



Vanuatu International Shipping Registry (VISR)

Quality Management System (QMS) Operational Policy for Fishing Vessels Compliance, Reporting, Monitoring and Enforcement

Issued by the Maritime Administrator

Document Control

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Applies To	All Vanuatu-flagged fishing vessels and, as applicable, their registered owners, beneficial owners, operators, managers, masters, charterers, Special Agents and authorized representatives
Distribution	VISR internal; Department of Fisheries; Special Agents; Owners/Managers of Vanuatu- flagged fishing vessels (as applicable)

Introduction:

This document establishes the operational policy for fishing vessels flying the flag of the Republic of Vanuatu. It provides the compliance, reporting, monitoring and enforcement framework applied by the Vanuatu International Shipping Registry (VISR) to reduce Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing risk, control operations in and around coastal

State Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), regulate transshipment and RFMO-related compliance, protect the reputation of the Vanuatu flag, and support formal oversight by VISR, the Department of Fisheries and other relevant stakeholders.

1. Policy on Compliance and Oversight of Fishing Vessels

1.1 Purpose and Scope:

This policy governs the standards of conduct expected from all Vanuatu-flagged fishing vessels and establishes the administrative framework through which VISR may monitor, investigate and enforce compliance. It applies throughout the vessel lifecycle, including pre-registration review, active operation under the flag, incident response, corrective action, suspension, deletion and any associated follow-up.

1.2 Application:

This policy applies to all Vanuatu-flagged fishing vessels and, where relevant, to the persons and entities exercising control over their operation. Compliance responsibilities extend to owners, beneficial owners, operators, technical managers, masters, charterers, Special Agents and any person corresponding with the Administration on the vessel's behalf.

1.3 Core Principles:

- **No IUU activity:** Fishing vessels shall not engage in, support, conceal, facilitate or benefit from Illegal, Unreported or Unregulated fishing in any form.
- **Zero tolerance for concealment:** Failure to report an incident, delay in notification, withholding of material facts, or submission of misleading information shall be treated as independent breaches.
- **Flag State independence:** VISR may take action on the basis of its own risk assessment and evidence review and is not required to await or mirror a coastal State decision before acting.
- **Risk-based supervision:** Where evidence is incomplete but risk indicators are credible, VISR may impose conditional status, enhanced monitoring or interim measures pending final assessment.
- **Accountability across associated parties:** The compliance history of related owners, managers, operators and agents may be considered where patterns of conduct affect the integrity of the flag.

1.4 Definitions:

- "High-risk boundary area" means waters at or near an EEZ limit where inadvertent or intentional entry into a coastal State EEZ could reasonably occur.
- "Incident" means any event that gives rise to an allegation, inquiry, warning, detention, fine, inspection, suspected EEZ entry, tracking anomaly, enforcement action or other compliance concern.
- "Raw tracking data" means original AIS, VMS or equivalent export files and supporting records in their native or machine-readable form; screenshots, summaries or reconstructed extracts are not a substitute.

- "Related party" means any beneficial owner, registered owner, operator, manager, charterer, Special Agent or other person exercising direct or indirect control over a vessel or its operations.
- "RFMO-related incident" means any allegation, citation, inspection, boarding, observer report, listing action, authorization issue, catch-documentation deficiency, transshipment issue or other non-compliance concern arising under the measures, schemes or procedures of a relevant regional fisheries management organization.
- "Transshipment" means any transfer or receipt of fish, fish products or catch between fishing vessels, carrier vessels or other receiving vessels, whether at sea or in port, where such activity is regulated, restricted or reportable under applicable law or RFMO measures.

2. Operational Requirements for Fishing Vessels

2.1 General Duty of Compliance:

Every Vanuatu-flagged fishing vessel shall comply with the laws and regulations of the flag State, the applicable requirements of the relevant coastal State when operating in or near its maritime zones, the measures of relevant regional fisheries management organizations, the terms of any authorization or certificate issued by VISR, and all registry circulars, notices and lawful directions.

2.2 EEZ and Boundary Area Operations:

No vessel shall enter, fish, deploy gear, transship, loiter for fishing purposes or otherwise operate in a coastal State EEZ unless such activity is lawfully authorized. When operating in a high-risk boundary area, the master shall maintain heightened navigational awareness, verify position frequently, ensure bridge records are complete, and avoid conduct capable of giving rise to a reasonable presumption of fishing or unauthorized EEZ entry.

- Fishing gear shall be secured whenever the vessel is transiting a boundary area without authorization to fish.
- Any uncertainty regarding location, boundary proximity, tracking alarms or chart settings shall be treated as reportable and escalated immediately.
- Intentional operation along an EEZ limit in a manner that creates repeated ambiguity, especially when combined with fishing-type patterns, may be treated as high-risk conduct even where a final coastal State determination has not yet been issued.

2.3 Mandatory 24-Hour Reporting:

The owner, operator, master and responsible Special Agent shall ensure that VISR is notified within 24 hours of any incident affecting compliance, reputation, or the legal status of the vessel. The reporting duty is not conditional upon the vessel's own view of whether a violation occurred.

- Mandatory reporting triggers include, at minimum: actual or suspected EEZ entry; contact with coastal State authorities; coastal State or media allegations of IUU fishing

or non-compliance; inspection, warning, detention, fine or prosecution; loss, deactivation or malfunction of AIS or other required tracking systems; serious discrepancies in logs or catch records; and any enforcement inquiry involving the vessel or an associated party.

- The report shall include a narrative of events, relevant dates and times, coordinates, copies of communications, names of authorities involved, preliminary corrective measures and the responsible contact person for follow-up.
- Supplementary reports shall be submitted promptly as new facts, determinations or official documents become available.

2.4 Data Integrity and Records:

Fishing vessels shall maintain complete, accurate and contemporaneous records, including bridge log books, daily fishing records, catch and gear deployment records, position records, alarm logs, communications with agents and authorities, and any other record reasonably required by the Administration. Such records shall be retained for not less than three years. This includes RFMO authorizations, observer communications and reports, transshipment declarations, catch documentation, and any carrier-vessel or receiving-vessel records where relevant.

- AIS shall remain active, accurate and properly configured unless a lawful and documented safety exception applies.
- Upon request by VISR, raw tracking data and supporting operational records shall be produced without delay and, unless otherwise directed, within 48 hours.

2.5 Transshipment, RFMO and Other IUU-Related Incidents:

For the avoidance of doubt, reportable and enforceable IUU-related incidents under this policy include not only suspected EEZ entry or illegal fishing, but also unauthorized or improperly documented transshipment, fishing or support operations undertaken contrary to RFMO rules, and the use of carrier or support vessels to conceal, receive or move catch in violation of applicable controls.

Without limitation, such incidents include: fishing without required coastal State or RFMO authorization; operating while absent from a required RFMO vessel list; breach of closed areas, closed seasons, quota or effort restrictions; use of prohibited gear or methods; interference with observers or inspectors; refusal of boarding or inspection; catch misreporting or documentation fraud; failure to submit or carry required transshipment declarations, catch certificates or authorizations; AIS or VMS disabling, tampering or data manipulation; and any support, resupply or receiving operation that facilitates IUU activity.

Any proposed or completed transshipment by a Vanuatu-flagged fishing vessel must be lawful, fully documented and, where required, pre-authorized or pre-notified. VISR may prohibit transshipment for any vessel on conditional status or where the reliability of the vessel's records, authorizations or compliance history is in doubt.

3. Oversight, Monitoring and Special Controls

3.1 Evidence and Monitoring:

In carrying out this policy, VISR may rely on AIS analysis, VMS data where fitted or required, satellite and third-party intelligence, coastal State reports, inspection findings, media reports, photographs, bridge logs, fishing records and any other information considered relevant. Evidence may also include RFMO vessel lists and authorizations, observer reports, boarding and inspection reports, transshipment declarations, catch documentation scheme records, and port State control or port State measures findings. The Administration is not bound to accept self-generated or selective extracts, summaries or reconstructions as conclusive evidence where raw records or independent data are available or requested.

- Self-generated screenshots, selective extracts, summaries or reconstructions are not treated as conclusive evidence where raw records or independent data are available or requested.

3.2 Conditional Status and Enhanced Monitoring:

Where credible risk exists but the evidence is not yet final, VISR may place a vessel on conditional operating status. Conditional status may include one or more of the following measures: enhanced reporting; mandatory submission of raw tracking exports; prior notice before operating in boundary areas; targeted inspections; restrictions on fishing operations in designated zones; prohibition or prior approval requirements for transshipment; and corrective action plans with fixed deadlines.

3.3 Responsibilities of Special Agents and Authorized Representatives:

Special Agents and authorized representatives must facilitate immediate communication between the vessel, its owner and the Administration. They shall not delay, filter, re-characterize or suppress reportable incidents. Any person corresponding with VISR on behalf of a vessel must be able to identify the capacity in which they act and produce evidence of authority if requested.

4. Enforcement and Penalty Framework

4.1 Classification of Breaches:

Breaches will be classified having regard to seriousness, evidence, recurrence, degree of control exercised by associated parties, actual or potential harm, and the reputational risk posed to the Vanuatu flag. The ranges below are indicative and do not limit the Maritime Administrator's discretion in exceptional or aggravated cases.

Level	Nature of breach	Indicative penalty (USD)	Administrative response
1	Administrative or minor	10,000 -	Warning,

	procedural breach, including documentation delays or isolated procedural deficiencies	50,000	corrective action and monitoring
2	Compliance breach, including failure to report within 24 hours, incomplete reporting or failure to cooperate	50,000 - 150,000	Recorded breach and conditional status
3	High-risk operational conduct, including suspicious boundary operations, AIS irregularities, unreported or poorly documented transshipment, RFMO authorization or listing discrepancies, or failure to produce raw data	150,000 - 500,000	Conditional penalty and enhanced monitoring
4	Confirmed violation, including unauthorized EEZ entry, confirmed illegal fishing, unauthorized transshipment, confirmed RFMO breach, or verified obstruction of enforcement	300,000 - 1,000,000 +	Immediate penalty, suspension or deletion depending on severity
5	Aggravated or repeat offender case, including concealment, falsified transshipment or catch records, systemic non-compliance, repeated RFMO breaches or repeated incidents	At discretion	Immediate deletion, blacklisting and related-party controls

4.2 Segmented Enforcement of Multi-Issue Cases:

Where a case contains both confirmed breaches and disputed or still-developing allegations, VISR may segment enforcement. Confirmed elements may be immediately payable or otherwise enforceable, while other elements remain under review pending further evidence. Such review does not amount to withdrawal, waiver or exoneration.

4.3 Aggravating and Mitigating Factors:

- Aggravating factors include concealment, delayed reporting, repeated incidents involving the same or related parties, false statements, altered or missing records, refusal to cooperate, and conduct creating significant diplomatic or reputational risk for the flag.
- Mitigating factors may include prompt self-reporting, early and complete production of raw data, verified corrective measures, and formal cooperation with the Administration and relevant authorities. Mitigation does not excuse a failure to report.

5. Suspension, Deletion and Related-Party Controls

5.1 Grounds for Escalation:

VISR may suspend or delete a fishing vessel from the registry where warranted by the seriousness of the conduct or the pattern of associated risk. Escalation may be justified by non-payment of penalties, repeated reporting breaches, refusal to produce evidence, confirmed IUU activity, false or misleading representations, repeated unauthorized transshipment or RFMO-related concerns, or any course of conduct that demonstrates the vessel is incompatible with continued operation under the Vanuatu flag.

5.2 Related-Party Assessment:

The Maritime Administrator may consider the compliance history of related parties across more than one vessel when assessing risk, imposing conditions, or deciding whether continued registration is appropriate. Changes in flag, ownership structure, technical management or agency arrangements do not prevent the Administration from evaluating the underlying pattern of conduct.

5.3 Reinstatement or Further Approval:

A vessel that has been suspended, or a related party that has been subject to adverse action, shall not be treated as rehabilitated merely because an external case has concluded. Any reinstatement, re-registration or approval of a related application shall occur only by written decision of the Maritime Administrator and only after satisfactory corrective measures have been demonstrated.

6. Responsibilities of Owners, Masters, Managers and Agents

6.1 Owners, Beneficial Owners and Managers:

Owners, beneficial owners and managers are responsible for ensuring that fishing vessels are operated lawfully, transparently and in a manner consistent with the obligations attached to the Vanuatu flag. They must ensure competent masters are appointed, tracking systems and charts are functioning, reporting lines are effective, and all vessel records are capable of independent verification.

6.2 Masters:

The master bears direct operational responsibility for navigation, location awareness, gear status, recordkeeping, bridge discipline and immediate escalation of any reportable incident. A master shall not rely solely on a monitoring office, agent or third party where local navigation, alarms or circumstances indicate a potential compliance risk.

6.3 Special Agents and Authorized Representatives:

Special Agents serve an important coordinating role but do not replace the primary obligations of the owner, manager or master. Any Special Agent or representative corresponding with VISR must act within the authority granted by the Administration and may be held accountable for failures to notify, delays in communication or misrepresentation.

7. Records, Review and Final Authority

7.1 Records Management:

VISR shall maintain records of incidents, penalties, conditional statuses, corrective actions, correspondence and decisions relating to fishing vessels. These records may be used for oversight, risk ranking, audit preparation, appointment reviews and future decisions affecting the same or related parties.

7.2 Review and Amendment:

This policy shall be reviewed periodically and may be amended, supplemented or replaced by the Maritime Administrator to reflect operational experience, new risk patterns, legislative change, or updated flag State priorities. Additional circulars and guidance notes may be issued to support implementation.

7.3 Final Authority:

All decisions under this policy are taken at the sole discretion of the Maritime Administrator in accordance with the Maritime Act, applicable regulations, registry policies and the international obligations of the Republic of Vanuatu. Nothing in this policy limits the Administration's power to take stronger action where necessary to protect the integrity of the flag.

Issued by the Maritime Administrator



Saade Makhouri

Maritime Administrator

Vanuatu International Shipping Registry (VISR)