with the YB3i units were made of copper wire, not tinned copper wire, which presented potential electrical safety risks.• The wiring fittings provided and used in the installation of the YB3i units were not of a marine grade which presented potential electrical safety risks.• Option Audio's workmanship in installing the YB3i units was regularly described as being poor with associated safety concerns being reported.• Inconsistently charged the industry for YB3i units and polling contracts.• Unauthorised deductions were made from fishers' accounts.• Delays and, in some cases, no action was taken in providing refunds. <p>These issues resulted in the following impacts:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the experience of dealing with the issues associated with Option Audio. Develop strategies for improving the management of the vessel tracking framework.• Provide the industry with advice about the availability of the services of the Office of Fair Trading where concerns about suppliers are encountered under the current framework.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • financial and time impacts on fishers. • increased frustration to fishers • increased departmental compliance scrutiny of some affected fishers. • significant departmental resources in dealing with Option Audio and the industry. • increased cost to the rebate scheme (more than was established by its terms) • ineffectual strategic management of Option Audio. <p>The department was unable to manage Option Audio's performance due to deficiencies with the vessel tracking framework, specifically, there were no enforceable arrangements between the department and Option Audio.</p>	
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Source: [Ombudsman's preliminary observations and proposed actions](#)

NOTE: Point two of the 'Proposed Actions' in Table 1, was completed in June 2024. The Department's webpage has been updated to include the Office of Fair-trading's contact information and available services.

2. Issues and Impacts

Following the implementation of vessel tracking in 2019, Queensland commercial fishers reported issues related to a specific provider, *Option Audio*. These concerns were not widespread across the fleet or program but were raised by fishers who had selected *Option Audio* and its RockFLEET (formerly YB3i) units at the outset of the Vessel Tracking Program. While these issues were not widespread across the fleet or program, they affected and involved a range of service delivery concerns and had stakeholder impacts.

2.1 Provider Understanding and Capability

Concerns were raised about *Option Audio*'s understanding of the requirements of the Queensland commercial fishing industry. This led to inconsistent and unsatisfactory service delivery, undermining trust and resulting in dissatisfaction among stakeholders.

2.2 Poor Service Delivery

Industry reported delays in service delivery and communication, including missed installation appointments, unreturned calls and difficulties reaching the provider.

Limited oversight and delayed provider transition was experienced, due to the absence of formal contracts or service-level agreements. This hindered performance monitoring and prolonged disruptions for affected users.

2.3 Unclear Contract Terms and Billing Practices

Some commercial fishers raised concerns regarding changes to service terms, including inconsistent billing practices, inconsistent monthly charges, unauthorised account deductions and unfulfilled installation commitments. There was confusion around the standby rate and other service terms, which led to frustration and a loss of confidence in the provider. Fishers also reported that *Option Audio* allegedly modified agreement terms post contract, undermining trust and damaging the providers reputation.

2.4 Installation Delays

Fishers who engaged *Option Audio* reported delays or missed appointments for installation, causing operational disruptions and financial inconvenience for those involved. These experiences were not representative of the broader fleet or other providers in the program.

2.5 Unit Quality and Installation Concerns

Some fishers raised concerns about the battery life discrepancies, non-marine grade wiring and poorly manufactured mounting brackets. Additionally fishers reported concerns about the quality of the installation work, including issues with workmanship that they felt may have compromised unit effectiveness.

2.6 Departmental Impacts

Due to provider issues additional support was required, including financial assistance and diversion of Fisheries Queensland resources to manage individual cases. There was unanticipated increased workload for DPI, with significant resources redirected to support impacted users and manage resolution activities. Given delays and service interruptions, this affected information used by Fisheries Queensland compliance teams and created compliance challenges.

3. Departmental Response and Improvement Measures

Despite the issues being isolated, DPI took industry concerns and observed impacts seriously. In recognition of the impacts to fishers, DPI undertook targeted rectification actions and implemented longer-term improvement strategies to strengthen the Vessel Tracking Program.

3.1 Immediate Support for Affected Users

To support affected commercial fishers, DPI provided the following targeted assistance:

- Support to transition to an alternative provider. A new provider took over *Option Audio*'s accounts, ensuring service continuity. This included the replacement or repair of faulty units and components, such as substandard cabling. The provider also honoured the warranty for affected units.
- Financial support was pursued by DPI, utilising funds from the Vessel Tracking Rebate Scheme to assist affected fishers. This assisted users with out-of-pocket expenses.
- A new policy was implemented to allow affected fishers to continue to operate without a vessel tracking unit while their issues were being resolved.
- Ongoing individual support was provided by DPI, maintaining regular contact with impacted fishers to monitor progress and provide case-by-case support throughout the resolution process.

3.2 Framework Improvement Strategies

In response to the challenges encountered, DPI reviewed and strengthened the vessel tracking provider framework to mitigate future risk and enhance oversight. Key strategies include:

- Clear and transparent performance standards, ensuring that performance expectations are clearly defined, including service quality timeliness and account management.
- Strengthening contractual arrangements now explicitly outlining hardware and service delivery expectations, aligned with the *Standard Operating Procedure – Approval of Vessel Tracking Units*.
- Regular provider performance monitoring has been implemented through structured monitoring systems to track provider performance against benchmarks.
- Regular meetings with providers enable early identification and resolution of emerging issues.

- Strengthened supplier evaluation criteria when selecting and retaining vessel tracking providers. These have been developed to specifically address the types of issues previously encountered and are reviewed every 12–18 months to ensure ongoing relevance.
- Complaint mechanisms now include the ability for fishers to choose between a dedicated email pathway to the Fisheries Queensland, Vessel Tracking team to action during business hours, or the DPI portal which provides email or phone options, 24-hours 7days a week. All complaints are recorded and triaged accordingly during business hours.
- Enquiries from fishers regarding units are also prioritised by the Vessel Tracking team who can address concerns during business hours through to the Vessel Tracking teams email.
- Complaint resolution processes are embedded to ensure that minor issues are resolved within 1-7 business days or 30 business days for more complex complaints as per the QLD Governments customer complaint management framework.

4. Conclusion

In response to challenges encountered during the initial rollout of the vessel tracking framework and with the provider *Option Audio*, DPI has implemented a series of targeted improvements to strengthen supplier oversight and management. While the number of impacted users were small, the result was impactful - with the lessons learned have informed meaningful changes to how providers are selected, evaluated and engaged.

Through clearer expectations, formalised procedures and stronger feedback and resolution mechanisms, as the vessel tracking program matures it is now better positioned better to maintain service quality, respond quickly to emerging issues and support the long-term success of digital reporting across Queensland's commercial fishing industry.

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