

# Sound Signals

There are many sound signals in use on the water way. There are a few that are known to most as they are minimum knowledge required for NSW boat licence requirements.

However there are many sound signals that are used or rather can be used by vessels, usually commercial vessels to indicate various things. These can include being used by a vessel that is higher in the hierarchy of “give way” vessels, and that sound signal can indicate that a vessel has “right of way” over your vessel.

Sound signals come under **RULE 35 of the COLREGS**. Here are all the sound signals and their meanings

## Definition of a long / short sound signal





A prolonged ‘horn blast’ is a sound signal that is four (4) to six (6) seconds in duration

This is indicated by the symbol: 

A short ‘horn blast’ is a sound signal that is approx one (1) second in duration

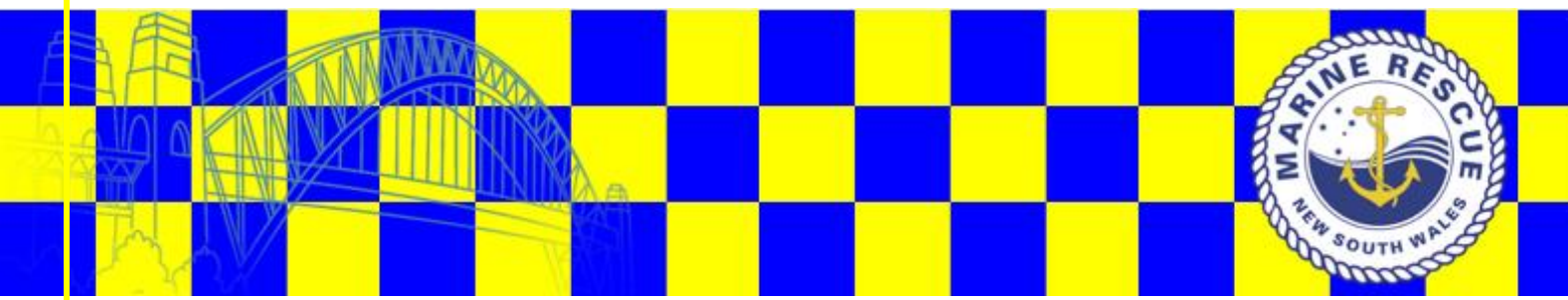
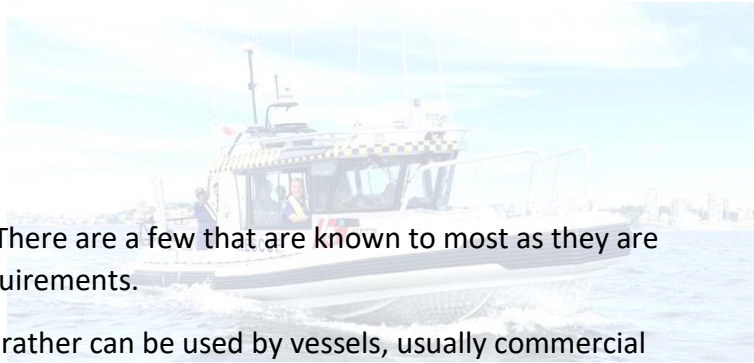
This is indicated by the symbol: 

## Basic Sound Signals





Sound	Description	Meaning
	One Short	I am altering course to <b>STARBOARD</b>
	Two Short	I am altering course to <b>PORT</b>
	Three Short	I am operating <b>ASTERN PROPULSION</b>
	Five Short	Make your intentions clear ( <b>DANGER SIGNAL</b> )

Note that Three Short Horn Blasts does not mean ‘I am going backwards’. A vessel may make this sound signal while steaming ahead, meaning they will operate astern propulsion in an attempt to slow down or stop, but some vessels may take several hundred meters to stop. Vessels may also emit this sound signal when reversing away from a wharf. Commonly heard where commercial ferries reverse (such as Circular Quay in Sydney Harbour).

Five short horn blasts is the danger signal. A vessel may emit this if the skipper believes another vessel is not taking action to avoid a collision.





Overtaking Sound Signals

Sound	Description	Meaning
	Two long, One Short	I intend to overtake on your <b>STARBOARD</b>
	Two long, Two Short	I intend to overtake on your <b>PORT</b>
	Long, Short, Long, Short	<i>Response:</i> I agree with your intention to overtake
	Five Short	<i>Response:</i> I do NOT believe that is safe to do so

The first two sound signals above are emitted by a vessel about to overtake. The final two sound signals are emitted by the vessel being overtaken, either agreeing that the overtaking manoeuvre is safe to do or not safe to do.

Making Way / Not Making Way Sound Signals For Power Driven Vessels


Sound	Description	Meaning
	One Long	Vessel making way (“here I come, sounding ONE”)
	Two Long	Vessel NOT underway

The sound signals above are used by power driven vessels when in restricted visibility or when rounding a blind corner in a river or channel. The signal “Here I come sounding ONE” is used to indicate to other vessels that you are motoring along but cannot see around the corner. It can also be used in fog or other restricted visibility situations. If you here this, you can also respond with the same sound signal if you are making way. If you are stopped in the water, your response would be TWO long horn blasts.

*Define: MAKING WAY* – A vessel is propelling its self through the water, for example, using engines to “make way” through the water.

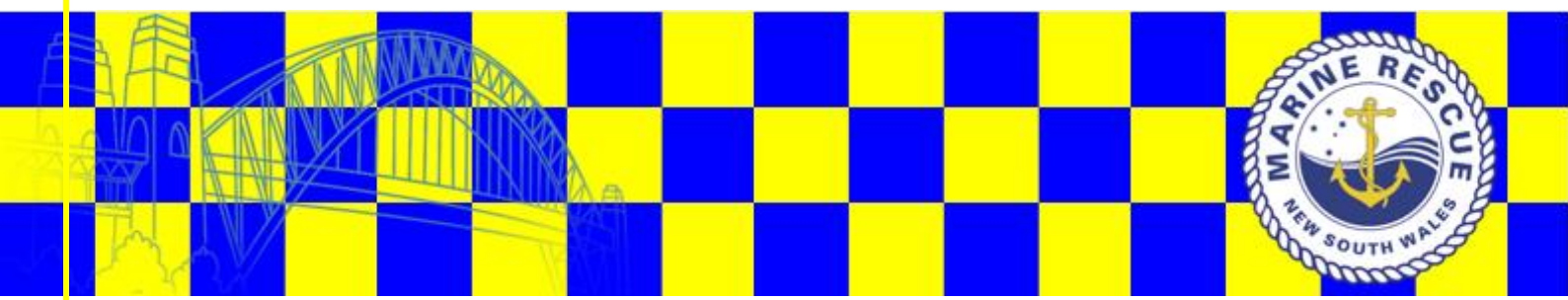
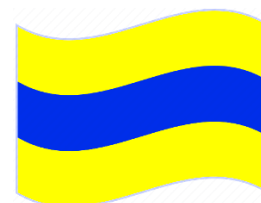
*Define: UNDERWAY* – A vessel is not fixed to a wharf or anchored/moored, so is “underway” or drifting. They are not “making way” as they are not propelling themselves through the water.

Manoeuvring With Difficulty (Lame Duck Signal)



Sound	Description	Meaning
	One Long, Two Short	Vessel manoeuvring with difficulty

The sound signals One Long and Two Short is used to indicate a vessel manoeuvring with difficulty. This can be emitted by a sailing vessel, a vessel restricted in its ability to manoeuvre (RAM), a vessel not under command (NUC), a vessel constrained by draught, a fishing or trawling vessel, a barge etc. If you were to hear this signal, immediately look for lights or day shapes that will help identify what type of vessel as it may claim “right of way” over your vessel.

*Note: the sound signal represents DELTA and the D Flag (seen right) represents a vessel manoeuvring with difficulty.*






**Towing Sound Signals**

Sound	Description	Meaning
	One Long, Two Short	Vessel Towing (front vessel)
	One Long, Three short	<i>Response:</i> Last vessel / object being towed

As above, One Long and Two Short is used to indicate a vessel manoeuvring with difficulty, in this case, a vessel towing. The sound signal is emitted and immediately after, the last vessel or object being towed would emit One Long and Three Short to identify where the tow length ends.

*When rigidly connected, use the signals for a power driven vessel, not the towing signals*

**Anchored Sound Signals**



Sound	Description	Meaning
	Bell, rapid ringing for 5 seconds	Under 100m: Anchored
	Bell, rapid ringing for 5 seconds at the fore part of vessel followed by a gong sounded aft	Over 100m: Anchored
	Short, Long, Short	You are running in to danger, or there is a risk of collision

Vessels at anchor emit the sound signal above every one (1) minute.

The sound signal ‘One Short, One Long, One Short’ can be used when a vessel is approaching to identify there is a risk of collision.

Vessels of up to 20metres in length are not required to make the sound signals as prescribed above but must make an efficient sound signal at intervals of not more than two (2) minutes.

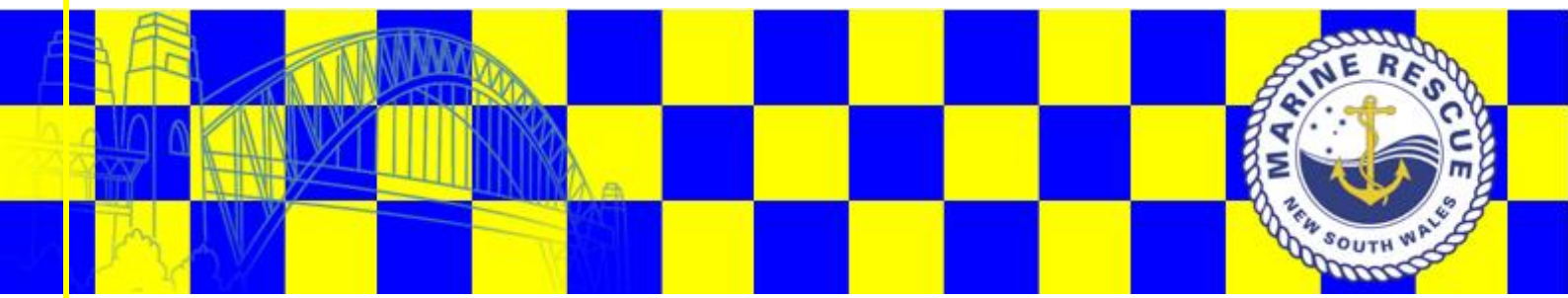
**Vessels Aground Sound Signals**

Sound	Description	Meaning
	Three bells, rapid ringing of bell, three bells	Under 100m: Aground
	Three bells, rapid ringing, three bells in the fore part of vessel, a gong sounded aft	Over 100m: Aground

Vessels at anchor emit the sound signal above every one (1) minute. Same as the Sound Signal for Anchored, but **MUST** sound three separate and distinct bells before and after the rapid ring of the bell.

**When To Emit Sound Signals**

Sound signals are normally emitted every two (2) minutes in restricted visibility but can also be used as per text in this document. When at anchor or aground, the sound signals need to be emitted every one (1) minute.



### Other Sound Signals You May Hear

Navigational aids, such as buoys can also be fitted with sound signal apparatus so that they can be identified. In Sydney Harbour, Junction Bell is a North Cardinal Marker that indicates the separation of the Eastern and Western Channels to the North. The buoy has a bell that rings when the wave action near the buoy has enough force to rock the marker.

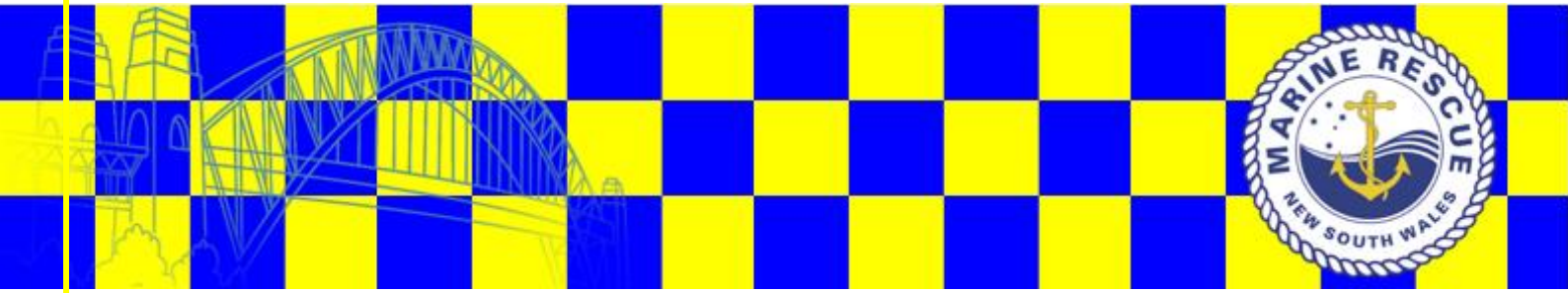


### Turning ‘about’ Sound Signals

The below sound signals are not commonly in use in Australia and are **NOT** part of the **COL-REGs** under *Rule 35 – “Sound signals in restricted visibility”*






Sound	Description	Meaning
●●●● ●	Four Short, Pause, One Short	I intend turn about to <b>STARBOARD</b>
●●●● ●●	Four Short, Pause, Two Short	I intend turn about to <b>PORT</b>

The sound signals above are used when a vessel is turning more than 135 degrees from their present course, usually when turning about (changing course to the reciprocal meaning turning right around to where they have come from). Note: *the above two sound signals are not commonly used in Australian waterways.*



Emergency Sound Signals On Board a Vessel

The below sound signals are set by IMO (International Maritime Organisation) for SOLAS (Safety of Lives at Sea) compliant vessels. These sound signals are **NOT** part of the **COL-REGs** by adopted for use within the maritime industry

Sound	Description	Meaning
	Three long	<b>Person Overboard</b> The MOB alarm signal comprises the vessel's internal alarm bell for 3 long rings to notify the crew onboard, along with 3 long blasts on the ship whistle to inform the other ships in the nearby vicinity
	Continuous Sounding	<b>Fire alarm</b> Fire suppression systems activated (Fire on board). Usually accompanied with a visual alarm (eg: rotating beacon). <b>Activation:</b> can be by any person who sees a fire. <b>Action:</b> Proceed to fire station and prepare to fight the fire.  On smaller vessels, a verbal command of " <b>Fire, Fire, Fire</b> " may be shouted to indicate a fire on board.
	Seven short, one long	<b>General Alarm</b> The general alarm on the ship is recognized by 7 short ringing of bell followed by a long ring or 7 short blasts on the ship's horn followed by one long blast. It can be used for collision, grounding, or any other scenario which could lead to abandoning ship.  <b>Activation:</b> is usually via the bridge by the Duty Officer <b>Action:</b> proceed to muster station(s).
	Prepare to Abandon Ship	<b>Prepare to Abandon Ship</b> Usually proceeding the General Alarm, a <b>verbal</b> order from the vessel skipper  <b>Action:</b> Muster on the main deck with your lifejacket, await instructions and be prepared to assist in launching life rafts.
	Abandon Ship	<b>Abandon Ship</b> Usually proceeding the General Alarm, the <b>Abandon Ship</b> is a <b>verbal</b> order from the vessel skipper and indicates all personnel are now to abandon ship  <b>Action:</b> Launch life rafts and enter as per instructions.

