

FACT SHEET: Paper Nautical Charts

Understanding Paper Nautical Chart symbology

Nautical charts use a standardised system of symbols and conventions that must be clearly understood to ensure safe navigation. Variations in chart presentation provide important information about data quality; for example, dashed depth contours with upright soundings indicate older or incomplete survey data, while continuous contours with sloped italic soundings represent modern and more reliable surveys.

Charts follow internationally recognised symbols and abbreviations developed by the International Hydrographic Organization, enabling consistent interpretation by mariners worldwide. A standardised colour scheme—typically white, blue, green and yellow—distinguishes water depths, land and intertidal areas. In addition, nautical charts display critical information including charted depths, hazards, recommended tracks, Traffic Separation Schemes, landmarks and navigational aids.

Accurate interpretation of these symbols is essential to maintain situational awareness and support safe, informed decision-making in both paper and electronic navigation environments.

For information regarding the accuracy and reliability of Electronic Navigation Charts, refer to AHP20 'Mariners Handbook for Australian Waters:

www.hydro.gov.au/prodserv/publications/ahp20.htm



