

Other AIS uses

Although developed to locate shipping, the AIS specification allows it to branch out to other areas, notably MOB location and 'virtual' navigation marks. McMurdo and Weatherdock are already marketing AIS SARTs, designed either to be clipped to a lifejacket or deployed by hand. In an MOB situation they can be tracked by any AIS receiver and used to locate the wearer.



Smartfind S5 AIS SART



EasyRescue AIS SART

AIS transmitters are already fitted to many aids to navigation, and the system is being used increasingly to provide virtual marks, for example to mark a wreck until a physical marker can be deployed. These are set by an approved authority and, if your AIS receiver and plotter's software allows, will show a symbol on the chart in the appropriate position. The symbols below are those approved by the International Hydrographic Organisation for use on shipboard ECDIS navigation systems.



Virtual AIS beacons are shown on the chart by symbols such as these with the legend 'V-AIS'

PBO verdict

For most of us, AIS will be an add-on to an existing system. Fortunately, the plethora of units now available means there is an off-the-shelf solution for most people, whether you choose to treat it as a separate device with its own screen or integrate with your existing electronics.

Nearly all models support NMEA 0183, but if you have a more modern system running NMEA 2000 or a manufacturer's proprietary protocol your choice will be narrower.

The table (right) summarises the key points of all the models we could find readily available for sale in the UK, notably whether the receiver is dual or single channel, whether a splitter is integrated and whether GPS is built-in. Many models without GPS have a useful function which accepts a GPS input and multiplexes it with the AIS output so that you can use a single input on your plotter – these are marked 'Input' in the GPS column.

AIS units at a glance

	Rx/Tx	Type	Channels	Splitter	GPS	Output	Cost (£)
Amec www.mantsbrite.com							
Camino-101	Tx	Black box	2	N	Y	NMEA 0183, RS232, Bluetooth (opt)	600
Camino-201	Tx	Display	2	N	Y	NMEA 0183, RS232, Bluetooth (opt)	798
Comar www.comarsystems.com							
AIS-2-2000	Rx	Black box	2	N	N	NMEA 2000	275
AIS-3R	Rx	Black box	2	N	Input	NMEA 0183, USB	238
CSB 200	Tx	Black box	2	N	Y	NMEA 0183, RS232	500
Digital Yacht www.digitalyacht.co.uk							
AIS100	Rx	Black box	2	N	N	NMEA 0183	119.94
AIS100	Rx	Black box	2	N	N	USB	128.95
AIS100 Pro	Rx	Black box	2	N	Input	NMEA 0183, USB	152.95
AIS200N2Net	Rx	Black box	2	N	Input	NMEA0183x2, NMEA 2000, USB	299.95
AISnet base station	Rx	Black box	2	N	N	USB, Ethernet	399.95
ANT200	Rx	Antenna	2	N	Input	NMEA 0183	159.95
ARX100	Rx	Black box	2	N	Input	NMEA 0183, USB	229.94
iAIS	Rx	Black box	2	N	Input	WiFi, NMEA 0183, USB	386.94
uAIS	Rx	Antenna	2	N	N	USB	199.94
AIT2000	Tx	Black box	2	N	Y	NMEA 0183, NMEA 2000, USB	499.96
CLB2000	Tx	Black box	2	N	Y	NMEA 0183, USB	849.95
Furuno www.furuno.com							
FA30	Rx	Black box	2	N	Input	NMEA 0183, Ethernet	579
FA50	Tx	Black box	2	N	Y	NMEA 0183, Ethernet	1079
Garmin www.garmin.com							
AIS300	Rx	Black box	2	Y	N	NMEA 0183, NMEA2000	300
VHF 300 AIS	Rx	Black box	2	Y	N	NMEA 0183, NMEA2000	660
AIS600	Tx	Black box	2	Y	Y	NMEA 0183, NMEA2000	650
Icom www.icomuk.co.uk							
MXA-5000	Rx	Black box	2	Y	Input	NMEA 0183, RS232	240
MA-500TR	Tx	Display	2	N	Y	NMEA 0183x3	650
MarineGadget www.radargadgets.com							
AIS	Rx	Dongle	Alternates	N	N	USB	99
NASA Marine www.nasamarine.com							
AIS Engine 3	Rx	Black box	Alternates	N	Input	NMEA 0183, RS232	120
AIS Radar	Rx	Display	Alternates	N	Input		220
Navicom www.mantsbrite.com							
RT650	Rx	Display	2	Y	Input	NMEA 0183	300
Raymarine www.raymarine.co.uk							
AIS350	Rx	Black box	2	N	Input	SeaTalkNG, NMEA 0183, USB	345
AIS650	Tx	Black box	2	N	Y	SeaTalkNG, NMEA 0183, USB	690
Sevenstar www.prscomms.com							
2RxPRO	Rx	Black box	2	N	Input	NMEA 0183, USB	185
SeaViewer	Rx	Black box	2	N	Y	NMEA 0183, RS232	392.50
SeaTraceR	Tx	Black box	2	N	Y	NMEA 0183, RS232	439
Simrad www.simrad-yachting.com							
AI50	Tx	Display	2	N	Y	SimNet, NMEA0183	840
NAIS-400*	Tx	Black box	2	N	Y	NMEA 2000, NMEA 0183, USB	600
Standard Horizon www.standardhorizon.co.uk							
GX2100e	Rx	Display	2	Y	Input	NMEA 0183	290
True Heading www.navigatebyus.com							
AIS RX Carbon+	Rx	Black box	2	Y	N	NMEA 0183, USB	199.99
AIS CTRX Graphene	Tx	Black box	2	N	Y	NMEA 2000, NMEA 0183, USB	688.69
AIS CTRX Graphene+	Tx	Black box	2	Y	Y	NMEA 2000, NMEA 0183, USB	945.49
Vesper Marine www.vespermarine.co.uk							
WatchMate 750	Rx	Display	2	N	Input	NMEA 0183	406
WatchMate 850	Tx	Display	2	N	Y	NMEA 0183, USB	767
WatchMate Vision	Tx	Display	2	N	Y	WiFi, NMEA 2000, NMEA 0183, USB	1068
XB-8000	Tx	Black box	2	N	Y	WiFi, NMEA 2000, NMEA 0183, USB	681
Weatherdock www.echopilot.com www.prscomms.com							
easyAIS A025	Rx	Black box	2	N	Input	NMEA 0183	209
easyAIS-IS A043	Rx	Black box	2	Y	Input	NMEA 0183, USB	299
easyTRX A023	Tx	Black box	2	N	Y	NMEA 0183	509
easyTRX-IS A050	Tx	Black box	2	Y	Y	NMEA 0183, USB	659

* This product is also available from B&G