

Ref : DMA/AIFI/98/C 1047  
Date: 21/08/2019

Dear Captain  
Good Day,

kindly find attached informative document issued as “ (*Loss Prevention Circular QITAPI-LP-15-2019 Vessel Traffic Services, Assistance in Making Decisions*) for your kind attention and necessary precaution measures.

You are requested to confirm receipt, discuss the contents in the next consolidated meeting on board & keep a copy in the file DA-11 .

Best Regards,

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(Note: This e-mail has been sent as BCC <blind carbon copy to : All R.O.D.-SMC Vessels, to eliminate the lengthy list that would result if this e-mail is printed)

**Loss Prevention Circular QITAPI-LP-15-2019**  
***(Vessel Traffic Services, Assistance in Making Decisions)***

► **What is VTS:** *A Vessel Traffic Service is a service implemented by a Competent Authority, designed to improve safety and efficiency of vessel traffic and to protect the environment. The service should have the capability to interact with traffic and respond to traffic situations developing in the VTS area. IMO Guideline for Vessel Traffic Services Resolution A.857 (20)*



Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) is an essential service provided by a shore authority to help manage ship traffic. It aims to improve safety and security, protect the environment and improve commercial efficiency, particularly in congested areas. Not all ports have a VTS; it is up to the country's government to arrange for this service where, in their opinion, the volume of traffic or the degree of risk requires it under their responsibilities stated in SOLAS.

It is vitally important that VTS provision is harmonized on a global basis so that all ports are consistent and that mariners can feel comfortable using these services wherever they are in the world. This crucial work is carried out by the International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities (IALA).

VTS is shore-based and the support it provides can range from providing simple information messages, such as the position of other traffic or meteorological hazard warnings, to extensive traffic organization within a port or waterway.

Many mariners don't recognize that there are three distinct types of VTS service:

1. INS – Traffic Information Service: ensures essential information is available in time for onboard navigational decision making
2. TOS – Traffic Organization Service: prevents dangerous maritime traffic situations from developing and provides for the safe and efficient movement of vessel traffic within the VTS area
3. NAS – Navigational Assistance Service: assists onboard navigational decision making and monitors its effects.

It is important to recognize that even in an area with NAS, where the VTS is providing decision making assistance, you remain in control of how your vessel moves. Any guidance must be result based – it tells you what the outcome of your actions should be, but not what to do to get that outcome. For example, the VTS may tell you to make good a course, but not what to steer to make that course good. VTS operators are (supposedly) maritime professionals trained to a standard set by IALA and agreed by the IMO. As with any exchange between fellow professionals, it is important to understand and observe good etiquette in all communications.

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► **Services provided by VTS:**

Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) differs significantly from routing measures and ship reporting regimes. A VTS is equipped and staffed to interact with marine traffic by providing specific services and to respond to developing situations in the interest of safety and efficiency. A VTS may provide one of three types of service. All VTS provide an Information Service. Traffic Organization and Navigation Assistance Services may be provided where the service is required and can be effectively provided. You can find out which of the services is provided in any given area by checking the Admiralty List of Radio Signals Vol. 6 or the Admiralty Sailing Directions. Ports often provide port information which will indicate if VTS is provided, and what services to expect.

*\*Information Service (INS):*

All VTS centres provide an Information Service, which receives, processes and shares information about conditions and events important to shipping and safety at sea. VTS endeavours to deliver information that is timely, relevant and accurate. This may include information on:

- ✓ The position, identity or intentions of other vessels in the VTS area
- ✓ Visibility or weather
- ✓ Availability of berths or anchorages
- ✓ Status of aids to navigation
- ✓ Any other information that could affect a vessel's safe transit.

Vessels are provided information at regular broadcast intervals, on request or whenever circumstances so require.

*\*\*Traffic Organization System (TOS):*

VTS manages space in the waterway. This means VTS may:

- ✓ Allocate arrival or departure times
- ✓ Assign anchorage space
- ✓ Manage traffic in one-way zones
- ✓ Employ other measures related to preplanning vessel movements.

*\*\*\*Navigational Assistance Service (NAS):*

The VTS can provide positioning or navigation assistance on request, in times of uncertainty or if a vessel's navigation equipment is malfunctioning. Such assistance can also be given if the VTS deems it necessary. In providing navigation assistance, the VTS delivers advice to assist with onboard navigational decision-making.

This may include:

- ✓ Bearing and range to a nearby danger or landmark
- ✓ A course to make good to a waypoint
- ✓ Advice on a course to steer
- ✓ Assistance in determining a vessel's position.

Information to assist navigation decision making must be provided in a timely manner. It must be clearly understood by both parties and not open to misinterpretation. It is likely that Message Markers will be used as per IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP).

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► **What shipmaster expects from VTS:**

A VTS must be properly equipped, staffed, and organized to deliver the services.

*VTS Equipment:* Mariners can expect that VTS has complete and reliable communications coverage of its area of responsibility. Most VTS use radar and the Automatic Identification System (AIS) in order to detect, identify and monitor vessel movements. Modern VTS employ data processing systems to manage information and produce a reliable and accurate traffic image as the basis on which the VTS operator will base his or her decision-making. The VTS records all communications and activities within range of their sensors.

*VTS Personnel:* Authorities that provide VTS should train their VTS personnel to high international standards, in line with the types of services being provided. Just as mariners are trained to meet internationally agreed standards, VTS personnel have a similar training regime. VTS personnel are aware of the demands placed on the bridge team. Mariners should also be aware of the demands placed on the VTS operational team.

*VTS Procedures:* Most VTS operating procedures have been designed to meet international standards. For example, mariners can expect that VTS personnel are familiar with and, capable of, communicating using the IMO Standard Maritime Communication Phrases (SMCP). However, local conditions may also dictate how the VTS delivers services.

► **What is expected of the shipmaster:**

Co-operation and understanding between the ship and the shore are essential to the safe operation of vessels in a VTS area.

Masters are expected to make the best use of VTS in navigational decision making.

*Participation:* The regulations or instructions setting out the types or classes of vessels that are required or requested to participate in the VTS are identified by the VTS and set out in the Admiralty Sailing Directions. These instructions include the radio frequencies to use in communicating with the VTS and a detailed list of the information to be provided. VTS expects the bridge team to be alert and monitor the VTS frequencies at all times.

*Compliance:* Vessels operating in a VTS area should acknowledge information from the VTS when asked and respond promptly to inquiries. Shipmasters are expected to adhere to VTS operating procedures and react to all warnings, advice and instructions.

*Responsibility:* As in any navigation situation, navigators are expected to exercise good seamanship and comply with the Collision Regulations.

The authority of the Master is never compromised by participation in a VTS.

***More information on VTS may be found in IMO Resolution A. 857(20), the IALA VTS Manual 2016 and IALA recommendations and guidelines, available at [www.iala-aism](http://www.iala-aism)***

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