Ramble – Communications Plan

Prepared by Mathew McKernan

Scope

This document outlines the available resources in terms of communications for my Ramble being conducted in North East Victoria and the Snowy Mountains over the Melbourne Cup Holiday weekend.

Key Points

This area of Victoria and New South Wales has little to no reception available on mobile telephones. As a result, this is a key consideration in devising this plan.

Communications Methods

Local Communications – Vehicle to Vehicle

All vehicles participating in the ramble are expected to have a UHF CB Radio fitted, operating off the vehicles power supply. If this is not possible, then a handheld may be used with three full sets of spare batteries.

Wide Area Communications

Communications with the wider world, the following methods can be employed:

- UHF CB Radio Repeaters
    - Unlikely to provide any assistance in an emergency but is available if needed. Repeaters in this part of the world are few and far between.
- Mobile Phones
    - A number of participants have mobile phones that operate on the Optus Mobile Network. These will be of little use, but will operate in major towns.
    - There are a number of participants with mobile phones that operate using Telstra's NextG network which provides good coverage in rural Victoria and New South Wales.
- Amateur Radio (2m and 70cm)
    - Four participants have their foundation radio licence, which permits operation on the amateur radio network. There are a number of repeaters on this network and have the capability to make emergency calls for assistance if required. This network also has the benefit that there are people who are genuinely willing to assist available.
- HF Radio
    - HF Radio has good operating record for emergencies. There is one vehicle fitted with a HF Radio with up to date authorities to permit access to the VKS 737 Network and Radtel Network.
    - Coverage is excellent and is virtually nation wide in the right conditions. There are about 8 bases around Australia on both Radtel and VKS737 networks which will ensure we have adequate communication during the trip.
    - Additionally, we will be carrying an "Emergency Antenna" for the radio, in case the antenna auto-tune fails or is broken in the case of a roll-over or similar. Without a working auto-tuner, the radio is useless without an emergency antenna kit.

    - RadTel:
        - Permits direct dialling to any phone number within Australia at a timed rate. Additionally, has “freecall” operators who are available 24/7 via radio who can contact emergency services as required.
    - VKS 737
        - Operator based network whereby a user can obtain assistance via a direct dial from the radio.
        - Operator can mobilise emergency services and also make contact with emergency contacts to inform them of a situation.
        - If provided with a “trip plan”, they will assist and monitor as required via “skeds”. Skeds allow travellers to check in and inform VKS-737 of their progress and location.
        - It is intended to use the facility of the “sked” process from VKS737
        - We will be providing our trip plan to VKS737 and checking in on our journey.
- CFA VHF Radio
    - In an absolute emergency and if no other methods work, this may be used to contact one of the many CFA Communications Centres (“VicFire”) around the state.
    - Permitted to be operated by a CFA member for official CFA purposes or in a genuine emergency by any member of the public.
- EPIRB
    - Provides GPS location direct to emergency services.
    - Most reliable method of calling for help by unskilled persons.
    - Can trigger a “cavalry” style response, as the remote emergency services are not aware of the exact situation.

Training

A minimum of three members will be trained on the operation of the HF Radio before we leave for the ramble. The operation of the other communications media are already well trained upon for those attending.

Preference Table

In the case of an emergency to make contact with services:

Unit	Availability	Preference
Optus Mobile Phone	3 Vehicles	1st
Telstra Mobile Phone	3 Vehicles	2nd
HF Radio	1 Vehicle	3rd
Amateur Radio	3 Vehicles	4th
UHF CB	All Vehicles	5th
CFA VHF Radio	1 Vehicle	6th
EPIRB	1 Vehicle	7th

Callsigns

The following are the Official Call Signs for the respective network:

- Amatuer Radio:
    - Tom Maddison: VK3FTOM
    - Lachy Gordon: VK3FLRG

    - Matty McKernan: VK3FMJM
- VKS-737:
    - Matty McKernan – VKS737 Mobile 2458
- Radtel:
    - Selcall ID: 2458

Urgent / Emergency Messages to Group During Ramble

As phone reception is minimal, contacting the group during the trip for an urgent issue back home is a challenge. However, Radtel & VKS737 can attempt to call our group while away. This is done by contacting one of the VKS737 or Radtel Bases and leaving a message.

The operators will attempt to contact the relevant radio and let us know to call someone who is looking for us. Please note that this service is on one of Matty's radios, so leave a message for Matty and we'll try to get back in contact. This process takes 1-2 hours for the message to be sent though.

Option 1 – Radtel:

Call 02 4943 1745 and leave the message.

You'll need to provide these details:

Name: Mathew McKernan
Selcall Number: 2458

If Radtel cannot help you, try contacting VKS737. Radtel will try to "call" the radio to deliver the message.

Option 2- VKS 737

Call 08 8287 6220 and leave the message.

You'll need to provide these details:

Name: Mathew McKernan
Callsign: Mobile 2458
Travellers Location: Snowy Mountains
Your Name
Your contact number
The message you want to leave. The message can be urgent or important, urgent messages will result in VKS737 trying to deliver the message by calling the radio or it will be delivered during the daily "sked".

Vehicle Radio Fleet Data

Car #	Driver	UHF	Amateur (2m/70cm)	HF Radio	Mobile Phone
1	Matty McKernan	✔	✔	✔	✔
2	Lachy Gordon	✔	✔		✔
3	Tom Maddison	✔	✔		✔
4	Brod Helmers	✔			✔
5	Daniel Hansen	✔	✔		✔