TECHNICAL PAPER 9.

FISHING VESSEL IDENTIFICATION AND MARKING

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Q: WHY DOES A THIEF WEAR A MASK?
A: SO WE WILL NOT RECOGNIZE HIM – SO WE CANNOT IDENTIFY HIM.

Q: WHY DO A GROUP OF BANDITS ALL TRY TO LOOK THE SAME?
A: SO WE CANNOT IDENTIFY INDIVIDUALS.

I have to be careful here, as I do not want to brand fishers as thieves, but fishers are one of the last hunter groups in the world and they have the many secrets of hunters – they have their special places for fishing; they do not want to be recognized so it will not reveal their special hunting/fishing ground; they have their special gear and bait that brings them success; and, last of all, they have their special practices that often follow no laws. When at sea, a fisher does not want to be known, except when in trouble and sinking. Then he wants the whole world to find him, and quickly!

Ease in vessel identification is one of the backbone elements in fisheries MCS, without which the whole system becomes very difficult to implement.

Consider the usual practice of many countries – one agency checks the vessel for vessel safety and provides one registration number. A Fisheries Department provides a second number for identification of the vessel or fishing gear as part of the licensing procedures. If recorded at all, these are usually placed under the bows of the vessel, where only a scuba diver in the water at a range of 5-10 m would be able to read them. Further, how many of us have seen the number obliterated by old paint peeling, nets or bags, etc., thrown over the numbers? All this might seem somewhat exaggerated, but hopefully it does that emphasize that clear vessel identification is a must for fisheries management purposes, and also for sea-air rescue.

From 1984 until 1989, FAO member countries laboured with this point on an international basis, mainly because every country had a different system, meaning that vessels fishing in international waters and in joint ventures or otherwise in other countries' waters, had to change their markings to comply with each separate national legislation. Hence the attempts to standardize the system, not only for governments but also for the fishers. Today I stand here and recommend that consideration be given to this system developed FAO by international consensus under the aegis of FAO.

WHY?

I recommend this FAO system for two purposes: first, because it provides a clear, internationally recognizable system, and, second, because it builds on an international system already in place for telecommunications, a system that provides a unique identifier for each vessel, and one that can only be duplicated with considerable difficulty.

In the field visit on 26 October, we all saw the Korean trawler in the port. How many of these vessels with possibly the same number, e.g. "xxx" do you think there are? I noted with interest the fact that when fishing in Oman waters the vessel must carry an Omani flag and the appropriate Arabic identification board on the top of the bridge. This is very good, and shows good attention to vessel identification. Can this identification be reproduced for two or three "xxx" vessels fishing in other areas of the sea?

In any case, would it not be good to have a clear identifier that can be used to call the vessel and then be able to check that it is indeed the "xxx"? This was why the international group of FAO fishing countries chose the international radio call sign as the identifier for the vessel: it is unique to the vessel; is already registered with the International Telecommunications Union in the List of Radio Call Signs; and can therefore be checked, and the name of the vessel and various other data can be verified, without even going on board the vessel. Interesting to check the radio call sign and note that the name of the vessel does not respond to the recorded name, or the name on the hull is different from that in the registry!

What is the FAO recommended Vessel Identification System? It is essentially a very simple system designed to aid in fisheries management and safety-at-sea. These standards are shown in the relevant FAO publication, included in the documentation.

There are recommendations on size of letters, spacing of letters and positioning of these radio call signs, and these recommendations should be incorporated in national legislation to ensure they are not only understood, but also enforceable. Certain letters and numbers are not recommended, to avoid confusion, such as letters I and O and numbers 1 and 0. There are further suggestions for numbering of vessels that do not have a radio call sign, and these can be modified to suit the situation.

In general the following letter and number marking specifications are suggested:

1. Standard block [capital] letters to be used.

2. Width and spacing of letters are to be proportional to the letter height for the size of vessel. Thus width of stroke to be not less than one-sixth the height (h/6); spacing not less than h/6, nor exceed h/4, and shall be different for letters with sloping sides [A or V], these letters being spaced at not less than h/10 nor exceed h/8.

3. Letters and numbers shall be black on white or vice versa.

4. The size of the letters (h) should be proportional to the length overall (LOA) of the vessel, as in the accompanying table.

5. Marks on the deck shall be not less than 0.3 m for all vessels over 5 m LOA.

LOA	Height of letters (h) and numbers
25 m and over	1.0 m
20 m - < 25 m	0.8 m
15 m - < 20 m	0.6 m
12 m - < 15 m	0.4 m
5 m – < 12 m	0.3 m
Under 5 m	0.1 m

MALAYSIAN SYSTEM

This system applies the FAO marking system in general, with the addition of requirements for:

- Vessel hull colours for state identification.

- Vessel identification plate situated on the bow post with irremovable nails.
- Zone identification letters in large white letters on black background.

REFERENCES

FAO. 1985 , Definition and classification of fishing vessel types. FAO Fisheries Technical Paper No. 267. 63 p.

FAO. 1996, "The standard specifications for the marking and identification of fishing vessels"- Annex II in FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries - Fishing Operations - 1.Rome, FAO, 69p.