

TECHNICAL PAPER 8.

THE MCS BOARDING

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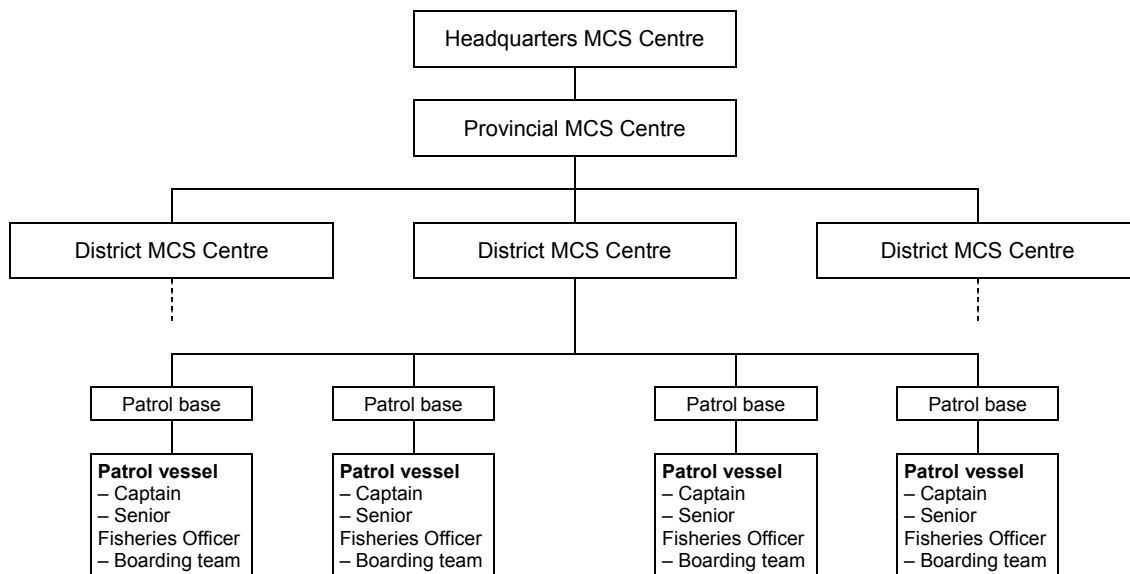
THE SITUATION

It is the priority of government to conserve the marine resources and stop illegal fishing activities. Typically, Fisheries Departments have been delegated to lead multi-agency marine resource protection programmes, with support infrastructure and activities from other maritime agencies on an agreed basis (Memoranda of Agreement), or secondary tasking and opportunity basis. The operational authority and control of all assigned assets for marine resources usually rests with the Minister responsible for fisheries, or their designate.

THE MCS TEAM

The MCS team comprises the headquarters, provincial, district, and patrol base staff in the MCS component. Further key members include the Captain of the patrol boat, the Senior Fisheries Officer (Senior Boarding Officer) and the boarding team. A typical general organizational relationship is illustrated graphically on the next page.

The actual boarding team usually comprises at least four members for a non-confrontational boarding of a small vessel (one note taker on the patrol vessel; security from the patrol vessel; two boarding officers). For a hostile boarding, a team of seven to ten is usually used, with an additional two armed security personnel on the patrol vessel. The disposition of the six includes one boarding-boat driver as safety security on the water; Senior Boarding Officer and one note taker; two upper-deck security and crew watchers; and a two-person vessel search team. One of the team would have engine room experience and one would have navigation and vessel piloting experience.



KEY EQUIPMENT

The **boarding boat** is a key component of the boarding exercise. It has been noted that many countries use only the main patrol boat from which to board vessels, without knowing what potential dangers they might face. The question is “What happens if the vessel being approached is not really a fishing vessel, but only acts that way in disguise?” The idea of putting the main transportation and security of the entire crew at risk by approaching the close proximity of another vessel whereby explosives or other such instruments of destruction can easily be transported between the two craft is not recommended. It is always recommended to carry out boardings from a secondary vessel under the stand-off security of the main patrol vessel, to protect the safety of the crew. Types of small boarding vessels popular in most countries are the rubber-sided Zodiac-type craft, or, in other cases, a 5-7-m glassfibre hull and rubber-sided craft with inboard, inboard-outboard or twin outboards. The boarding vessel should be fast, so as to rapidly approach the target vessel, and – conversely – be able to rapidly remove itself from the area should hostilities occur.

As safety is the name of the game, one must consider this aspect during all planning and operations. The common practice in some countries of jumping on to the target vessel in bare feet in the belief that it is more secure, is a fallacy, especially if the target vessel leaves any sharp instruments under the net being jumped upon, etc. It is recommended that in choosing crew equipment for boarding, the idea of SAFETY, SAFETY and SAFETY be at the forefront of the selection process, e.g., life jackets, armored vests if a hostile boarding appears possible, steel-toed marine safety boots, and hard hats if climbing is required. It is amazing what types of materials can “accidentally” fall overboard just above the boarding ladder at the time of boarding. For equipment, the key words are **think safety**.

In addition to safety equipment, it is always appropriate to carry a hand-held GPS monitor, previously calibrated against the patrol vessel’s master unit in order to verify the target vessel’s position in comparison with the target vessel’s own navigation equipment. Finally, appropriate boarding documents, calculators and paper are essential to every Boarding Officer’s kit.

TARGET VESSEL SIGHTED?

What do we do? Well first we record the current situation: patrol type, weather, sea condition, wind direction, position of target vessel, type of vessel, etc. We hail the vessel and ask its name, port of registry and destination or activities (if not readily apparent). We then inform the vessel to prepare for a boarding team. The responses to these simple questions will assist in determining the type of boarding to conduct, either a routine general inspection or be prepared for a hostile boarding. Here we will be discussing only the former, later queries can address the latter in accordance with each country's "rules of engagement."

The senior boarding team officer should designate the Officer of the Watch to maintain a log of events while they brief the boarding team.

BRIEFING THE BOARDING TEAM

- (i) The Boarding Officer (Senior Fisheries Officer) provides information on the target vessel (name, position, port of registry, activities), and *type of boarding* – general inspection or hostile boarding.
- (ii) He then reviews the *role and responsibilities of each member of the boarding team* and receives a response of understanding from each member (this includes positions in the boarding boat for boarding the target vessel, during the boarding, team pairs and tasks, and includes disembarkation).
- (iii) These instructions also reflect the duties and positions of both the patrol vessel and the boarding boat to provide maximum protection to the boarding crew in case the boarding turns from general inspection to hostile (SAFETY, SAFETY, SAFETY).
- (iv) The communications call signs and frequencies are reviewed and practiced by each crew member, including emergency codes, e.g., I am captured; I am being fired upon; assistance please; etc.
- (v) The security arrangements immediately after boarding are reviewed: isolate the captain, gather the crew in an open space where they can be watched, inspection procedures below deck, etc. (SAFETY, SAFETY, SAFETY).
- (vi) Documents to be checked are reviewed and a list given to the Note Taker.
- (vii) Equipment is issued and checked for safety.
- (viii) The boarding strategy is once again reviewed just before boarding the boarding boat.
- (ix) The Patrol Vessel requests the target vessel to slow its speed to less than 3 knots, to place a secured boarding ladder over the leeward side of the vessel, and to standby to receive the boarding party. Be careful, as the boarding ladders are often not properly secured, are old or do not have spacers. Hopefully one will be able to just jump aboard, but if climbing is required, watch your boarding partner: they are your responsibility.
- (x) The boarding party departs the patrol vessel.
- (xi) The Boarding Party conducts the inspection, takes appropriate action, completes the boarding forms, signs and leaves a copy with the target vessel master, disembarks and returns to the patrol vessel for de-briefing.

THE BOARDING VESSEL POSITIONS**Points to Remember**

- (i) Secure the boarding point
- (ii) Secure the crew

- (iii) Inspection – Pairs and Crew member below decks
- (iv) Documents
 - for inspection
 - for violations

THE BOARDING

Points to check include:

- (i) Equipment check.
- (ii) Boarding boat manned.
- (iii) Boarding flags checked and raised.
- (iv) Radio message sent to vessel to prepare for boarding.
- (v) Board vessel in assigned order.
- (vi) Secure the area.
- (vii) Secure the crew in a forward space and check for weapons if necessary.
- (viii) Isolate Captain and begin boarding queries.
- (ix) Inspect the vessel in a team(s) with a crew member leading (latter optional – decision of Boarding Officer).
- (x) Check vessel and fishing documents and note on the boarding forms.
- (xi) Check fishing and processing equipment and note.
- (xii) Check fish, processing plant and storage (if appropriate).
- (xiii) Review results with the captain.
- (xiv) Complete the Boarding Forms, sign and provide a copy to the captain.
- (xv) If no concerns, disembark and return to the patrol vessel.
- (xvi) If concerns identified, take appropriate action to leave behind appropriate crew and order captain to take vessel to port, or alternatively – with an uncooperative crew – take the vessel to port, removing the captain to the patrol vessel.
- (xvii) Follow up reports for the patrol or incident.

DEBRIEFING

Points to cover include:

- (i) Reports from the teams on actions taken and results, any problems identified and lessons learned.
- (ii) Summary of results of the boarding.
- (iii) Lessons and recommended changes for future boardings.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this very short summary paper will stimulate thought on the subject to assist in planning your own boarding strategy in a manner that will be effective, humane and safe.