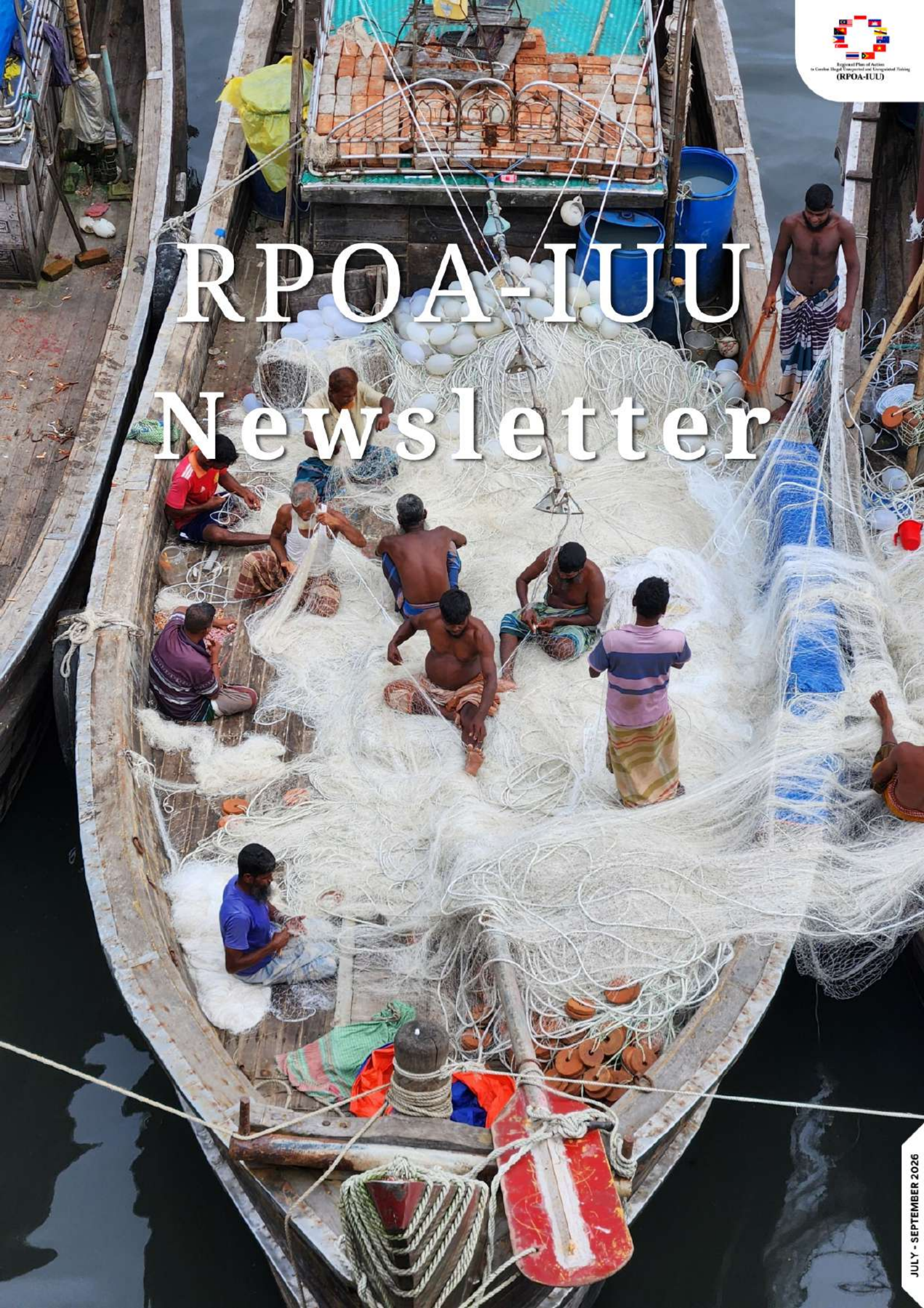


Regional Plan of Action to Combat Illegal Unreported and Unregulated Fishing
(RPOA-IUU)

RPOA-IUU Newsletter

JULY - SEPTEMBER 2026

PREFACE

It is with great pleasure that I present July to September 2026 edition of the RPOA-IUU Newsletter. As we conclude another productive year, this quarter reflects the unwavering commitment and collective efforts of our member countries and partners in combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUUF) across our region.

IUUF continues to pose significant challenges to the health of our marine ecosystems, the livelihoods of coastal communities, and the sustainability of regional fisheries. Yet, through close collaboration, knowledge sharing, and strengthened partnerships, we continue to make meaningful strides toward more effective governance and responsible fisheries management.

This quarter has seen further progress in introducing the decent working conditions in the fisheries sectors and outlining the technology used for supporting the monitoring, control, and surveillance measures.

Our engagement with international and regional partners also continues to reinforce the collective resolve of RPOA-IUU to address IUUF through theoritical and practical approaches.

The third edition of 2026 underscores our joint progress toward finalizing the Joint Ministerial Statement (JMS). I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all participating member countries, esteemed partners, and individuals whose dedication and collaborative spirit remain vital to achieving our regional goals.

As we look ahead to 2026, let us continue to strengthen our cooperation, embrace innovation, and uphold our shared vision for sustainable and well-managed fisheries in the RPOA-IUU region.

EDITORIAL TEAM

This newsletter is a collaborative work from the RPOA-IUU Secretariat's editorial team. We work together to develop and create the contents that inform and engage towards responsible fishing practices. Meet the team below and stay connected with us if you have any feedback and insights.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The successful implementation of the Regional Plan of Action to Combat Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing (RPOA-IUU) in the region has been made possible through the unwavering support, collaboration, and dedication of esteemed advisory bodies, observers, and partner countries. Their invaluable guidance, expertise, and commitment have played a pivotal role in shaping and advancing efforts toward sustainable fisheries management and the protection of our marine ecosystems. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to all stakeholders who have contributed to this vital initiative. Together, we continue to make significant strides toward ensuring the long-term health of our oceans and fostering a more sustainable future for all.

WHY DECENT WORK IS THE ANCHOR OF SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES

Implementing decent working conditions in marine fisheries is essential for:

- Eradicating Labour Abuses and Human Rights Violations: Addressing vulnerabilities in fisheries, including forced labour, human trafficking, excessive working hours, and unpaid wages.
- Combating IUU Fishing: Tackling the link between IUU fishing and labour exploitation, often driven by weak governance, limited transparency, and poor accountability.
- Enhancing Regulatory Compliance and Seafood Sustainability: Promoting fair employment, safe working conditions, and occupational safety and health standards to strengthen compliance and responsible fisheries management.

COUNTRY STATUS FOR IMPLEMENTING ILO CONVENTION NO. 188 (C188)

The ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188), sets minimum standards for working and living conditions on fishing vessels, covering employment, accommodation, medical care, safety, and social security. Countries worldwide are at different stages of implementation.

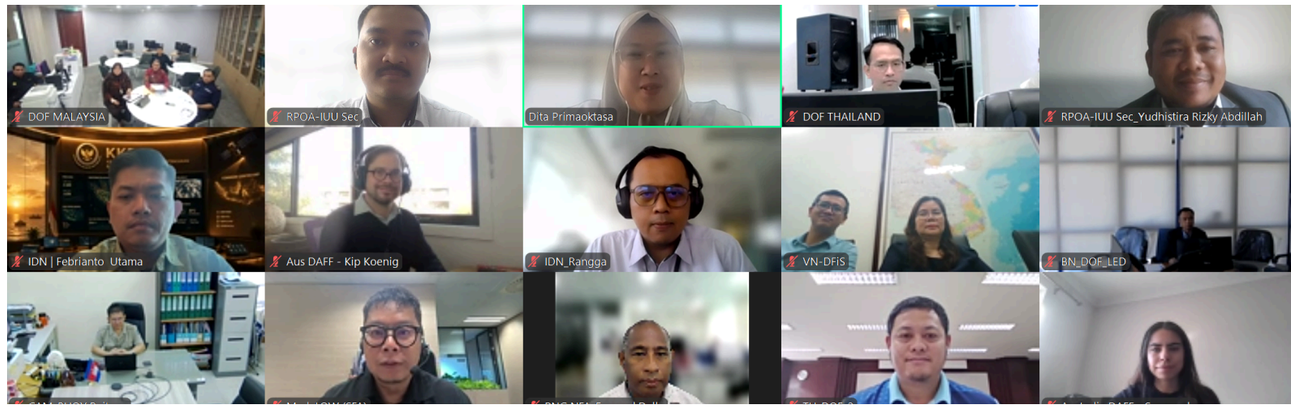
- Thailand was the first country in Southeast Asia to ratify ILO C188, incorporating wage protections and joint inspections into its national framework.
- Other regional participants—such as Malaysia, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Papua New Guinea—are taking progressive steps by strengthening national laws, improving port/coastal inspections, adopting crew certification systems, and enhancing inter-ministerial coordination to align with international standards.

REAFFIRMING COMMITMENT THROUGH THE JOINT MINISTERIAL STATEMENT: THE 1ST RPOA-IUU CONSULTATIVE MEETING

The 1st Regional Plan of Action to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices, includingCombating IUU Fishing in the Region (RPOA-IUU) Consultative Meeting (CM) 2026 was held virtually on 9 July 2026. The meeting was attended by 9 (nine) RPOA-IUU participating countries from Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Within the RPOA-IUU (Regional Plan of Action to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices including Combating IUU Fishing in the Region), the Consultative Meeting (CM) serves as a consultation forum for participating countries to discuss, provide inputs, and reach common understanding on matters related to the implementation and development of RPOA-IUU cooperation.

RPOA-IUU SECRETARIAT



The forum provides an opportunity for participating countries to share their respective views and national developments before an agenda or document is brought forward for further discussion or consideration at a more formal forum, such as the RPOA-IUU Coordination Committee Meeting (CCM). Discussions during the CM may cover meeting rules and procedures, cooperation agendas, joint documents, and follow-up actions from previous discussions.

This was reflected in the 1st RPOA-IUU Consultative Meeting 2026, which discussed the draft Rules and Procedures for RPOA-IUU meetings and the process of reconfirming the **Joint Ministerial Statement (JMS)**.

One of the key discussions focused on the **Draft Rules and Procedures**, primarily serving as a governance framework for the organization and conduct of RPOA-IUU meetings. The document provides clearer guidance on the preparation, conduct, and follow-up of meetings, ensuring that cooperation among participating countries is carried out in a structured and consistent manner. During the 2026 CM, discussions focused on further refining the rules and procedures, particularly regarding the mechanism for determining and organizing host countries for RPOA-IUU meetings.

The Joint Ministerial Statement (JMS) is generally a formal statement jointly agreed upon and issued by ministers from participating countries within a regional cooperation framework or international forum.

It serves to reaffirm common understanding, commitments, and the direction of cooperation on issues of shared interest. The JMS generally outlines key outcomes, developments, priorities, and commitments for follow-up actions.

Beyond serving as an official record of a ministerial meeting, the JMS may also provide a reference for strengthening coordination among participating countries and communicating their shared commitment to external stakeholders. In the context of regional cooperation under RPOA-IUU, the JMS can reinforce participating countries' commitment to combating Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing and provide strategic direction for future cooperation.

Regarding the announcement of the JMS, participating countries expressed a preference for its release in conjunction with the International Day for the Fight against IUU Fishing on 5 June, as this was considered an appropriate occasion to highlight the shared commitment.

RPOA-IUU SECRETARIAT

Following the consultation, the RPOA-IUU Secretariat will circulate the updated Draft Rules and Procedures and JMS for further comments and final confirmation by participating countries ahead of the CCM. The Secretariat will also facilitate further consultation on the proposed JMS announcement and encourage countries to communicate the key outcomes of the CM to their respective senior officials and complete relevant internal consultations. The outcomes of the 1st RPOA-IUU CM 2026 will serve as an important basis for continued coordination and preparation toward the upcoming RPOA-IUU Coordination Committee Meeting, supporting stronger and more coordinated regional efforts to combat IUU Fishing.



RPOA-IUU SECRETARIAT ENGAGEMENT WITH ILO IN PROMOTING DECENT WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE FISHERIES SECTOR

In close cooperation with the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Secretariat of the Regional Plan of Action to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices including Combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing (RPOA-IUU) organized the regional workshop "Introducing Decent Working Conditions in the Fisheries Sector" on September 15 in Jakarta, Indonesia. In order to address the connections between IUU fishing and labor exploitation, the two-day workshop brought together RPOA-IUU participating nations, labor authorities, law enforcement agencies, and representatives of fishermen and fisheries industry operators. Additionally, it gave participants a chance to investigate how encouraging respectable working conditions can help stop IUU fishing.



This workshop focuses on promoting decent working conditions within the RPOA-IUU Frameworks, aiming to support responsible fishing practices and combat IUU fishing in line with CCRF paragraph 6.17, which mandates safe, healthy, and fair conditions for fishers.

REGIONAL OVERVIEW ON THE IUU FISHING IMPACT

Represented by the Vice of the Executive Director of the RPOA-IUU Secretariat, Yudisthira Rizky Abdillah, the presentation was commenced with the overview of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing across the RPOA-IUU region, highlighting three major regional hotspots: the South China Sea, the Sulu-Sulawesi Seas, and the Arafura Sea. IUU fishing poses a severe economic and ecological threat to the region, causing an estimated annual value loss of USD 165.6 million and a volume loss of 82,798 tons of fish, with approximately 2,587 illegal vessels apprehended. Indonesia and the Philippines bear the vast majority of these impacts, together contributing around 85% of the total estimated value loss, with each nation suffering a loss of USD 69.6 million (42%). These figures underscore the widespread nature of transboundary poaching due to porous maritime borders and demonstrate the urgent need for ongoing, strengthened regional enforcement efforts.

To the currently adopted key MCS instruments, there are only two countries that have ratified the ILO C-188, Indonesia and Thailand.



Participating countries are encouraged to evaluate working conditions on their fishing vessels to address identified gaps and align with ILO C-188 standards.

IUU fishing is not only a threat to marine ecosystems, but also directly drives the exploitation and abuse of fishers by enabling operators to evade legal jurisdiction and oversight.

To conceal their illicit activities, perpetrators rely on common modus operandi such as flag hopping, using flags of convenience, operating without nationality, forging false documents, conducting illegal transshipment at sea, and turning off AIS/VMS tracking devices.

WAYS TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES TO PROMOTE DECENT WORKING CONDITIONS

As highlighted, the key challenges, including the longstanding misconception that responsible fisheries only concern resource sustainability, alongside navigating complex national and international legislations where fisheries agencies must coordinate with labor ministries responsible for decent working conditions.

However, significant opportunities are emerging as RFMOs adopt labor standards, major importing states enforce strict trade measures, and global consumer demand grows for legally-caught seafood which is vital given that ASEAN nations generate roughly 21% of global fish production and 10% of the worldwide seafood trade. To overcome these challenges, the decent work conditions should include fair wages, safe workplaces, adequate health services, and full protection from exploitation.



WAY FORWARD

As a follow up from the workshop, at the regional level, efforts focus on identifying priority areas and strengthening the integration of decent working conditions into work plans and future activities. This is supported by expanding technical cooperation and continued engagement with the ILO and other international partners, delivering targeted capacity-building programs, and facilitating the sharing of national experiences, best practices, and labor-related risks.



Meanwhile, at the national level, priority is given to strengthening inter-agency coordination, implementing legislation aligned with international labor standards, considering the ratification of ILO C188, and enhancing the capacity of inspectors, enforcement officers, vessel operators, and workers' organizations to ensure concrete follow-up actions.



"Responsible fisheries are not only about sustainably managing fish stocks, but also about recognising the social aspects of ecosystem-based fisheries management" Mr. Saiful Umam, the Executive Director of the RPOA-IUU Secretariat"



"Addressing abuse and exploitation of fishers is essential to achieving sustainable fisheries" Ms. Simrin Singh, the ILO Country Director for Indonesia and Timor-Leste"

"Decent working conditions should also be considered as an important aspect of responsible and sustainable fisheries" Ms. Saiti Gusrini, Programme Manager for Human Rights, Democracy, Gender and Migration at the European Union"



SAFET 2026: ADVANCES REGIONAL COOPERATION ON SEAFOOD LEGALITY AND TRACEABILITY

The Seafood Alliance for Legality and Traceability (SAFET) Conference 2026, held from 8 to 10 September 2026 in Cebu, the Philippines, and co-hosted by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), marked a significant milestone in accelerating the adoption of sustainable fisheries technologies across the Southeast Asian and Pacific regions.

RPOA-IUU SECRETARIAT

Initiated by Prima Advisors in collaboration with Oceankind, the initiative, titled “Bridging the Fisheries Technology Divide,” was designed to address critical challenges facing the regional fisheries sector, including overfishing, the prevalence of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, climate change, and increasing global market demands for greater transparency in seafood supply chains. The conference was attended by representatives from seven RPOA-IUU member countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam.



The conference addressed these topics through a range of activities, including interactive sessions, networking opportunities, use-case demonstrations, and post-conference engagement. The key objectives were to strengthen collaboration, facilitate a deeper understanding of fisheries-related challenges and solutions, and promote the adoption of shared approaches to advancing the sustainability of fisheries and seafood systems through technology.

The conference also aimed to introduce government and market initiatives related to fisheries management and seafood systems, while exploring how emerging technologies can support stakeholders in meeting regulatory requirements and achieving fisheries management objectives. In addition, the event focused on identifying shared priorities, exploring opportunities to implement and scale solutions, and establishing sustainable partnerships among stakeholders at the global level.

SAFET 2026 focuses on strengthening fisheries governance, enhancing supply chain transparency, and supporting livelihoods and coastal communities through technology and innovation. Discussions covered the enhancement of fisheries monitoring, the application of technology and data to strengthen seafood supply chains, and the development of inclusive and sustainable fisheries systems for coastal communities.



Across these areas, particular emphasis was placed on technological innovation, observation systems, financing and investment, and scaling solutions from pilot projects to operational systems. The conference also highlighted data sharing and interoperability, responsible data governance, and collaboration among governments, industry, technology providers, and coastal communities to support more transparent, effective, and sustainable fisheries management.



The technologies presented at the conference support sustainable fisheries by integrating real-time monitoring, data analysis, and supply chain traceability. Technologies such as satellites, drones, in-situ sensors, electronic monitoring systems, and electronic logbooks can record fishing activities at sea in real time, thereby strengthening fisheries monitoring and governance transparency. The resulting data can then be processed using Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning to analyze fishing patterns and support regulatory compliance.

The analysis and integration of these data enable seafood products to be traced from the point of harvest to consumers, strengthening traceability and providing greater assurance of responsible sourcing. These technologies are also designed to be inclusive by supporting small-scale fishers in complying with regulations, promoting a more equitable distribution of economic value, and strengthening the long-term resilience of coastal communities.

THE 15TH MCS SUB-REGIONAL (ARAFURA AND TIMOR SEAS) GROUP MEETING STRENGTHENS REGIONAL COOPERATION AGAINST IUU FISHING

On 6 August 2026, Indonesia hosted the 15th MCS Sub-Regional (Arafura and Timor Seas) Group Meeting which was convened in Jakarta, Indonesia. The meeting brought together representatives from Australia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Timor-Leste. This annual meeting, held in person, aims to strengthen cooperation and facilitates coordination between the participating countries to address IUU fishing issues within the Arafura and Timor Seas. The meeting was organized by the Directorate General of Surveillance for Marine and Fisheries Resources (PSDKP).

This meeting also served as an avenue for each participating country presenting their respective country reports, outlining their current IUU fishing challenges and focused on the key issues relevant to the Arafura and Timor Seas.

Countries discussed actions undertaken by each member country, providing feedback and input to support the assessment of progress against these agreed actions, including the implementation of and progress of this Group's '2025 Key Issues and Action Plan

This review is an important basis for determining efforts to address or eliminate a previously identified issue, and assess whether further regional cooperation is required.
Through collaborative discussions during the meeting, delegates identified both emerging and persistent challenges related to IUU fishing that demand joint regional intervention. Expanding upon the insights of the 2025 review, participating nations formulated the 2026/2027 Work Plan to guide future collective strategies focused on tackling these maritime threats within the Arafura and Timor Seas.



INDONESIA–AUSTRALIA STRENGTHEN FISHERIES MONITORING COOPERATION THROUGH VMS PILOT PROJECT AND INTELLIGENCE SHARING



Indonesia and Australia reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening fisheries surveillance and addressing cross-border fishing activities during bilateral meetings in Canberra. The meetings involved representatives from the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT),

Australian Border Force (ABF), Indonesia's Directorate General of Marine and Fisheries Resources Surveillance (DG PSDKP), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The bilateral meeting took place in Canberra, Australia from 22 to 26 September 2026.

As part of the programme, the Indonesian delegation visited the Maritime Border Command (MBC) Command Centre. MBC reported a decline in Indonesian fishing vessels entering Australian waters in 2026 compared with the previous year and acknowledged DG PSDKP's cooperation through Operations Horizon Watch and Jawline Arafura, as well as intelligence and information sharing.

At AFMA headquarters, discussions focused on the VMS Pilot Project involving 20 small-scale fishing vessels in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). Both sides recognised the project's progress and agreed to jointly analyse vessel movements and operational behaviour to better understand the factors influencing fishers to cross maritime boundaries.

COUNTRIES: INDONESIA

The findings are expected to support evidence-based policymaking and more targeted responses to cross-border fishing incidents.

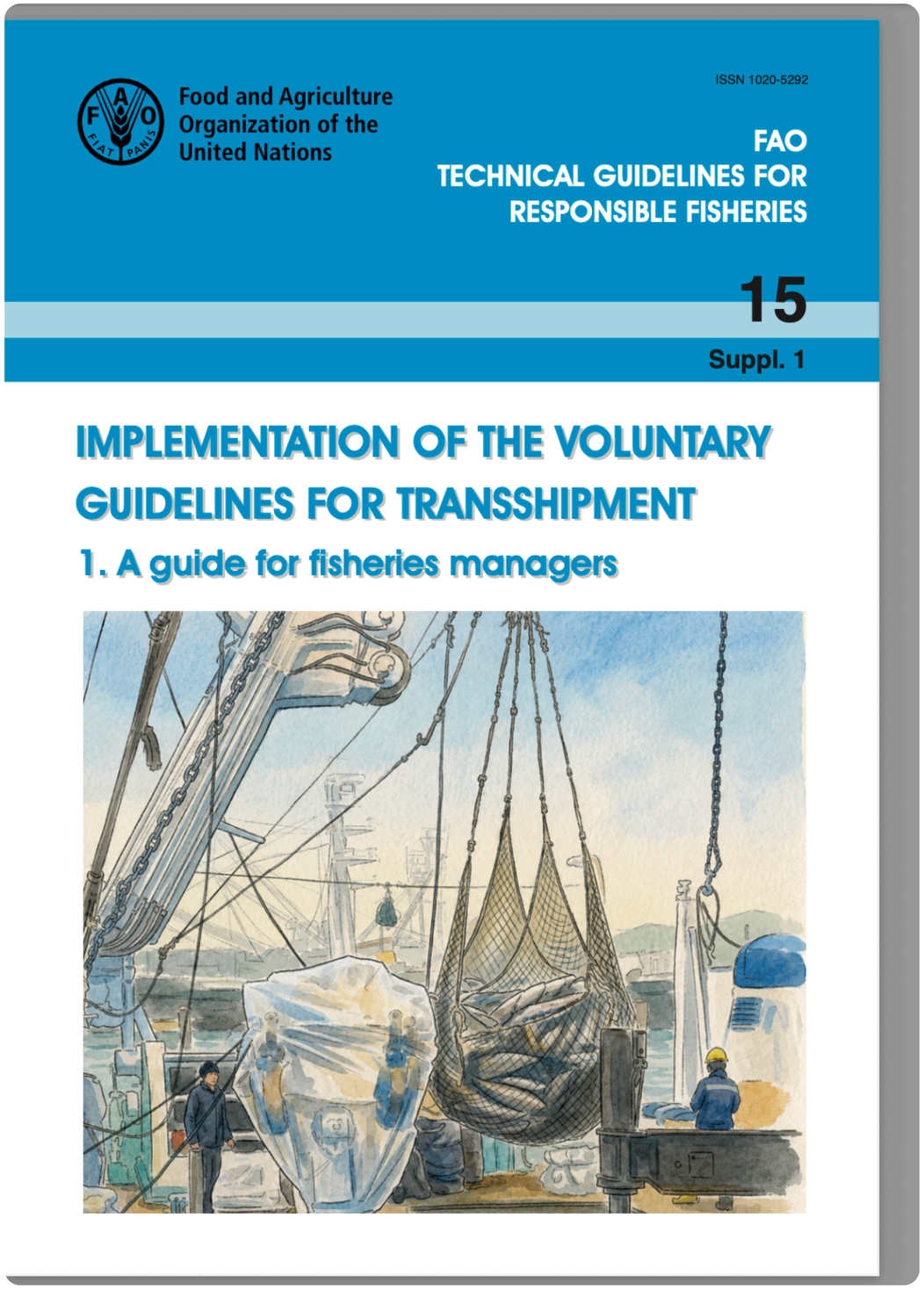
The meetings also highlighted the importance of secure information exchange, including relevant biometric, forensic, and intelligence information, subject to applicable laws and security protocols. AFMA proposed further technical cooperation through capacity-building programmes in fisheries digital forensics and VMS data analysis.

As follow-up actions, both sides will work towards establishing a secure data-exchange protocol and developing proposals for targeted technical cooperation. Joint analysis of pilot project data will also help generate practical insights for fisheries monitoring and management.

COUNTRIES: INDONESIA

These initiatives demonstrate the value of bilateral cooperation, technology-based monitoring, and intelligence sharing in strengthening fisheries compliance. They also contribute to the objectives of the Regional Plan of Action to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices, including Combating Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in the Region (RPOA-IUU).

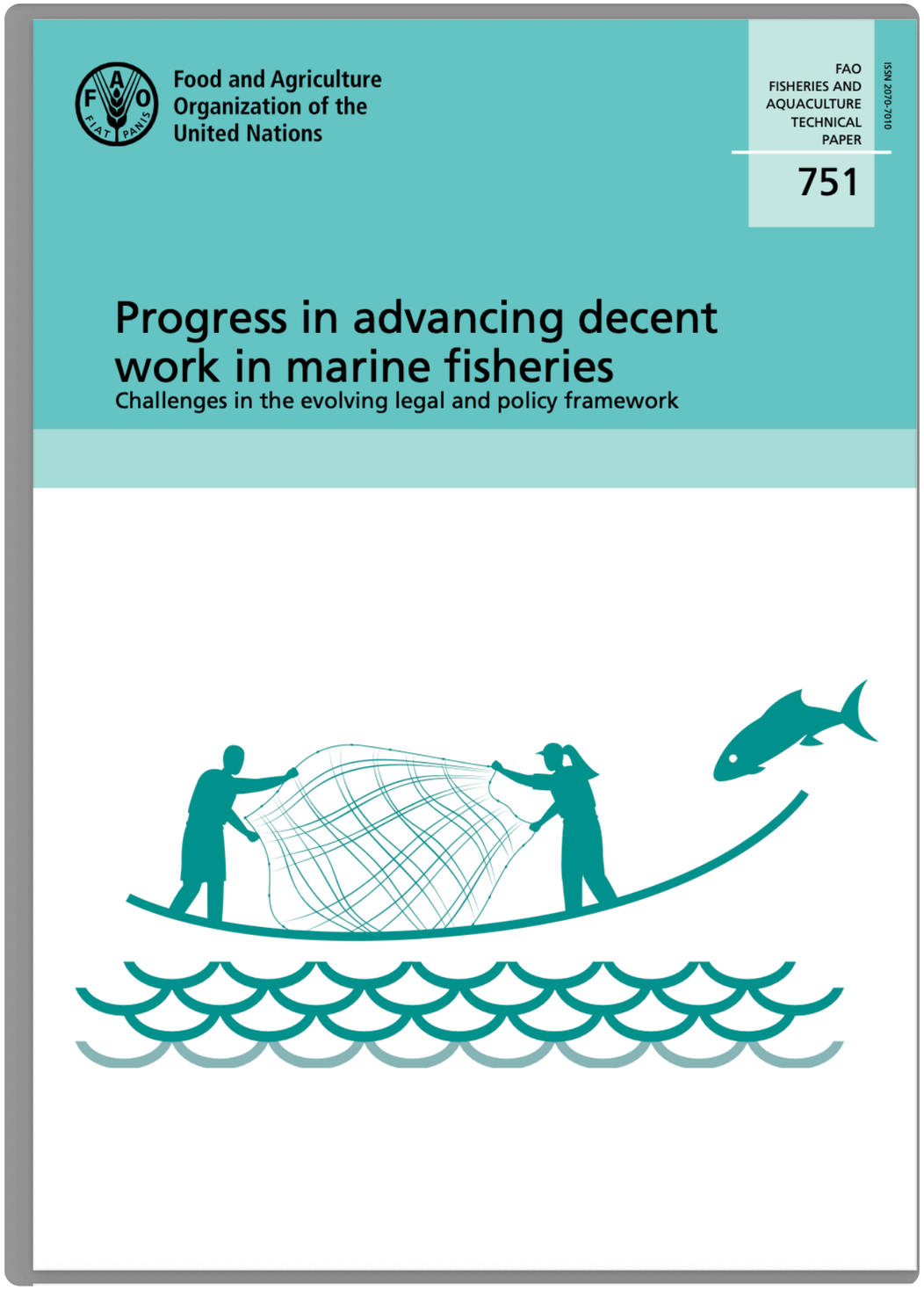




ABSTRACT

The Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment (VGTS) describes minimum standards for managing transshipment and landing activities in which if the transshipment is widely and effectively implementend, the guidelines can prevent the infiltration of IUU catch. It also outlines the important component of regulations, monitoring, and control of each activity. Step-by-step instructions for controlling landings and transshipments are provided to help flag, port, and Coastal State to gather and maintain legal provenance of traceability for fishery products.

For full publication, kindly access: https://kmp.rpoaiuu.org/implementation-of-the-voluntary-guidelines-for-transshipment/



RECENT PUBLICATION

ABSTRACT

It explores the intersection of labour abuses with illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, demonstrating that decent work is vital to the social sustainability of marine fisheries. To address unique obstacles such as long periods at sea, isolation, and complex jurisdictional arrangements, the study applies a three-dimensional framework focusing on the jurisdiction of fishing operations, the legal status of fishers, and the fishing fleet. It maps the interactions between international instruments—highlighting ILO Convention No. 188—and national laws. Overall, the paper concludes that achieving decent work in marine fisheries requires a holistic, coordinated, and multisectoral approach.

For full publication, kindly access: https://kmp.rpoaiuu.org/progress-in-advancing-decent-work-in-marine-fisheries/



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