

International Partners Collaborate to End Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing



Crew members from the Coast Guard Cutter Munro (WMSL 755) prepare to conduct a law enforcement boarding from the cutter's 35-foot Cutter Boat in the Central Pacific, Dec. 2, 2018. The cutter was conducting its first operational patrol and was enforcing conservation and management measures established by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class Matthew West*

The 2021 Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Exchange was conducted virtually from Hawaii, with a focus on the global problem of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

The event took place Sept. 8-9, and was moderated by retired Navy Capt. Larry Osborn, Navy League Pacific Region vice president, and hosted by the East West center, Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies and the Pacific Forum.

The Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Exchange (IMSE) is produced annually by Navy League of the United States Honolulu Council. The enduring IMSE theme is "building partnerships for security, stability and prosperity. IMSE's purpose is to provide a forum for senior leaders, subject matter experts and interested members of the general public to engage in dialogue about maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region.

The two-day event concentrated on the problems created by IUU fishing and the solutions available to counter the illegal fishing and the impacts on this vital global food resource.

According to the U.S. Coast Guard, IUU fishing is a pervasive, far-reaching security threat.

“IUU fishing has replaced piracy as the leading global maritime security threat. If IUU fishing continues unchecked, we can expect deterioration of fragile coastal states and increased tension among foreign-fishing nations, threatening geo-political stability around the world,” said Commandant of the Coast Guard Adm. Karl Schultz in the service’s IUU Fishing Strategic Outlook, released in September 2020.

The IMSE conference examined new technologies to conduct all-domain sensing and gather information through satellite imagery and acoustic data, as well as methods to share and analyze huge amounts of data to deter illegal fishing.

Vice Adm. Linda Fagan, vice commandant of the Coast Guard, and Rear Adm. Blake Converse, deputy commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, both delivered keynote addresses that emphasized the importance of partnerships, especially between multi-national organizations, nations and agencies with the means to detect and interdict violators and those countries who rely on their fisheries. Rear Adm. Matthew W. Sibley, commander of USCG District 14, shared the Coast Guard’s support to the nations in Oceania, which have limited assets and resources, to help them combat IUU fishing.

According to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, IUU fishing is “a broad term that captures a wide variety of fishing activity. IUU fishing is found in all types and dimensions of fisheries; it occurs both on the high seas and in areas within national jurisdiction. It concerns all aspects and stages of the capture and utilization of fish, and it may sometimes be associated with organized crime.”

Capt. Holly Harrison, commanding officer USCG Kimball (WMSL 756), detailed the actual operations involved in approaching, boarding, inspecting and taking any necessary action aboard

fishing vessels on the high seas.

There is no one solution to the problem that affects both large and small nations in so many ways. "Combating IUU fishing has to be a whole of government and a whole of society approach," said retired Rear Adm. Pete Gumataotao, head of the East West Center at the University of Hawaii-Manoa.

Osborn said IUUF is a maritime security threat that has a destabilizing effect on the Indo-Pacific region.

"The war on IUUF is won through trust and international collaboration. Data from commercial SIGINT [signals intelligence], EO [electro-optical imagery] and SAR [synthetic aperture radar] satellite constellations, as well as commercial acoustic arrays attached to unmanned surface vehicles, will make it impossible for 'dark vessels' to conceal their locations and identities."

Osborn said the conference examined the application of artificial intelligence and machine language learning, which have become indispensable tools in creating actionable intelligence from disparate datasets.

"We found academics, NGOs, and small entrepreneurial companies with relevant technologies and solutions," he said. "I think this made our conference a success."

"The international stakeholders have done a commendable job in illuminating the problem and holding the violators accountable. The key has been collaboration and transparency," Osborn said. "Once you have that many of the other problems go away."