

HALF YEARLY OVERVIEW 2025



IFC- I R



INFORMATION FUSION CENTRE – INDIAN OCEAN REGION
COLLABORATION FOR SAFETY AND SECURITY

HALF-YEARLY COMPARISON

2198

2072

1854

H1-24

H2-24

H1-25

East Africa

- *The Centre monitored 205 incidents in H1-25, a 25% decrease from 274 in H1-24 and a 13% decrease from 236 in H2-24.*
- *Maritime incidents (123), Irregular Human Migration (28), IUU Fishing (20), Contraband Smuggling (18), Piracy and Armed Robbery (13) and Maritime Environment Pollution (03) constituted the reported incidents.*

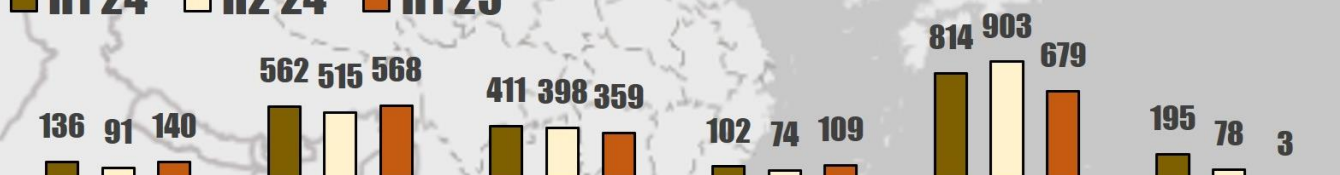
Gulf of Guinea

- *19 incidents of Piracy and Armed Robbery, compared to 14 in H1-24 and 15 in H2-24.*
- *Higher number of hijacking and kidnapping incidents, especially on the Nigerian waterways (six attacks on passengers vessels saw abduction of 51 persons and two deaths). Besides these six attacks, five vessels were boarded offshore (3 crew members abducted) and eight were boarded while at anchor by perpetrators.*

West Asia

- *153 incidents monitored in West Asia in H1-25, a 56% decrease from 350 in H1-24 and a 23% increase from 124 in H2-24.*
- *Contraband Smuggling (67), Maritime Incidents (33) Irregular Human Migration (29), IUU Fishing (14), Cyber Security Threats (04), Maritime Security Threats (03), Marine Environment Pollution (02) and Piracy and Armed Robbery (01) constituted the reported incidents.*
- *Despite a dip in large-scale attacks, hybrid maritime threats persist in West Asia. Incidents included a Palau-flagged tanker hit by gunfire off Yemen (10 Jan), a US-flagged ship harassed near Ras Tanura (24 Jan), and a suspicious boarding attempt near Jebel Ali, UAE (10 May), highlighting ongoing regional risks.*

■ H1 24 ■ H2 24 ■ H1 25



P & AR

CS

IUUF

IHM

MI

MST(HYBRID)

CLUSTER COMPARISON

South Asia

- The Centre monitored 314 incidents in H1-25, a 17% decrease from 380 in H1-24 and a 18% decrease from 381 in H2-24.
- Contraband Smuggling (134), Maritime Incidents (105), IUU Fishing (57), Piracy and Armed Robbery (10), Irregular Human Migration (05) and Marine Environment Pollution (03) constituted the reported incidents.

Southeast Asia

- The Centre monitored 1,163 incidents in H1-25, a 5.5% decrease from 1,231 in H1-24 and an 18% decrease from 1,266 in H2-24.
- Maritime Incidents (418), Contraband Smuggling (328), IUU Fishing (268), Piracy and Armed Robbery (97), Irregular Human Migration (47), Marine Environment Pollution (04) and Cyber Security Threats (01) constituted the reported incidents.

INDIAN OCEAN REGION
MARSEC OVERVIEW H1 - 25



PIRACY & ARMED ROBBERY

H1-24
136

H2-24
91

H1-25
140



vs H1-24
3%

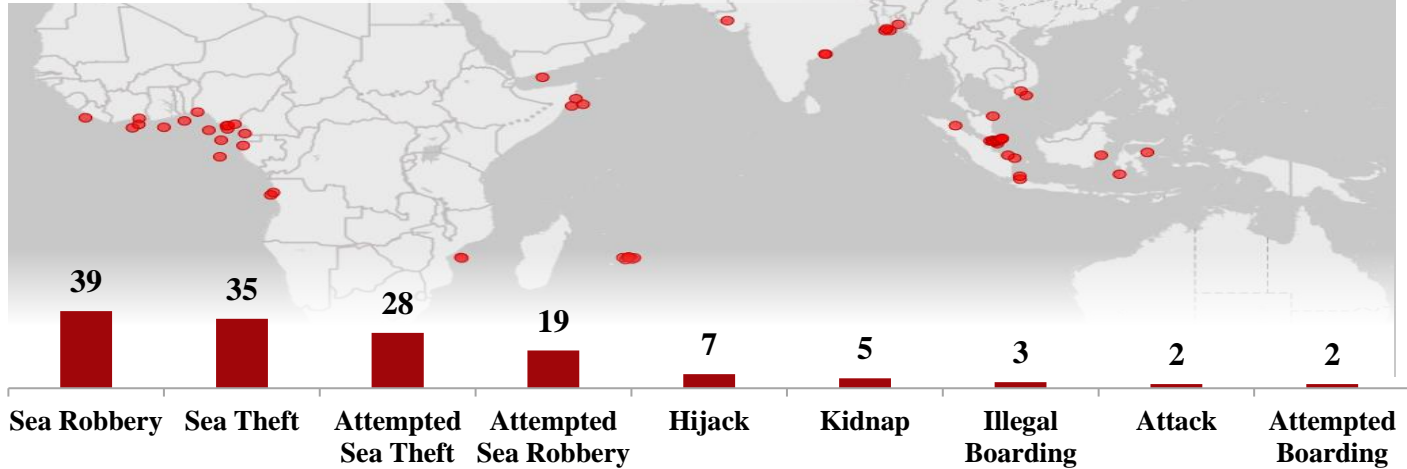
vs H2-24
54%



504
PERPETRATORS /
APPREHENDED



56
INJURED



WEAPONS USED



31 Guns

24 Knives

02 Hammers

01 Knives and Metal Bars

15 UNK

STATUS OF VESSEL

97 Underway

23 Anchored

11 Alongside

09 UNK

TIME OF INCIDENT



Day
19



Night
106

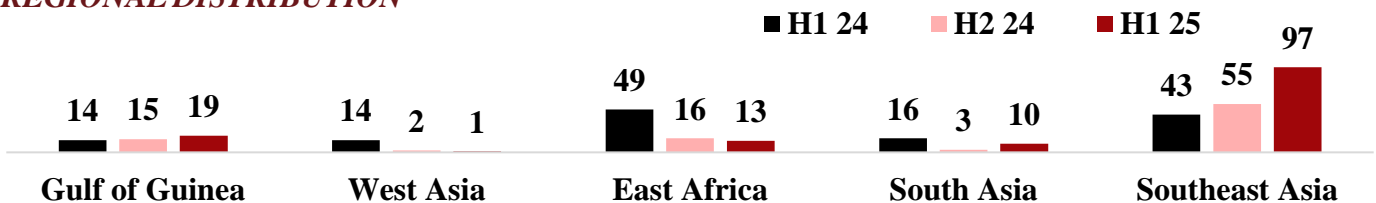


UNK - 15

OVERVIEW

- In H1-25, the Indian Ocean Region saw a rise in piracy and armed robbery incidents, driven mainly by increased sea thefts and robberies in Southeast Asia. While East Africa and West Asia recorded fewer incidents, Southeast Asia experienced a sharp surge.
- Within Southeast Asia, Bulk carriers and tankers were the primary targets, often attacked at night and within 12 nautical miles of the coast. Offenders typically used small crafts and fled upon detection or alarm.

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION



Gulf of Guinea. Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea witnessed resurgence, reversing earlier declines and once again making it a dangerous region with incidents of crew kidnappings and violent maritime crime. After a period of reduced activity, attacks have shown an upward trend since Dec 24. Increased incidents of hijacks and kidnaps, especially on the Nigerian waterways (six attacks on passenger vessels saw abduction of 51 persons and two deaths). Besides these six attacks, five vessels were boarded offshore (3 crew members abducted) and eight were boarded while at anchor by perpetrators.

2025

H1

HALF YEARLY
OVERVIEW



PIRACY AND ARMED ROBBERY

East Africa. Piracy in East Africa has seen a substantial decline, which may be attributed to effective international naval presence in Gulf of Aden and East Africa. Efforts of Somalian authorities in the fight against IUU fishing, which is a known cause for piracy, has also contributed to this decline. The reduction in piracy reflects enhanced coastal security and faster response times, but ongoing instability and economic hardship in Somalia present persistent risks. While the situation at sea has improved, vigilance and coordinated security efforts remain essential to prevent resurgence.

Among all the events monitored, the attack on the Russian flagged oceanographic vessel MV ATLANTIDA off Mozambique on 12 May 25 by militants is a cause of concern, as it is the first known militant attack on a foreign vessel in the area.

West Asia. Similar to H2-24, incidents of Piracy and Armed Robbery have remained low in West Asia when compared to H1-24, wherein Piracy and Armed Robbery incidents had flared up. The presence of multinational forces and robust intelligence sharing among regional and international actors have certainly deterred the perpetrators. Shifting shipping patterns and heightened vigilance due to warnings from amidst ongoing West Asian crisis have also limited the opportunities for attacks.

On 15 Apr 25, an incident of attack was reported on a vessel about 100 nm E of Aden, Yemen. Reportedly, the vessel was followed by armed persons in multiple small craft for approximately two hours with shots being fired towards the vessel.

South Asia. Piracy in South Asia witnessed a 23% increase compared to H2-24, with an increase in incidents reported off Bangladesh, primarily involving sea robbery and theft targeting vessels anchored at night. These incidents raise serious concerns over the growing aggression and violence displayed by perpetrators.

On 26 May 25, perpetrators boarded MV SEJYOTI at Mongla Port, tied up the crew, and escaped with crane grabs, wire ropes, engine bearings, fuel oil and personal belongings. In another incident on 09 Apr 25, multiple fishing trawlers were attacked and 27 fishermen were injured during a violent assault at sea.

Southeast Asia. Of the 140 piracy and armed robbery incidents reported in H1-25, Southeast Asia accounted for 97, making it the most affected region. The majority of these incidents involved petty thefts, comprising both actual and attempted sea robberies, predominantly occurring at night or during periods of reduced visibility, particularly in the Singapore Strait and adjacent channels. A temporary decline in incidents was observed in Apr 25, likely due to intensified patrols and adverse weather conditions. However, a subsequent increase in May 25 may be attributed to improved weather. Perpetrators, typically in small groups of three to five armed with basic weapons, primarily targeted vessels underway, stealing ships' items and engine spares. The continued prevalence of such low-level maritime crimes highlight the critical need for enhanced surveillance, sustained patrols and strengthened regional cooperation for securing these vital shipping routes.

CONTRABAND SMUGGLING

H1-24
562

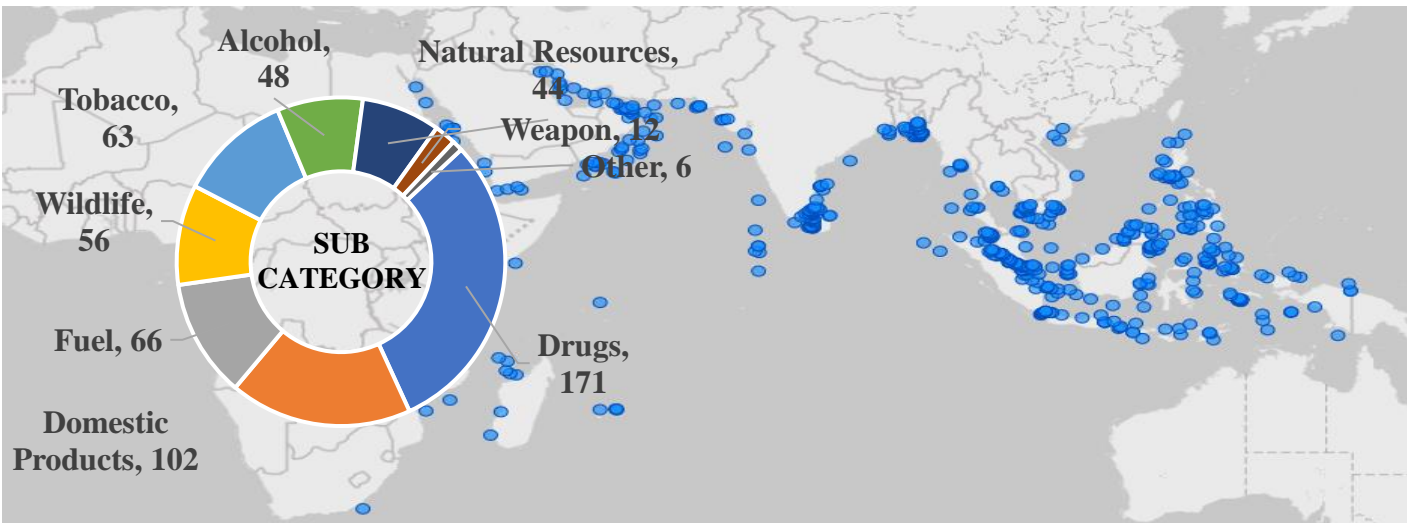
H2-24
515

H1-25
568



vs H1-24
01%

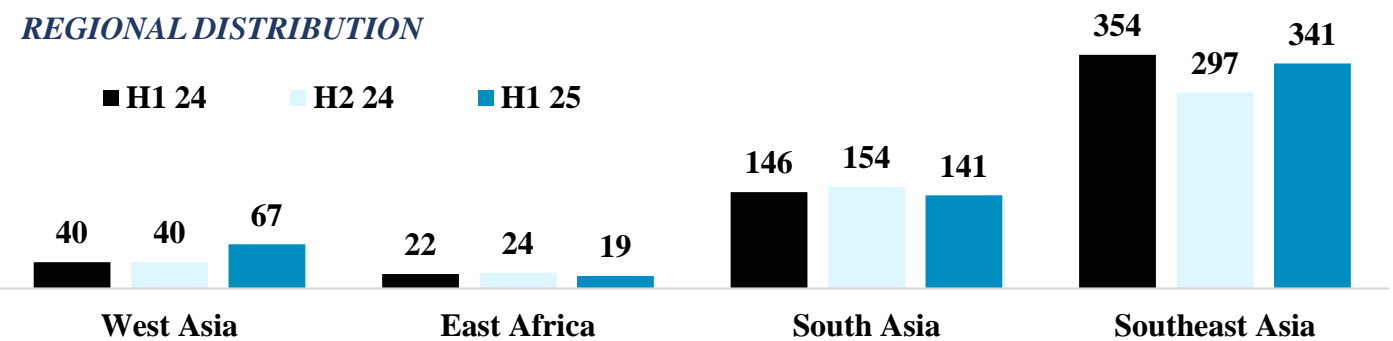
vs H2-24
10%



OVERVIEW

- H1-25 comparison with preceding periods suggests an overall surge in seizure activities during the first half of the year, followed by a relative decline in the second half.
- This may be attributed to the rough and unfavourable sea conditions typically prevailing from June to October (period aligns with the Southwest Monsoon season), which can impact smuggling operations and enforcement activities alike.
- Narcotic seizures remain the highest contributor to Contraband Smuggling incidents.
- A notable surge in seizure of Opioids was observed in H1-25 (5,447 kgs), an eight-fold increase in seizure compared to 2024 (678 kgs).
- The Golden Triangle remained the most prominent source of synthetic drug trafficking, particularly methamphetamine, which continues to be the most frequently seized narcotic (103 incidents).

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION



DRUGS SEIZURES



20
Opioids



45
Cannabinoids



30
Other



102
ATS

2025

H1

HALF YEARLY
OVERVIEW



CONTRABAND SMUGGLING

West Asia

- 41 of 67 contraband smuggling incidents were drug seizures, making it the most dominant sub-category.
- Amphetamine-Type Stimulants (ATS), especially Captagon pills and methamphetamine constituted the highest seizure percentage.
- The interception of large quantities of opioid-based narcotics in the Arabian Sea highlights sustained trafficking activity, despite opium ban in the Golden Crescent region.
- The majority of these seizures occurred at ports, where smugglers attempted to conceal the narcotics within household items.

East Africa

- Nine of 19 instances were of drug smuggling.
- While contraband smuggling instances reflect a downward trend compared to H1-24 (22) and H2-24 (24), persistence of drug smuggling incidents suggests continued use of this region as a key transit corridor for narcotics such as cocaine.

South Asia

- 57 of 141 contraband smuggling incidents were of drug smuggling and 28 were of domestic product smuggling.
- While the number of drug smuggling incidents in South Asia (59) is lower than Southeast Asia (67), a significant volume of narcotics was intercepted in South Asia, revealing large-scale drug trafficking within the region.
- A significant portion of the total seizures in the region were made in Bangladesh (27) and Sri Lanka (17), reflecting effective surveillance and enforcement efforts.

Southeast Asia

- Among the total 341 incidents in Southeast Asia, the most frequent seizures included domestic products (68 incidents) and narcotics (64 incidents).
- The region continues to be a key transit and destination point for synthetic drugs trafficked via maritime routes, primarily due to its proximity to the Golden Triangle.
- Other than narcotics, several other contraband seizures were frequently made which included fuel (54), tobacco (51), wildlife (46) and alcohol (35). These smuggling activities are largely driven by significant price disparities and varying regulatory controls across countries in the region.

NOTABLE SEIZURES

- **North Arabian Sea (22 May 25)** HMS *Lancaster*, under Combined Task Force 150, intercepted a dhow carrying 1,000 kg of heroin, 660 kg of hashish and 6 kg of amphetamines (Captagon pills).
- **Southeast Asia – Malaysia (25 Jan 25)** Malaysian custom officials seized 33,200 kg of methamphetamine disguised as cosmetic ingredients in 166 drums at Klang Port, valued at USD 239.5 million.

IUU FISHING

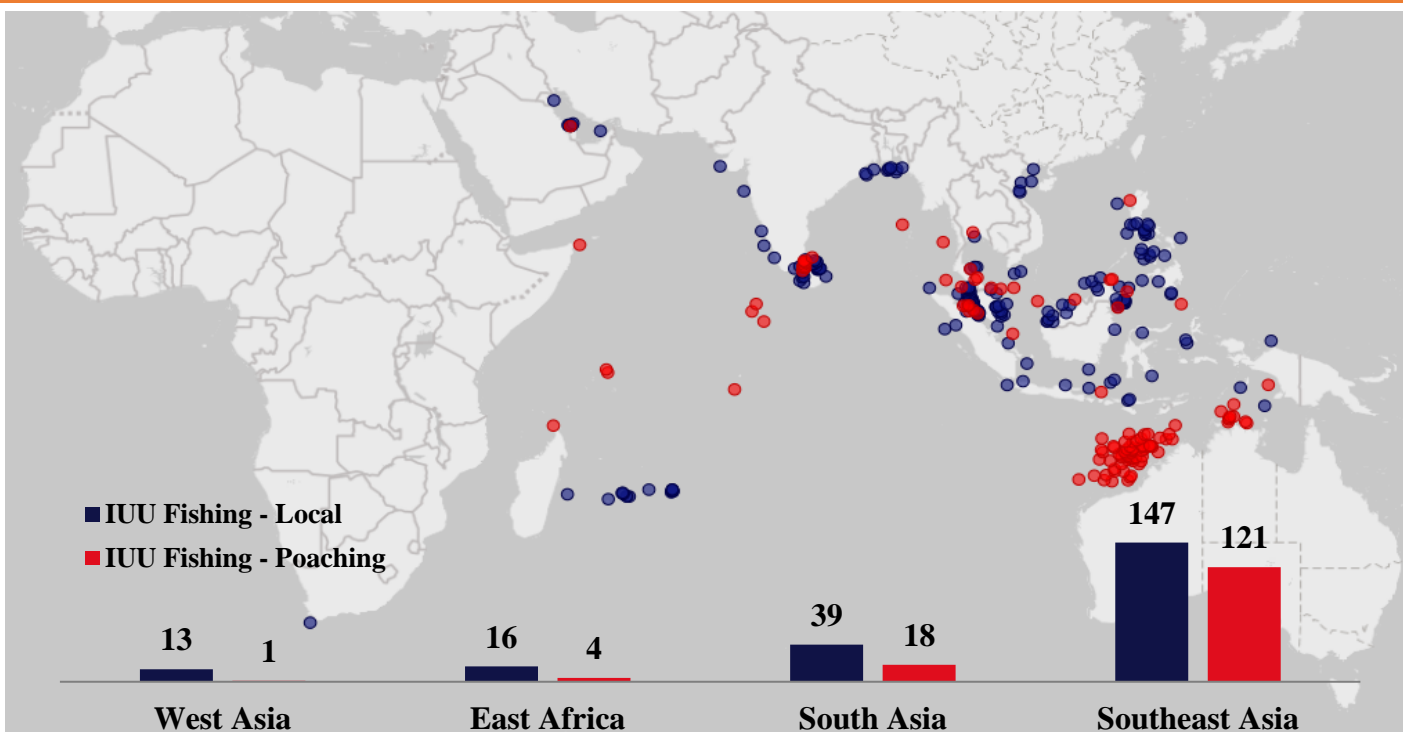
H1-24
411

H2-24
398

H1-25
359

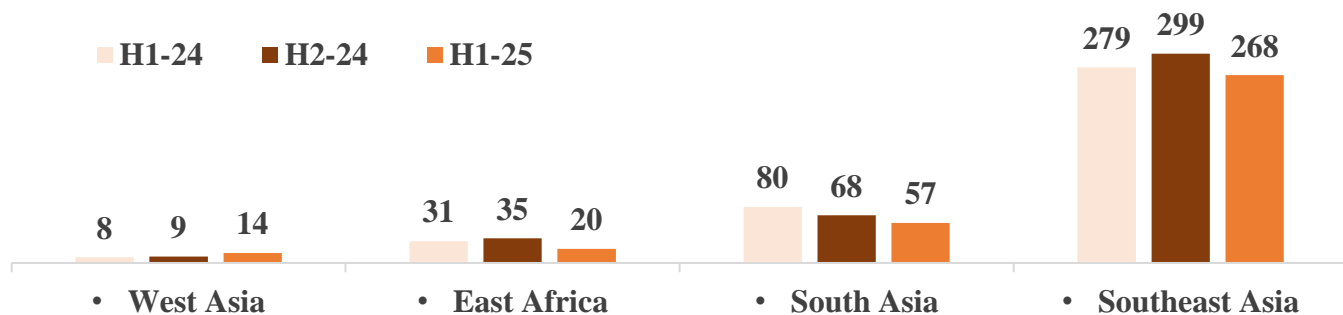
vs H1-24
13%

vs H2-24
10%



OVERVIEW

- H1-25 witnessed a significant decline in IUU fishing in comparison to H1 and H2-24.
- Most incidents involved either foreign vessels entering territorial waters illegally or local fishers using banned fishing, blast fishing, bottom trawling, light-coarse fishing, night diving, and shrimp fishing methods like fine-meshed nets and unlicensed gear.
- Southeast Asia accounted for nearly 75% of the total incidents, highlighting the effectiveness of enforcement agencies in recording, reporting and responding to such incidents.



West Asia

- Ten of 14 incidents were seizures of illegal nets and traps
- Only one incident of Poaching.

East Africa

- Four of 20 incidents were of Poaching
- Poaching incidents involved 48 fishermen

South Asia

- 46 of 57 incidents were reported off India and Sri Lanka
- 14 of 18 incidents of Poaching off India and Sri Lanka, where 182 fishermen and 29 fishing boats were apprehended/ seized.

Southeast Asia & Australia

- 121 of 268 cases were of Poaching
- More than 8,900 kg of Sea Cucumber & 351 fishing vessels seized.

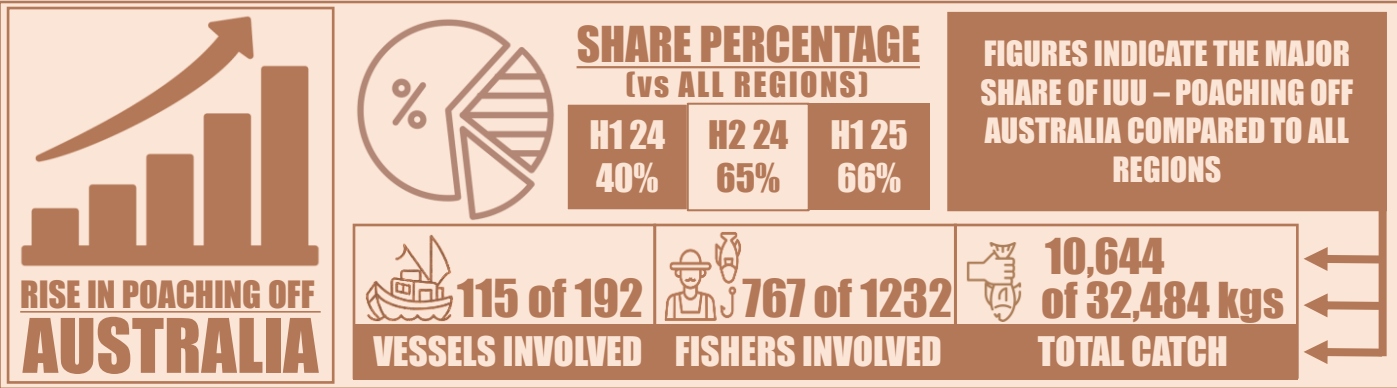
2025

H1

HALF YEARLY
OVERVIEW

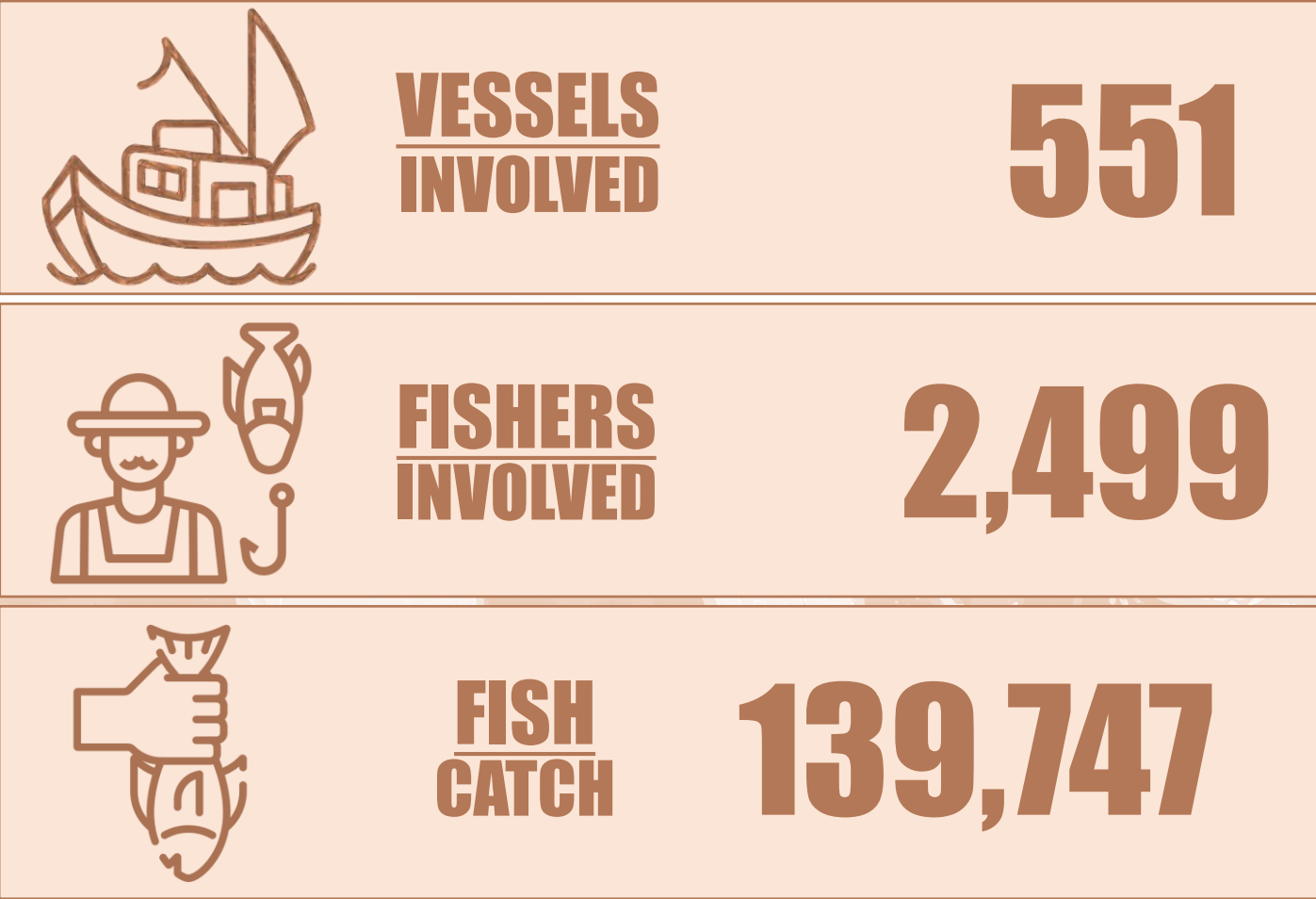


IUU FISHING



TREND ANALYSIS

Poaching in Southeast Asia and North Western Coast of Australia. There is a clear rising trend of foreign poaching in Southeast Asia and off the North Western Coast of Australia (see figure above). The high incidence of foreign fishermen engaging in IUU fishing in Australian waters is driven by a confluence of factors; depleted waters in adjacent countries due to overfishing, high market value of Australian species such as sea cucumber, shark fin and reef fish in Asian markets, poverty and lack of alternatives combined with geographical proximity to accessibility by neighboring countries are some of them.



IRREGULAR HUMAN MIGRATION

H1-24
102

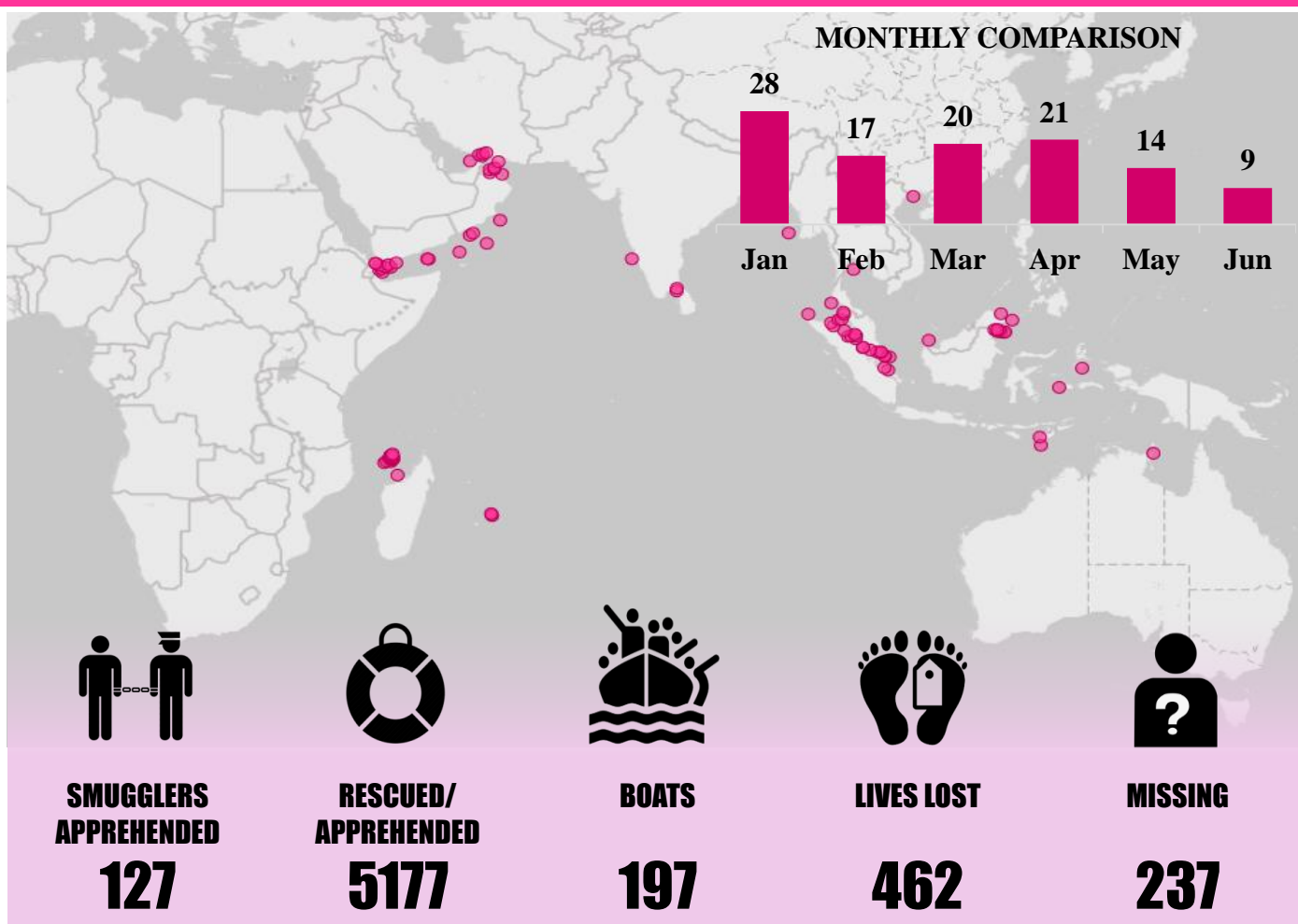
H2-24
74

H1-25
109



vs H1-24
07%

vs H2-24
47%



OVERVIEW

- H1-25 saw substantial increase in IHM incidents, with concerning casualties (462 lives lost and 237 missing), substantially greater than those in H1-24 (127 lives lost and 228 missing).
- Observed trend indicates that despite rising casualties, more individuals are risking their lives in illegal and perilous sea migration.
- May 25 recorded the highest number of deaths (427)*.
- Unsafe migration from East Africa towards oil-rich Gulf countries through Yemen has been a cause of concern.

Three major incidents heavily contributed to the number of casualties in H1 25.

- *On 18 Jan 25, a boat carrying 37 migrants capsized off the coast of Taizz, Yemen, resulting in 20 fatalities. Earlier during same month, Yemen authorities intercepted two boats near Kida Beach in Rudum, Yemen, carrying 336 migrants from East Africa, exposing the scale of human smuggling operations.*

**On 09-10 May 25, two boats with 514 irregular human migrants sank off Myanmar. Reportedly, 87 migrants were rescued and 427 lost their lives.*

2025

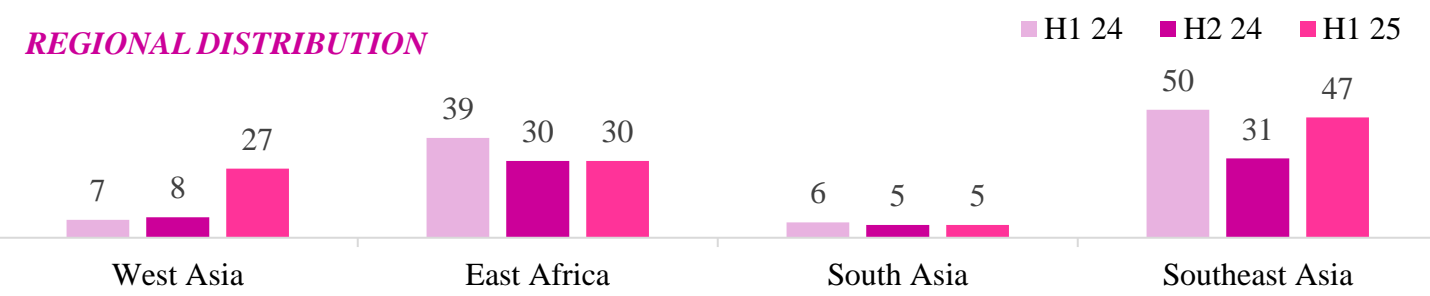
H1

HALF YEARLY
OVERVIEW



IRREGULAR HUMAN MIGRATION

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION



Regional Migration Trend

Region	Rescued / apprehended	Smugglers Apprehended	Missing	Lives Lost	Boats Involved
West Asia	1934	15	215	20	18
East Africa	1441	67	22	10	140
South Asia	247	-	-	5	3
Southeast Asia	1555	45	-	427	36

West Asia

- Persistent illegal migration attempts from East African nations are towards the Gulf countries via Yemen. Use of unseaworthy overcrowded vessels during such attempts, coupled with harsh sea conditions, resulted in capsizing of several boats off Yemen, with over 200 migrants reported missing or deceased.
- Oman has emerged as one of the preferred destinations for illegal migrants from various Asian countries. Repeated interceptions by Omani authorities along the Batinah, Musandam and Sadah coasts indicate persistent irregular migration attempts into Oman.

East Africa

- Mayotte remained the most preferred destination for illegal migration, with French authorities routinely apprehending large numbers of migrants (1347 migrants and identified smugglers) with small boats (136 kwassa-kwassa boats seized).
- The dangerous nature of illegal crossings from East Africa to Yemen can be corroborated through two tragic incidents off Djibouti in Mar and Jun 25, resulting in atleast 10 confirmed deaths and 22 migrants missing.

South Asia. Five incidents of IHM recorded are in this region during H1-25, mostly involving fishing trawlers used for transport. Notably, Bangladesh authorities successfully foiled two significant irregular migration attempts from South Asia to Southeast Asia wherein five lives were lost.

Southeast Asia. Most active region with highest IHM incidents, mostly involving wooden boats, passenger ferries and fishing vessels. While the incidents in this region involved a high number of migrants (1,555), only one incident resulted in fatalities wherein two boats with 514 irregular human migrants sank off Myanmar of which only 87 migrants were rescued and 427 (estimated) lost their lives.

MARITIME INCIDENTS

H1-24
814

H2-24
903

H1-25
679

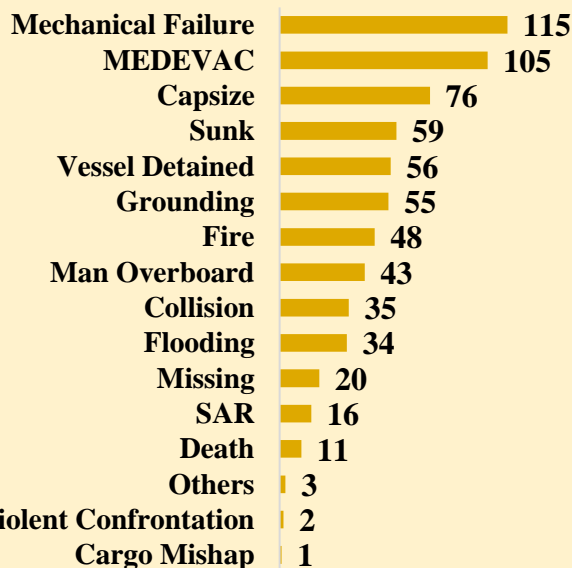
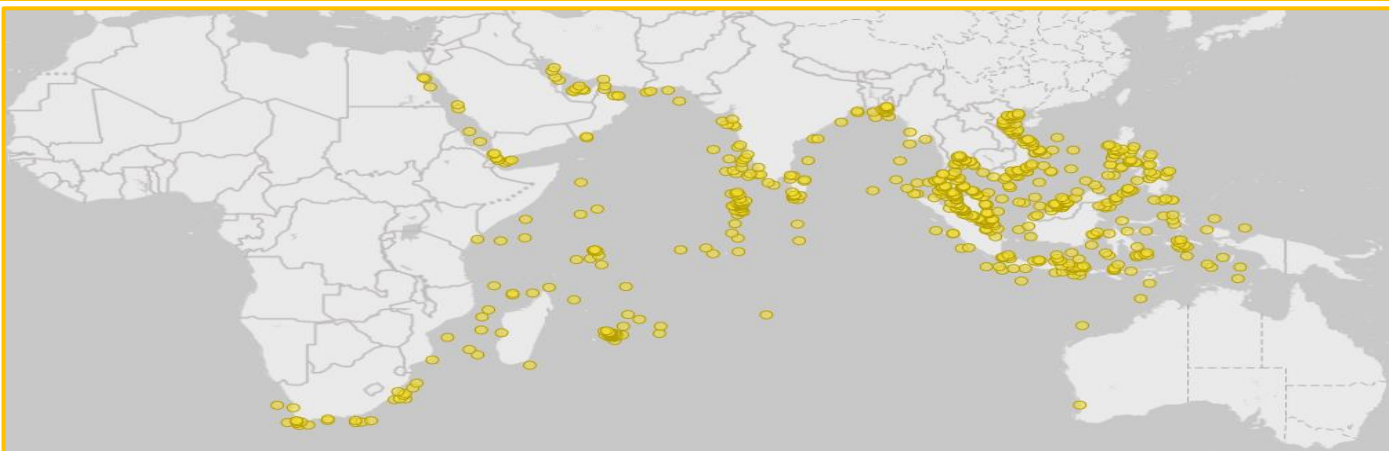


vs H1-24

17%

vs H2-24

25%



CLASSIFICATION OF INCIDENTS

179

Incidents affecting individuals

442

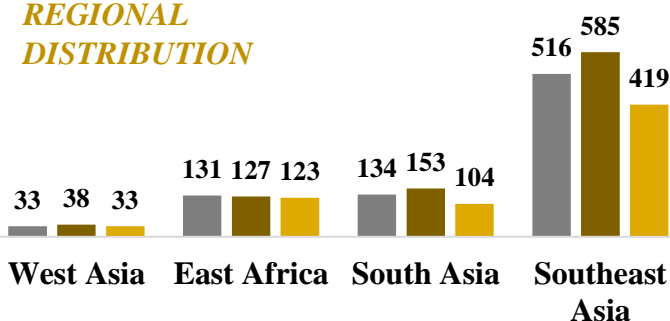
Incidents affecting vessels

58

Incidents with legal connotations

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION

■ H1 24 ■ H2 24 ■ H1 25



3394
RESCUED



169
DEATHS



400
MISSING

OVERVIEW

- Mechanical failure and MEDEVAC were the top contributors to maritime incidents during the period.
- Safety challenges remain with more than 4000 personnel affected by such incidents.
- Weather disturbances were a major contributor, especially impacting smaller vessels.
- Southeast Asia recorded the highest number of incidents, followed by East Africa, South Asia and West Asia.

West Asia - In West Asia, unclassified vessels (UNK, generally smaller vessels whose category is unknown owing to no AIS data) faced the highest numbers of incidents and related fatalities. Such incidents were mainly related to Irregular Human Migration from East Africa to Middle East (four incidents of vessels capsizing during failed migration attempts resulting in 215 missing persons and loss of 24 lives). Large vessel categories (merchant and passenger vessels) reported a moderate number of incidents. Notable incidents were the fire onboard *YI CHENG 6* and the collision between tankers *ADALYNN* and *FRONT EAGLE* on 17 Jun 25, which led to a major fire on *ADALYNN*. However, no casualties were reported.

2025

H1

HALF YEARLY
OVERVIEW



MARITIME INCIDENTS

East Africa – In East Africa, passenger vessels (smaller pleasure craft, yachts and passenger ferries) accounted for the highest number of incidents, which mainly comprised MEDEVACs and groundings. On 19 Jun 25, the Madagascar-flagged passenger vessel *AZFARDATH & WINDIO* went missing northwest of Madagascar with 11 crew and 19 passengers onboard. Large merchant vessels, though involved in fewer incidents, accounted for the majority of MEDEVACs (15 MEDEVACs, mainly off Mauritius and South Africa). A large number of MEDEVACs off Mauritius and South Africa may be attributed to the re-routing of traffic along Cape of Good Hope amidst the West Asian Crisis. Fishing and unclassified vessels (smaller vessels) remained particularly vulnerable, with several lives lost (11)/missing (40) (mostly due to weather-related incidents resulting in sinking/ capsizing of vessels).

South Asia– In South Asia, fishing vessels experienced the highest number of incidents (mainly involving MEDEVACs - 13 and Mechanical Failures - 10). Passenger vessels (mostly smaller-sized crafts except *MV CELEBRITY MILLENNIUM*) faced incidents mainly related to weather and vessel upkeep (capsized vessels, flooding, mechanical failure and fires), accounting for one death and five missing persons. Larger vessel categories faced fewer but highly concerning incidents in H1-25, revealing critical onboard safety lapses. The *MSC ELSA 3* capsized in heavy weather off Kochi due to flooding and a reported explosion below deck, in cargo hold area, occurred onboard *WAN HAI 503* - both saw critical involvement of IFC-IOR in enabling prompt response and saving lives. On 13 Jun 25, an Indian crew member requiring medical evacuation from *EAGLE VERACRUZ* was rescued off Kochi - a life was saved through seamless information sharing and operational coordination at IFC-IOR.

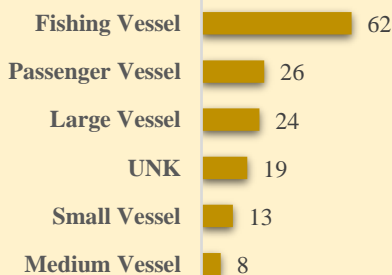
Southeast Asia – In Southeast Asia, small fishing and wooden vessels were involved in the majority of incidents, with many linked to bad weather conditions and structural vulnerabilities. These included capsizing, engine failure and flooding, often leading to emergency evacuations or vessel abandonment. Passenger vessels, primarily smaller boats, also suffered due to rough seas and inadequate maintenance, resulting in several fatalities and missing persons, including at least eight confirmed deaths and over 17 reported missing. Larger commercial and merchant vessels were less affected, with moderate incident rates and limited casualties, typically due to better weather resistance.

Malaysia saw frequent vessel detentions for lacking valid documents, mostly within its waters. A total of 337 people were involved, including many foreign crew, mainly from Myanmar, Indonesia and China.



Heavy Weather At Sea

VESSELS AFFECTED DUE TO WEATHER

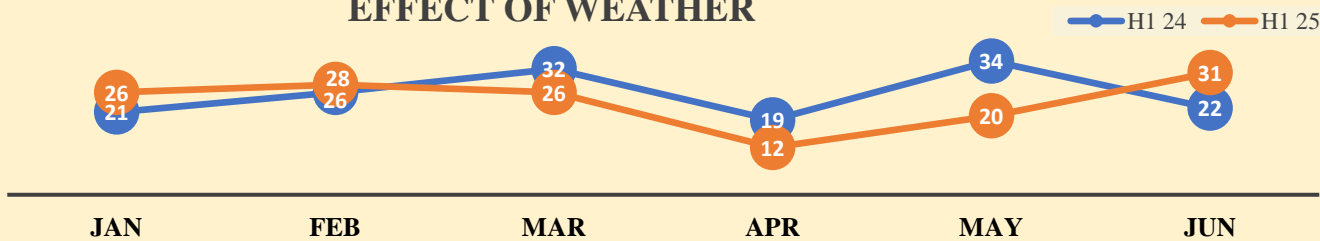


Vessel Vulnerability in Heavy Weather

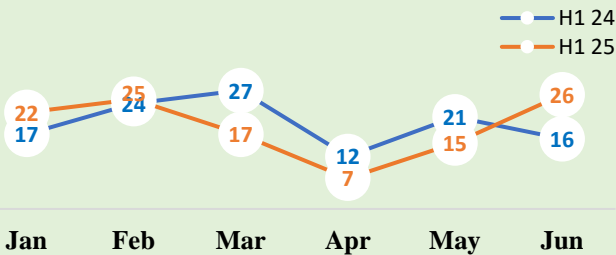
Southeast Asia faced the highest vessel impact, dominated by fishing (51) and passenger vessels (17). **South Asia and East Africa** reported moderate involvement, primarily fishing, passenger and other small vessels. **West Asia** experienced minimal cases. The data indicates that fishing and passenger vessels are most vulnerable to heavy weather across all regions.

MARITIME INCIDENTS

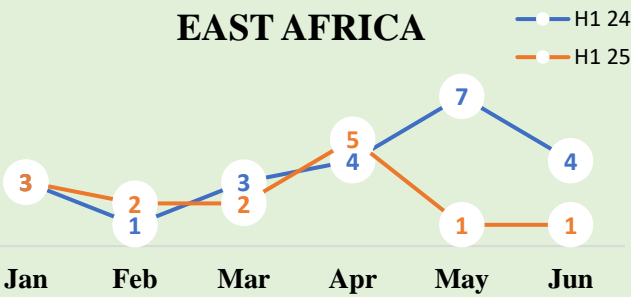
EFFECT OF WEATHER



SOUTHEAST ASIA



EAST AFRICA

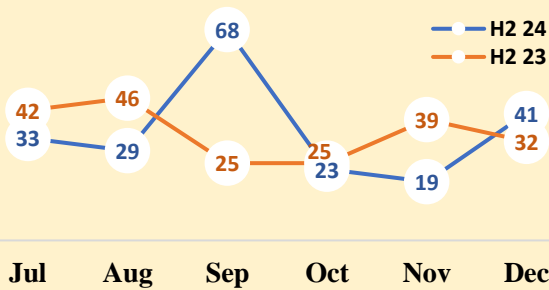


- Incidents owing to heavy weather viz capsizing, sinking, Man Overboard (MOB) and grounding, followed a similar monthly pattern as observed during 2024.
- Regional data reflects different trends in each region, influenced by the characteristics of local monsoon changes. Not surprisingly, the most affected were fishing vessels and other small craft. The number of incidents involving large vessels remains a cause for concern.
- South Asia & West Asia.** The Centre recognizes that the number of reports received from these regions are insufficient for comprehensive analysis. Accordingly, the Centre is striving towards better collection of data to gain a better understanding of incident trends.



Future Risk Assessment

PAST TRENDS



maritime authorities are encouraged to issue timely weather advisories, reinforce port inspection protocols and maintain readiness for rapid response.

IFC-IOR will continue to maintain high attention during this period by closely monitoring and collecting incident data, and coordinating with other maritime information centers and relevant agencies to enhance situational awareness and ensure an effective, collaborative response to any incident that may arise.



MARITIME SECURITY THREATS (HYBRID)

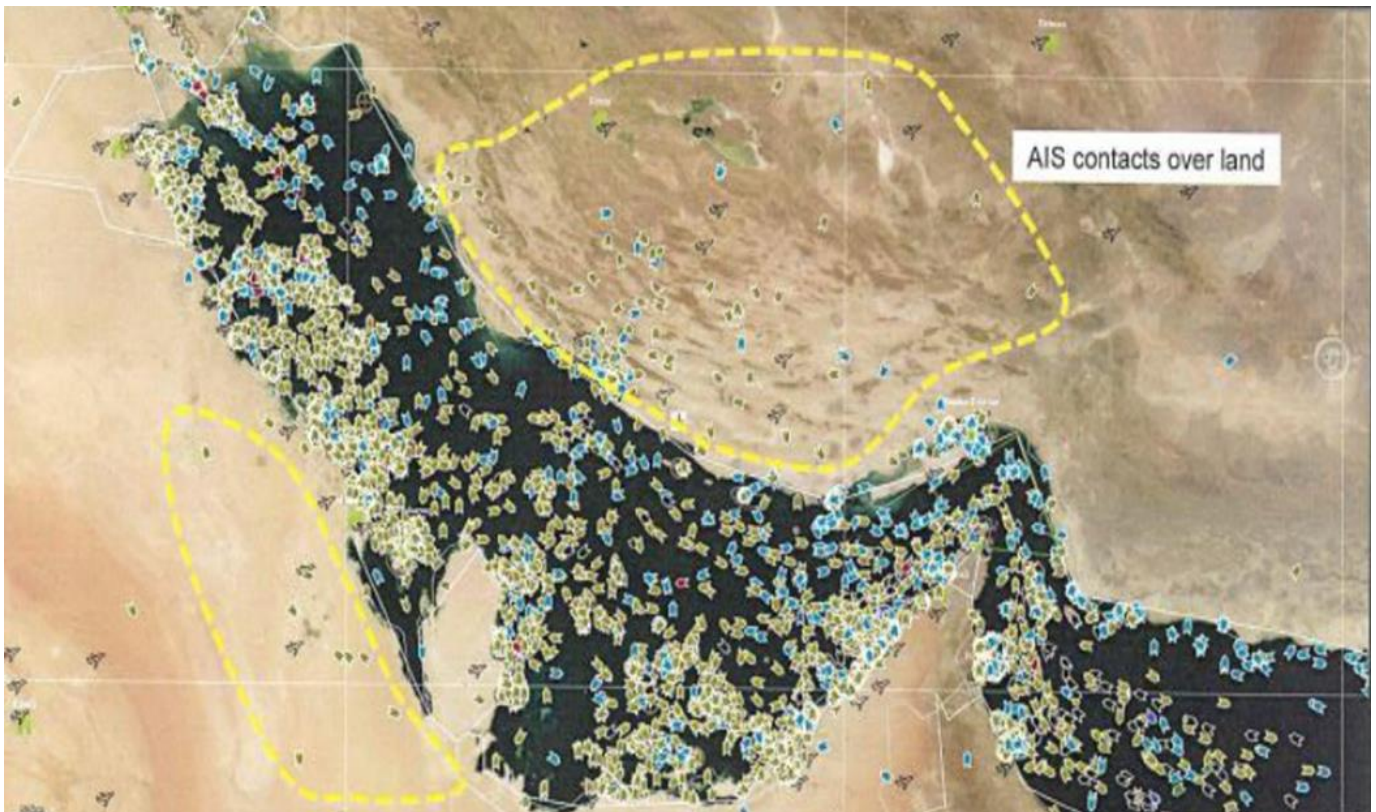
The Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and Gulf of Oman have witnessed a sharp escalation in GPS jamming and electronic interference, particularly since mid-2025 amidst heightened regional tensions.

Reports indicate that nearly 1,000 ships per day experienced GPS disruptions in these strategic waterways, with incidents peaking at over 1,150 vessels in a single day. *Based on analysis of AIS data received at the Centre, several vessels were monitored over land in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman.*

The AIS transmission appeared upto 295 nm landward from the coast. AIS signals were increasingly appearing in Iranian ports, Omani desert and around Dubai - due to widespread GPS jamming in the region.

This interference, including both jamming and spoofing, has resulted in false vessel positioning, navigational errors, and even collisions, notably impacting tanker and cargo traffic through one of the world's most vital maritime corridors.

As the commercial vessel traffic remained normal amidst the heightened situation, GPS interference and jamming continue to exist. This may impact the vessels navigating through this vital maritime corridor.



The Anarchy of High Seas Fishing and the Imperative Role of NGOs

The vast expanse of the high seas, formally known as Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ), exists beyond the immediate reach of individual nations' domestic laws. This inherent lack of direct governance has unfortunately transformed these waters into fertile ground for Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. This '*Anarchy at Sea*', as some scholars term it, allows fleets to operate year-round without regard for sustainable practices, threatening fish populations and the delicate marine ecosystem.

The Intricate Facets of the Fishing Industry

Fishing is a deeply interwoven socio-economic activity, as demonstrated by the catastrophic decline of Cod fish stocks in Newfoundland waters in 1992, leading to a fishing ban and the loss of 40,000 jobs. Similarly, despite the establishment of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in 1946, whaling continued largely unchecked, forcing the IWC to impose a 'Zero Quota Moratorium' in 1985. Even this moratorium was not universally respected.

These examples highlight the immense complexity of curbing fishing activities, especially on the high seas, given the significant economic and social implications for states. No nation is eager to curtail its fishing operations without a compelling, universally agreed-upon framework.

Efforts to Combat IUU Fishing on the High Seas

IUU fishing encompasses three distinct categories: illegal (violating laws or regulations), unreported (not reported or misreported to authorities) and unregulated (conducted by vessels without nationality or in areas/stocks not covered by conservation measures). While national authorities can address these issues within their EEZs, the high seas present a monitoring and enforcement void.

The international community has attempted to address this through various agreements which include: -

- ❖ **FAO Compliance Agreement (1993, enforced 2003):** This agreement outlines measures states should adopt to ensure their fishing vessels comply with international conservation and management regulations.
- ❖ **UN Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA, 2001):** This agreement specifically targets straddling and highly migratory fish stocks in the high seas, emphasizing compliance, catch verification and reporting.

Under the auspices of these agreements, Regional Fishery Management Organizations/Agreements (RFMO/As) have been established globally. RFMOs are intergovernmental organizations, while RFMAs typically involve, conferences/ meeting of parties as their decision-making body. Most RFMO/As focus on straddling and highly migratory fish stocks, though some address other categories like anadromous, shared and discrete high seas stocks. Examples include the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT), the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

ARTICLE OF INTEREST

RFMO/As generally serve three main functions, which include scientific research, advisory/regional coordination and management/governance of fishery resources. Their key roles include: -

- ❖ Setting and enforcing quotas.
- ❖ Monitoring conservation and protection of fish stocks (in high seas and within member EEZs).
- ❖ Designing measures to conserve associated species.
- ❖ Creating and maintaining blacklists of vessels involved in illegal fishing.

Limitations of Existing Measures

The UNCLOS provides broad scope for high seas fishing, while UNFSA offers a more targeted approach, but both lack strict control and enforcement mechanisms for IUU fishing, deferring these to RFMO/As. Furthermore, while RFMO/As provide an institutional framework for cooperation, scientific advice, compliance and monitoring, they face the following limitations: -

- ❖ Limited Enforcement Power: RFMO/As lack sovereign enforcement authority.
- ❖ Voluntary Compliance: Compliance is voluntary for both member and non-member states, making enforcement on the high seas challenging.
- ❖ Flag of Convenience (FOC) Loopholes: IUU vessels exploit FOCs, registering in countries with weak enforcement, making blacklisting ineffective as vessels frequently change flags.
- ❖ Unequal Member Participation: The problem of "free riders" – members who don't fully comply – undermines collective efforts.
- ❖ Slow Decision-Making: Operating by consensus, RFMO/As can be slow to respond to urgent issues like stock depletion or new IUU activity.
- ❖ Data Gaps and Inconsistencies: Inaccurate or incomplete data hampers scientific assessments and management efforts.
- ❖ Species/Region Specificity: The narrow focus of some RFMO/As allows IUU activities to shift into unregulated areas or target non-covered species.
- ❖ Limited Extraterritorial Reach: RFMO/As can blacklist member or non-member vessels but struggle to deter extra-regional vessels operating in their areas of interest.

The Crucial Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

The limitations of state and RFMO/A-led efforts highlight the critical need for alternative approaches, particularly the involvement of NGOs. The case of the fishing vessel Thunder in 2014 vividly illustrates this. The Thunder, a vessel banned from Antarctic waters since 2006 for serial IUU fishing of Patagonian toothfish and allegedly profiting over \$75 million, was placed on Interpol's "Purple Notice". However, it was Sea Shepherd Global's vessel, the Bob Baker, that actively pursued and monitored the Thunder for over 110 days at the high seas. The Thunder eventually sank intentionally to destroy evidence, but its crew was rescued and handed over to authorities by Sea Shepherd. The evidence collected by Sea Shepherd's vessels, including video and photographic documentation,

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proved crucial in prosecuting the ship's officers, who were sentenced to three years in prison and fined \$17 million. Despite this, the vessel's frequent flag-hopping prevented the prosecution of the true owners.

The Thunder case underscores several key points: -

- ❖ The immense challenge of industrial-scale IUU fishing on the high seas.
- ❖ The ability of illicit vessels to operate for extended periods by turning off AIS and constantly changing flags.
- ❖ The limitations of Interpol notices in actual pursuit and apprehension.
- ❖ The general reluctance of states to pursue such vessels due to legal gaps, costs and lack of interest.

Given that only a few NGOs like Sea Shepherd Global and Greenpeace possess the financial capacity to operate vessels globally for direct intervention, regional fishery regulatory bodies and organizations can actively promote greater NGO involvement in deterring, preventing and controlling IUU fishing on the high seas through several avenues: -

- ❖ Formalizing NGO Involvement: Granting NGOs official observer status in RFMO/A activities, allowing them to participate in discussions and provide valuable input.
- ❖ Funding for Assets: Providing financial support to NGOs for acquisition and operation of surface assets (vessels) to enhance high seas monitoring.
- ❖ Enhanced Transparency and Data Sharing: Fostering greater data exchange between states, regional fishery bodies, and NGOs to facilitate the identification and tracking of IUU vessels.
- ❖ Strengthening Compliance and Enforcement: Collaborating with NGOs and state law enforcement agencies to fortify compliance and enforcement activities on the high seas, leveraging NGO monitoring capabilities and evidence collection.
- ❖ By embracing and integrating NGOs, the global community can significantly enhance its capacity to combat the 'anarchy at high seas' and move towards a more sustainable future for marine resources.

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Logo of the IFC-IOR draws inspiration from the Centre's vision of 'Collaboration for Maritime Safety and Security'. It highlights the convergence and fusion of information and data from multiple sources, that are extensively analysed to derive usable insights and disseminated to relevant stakeholders. The petals painted in all seven vibrant colours of the optical spectrum depict various national and international partners who contribute in promoting collaborative Maritime Safety and Security towards a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indian Ocean Region.



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