

# CHINESE TRAWLERS IN SOUTHERN INDIAN OCEAN WORRY INDIA

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The rise in the number of Chinese trawlers in the Indian Ocean was discussed at coastal security meetings. K.K. Mustafah

There has been a huge increase in Chinese deep-sea fishing trawlers in the southern Indian Ocean far from the Chinese coast which has raised concerns in the government and the security establishment, according to official sources. This was discussed in the recent coastal security meetings involving Director-General (DG), Shipping, the Navy and other stakeholders.

“In the last four years, on an average at least 500 Chinese trawlers were present in the region and around 32,250 incidents per year were recorded,” a senior defence source said. The trawlers were, however, not in India’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) but beyond, the source added. This includes trawlers from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Breaking this up further, there were 1,100 occurrences near Somalia and 1,500 occurrences near the Coast of Oman. Occurrences are recordings of the Automatic Identification System (AIS) aboard trawlers and ships recorded when they are activated. So a trawler can be recorded multiple times based on its AIS signature. Chinese trawlers have institutional backing and have processing facilities with them which are sold in the vicinity, the source added on the modalities of the operation.

While India has good inland fishing, the ocean fishing capacity is way below capacity. There have been recommendations for the need to boost domestic deep-sea fishing. “Our deep-sea fishing is in bits and pieces. We need to boost that,” the source said.

The maritime movements in the region are tracked at the Navy’s Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) at Gurugram, which is the single-point centre interlinking all the coastal radar chains and other inputs along the coastline. The AIS information comprises name, MMSI number, position, course, speed, last port visited, destination and so on. This information can be picked up through various AIS sensors including coastal AIS chains and satellite based receivers.

To address this, the National Maritime Domain Awareness initiative aims to integrate fishing, ports, customs so that the database is available to everyone. Currently, the States have their databases. As part of this evolving mechanism, the National Committee for Strengthening Maritime and Coastal Security is scheduled to meet this week to discuss the implementation.

There has been a national effort to install AIS systems on ships under 20m for which a pilot study has been carried out. AIS works through satellite and the ISRO has already delivered 1000 transponders for trails in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu.

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