



## File formats

Unlike Word Processors or Spreadsheets: mapping software –in general- deals with many different file formats. There are two basic file formats:

- Raster
- Vector

**RASTER** files are usually big, slow your computer down and clog up your hard disc. They can be described as “digital photo copies” of what used to be shown on paper. Because they need to contain the “entire paper” they are so big.

The generic name of this file type is “**Bitmap**”.

Examples of standard bitmaps are :

- \*.bmp
- \*.tiff
- \*.jpg (so called j-peg)
- \*.ecw

\*.bmp files are usually the biggest, but can have the best possible clarity.

\*.tiff files are a bit awkward: there are several different structures within this file format and MM can not cater for all of them- avoid using them. It is a ‘compressed’ format: image quality is traded for the sake of less data volume. Although faster than bmp files: Tiff files are not the fastest to get on screen.

\*.jpg files are fast to get on screen, take the least memory but quality is compromised

\*.ecw fastest to get on screen, also a ‘compression format’, file sizes slightly bigger than jpg’s.

Because raster files are “digital copies” the image is ‘pixelated’ and thus the image can only be shown at a specific (intended) scale. When you zooming in further than that you will see the “grain” of the image.

**VECTOR** files only record the map object through their mathematical characteristics: thus these files are ‘scale independent’. You can zoom in to endless detail without losing any clarity. Because of this file sizes are, in relation to bitmaps, much smaller. (However “DXF” files can be quite bulky....)

Vector files are digital drawings, created in various different software packages.

Examples are:

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Map Maker:</b> | *.dra  |
| OS                | *.ntf  |
| AutoCad:          | *.dxf  |
| ArclInfo:         | *.shp (so called: ‘shape’ files)                         |
| MapInfo:          | *.MIF (Map info Exchange format –paired with *.MID file) |

(Map Maker can read all of these 3 files as they are, but when you want to manipulate them you need to convert them to Map Maker’s native \*.DRA format.

Because map maker can work with a multitude of files (even Word Documents and Excel files), when looking for a file you must always first “**filter out**” the desired file extension.

## File Management

With digital mapping you definitely need to have a very high level of discipline with regards to file management. It is the very nature of this type of work that many files are needed and many files are created. Not only different output & input files, but you will soon also be making all sorts of variations to existing maps to show a slightly different aspect of your work. On top of that you end up creating all kinds of different versions as you work up to your final product.

To keep track of all these files, design a directory structure that works well for you. (One folder per project or one for each different file type for example. One folder for “Work in Progress” other folders for “Final” work etc.)

As soon as you have completed a job: take the time to clear up the folders and delete all help, temp, and not needed files....

(Learn the use of **Windows explorers** and set it to “Classic” to show all file “Details”).