

Highlights of Progress: Fisheries Monitoring Center now fully operational

Development of a **fully functioning Fisheries Monitoring Center (FMC)** has always been at the core of Thailand's efforts towards an effective Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) mechanism. Since 2015, Thailand has made continuous **improvements in both technical and organisational components** of the ad-hoc VMS center which has recently been upgraded to be a fully functioning FMC.

The FMC is now fully operational as the central command and control center for all MCS activities. The FMC works closely with PIPO centers, observers on-board, and relevant inspection units including aquatic animals inspection unit, fisheries patrol unit, and Thailand Maritime Enforcement Coordinating Center (THAI-MECC) to oversee all MCS operations, including VMS monitoring, port-in/port-out control and reporting, at-sea/at-port inspections, transshipment permission and control, fish landing and catch inspections, control of marine catch import, and implementation of Port State measures, as well as collection of infringement data for further legal action.

The FMC has been equipped with the upgraded VMS technology called "VMS Phase 2". Under this phase, the newly-developed VMS software can now support advanced VMS functions so as to ensure proper control of Thailand's fishing fleet. These new functions are as follows;

- ability to generate **lists of different groups of vessels according to license and vessel types** such as vessels in Thai waters, overseas fishing vessels and transshipment vessels, as well as to display real-time location of all vessels or selected vessel groups, both within and outside the Thai waters. It can also display status of vessels which are undergoing maintenance at port;

- ability to **record navigation histories** of each vessel, display past locations and reconstruct navigation route at a selected time, as well as to **reconstruct and compare navigation history of up to 10 vessels**;

- ability to **record infringements and fisheries behaviors** as well as to generate report of different types of infringements and suspicious activities upon request;

- ability to **categorise fishing behaviors into different levels of risk** and generate risk-based vessel list including a watch list to identify vessels subjected to different types of alert. Each risk group indicates different levels of intensity of MCS procedures to be conducted by FMC officials;

- **a real-time automatic alert system** when infringements and suspicious activities are detected including when two vessels approach each other in the distance of less than 50 meters, when entering EEZ of 3rd countries, and when vessels remain out at sea beyond 30 consecutive days. The setting of automatic alert can also be tailored to fishing behavior that indicates illegal activities or appeared to be violating the laws and regulations. Each type of alerts are recorded for further risk-based analysis;

- **an integrated fishing info system linked to VMS software**, which combines information on vessel registration, fishing e-license, record of VMS status, as well as seaman book and fishing logbook data. The online fishing info database is the basis for MCS planning and decision making when an action against infringement is needed;

With these new features, the VMS/FMC can now fully function as a **tool for behavior-based and risk-based analysis** for a reliable and timely detection of suspicious illegal activities. The record of violations and suspicious activities can be used to determine the intensity of MCS activities conducted by related inspectors as well as for investigation into possible wrongdoings.

With regard to VMS equipment on board, Thailand is carrying out an operation to **inspect and seal all VMS equipment to prevent removal and tampering**. Approximately 96% of all VMS equipment have already been sealed and/or relocated to better satellite position. Furthermore, the Department of Fisheries has issued **regulations for 2nd phase of VMS hardware development** which set out standard requirements for VMS equipment and installation, VMS data transmission service, and system testing and maintenance in order to ensure full capacity of VMS device and to prevent sub-standard VMS in the future.

Standard Operation Procedures (SOP) have been developed for a loss of VMS signal and detection of infringements. Immediate warnings for non-compliance are sent to vessel operators and information on infringing vessels are sent to competent authorities including PIPO centers, fisheries patrol unit, and THAI-MECC in order to take further action such as VMS inspections, at-sea/ at-port inspections, as well as arrest and further legal actions as appropriate. The FMC also coordinates with the Legal Affairs Division of DOF to **gather infringement information for legal proceeding and prosecutions**. Since July 2016, a total number of 7,390 suspicious activities have been identified for inspections and 14,137 warnings of infringements have been sent to vessels operators/owners. Since the launch of VMS in 2015, over 2,000 cases have been brought against vessels owners/operators for violation of VMS related obligations.

MCS personnel has also been improved significantly, both in terms of manpower and skills. From 16 staff members in 2015, the FMC now has 83 full-time officers running MCS activities on a 24/7 basis. Additional 123 officers were also recruited in 2016 for various inspection activities both at sea and at port. Series of trainings were carried out throughout 2016 with the support of Catapult UK, Environmental Justice Foundation and the FMC of the Republic of Korea. More training programmes, with the support of the EU, are in the pipeline to further enhance the capacity of FMC as well as to foster “investigative mind” of its staff to be able to fully utilize all MCS tools available.

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