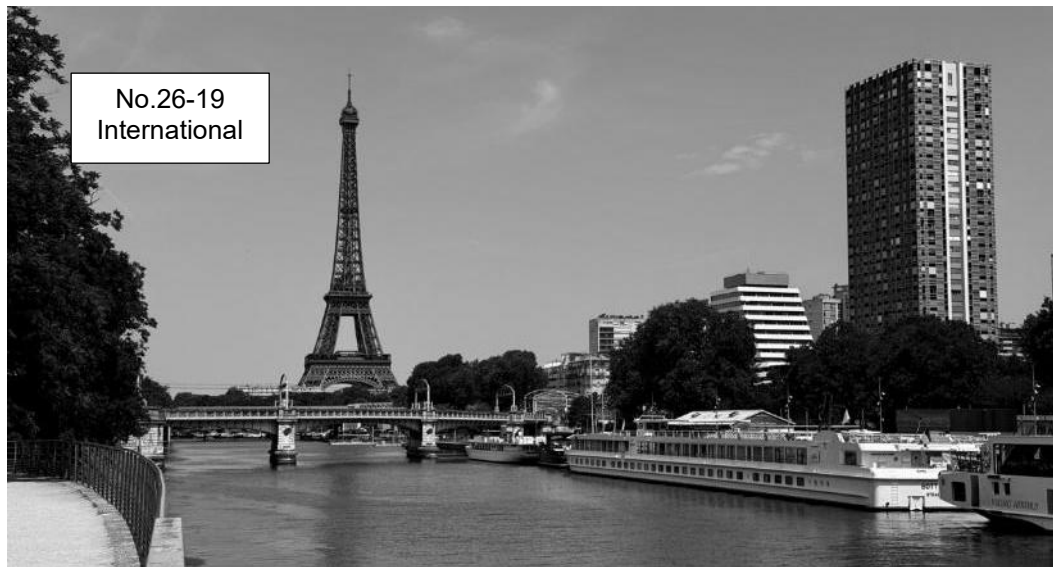




The Eiffel Tower and the River Seine, Paris, France

European Maritime
Safety Report
The Japan Association of
Marine Safety
London Research Office

Supported by  日本財団 THE NIPPON FOUNDATION

Participation Report: IMRF Global Maritime SAR System Review – Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop

◆ Introduction

The [International Maritime Rescue Federation \(IMRF\)](https://www.international-maritime-rescue.org/)¹, which has its headquarters in London, promotes international cooperation among maritime search and rescue (SAR) authorities, rescue coordination centres (RCCs) and related organisations worldwide. The relationship between the London Research Office and the IMRF was introduced previously in Report No. 26-03, “International News: An Introduction to the Activities of the International Maritime Rescue Federation”.

Following an invitation from the IMRF, the London Research Office of the Japan Association of Marine Safety attended the Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop of the [“Global Maritime Search and Rescue System Review”](https://www.international-maritime-rescue.org/sar-review)², together with Ms Nanami Takemoto, Instructor at the [Japan Coast Guard Academy](https://www.academy.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/english/)³. The workshop formed part of the international research project of the same name, which the IMRF is conducting with the [Lloyd’s Register Foundation](https://www.lrfoundation.org.uk/programmes/the-international-maritime-rescue-federation)⁴, and served as a regional validation process to assess and analyse maritime SAR systems worldwide and identify future challenges

¹<https://www.international-maritime-rescue.org/>

²<https://www.international-maritime-rescue.org/sar-review>

³<https://www.academy.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/english/>

⁴<https://www.lrfoundation.org.uk/programmes/the-international-maritime-rescue-federation>



and areas for improvement. The findings will be reflected in the final report scheduled for January 2027 and will inform recommendations aimed at improving the international SAR system.

At the workshop, the Japanese participants contributed practical knowledge and perspectives on SAR arrangements and challenges across countries and territories in the Asia-Pacific region, thereby contributing to the deliberations of the Global SAR Review. The workshop also provided a valuable opportunity for Japan to assess the strengths and challenges of its own SAR arrangements through comparison with other countries and to identify useful implications for the future operation and human resource development of the Japan Coast Guard.

The attached participation report, provided by Instructor Takemoto, summarises the challenges facing SAR globally and in the Asia-Pacific region, the future direction of SAR systems, and the implications for Japan, as discussed at the workshop.

Ryosuke Tateishi

Director

The Japan Association of Marine Safety, London Research Office

Attachment

IMRF Global Maritime SAR System Review Participation Report: Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop

~ A Regional Workshop Towards the Review of Maritime SAR Systems Worldwide ~

Nanami Takemoto, Maritime Safety Science Course, Japan Coast Guard Academy

◆ 1. Introduction

On 26 and 27 July 2026, the “IMRF Global Maritime Search and Rescue System Review Regional Workshop for Asia-Pacific” (hereinafter “the Workshop”) was held at the Royale Chulan Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Japan was represented by the Director of the London Office of the Japan Association of Marine Safety and the author. This report provides an overview of the Workshop together with the author’s observations. With the support of Lloyd’s Register Foundation, the IMRF has been conducting a twenty-month study entitled the “Global Maritime Search and Rescue System Review” (hereinafter “the Review”) since June 2025. The Review examines how SAR (search and rescue) systems operate in practice at global, regional, national and local levels, and seeks to identify gaps in existing SAR systems as well as future challenges and opportunities. Based on these findings, practical recommendations will be developed with a view to building a more resilient and inclusive international SAR network. A reporting event is scheduled to be held in London, United Kingdom, in January 2027. As part of the Review, a total of four regional workshops are being held around the world, with the Workshop focusing on the Asia-Pacific region. Participants were drawn from a wide range of bodies in the region, including coast guard authorities, rescue coordination centres (RCCs), industry associations, private companies, and educational and research institutions. By bringing together this diverse group of participants, the Workshop aimed to gather and validate information on the current situation in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as the challenges, strengths and future needs of SAR, and to ensure that these perspectives are reflected in recommendations for improving the global SAR system.



Group photograph

◆ 2. Overview of the Workshop

(1) IMRF Global Maritime SAR System Review

The first day opened with an explanation by Mr Steve Wills of the IMRF concerning the research methodology and the progress of the Review. The Review is divided into three phases: Phase 1 (analysis of the current situation and literature review), Phase 2 (regional workshops and data validation), and Phase 3 (strategic recommendations and reporting). In Phase 1, existing information was gathered through a literature review, surveys were conducted by means of interviews and questionnaires, and data were collected from external organisations; this work has now been completed. The Review is currently in Phase 2, with regional workshops having already been held in the Americas, Europe and Africa, and the Asia-Pacific Workshop being the final workshop in the series.

The Review will now enter its final phase, in which all data and views will be consolidated and a report prepared setting out recommendations at both the global and the regional level. The findings are intended to serve as evidence in decisions on policy and funding, and are expected to lead to improvements in SAR systems. Mr Wills repeatedly emphasised during the meeting that the Review is a starting point rather than an end point, and that issuing the report is not an end in itself. This makes clear that the ultimate objective of the Review is to enhance SAR capability through systemic change.

Following the overview of the Review, the findings obtained from the initial research in Phase 1 were shared. The literature review covered academic and grey literature,

including government reports, SAR-related publications and industry reports, as well as social media. In addition, structured interviews were conducted with 39 stakeholders in SAR systems, and the online questionnaire attracted approximately 140 responses. The data obtained from external organisations included Inmarsat GMDSS distress alerts, the number of rescues undertaken by SAR organisations, the number of SAR responses by merchant vessels, and WHO data on SAR capability.

Against this background, a number of challenges were highlighted, of which this report focuses on the principal ones. In global SAR, demand and risk are increasing as a consequence of conflict, migration and climate change, while significant disparities remain in the resources available to high- and low-income countries, and the SAR burden borne by merchant shipping is also increasing. New technologies such as uncrewed systems and AI are coming to the fore, but their practical implementation and potential conflicts with existing regulatory requirements, including how the obligation to render assistance under the [SOLAS Convention](#)⁵ is to be discharged, remain under discussion. The Asia-Pacific region is characterised by particularly wide disparities in SAR capability. While some countries have advanced SAR systems and are making large-scale investments, many Pacific island states remain at an earlier stage of development and face significant resource constraints. Fragmented governance across multiple agencies, together with long response times across vast search and rescue regions and shortages of personnel and equipment, were also identified as structural challenges. From the perspective of international cooperation, Australia and New Zealand function as hubs for the Pacific island states, whereas political tensions such as those in the South China Sea can impede SAR cooperation between neighbouring countries. Furthermore, compared with Oceania, SAR organisations in Asia have undertaken more limited preventive measures, including mental health support for rescue personnel.

Finally, using [Mentimeter](#)⁶, participants were invited to give their views on the results of the IMRF's Review to date. Participants were asked, for example, whether the finding that SAR data are fragmented and inconsistent across countries reflected their own experience, and whether they agreed with the assessment that SAR systems in the Asia-Pacific region are not yet sufficiently adapted to incidents such as flooding associated with climate change. They responded using a five-point scale. Any errors,

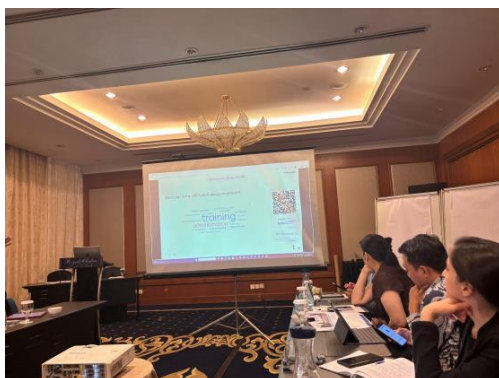
⁵[https://www.imo.org/en/about/conventions/pages/international-convention-for-the-safety-of-life-at-sea-\(solas\),-1974.aspx](https://www.imo.org/en/about/conventions/pages/international-convention-for-the-safety-of-life-at-sea-(solas),-1974.aspx)

⁶<https://www.mentimeter.com/>

inaccuracies or omitted issues could also be submitted anonymously in free-text form.

(2) Discussion and Presentations on the Challenges Facing Each Region

On the second day, building on the discussions from the first day, participants undertook group work on challenges and opportunities specific to maritime SAR in the Asia-Pacific region. The groups were divided broadly by area, and the author's group was composed of members from the Republic of Korea, China and Japan. In each session, 30 minutes were allocated for discussion within the group, after which each group presented to the plenary for five minutes. The first session was devoted to external factors affecting SAR challenges and opportunities, using PESTLE (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental) as the analytical framework. In the second session, which focused on internal factors, participants were asked to organise SAR-related challenges and opportunities using a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats).



Collecting participant feedback via Mentimeter



The author presenting

The author's group identified several external factors, including more frequent typhoons associated with climate change, demographic change and population ageing, and the introduction of new technologies such as AI. Another group deliberately raised as a point of discussion the problem of political intervention determining the conduct of SAR, which was particularly notable because the author's group had decided not to address political issues. In addition, an account of fishers who declined to wear the lifejackets distributed to them on account of traditional custom was a valuable observation, demonstrating the importance of understanding the cultural and social context when assistance is provided.

With regard to internal factors, the author's group focused on rescue divers and conducted a SWOT analysis. In its presentation, the group explained that all three countries, Japan, China and the Republic of Korea, possess diver teams capable of

underwater rescue and have a strong foundation for developing and deploying advanced technical capabilities. At the same time, specialised rescue scenarios and human resource constraints limit the ability to respond to every incident. The group further indicated that advances in AI and in uncrewed underwater rescue technologies may in future help to overcome some of these limitations. Other groups developed their discussions principally around the legal frameworks and procedures applicable to SAR activities in general. Reflecting on the discussion of internal factors, the author considers that factors within an organisation are often strongly influenced by external conditions and can therefore be difficult to consider in isolation. In particular, because “O: Opportunities” and “T: Threats” in a SWOT analysis are inherently external in character, there were occasions when internal and external factors became intermingled within the author’s group, and the same appeared to be true of other groups. It might therefore have been easier to structure the discussion by examining internal factors corresponding to the external factors identified in the first session, or by considering both external and internal factors together within a single SWOT analysis.

Thereafter, each participant gave a presentation setting out their own views on SAR systems. In her presentation, the author first provided an overview of the organisation of the [Japan Coast Guard](#)⁷ and explained that SAR activities are conducted on the basis of the Japan Coast Guard Act and the Japan–US SAR Agreement. She then introduced, as organisational strengths, the high level of expertise embodied in units such as the Special Rescue Team and the nationwide rapid-response posture, and identified as challenges the difficulty of recruitment, a rising turnover rate, and cooperation with the private sector.

Regarding current initiatives, she described the operation of uncrewed aerial vehicles and the introduction of a public–private cooperation application, while noting that future priorities include securing personnel, addressing cyber security, and responding to the wider adoption of new technologies such as autonomous vessels. Each country introduced the challenges and initiatives particular to it, and the author noted that the use of new technologies such as AI and drones featured prominently across many of the presentations.

The final part of the programme consisted of further group work on two topics relating to SAR activities, namely data collection and training. On the collection of SAR data, each group discussed the methods of data collection and the state of data sharing

⁷https://www.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/e/index_e.html

within their organisations, together with the barriers and challenges involved. As no plenary discussion was held on this topic, the position in other groups could not be confirmed. Within the author's Japan–China–Korea group, however, participants shared the understanding that aggregate statistical data, such as the number of SAR operations, are published in annual reports, whereas detailed information on individual incidents, including the deployment of operational assets, is highly confidential and is generally not disclosed.

With regard to SAR training, participants examined how existing training is delivered, certified and disseminated, identified the challenges involved, and considered measures for improvement. Discussion took place first within each group, and the content was subsequently shared in plenary. The author explained that, in Japan, training is conducted almost entirely through on-the-job training (OJT) in the field. Other countries likewise appeared to incorporate OJT in some form. As regards future training needs, participants noted a particular need not only to strengthen technical training for front-line responders, but also to provide education for decision-makers such as SMCs (search and rescue mission coordinators) and OSCs (on-scene coordinators), as well as training in non-technical areas including mental health support.

◆ 3. Conclusion and Observations

The Workshop provided a valuable opportunity to learn about the SAR arrangements and current circumstances of countries across the Asia-Pacific region. Learning about the approaches taken by other countries also provided an opportunity to re-examine Japan's own maritime rescue arrangements from a fresh perspective.

Japan possesses a high level of technical capability and expertise in maritime SAR that compares favourably with that of other countries. At the same time, much of this capability has developed through practices specific to Japan, which may create a risk of becoming overly influenced by established assumptions and ways of working within one's own organisation. The author was struck by the importance of learning about practices and circumstances overseas through forums such as this Workshop and of viewing one's own system from an external, comparative perspective.

The final report of the Review is scheduled for publication in January 2027. By continuing to follow its findings and the policy developments subsequently considered on the basis of them, and by feeding those insights back into front-line operations at



the Japan Coast Guard and into education at the Japan Coast Guard Academy, the author hopes to contribute to maintaining and enhancing Japan's maritime rescue capability in the years ahead.

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