

SAFETY AT SEA - Safety at Sea Update

Good morning,

Here's some information on a piece of equipment that would be a great addition to every boat: a cost-effective, portable AIS transponder.

This standalone unit records and stores up to 24 hours of voyage data, which must be downloaded within that period for longer-term storage. It is available in both 5W and 10W versions, and when operating beyond the range of coastal AIS stations, it can still be monitored via satellite—we've successfully tracked a unit more than 65 miles offshore.

Designed with durability in mind, these devices are commonly used to locate fishing gear at sea, meaning they are robust, waterproof, and built for tough conditions. The 5W model offers an impressive battery life of up to two weeks when transmitting every three minutes. Increasing the transmission rate (for example, every 30 seconds) will reduce battery life but still provides more than sufficient endurance for a day at sea.

This makes it an excellent safety tool, particularly for offshore anglers and vessels operating far out, such as those fishing beyond Struisbaai. Its compact, fully self-contained design means it can be stored in a grab bag, used on jet skis, or even fitted into a PFD for paddlers. It remains operational in emergency scenarios—capsize, dismasting, flooding, blackout, or even from a life raft—making it a highly reliable backup system.

While it does not transmit a distress signal, it continuously broadcasts key information such as position, vessel name, dimensions, and speed. This allows it to appear on other vessels' chart plotters and be picked up by shore stations, enhancing visibility and situational awareness. It can also serve as a primary AIS transmitter for vessels not already equipped with one.

It's worth noting that AIS operates on VHF and is therefore line-of-sight dependent. Increased power does not always equate to greater range, as reception quality also depends heavily on the sensitivity of receiving stations. Shore-based systems are typically very well tuned and offer excellent coverage.

After further discussion, the RS 109M portable AIS transponder has been identified as a particularly suitable option—affordable, practical, and highly effective for improving safety at sea.

This is not just for larger vessels; paddlers and canoeists, especially those operating along routes such as Miller's Point to Fish Hoek, should also consider carrying one. The same supplier offers handheld GPS and DSC radios at very competitive prices.

For more information, you can contact Holger Heye at Recent-Radio on +27 82 859 1609. Be sure to mention SBM when you get in touch.

Stay safe out there.

