



clever solutions | beyond class

CIRCULAR

China MSA – Prevention of Merchant and Fishing Vessel Collision

C26045 | 28 Sep 2026

Notice to: Ship Owners / Managers / Operators / Masters

China MSA issued a [guideline](#) dated 22 September 2023, on the prevention of collisions between merchant and fishing vessels in Chinese coastal waters. The guideline provides recommendations on safe navigation, collision avoidance, and emergency response, with the aim of improving collision risk awareness and control for merchant and fishing vessels.

Before entering or transiting Chinese coastal waters, vessels should review the distribution of fishing grounds, assess collision risks, and plan the voyage accordingly. Fishing vessel concentrations should be avoided where practicable. Where entry is unavoidable, maintain a heightened lookout, identify fishing vessels and their fishing gear, and plan safe clearance from vessels and nets.

High-Risk Warning Zones

China MSA has designated 38 high-risk warning zones for collisions between merchant and fishing vessels along the Chinese coast. These zones are grouped into three areas: north of 35°N, 35°N–26°30'N, and 26°30'N–12°N.

Vessels should refer to the latest China MSA [information](#) and the accompanying zone details when planning and navigating in these areas.

Navigation Guidelines

- Conduct a safety navigation briefing before entering high-density fishing areas, covering fishing operations, collision risks, avoidance measures, and applicable procedures.
- Inspect and test all navigation, communication, signaling, machinery, and steering equipment, ensuring the vessel is ready for immediate maneuvering.

- Maintain an appropriate bridge watch, with at least two watchkeepers present. Maintain a proper lookout using sight, hearing, and all available means, and continuously assess collision risks.
- Use manual steering in high-density fishing areas and, where practicable, maintain at least 1 NM clearance from fishing vessels. Remain alert to sudden changes in speed or course.
- The OOW should adjust the watchkeeping level according to traffic density and call the Master when necessary. The Master should issue appropriate night orders when navigating fishing grounds at night.
- Exercise increased vigilance during periods of high fishing activity, particularly between 2300–0400. Caution is required near anchored fishing vessels, fishing nets/markers, and small or wooden fishing vessels that may be difficult to detect.
- Be aware that AIS signals from fishing gear or markers may result in interference or misleading targets on AIS, radar, or ECDIS.
- During watch handover, communicate relevant traffic and navigation risks. Complete the handover only after any ongoing collision-avoidance maneuver has been concluded.

Collision Avoidance

- Take early, substantial and clear avoiding action, maintaining sufficient passing distance.
- Where collision risk exists, use VHF Ch. 16 to establish contact. If there is no response, take timely action and use appropriate sound/light signals.
- In an emergency, use at least five short Aldis light flashes and/or whistle blasts, reduce speed or stop engines if necessary.
- Ensure avoiding action does not create risk with other traffic, particularly in dense fishing areas.
- In restricted visibility or adverse weather, reduce speed as necessary, use required signals, and enhance lookout, including at the bow when required.
- Consider language and accent differences to ensure clear VHF communication.
- Fishing vessels proceeding at around 3 knots may have restricted maneuverability. Anticipate sudden speed/course changes and take early avoiding action.
- Maintain a safe passing distance, as close contact, wave action, or vessel suction may damage or capsize fishing vessels.
- In dense fishing areas, fishing vessel lights and AIS signals from fishing gear may obscure other merchant vessels, maintain an enhanced lookout.

Emergency Rescue

If collision is unavoidable, reduce speed as much as practicable and avoid striking the fishing vessel's side with the bow where possible. Following a collision, stop as soon as practicable, prioritise rescue, remain on scene until all persons are safe unless own vessel's safety is seriously endangered. Promptly notify the nearest competent maritime authority and nearby vessels, providing the vessel's position, casualties, damage, prevailing conditions, and any rescue requirements.

Act now

Ship Owners / Managers / Operators / Masters should review the China MSA collision-prevention guidance and high-risk warning zones. Ensure voyage planning, lookout, equipment readiness, and collision-avoidance procedures are reinforced before entering areas of dense fishing activity.