

Media release

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VRCA installs 'watchdog' to improve ship safety

The VRCA has installed sophisticated technology that automatically raises the alarm with marine authorities when ships drag their anchors in Geelong's harbour.

The 'watchdog' technology, delivered through an upgrade of the authority's GateHouse AIS Display system, means marine controllers can react proactively to prevent potentially dangerous situations including ship collision, stranding or grounding from arising.

The upgrade is part of the VRCA's ongoing commitment to safe navigation in Geelong's shipping channels network and anchorage zone. The authority has also invested more than \$60,000 to improve its VHF marine radio system.

Rough weather is usually the trigger for a ship to drag its anchor. It's a serious problem, with the potential for damage to the ship in question and nearby vessels.

All commercial ships entering Geelong's port waters must have Automatic Identification System transponders operating, allowing authorities to identify them and track their movements. The GateHouse upgrade uses the concept of 'watchdogs' to monitor AIS-enabled ships within the Geelong anchorage. When the ship drags its anchor across the zone's boundary, the watchdog generate alerts in VRCA headquarters and the port's Marine Control office on large display screens, by audible alarm and text message. The Harbour Master and duty marine controller also receive an SMS on their mobile phones, advising them of the potential danger at the anchorage.

The alerts allow marine controllers to warn the ship's captain of the problem so action can be taken to correct drift out of anchorage. The technology generates a de-activation alert after the ship stops dragging its anchor.

The upgrade also ensures the VRCA has a complete historical record of all incidents.

The VRCA, with ship safety again the driver, has upgraded the 10-year-old radio system used by the Geelong Harbour Master and the marine controller with VHF Marine radio access to Geelong's port. The upgrade includes:

- Replacing ageing base stations on the iconic GrainCorp silo with new ones to improve system reliability;
- Upgrading communications equipment in the Marine Control office including radios, handsets, recorder unit and software;
- And supplying the VRCA's communications centre with two new six-channel handsets providing access to channels six, eight and 12 and three Marine Controller local radios.

For more information, please contact Victorian Regional Channels Authority chief executive officer Captain Peter McGovern on (03) 5225 3500 or 0409 199 470.