

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ASEAN MARITIME OUTLOOK (AMO) IN OVERCOMING ILLEGAL, UNREPORTED, AND UNREGULATED FISHING WITHIN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

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Abstract

This paper explores the implementation of the ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO) in overcoming Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing within the Indo-Pacific region. As a strategic document issued by ASEAN in 2023, the AMO aims to enhance regional maritime cooperation, particularly in surveillance, law enforcement, and sustainable resource management. The Indo-Pacific, rich in marine biodiversity and economic value, has become increasingly vulnerable to IUU fishing, which creates threats to food security, environmental sustainability, and regional stability. Despite ongoing initiatives, IUU fishing remains rampant due to weak enforcement, limited technology, and differing national interests. Using the theory of regionalism, this study analyzes AMO's function as a non-binding but guiding framework. The study concludes that while AMO has strengthened coordination efforts through joint patrols and

surveillance systems, its current limitations demand stronger implementation mechanisms, increased technological investment, and more frequent policy updates to effectively deter IUU fishing in the region.

Keywords: ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO), IUU Fishing, Regionalism, Indo-Pacific.

1. BACKGROUND

The Indo-Pacific is a term that refers to the water region that extends from the eastern side of the Indian Ocean to the western part of the Pacific Ocean. This region connects various important seas and straits, including the Malacca Strait, which is a major route for international trade and maritime transportation. The region includes tropical waters rich in biodiversity and includes countries in Southeast Asia, East Asia, Australia, and islands of the western Pacific. The Indo-Pacific also includes several vital maritime chokepoints for global energy supply and trade (Rustam, 2016), thus becoming the center of global geopolitical and economic attention. Interestingly, this region was actually called the Asia-Pacific under Obama's leadership, but changed to the Indo-Pacific since Trump became president. From a geopolitical perspective, the change of US foreign policy from focusing on the "Asia-Pacific" in the Obama era (Glosserman, 2016) to the "Indo-Pacific" during the Trump administration occurred due to the US faced increasing challenges from China. To maintain its global dominance, the United States strengthened its military presence in this millions of square meters region and strengthened strategic cooperation with key partners such as Australia, India, and Japan (Saeed, 2017). As the center of global attention, the natural resources of this are certainly very appealing. In terms of non-biological, sea sand and gravel are often exploited for reclamation purposes, as well as oil and natural gas for industrial energy sources. On the other hand, in terms of biology, this region offers a variety of biota and fish that are very profitable, such as snapper and tuna

as the main exports from this area, to ornamental fish such as *napoleon* fish and *terapontidae* fish which are unfortunately endangered.

With the vast area and extraordinary commodity content, this area is vulnerable to various crimes and acts that are not in accordance with norms. In 10 years, acts such as terrorism threats, ship hijackings, and drug smuggling have occurred. However, an act that caught the author's attention was illegal fishing. Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, a term that refers to this crime and has become a global problem to this day. FAO (2001) explains the term IUU fishing which consists of three main components, namely illegal (I) for illegal fishing, unreported (IN) for unreported arrests, and unregulated (U) for unregulated fishing, where each has a different definition. Of course, if carried out, this action will be very detrimental to the country that has the sea territory. In fact, there are already many regulations or legal frameworks that generally try to overcome the IUU fishing problem such as UNCLOS 1982 and Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) 1995, but until now there are still cases of unethical fishing that occur throughout the world, including in the Indo-Pacific Region, such as the Arrestmen of the MV *Hai Fa* Ship in Papua (2014) and Foreign Ship with the Philippine Flag in the Sulawesi Sea (2023).

In response to the problem, the regional organization Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) views this as very urgent, where 9 out of 10 ASEAN countries have seas that are included in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, various initiatives, cooperation, and meetings are carried out by this organization to discuss the solutions of IUU fishing and other general maritime issues. As examples, the Regional Plan of Action (RPOA), which is a regional forum, has formed a joint commitment to prevent and overcome IUU fishing to manage sustainable marine and fisheries resources (KKP, 2024). There is also CTI-CFF which is a collaboration with the aim of protecting marine biodiversity while improving the welfare of coastal communities (CTI-CFF, 2009). However, the dynamics of success through solutions that are implemented still occur and problems still remain. One of the collaborations that caught the author's attention is ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO), a document containing views regarding what actions should be taken in the ASEAN maritime region.

ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO) is a strategic ASEAN document that serves as a reference and guide in strengthening, aligning, and directing maritime cooperation in the Southeast Asian region, which is between ASEAN member countries and with their external partners. This document emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive, rule-based, and sustainable approach to address challenges and take advantage of opportunities in the Indo-Pacific region's maritime sector (Rolliansyah, 2023). The purpose of AMO is to align various maritime cooperation initiatives and programs under the three pillars of ASEAN, so as to increase effectiveness and avoid duplication of regional cooperation efforts. AMO is expected to be the basis for ASEAN in formulating comprehensive and integrated policies and strategies in dealing with various maritime issues around ASEAN countries, including practices of illegal fishing in the Indo-Pacific region. With a rules-based approach and cross-border cooperation, AMO can strengthen ASEAN's capacity in surveillance, law enforcement, and enhancing technical and funding cooperation to combat IUU fishing in the Indo-Pacific region. This is what the author wants to examine through this article regarding the realization of the AMO document in overcoming this problem. The author also plans to attach challenges and recommendations faced by both AMO and ASEAN regarding the prevention and resolution of IUU fishing problem.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing is a despicable act that is very detrimental to the Indo-Pacific and is quite the biggest major challenges for countries in the region. In practice, IUU fishing was carried out with various motives and purposes, but most often associated with the problem of economic needs. In addressing the problems that have occurred for some time, various literature has been compiled and distributed to be a source of reference for problem analysis and the search for solutions and prevention in the future. Therefore, in compiling this article, the author conducted several literature studies as a comparison regarding the problem of IUU fishing in the Indo-Pacific and the role of ASEAN Maritime Outlook in overcoming it. In compiling this article, the author took one of the most famous theories in the International Relations “world”, namely the Regionalism Theory. C.S.T Kansil and Cristine Tansil, 2002, 233 stated that the Regionalism Theory is an understanding to establish cooperation between countries in a particular region. This means that this theory can be applied by countries in the Indo-Pacific to overcome various problems in their region, especially IUU fishing. Those countries play a major role in maintaining and preserving their resources including in the ocean area. This explains the importance of the state as the biggest actor in making decisions to overcome problems, finding solutions, and prevent the risk of threats related to maritime areas including the IUU fishing.

The first literature studied by the author is the ASEAN Maritime Outlook or AMO itself. Its first edition in 2023 includes various maritime guidelines for ASEAN countries in facing maritime challenges. On page 10, there are 4 main objectives of AMO, namely as a practical tool that can capture the dynamics of maritime issues across ASEAN, promote general principles in advancing maritime cooperation in various sectors, become a practical tool to explore and identify opportunities for technical and financial assistance, and become a reference for maritime trends, opportunities, and challenges in the region and synergize ASEAN programs and work plans. Furthermore, page 42 explained how IUU fishing is usually carried out, like using cyanide and electrical devices that can damage coral reefs and disrupt the food chain. Then at the annex part, AMO attached a series of activities carried out by ASEAN to maintain maritime areas, including prevention of IUU fishing. Thus, the AMO is not only a document of defining various criminal acts in their region, but also an instrument that prioritizes coordination in increasing the effectiveness of dealing with these acts, including IUU fishing.

The next literature reviewed by the author is a journal article published in Malaysia. With the title *Framework for Managing Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing in ASEAN*, the article discusses various IUU fishing issues that occurred in the Southeast Asia region. Based on the writing of Wen Chiat Lee and K. Kuperan Viswanathan, the thing that caught the author's attention was the data on the ASEAN marine and fisheries sector where they highlighted the very significant economic impact of IUU fishing. It turns out that the total loss is around USD 6 billion per year for member countries. According to data, Indonesia experiences the largest economic loss in ASEAN, with a loss of USD 3 billion per year. Followed by Vietnam which recorded a loss of USD 1.6 billion per year (Havoscope, 2019). These actions not only threaten the sustainability of marine resources and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, specifically ASEAN, but also threaten the welfare of local residents and the effectiveness of conservation efforts and sustainable fisheries management. One of the reasons for this crime is the fact that ASEAN countries contribute around a quarter of the world's total marine catch production, with Indonesia, Vietnam, and Myanmar as the main producers (FAO, 2018). Due to the high number of fishermen in this region, there is fierce competition for fish resources. This socio-economic



condition is what triggers low incomes for fishermen so that many of them are forced to practice IUU fishing in order to meet the needs of life.

Then after that, the last literature that was reviewed by the author is the work of Peter C. Oleson in 2021. In the article, he raises the pressing issue of increasing IUU fishing practices in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in the Pacific region. Oleson emphasized that IUU fishing has now become a very big threat to global maritime security. If not addressed immediately, IUU fishing could worsen the conditions of vulnerable surrounding countries and increase tensions between fishing countries, thus having implications for the geopolitical stability of the region. Then, around 60% of the world's fish yield comes from the Pacific Ocean, and more than half of it is a very threatened type if exploited mercilessly. Countries such as China, Taiwan, and Vietnam are said to be the main actors of IUU fishing. This practice not only harms local economies and threatens the food security of surrounding countries, but also causes damage to the marine environment due to climate uncertainty. IUU fishing is also related to transnational crimes, such as document forgery, corruption, human trafficking, and smuggling and to address these challenges, Oleson then highlighted the importance of utilizing cutting-edge surveillance technology, such as drones, satellites, and artificial intelligence (AI). He also emphasizes the urgency of multinational collaboration to prevent overexploitation. In addition, certification of catches and development of aquaculture are also recommended as one strategy to reduce demand for fish from IUU fishing activities. Overall, handling IUU fishing in the Indo-Pacific requires cooperation between countries and an approach that involves technology, policy, and strong law enforcement, which in this context is ASEAN through the ASEAN Maritime Outlook.

3. METHOD

In writing this article, the author uses the narrative review method to collect in-depth data. Ferrari (2015) stated that Narrative Review is a research method used to evaluate, identify, analyze, and summarize previously published literature. This method aims to avoid duplication and explore new research and understanding zones that have not been widely discussed. Thus, narrative review can help identify topics that have been explored by previous researchers related to the document of ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO) and the reality of conflict in the Indo-Pacific Region. This method helps the author understand previous research related to the relevance of the topic and the writing plan that is trying to be conveyed so that from that, the author departs to a more updated discussion, namely how the implementation of the AMO document in overcoming maritime problems in the Indo-Pacific Region, especially conflicts over IUU fishing.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As discussed in the previous section, the Indo-Pacific region has a very large area and very tempting commodities for surrounding countries such as ASEAN, and even the whole world. Of course, this creates a very big risk of exploitation and the realization of detrimental crimes. As a regional organization included in the Indo-Pacific region, ASEAN has a big responsibility both in utilizing the commodities wisely and maintaining the sustainability of its natural resources. Therefore, ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO) published by them has become the center of world attention regarding the implementation in overcoming various IUU fishing problems.

Implementation of AMO in Indo Pacific Region

ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO), the first edition of which was published in 2023, is a strategic document that functions as a guide for ASEAN member countries in cooperating on maritime aspects. AMO is designed to strengthen synergy and coordination of countries in facing various maritime challenges, including IUU fishing, as one of the biggest threats to the condition of marine resources in this region. This document not only emphasizes the maritime aspect in the field of security, but also integrates the dimensions of the blue economy, environmental conservation, and the development of maritime surveillance technology (ASEAN Maritime Outlook, 2023, pp. 5-15).

One of the most concrete implementations of AMO is the implementation of joint patrols involving several ASEAN countries. The most prominent example is the trilateral patrol between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines in the Sulawesi Sea and Sulu Sea (Trilateral Maritime Patrol). This patrol aims to improve Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) by jointly monitoring the activities of suspicious vessels, including vessels suspected of carrying IUU fishing out. Moreover, a joint operation between Indonesia and Australia known as Operation Gannet also serves as a concrete example of how AMO encourages cross-border cooperation in order to tackle IUU fishing and other maritime crimes. Through this joint patrol, ASEAN countries can share information, operate in the field, and strengthen law enforcement against IUU fishing perpetrators (ASEAN Maritime Outlook, 2023, pp. 20-30). Within the AMO there is also support for the use of advanced maritime surveillance technology, such as the use of Automatic Identification System (AIS) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). These technologies help ASEAN to monitor ship movements in the Indo-Pacific waters in real time and detect any illegal activity faster and accurately. It means AMO not only serves as a strategic guide, but also drives the much-needed modernization of maritime surveillance to address the IUU fishing problems which are increasingly complex (ASEAN Maritime Outlook, 2023, pp. 28-32).

However, various cases of IUU fishing in the Indo-Pacific shows that the challenges faced are still very large and complex. From 2024-2025, the Indonesian Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) managed to catch more than 112 illegal vessels originating from the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, and so on. The state losses that were successfully avoided from the capture of these vessels are estimated to reach IDR 3.1 trillion. One prominent case was the arrest of a Philippine-flagged vessel in Papuan waters in May 2025, which showed the modus operandi of illegal vessels that move from region to region quickly to avoid detection by law enforcement officers. In the Malacca Strait, several Malaysian fishing vessels using fishing trawls were also successfully secured, with a potential state loss of IDR 19.9 billion. Meanwhile, in the North Natuna Sea, a Vietnamese-flagged vessel using prohibited fishing gear was also detected and prosecuted, with the value of the losses prevented reaching Rp152.8 billion (KKP, 2025).

These cases show how widespread the practice of IUU fishing in the Indo-Pacific, despite the cooperation and joint supervision facilitated by the AMO. This shows that although the AMO has become a politically binding strategic document, so far, the AMO has functioned more as a normative guideline and policy reference rather than a directly binding legal instrument. Member countries still have the flexibility to implement AMO recommendations in accordance with their respective national interests, so that the effectiveness of the AMO in suppressing IUU fishing has not reached the optimal or expected level (ASEAN Maritime Outlook, 2023, pp. 35-40).

From the perspective of regionalism theory, AMO can be understood as a *soft regionalism* form which emphasizes dialogue, coordination, and solidarity between countries without sacrificing national sovereignty. AMO strengthens ASEAN maritime integration by building shared understanding and voluntary cooperation. However, differences in national interests, imbalances in monitoring capacity between countries, also geographical and political conditions in the Indo-Pacific region, especially ASEAN, are major obstacles to the implementation of AMO consistently and effectively. Some countries may prefer to take a dialogue approach rather than being directly involved firmly (Acharya, 2014).

The Reality of AMO as an Instrument for Preventing IUU Fishing

Conceptually, the ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO) is designed to be an effective tool in preventing IUU fishing in the Indo-Pacific. AMO voiced the need to increase maritime surveillance capacity, law enforcement, and develop cooperation with international partners to address IUU fishing challenges which cross the border (ASEAN Maritime Outlook, 2023, pp. 22-25). However, the reality on the ground shows that AMO still faces several significant obstacles. First, the weakness of regulations at both the national and regional levels is a major obstacle in this region. AMO does not yet have binding legal force so that member countries are not obliged to implement all of its agreements. This is exacerbated by differences in interpretation of maritime law and different claims of maritime sovereignty between ASEAN countries, especially in disputed areas such as the South China Sea. Second, limited progress in surveillance technology in several member countries hinders the effectiveness of detecting illegal vessels. This is supported by the fact that although AMO encourages the use of advanced technology such as satellites and AIS (Automatic Identification System) systems, their implementation is not evenly distributed throughout the region (ASEAN Maritime Outlook, 2023, pp. 28-30). AMO also faces major challenges related to the complexity of coordination between institutions and mechanisms spread across ASEAN. This document seeks to unify various sectoral bodies and maritime cooperation mechanisms in the region, such as the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), as well as other bilateral and multilateral forums. However, the existence of many of these mechanisms can actually create overlapping functions and hinder the effectiveness of the implementation of maritime policies as a whole (ASEAN Maritime Outlook, 2023, pp. 12-15).

In addition, the frequency of AMO issuance, which is only once every three years, raises concerns regarding the ability of this document for responding to rapidly changing maritime issues. To address this issue, several recommendations can be made. First, AMO needs to be strengthened so that it is not only a normative document, but also has a clear and measurable monitoring and evaluation mechanism for implementation, for example by establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the reduction in IUU fishing cases periodically (Oleson, 2021). Second, increasing the capacity of maritime surveillance technology must be a top priority, including investment in satellite systems, drone patrols, and data integration between member states (Lee & Viswanathan, 2020). Third, ASEAN needs to strengthen maritime legal and law enforcement cooperation by building a more concrete and coordinated joint law enforcement mechanism, including the harmonization of maritime regulations at the regional level (ASEAN Maritime Outlook, 2023, pp. 35-37). Finally, the frequency of AMO updates should be accelerated to two years or even one year so that responses to maritime issues are faster and more relevant to current developments. By implementing these recommendations, AMO can transform from a normative strategic document into a prevention IUU fishing instrument which is more effective and implementable, in accordance with the regionalist view which

emphasizes cooperation and solidarity between regional countries (ASEAN) in maintaining the security and sustainability of the Indo-Pacific region.

5. CONCLUSION

The ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO) has emerged as a vital instrument to overcome the long-standing and complex issue of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in the Indo-Pacific region. As a region characterized by vast marine resources and strategic waterways, the Indo-Pacific faces significant challenges from transnational maritime crimes, particularly IUU fishing, which causes extensive ecological and economic damage. The AMO, launched in 2023, represents ASEAN's collective strategic approach to strengthen maritime cooperation, improve surveillance, and foster regional coordination.

Concrete efforts such as the Trilateral Maritime Patrol involving Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, and Operation Gannet with Australia, reflect the AMO's contribution to enhancing Maritime Domain Awareness. Furthermore, AMO promotes the use of modern technologies like the Automatic Identification System (AIS) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to monitor vessel movements and prevent illicit activities. However, the persistence of IUU fishing, with over 112 illegal vessels apprehended between 2024 and 2025, highlights critical gaps in enforcement and legal harmonization.

One of AMO's main weaknesses is its nature as a normative, non-binding framework. While it fosters voluntary cooperation, the absence of enforceable obligations leads to inconsistent implementation across ASEAN member states. National interests, technological disparities, and sovereignty concerns often hinder cohesive action. Additionally, AMO's triennial update cycle is inadequate for responding to rapidly evolving maritime threats.

From the lens of regionalism theory, AMO exemplifies soft regionalism, prioritizing consensus and solidarity over supranational enforcement. To improve its effectiveness, several recommendations are proposed: First, the establishment of key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor IUU reduction outcomes. Second, enhanced investment in surveillance infrastructure such as satellites and drones. Third, regional harmonization of maritime laws and a joint enforcement mechanism. Lastly, AMO's review frequency should be accelerated to ensure responsiveness to emerging threats.

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