

MCI Circular 337/ 2026

To: Shipowners, Ship Operators, Managers, Masters, Company Security Officers (CSO), Ship Security Officers (SSO), Recognised Organisations and Seafarers serving on Cook Islands-flagged vessels.

Subject: ESCALATING SECURITY SITUATION – PERSIAN GULF, STRAIT OF HORMUZ, GULF OF OMAN, RED SEA AND GULF OF ADEN (MARSEC ADVISORY TO COOK ISLANDS FLAGGED VESSELS)

Date: 28th February 2026

Summary

The Cook Islands Flag Administration notes the continued escalation of military and asymmetric security activities in:

- Persian Gulf
- Strait of Hormuz
- Gulf of Oman
- Red Sea
- Gulf of Aden

The evolving situation presents heightened risks to commercial shipping, including but not limited to:

- Missile and drone attacks
- Naval military operations
- Unmanned aerial and surface threats
- Seizure or detention of vessels
- Disruption of port services
- Rapid changes in port security levels

The geographic scope of the threat environment is expanding and may change at short notice.

Mandatory Risk Assessment

All Cook Islands flagged vessels operating or intending to operate in the above regions shall:

- Conduct a documented voyage-specific security risk assessment;
- Re-evaluate trading patterns and port calls in affected areas;
- Consider alternative routing where practicable;
- Ensure crew are briefed on regional threat profiles.

MARSEC / ISPS Compliance

In accordance with the ISPS Code and national implementing legislation:

- Vessels shall operate at the MARSEC level as set by the relevant Contracting Government.
- Where intelligence or local authority direction indicates heightened risk, vessels shall elevate to a higher Ship Security Level as appropriate.
- Ship Security Plans (SSP) must be implemented in full for the corresponding security level. Company Security Officers are to ensure:
- Immediate review of Ship Security Assessments (SSA);

- Verification of security equipment functionality;
- Readiness for rapid transition between security levels.

Operational Precautions

Masters operating in or transiting affected areas are strongly advised to:

- Maintain enhanced bridge watchkeeping and radar surveillance;
- Minimise AIS data to the extent permitted under SOLAS and flag guidance where security risk justifies;
- Maintain secure communications with Company and relevant reporting centers (e.g., UKMTO, MSCHOA where applicable);
- Implement anti-drone and anti-boarding watch procedures;
- Avoid loitering and maintain maximum safe speed through high-risk corridors;
- Coordinate with naval advisories and convoy schemes where available.

Crew safety remains paramount. Non-essential deck access should be restricted during transit of high-risk zones.

Shipowners and Masters must determine whether continued presence in the area is operationally justified and consistent with the safety of life at sea.

Port and Coastal State Directives

Masters shall comply fully with:

- Port State security directives;
- Coastal State navigation restrictions;
- Naval authority instructions.

It is anticipated that:

- Port services may be disrupted;
- Entry permissions may be withdrawn at short notice;
- Security declarations (DoS) may be required more frequently.

Insurance and Chartering Considerations

Owners and operators are reminded to:

- Review war risk insurance coverage and notifications requirements;
- Verify charterparty clauses related to war risk and unsafe ports;
- Maintain clear documentation of security assessments and routing decisions.

Red Sea and Gulf of Aden

Given the potential spillover of hostilities, vessels transiting the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden shall:

- Register with relevant maritime security centers;
- Ensure citadel readiness where applicable.

Reporting Requirements

Any security incident, suspicious activity, or hostile engagement involving a Cook Islands flagged vessel shall be reported immediately to:

- Cook Islands Maritime Authority (24/7 contact) at: sos-alert@maritimecookislands.com

- Company Security Officer
- Relevant regional maritime security coordination center

A full written report shall follow within 24 hours.

Continuous Monitoring

Cook Islands Flag Administration is monitoring the situation closely. Further circulars may be issued without prior notice **should the threat level escalate.**

The Cook Islands Flag Administration strongly urges all stakeholders to exercise the highest degree of vigilance and prudence. **Protection of life, vessel, and cargo must take precedence over commercial considerations.**

CSO and SSO are encouraged to follow developments closely, using reliable sources.

For further information or clarification please contact the Technical Department
sos-alert@maritimecookislands.com