

MSOC Policy Statement

Maritime Domain Awareness

Purpose

Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is the detection and monitoring of relevant maritime activity to enable prevention and response actions to be taken by maritime security agencies to safeguard New Zealand's interests. Giving effect to the Maritime Security Strategy requires comprehensive MDA. MDA is the shared responsibility of several maritime security agencies.

MDA roles and responsibilities can be difficult to navigate due to the many potentially overlapping legislative frameworks involved. This also makes it difficult to be definitive about responsibilities over all possible MDA scenarios. This Policy Statement's purpose is to clarify connections and responsibilities and to establish a set of mutually agreed principles to guide maritime security agencies' MDA cooperation. This Policy Statement is also a resource for agency policy and operational practitioners.

Context

Definitions

Maritime Domain Awareness is the effective understanding of anything associated with the maritime domain that could impact security, safety, the economy or the marine environment.

Maritime security agency means a government agency identified in the Maritime Security Strategy with a mandate to provide MDA. These are: Maritime New Zealand, the Ministry for Primary Industries, the New Zealand Customs Service, and the New Zealand Defence Force.

1. Maritime security involves preventing, detecting, mitigating and responding to risks introduced by malicious, unregulated, negligent or harmful (or potentially harmful) activities at sea. This reduces the ability of malicious and negligent actors to use the maritime domain to undermine national security interests and objectives.
2. New Zealand has one of the largest maritime areas in the world. The Maritime Security Strategy directs central government activity in this area. It highlights the critical importance of being able to detect and monitor relevant maritime activity, coordinate, assess, analyse, and fuse relevant information and intelligence streams, and provide nationally focused maritime security assessment.
3. The first pillar underpinning the Maritime Security Strategy is the Understand pillar. The Strategy identifies effective MDA as a key enabler for the Understand pillar. It is critical that New Zealand can detect and monitor relevant maritime activity so that prevention and

response actions can be undertaken by maritime security agencies to safeguard our interests. Those interests encompass a very large area (1/12th of the world's surface) but also have a global dimension.

4. Effective guardianship of New Zealand's maritime security is underpinned by clarity of MDA roles and responsibilities across agencies.

Scope of the Policy Statement

5. This Policy Statement should be read alongside the National Security Strategy 2023, the Maritime Security Strategy 2024, and the Strategic Defence Policy 2025.
6. This Policy Statement applies to MDA activities carried out by New Zealand maritime security agencies. Maritime security agencies have different needs for MDA and their internal procedures may differ but, in line with the Maritime Security Strategy's Comprehensive Multi-Agency Approach, all maritime security agencies are guided by this Policy Statement.
7. Reform to the National Maritime Coordination Centre (NMCC) and its functions is out of scope, as this was covered by the 2024 NMCC review. The NMCC's agreed functions are¹:
 - a. Support the tracking of Vessels of Interest and activity of concern in New Zealand's Maritime Area of Interest, and
 - b. all of Government maritime security effects coordination.

Principles

8. The following principles constitute a framework for good decision making and best practice. They should be taken into account by maritime security agencies when planning or carrying out MDA activities. These principles are subject to operational and legal constraints.
9. **Responsibility to share:** It is critical that New Zealand can detect and monitor maritime activity so that prevention and response actions can be taken by maritime security agencies to safeguard New Zealand's interests against threats. Those interests encompass a very large area and the Maritime Security Strategy highlights the expectation that maritime security agencies will provide MDA in this large maritime area of interest.
10. A culture of information sharing underpins all-of-government MDA activity. Maritime security agencies should share relevant MDA information, subject to security and agency-specific legal requirements and at as low a classification as possible, with other maritime security agencies, and be aware of the pathways for doing so.
11. **Comprehensive multi-agency approach:** The Maritime Security Strategy demands a maritime security system that operates with clear governance and operational accountabilities, prioritises activity through regular inter-agency planning processes and

¹ As agreed by MSOC, 12 February 2025.

targets maritime security investment against a clear set of priorities. Lack of clarity over MDA responsibilities inhibits this principle.

12. New Zealand achieves maritime security through a multi-agency approach because this is more efficient and effective than individual agencies acting independently. The Maritime Security Strategy emphasises that no single agency owns maritime security or manages maritime threats without the support of other agencies and stakeholders such as the maritime industry. Maritime security threats and issues are not mutually exclusive, and threat actors and events often span multiple agency mandates. The Maritime Security Strategy expects that agencies work together.

Agency MDA mandates

13. Whilst the Maritime Security Strategy requires agency cooperation for MDA, maritime security agencies retain individual statutory responsibilities, and are empowered under their own legislation².

Areas of agency expertise

14. In giving effect to the responsibility to share and comprehensive multi-agency approach principles, maritime security agencies should leverage their sector expertise for other all-of-government MDA. Other MDA agencies may rely on this expertise for their own MDA responsibilities.

Matters to be reflected in internal policies and procedures

15. To ensure a comprehensive multi-agency approach, it is important for all maritime security agencies subject to this Policy Statement to have internal policies and procedures that are consistent with this Policy Statement's principles and to have systems in place to support and monitor compliance.
16. MDA agencies are expected to provide expertise, but lead agencies for Maritime Security issues retain their leadership of that issue.

Duration of Policy Statement

17. This Policy Statement will take effect from the date of its approval for a period of five years. The Maritime Security Oversight Committee may at any time amend, revoke, or replace the Policy Statement.

² Some maritime security agencies may also cross-warrant other agencies to act under their legislation.