AFMA recognises that some concession holders may find it impractical to have their VMS unit operating continuously. AFMA aims to assist concession holders that have a genuine and exceptional cause that prevents continual operation of their VMS.

The ICVMS conditions in Commonwealth permits and Statutory Fishing Rights (SFRs) provide the opportunity for concession holders to remain in compliance whilst the unit is switched off provided an arrangement is entered into with AFMA.

AFMA has formalised this process by requiring concession holders to enter into a Temporary Switch Off (TSO) arrangement.

Please be aware that TSO arrangements with AFMA are not intended to exclude or limit any State or Territory obligations. This means if a State concession says a VMS unit must be on, an AFMA TSO does not mean that this State requirement doesn’t apply.

1. Circumstances in which a TSO may be granted.

1.1 TSOs will only be granted in cases where a vessel has a VMS unit installed which has been polling for AFMA. TSOs will not be issued in respect of vessels which do not have a continuously operational VMS unit which is polling for AFMA.

1.2 A TSO may be granted to a concession holder in cases where:

1.2.1 A nominated vessel is undergoing maintenance or repair-type activity and electrical equipment on board this vessel is required to be shut down;

1.2.2 A nominated vessel is not undertaking any fishing activity and this vessel is in an extended berth at a single port;

1.2.3 A nominated vessel is in circumstances which make continual operation of the VMS impractical and AFMA deems it necessary, on a case-by-case basis.
2. The obligations of a concession holder when holding a TSO
Concession holders should be aware that they are legally responsible for complying with the concession conditions in respect of any vessel/s nominated to their concession/s. By accepting a TSO arrangement from AFMA, the concession holder agrees:

2.1 The nominated vessel will not undertake any fishing activity as defined under section 4 of the Fisheries Management Act 1991.

2.2 The nominated vessel will remain stationary at an elected point for the entire duration of the TSO unless they have contacted AFMA and received confirmation that the vessel is to be moved (this must be done prior to moving the vessel);

2.3 To ensure the VMS unit is operational before embarking on the first fishing trip after the TSO expires; and

2.4 To any other obligation set out by AFMA expressed in writing on the TSO response.

3. Ceasing a TSO before the expiry date

3.1 The concession holder may terminate the TSO agreement prior to expiry provided they have confirmed with AFMA that the VMS is operational*.

3.2 As stated in permit and SFR conditions, the VMS must be switched on and operational. It is the responsibility of the concession holder to ensure the VMS is operational by contacting AFMA Direct on 1300 723 621.

*In order to be operational, the unit must be sending position reports to AFMA at frequencies required by AFMA.
4. Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a Temporary Switch Off (TSO) and why do I need one?
A temporary switch off (TSO) is a formal arrangement with AFMA that acknowledges that a VMS unit will not be operational for a specified period of time. This arrangement protects you from breaching your permit conditions when your VMS is not operational. If the VMS unit is not operational without a TSO being issued then the concession holder may be held liable for breach of their permit conditions.

2. I don't have an operational VMS, can I get a TSO?
No. TSOs will not be issued where a vessel does not have a VMS unit installed which has been polling for AFMA. A TSO may be given in exceptional circumstances such as extended berthing, maintenance or accidental damage.

3. I move my boat before the end of the TSO?
No. The vessel must remain at the location specified for the duration of the TSO unless you have contacted AFMA and given notification that the vessel is to be moved. This must be done prior to moving the vessel.

4. When will my TSO expire?
Your TSO will expire when one of the following occurs:
- The negotiated period expires;
- The vessel leaves the specified berth;
- The vessel returns to port from being at sea under a TSO.
If it is necessary you must contact AFMA and arrange a new TSO before the existing one expires.

5. How do I apply for a TSO?
You should apply for a TSO as soon as you become aware that your VMS is or will be non-operational. Simply fill out an ‘Application for VMS Temporary Switch Off’ form and send it to AFMA by Fax: 02 6225 5440
Email: vmsreporting@afma.gov.au
Mail: Data Processing
Australian Fisheries Management Authority
PO Box 7051,
AFMA will notify you of the outcome of your application. For any further enquiries, refer to the website http://www.afma.gov.au/industry/vms/default.htm or contact AFMA Data Processing on 02 6225 5369 or AFMA direct on 1300 723 621. If you are prompted to leave a voice message, please leave details as requested.