



JAPAN P&I NEWS

To the Members

China—Collision Risks between Merchant Vessels and Fishing Vessels in China’s Coastal Waters: Analysis and Prevention Recommendations

We have obtained information from Huatai Insurance Agency & Consultant Service Ltd. on the ongoing risks of collision between merchant vessels and fishing vessels in China’s coastal waters. According to their circular, while the number of such collision accidents has shown a yearly downward trend, the casualty rate per accident remains notably high.

A recent accident involving a Panamanian-flagged merchant vessel and a fishing vessel approximately 110 nautical miles east of Tianjin Port resulted in the sinking of the fishing vessel and 10 fatalities or missing persons, again highlighting the need for effective preventive measures.

According to the circular, high-risk areas for collisions are mainly concentrated in waters where customary routes of merchant vessels overlap with fishing grounds, port anchorages and approach/departure channels, waters with concentrated fishing activities during fishing seasons, and inshore waters with complex ocean currents and tides. Accident investigations also revealed that the vast majority of collisions occurred at night, particularly between 23:00 and 04:00.

The circular analyses both merchant and fishing vessel aspects, noting that officers on watch sometimes fail to maintain a proper look-out, or over-rely on navigation equipment. It also highlights that fishing vessels often fail to maintain proper look-out, with bridge watchkeepers participating in fishing operations on deck, and that some fail to display lights and shapes in accordance with COLREGS.

It is suggested that shipowners and bridge teams familiarize themselves with the “Guideline for the Prevention of Collisions between Merchant Vessels and Fishing Vessels in Coastal Waters of China” issued by the Maritime Safety Administration of the People’s Republic of China (China MSA). Also, the China MSA has identified 38 high-risk areas for merchant-fishing vessel collisions and advises vessels to familiarize themselves with the geographical distribution of these areas, enhance vigilance and navigate in caution.

For more information, please see the attached circular issued by Huatai Insurance Agency & Consultant Service Ltd.

Yours faithfully,

The Japan Ship Owners’ Mutual Protection & Indemnity Association

Attachment: Huatai Circular No.PNI(2025)07

collision accidents in China's coastal waters has exhibited a yearly downward trend, the casualty rate per accident remains notably high.

A recent collision accident involving a Panamanian-flagged merchant vessel and a fishing vessel occurred approximately 110 nautical miles east of Tianjin Port, resulting in the sinking of the fishing vessel and 10 fatalities or missing persons. This accident again serves as a reminder to all parties that effective measures must be adopted to minimize the occurrence of such accidents.

In this context, this Circular is issued to analyze the occurrence patterns, distribution characteristics, and underlying causes of such accidents. It also puts forward targeted preventive recommendations to support Members' safety management and minimize the likelihood of the occurrence of such collisions.

Characteristics of Collision Accidents between Merchant Vessels and Fishing Vessels in China's Coastal Waters

1. Geographic Distribution of Collision Accidents

High-risk areas for merchant vessel-fishing vessel collisions are mainly concentrated in the following water types:

- Areas where customary routes of merchant vessels overlap with fishing grounds.
- Port anchorages and approach/departure channels.
- Waters with concentrated fishing activities during fishing seasons.
- Inshore waters with complex ocean currents and tides.

2. Temporal Patterns of Accidents

- **Annual Cycle**

The high-risk period for such accidents is typically before the summer fishing ban (April–June) and after the ban is lifted (September–November) each year. During these periods, intensive fishing vessel operations lead to a sharp increase in maritime traffic density in coastal waters, thereby significantly raising collision risks.

- **Daily Cycle**

Accident investigation results have found that the vast majority of collisions occurred at night, particularly between 23:00 and 04:00 the next day.

3. Vessel Types Involved and Accident Consequences

3.1 Vessel Types Involved

- Container ships and bulk carriers are the primary vessel types involved in such collisions. These vessels typically sail at high speeds and have significant inertia, resulting in shorter collision avoidance response times and severe damage to fishing vessels.

- Trawlers and purse seiners account for the highest proportion of accidents. Trawlers have a wide range of extended fishing gear, while purse seiners operate in dense groups. These characteristics significantly elevate the likelihood of collisions with merchant vessels.

3.2 Accident Consequences

