



Fact Sheet:

Maritime Military Firing Practice and Exercise Areas

Introduction

Military firing practice areas may be selected anywhere and details are published in the Australian Government Gazette or the Designated Airspace Handbook (published on the Air Services Australia website).

Chart Symbology

Frequently used firing practice areas are depicted on charts using the following symbology:

<i>Electronic Navigation Chart (ENC)</i>	<i>Paper Nautical Chart (PNC)</i>

Mariners should not to enter these areas unless in an emergency situation.

Notification of Warnings

Warnings of firing practices are promulgated as Notices to Airmen (NOTAM) originated by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). NOTAMs are published by Air Services Australia on their website. Where possible, military firing and practice activity affecting areas of surface navigation will be issued by one or more of the following services: Notices to Mariners (NTM); AUSCOAST (coastal areas) or NAVAREA X (longer range) radio-navigational warnings– see section 8.4.1.

As clear range procedures are followed no broadcast warnings will be issued in respect of weapons firing practices, major exercises will be the subject of special warnings. Vessels approaching weapons practice areas are requested to maintain a radio listening watch.

Shoalwater Bay Training Area (Queensland) closures are circulated by Queensland Department of Transport Notices to Mariners which are published on their website.

Air Services Australia website:	www.airservicesaustralia.com
Maritime Safety Queensland website:	www.msq.qld.gov.au/Notices-to-Mariners.aspx
AHO website:	www.hydro.gov.au
Shoalwater Bay Training Area Range Control Telephone: +61 7 4935 5000 Facsimile: +61 7 4935 5024 Email: shoalwater.bay@defence.gov.au	

Visual warnings:

- Ships engaged in firing practices fly a red flag by day.
- Ships and aircraft carrying out night exercises may illuminate with bright white flares.
- All safety craft, target towers or control launchers for radio controlled targets will display:
 - a large red flag at the masthead
 - a painted canvas strip (1.8 metre x 0.9 metre) with red and white or red and yellow checks in 0.3 metre squares on the foredeck or cabin roof.

Vessels should comply with requests made by Range Safety Craft.

The absence of warning signals cannot be accepted as evidence that a practice is not taking place.

Cautions

Range authorities are responsible for ensuring that there should be no risk of damage due to the firing to any vessel in the practice area. Clear Range Procedure means firings cannot take place where such a risk exists. If, however, a vessel finds herself in an area where a practice is in progress she should maintain her course and speed, however if she is prevented from doing so due to the navigation situation, she should endeavour to clear the area at the earliest possible moment.

Fishermen operating near firing practice and exercise areas may occasionally bring unexploded ordinance or portions of them to the surface in their nets or trawls. These objects may be dangerous and should be treated with great circumspect and jettisoned immediately. No attempt should be made to tamper with them or bring them back for inspection by Navy authorities. Such objects should be reported immediately to JRCC Australia or the Police.

Precautions taken by units undertaking firing practice

All such firings are conducted under Clear (Air and Sea) Range Procedure. This includes confirming that any area in which a firing is scheduled to take place is confirmed to be clear both by radar and visually, including wide clearance arcs either side of the intended direction of firing, and any potential ricochet area. Firings are invariably delayed if the area is not clear, or if a vessel has the potential to stray into a previously clear area.

Devices are generally incorporated whereby the missiles may be destroyed should their flight be erratic.

While the sound of weapons being fired may occasionally be heard by passing vessels, this does not mean they are in any danger – sound may carry considerably further at sea than might be expected due to prevailing winds and the lack of any high land features to dissipate the sound.

Types of firing practices

The principal types of practices carried out are:

- Aircraft:
 - Bombing practice, generally at targets on a coastal (or inland) bombardment range.
 - Air to air firing practice, by aircraft at a large white or red sleeve, a winged target, or flag towed by another aircraft moving on a steady course.
 - Air to sea (or ground) firing practice - the former is carried out at towed or stationary targets, while the latter may be carried out against targets on a coastal bombardment range.
- Surface (sea / land) to air:
 - Anti-aircraft firing from sea or land to air - this may be from AA guns, machine guns or missiles at a target towed by an aircraft, a pilotless target aircraft or, at balloons or kites.
- Surface to surface:
 - At fixed or floating targets on the sea, primarily using small calibre weapons.
 - At targets on a coastal bombardment range, primarily using large calibre (loud) guns.
 - At remote controlled craft - these are 6.4 metre surface craft, orange in colour and carry no distinctive shapes or lights. They are however, fitted with navigation lights appropriate to their size in accordance with the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972. Such craft are remotely controlled from helicopters, ships and occasionally from the shore.
- Rocket and guided weapons firing may occasionally be undertaken in conjunction with or in lieu of gun firing practice for air to air, air to surface, or surface to surface firings.