



***A GENDER PERSPECTIVE AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS FOR MARITIME ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY***

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[Recent assessments](#) of the environmental health of the Coral Triangle region suggest that it is in serious decline, largely due to crimes like illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and other anthropogenic activity like the burning of fossil fuels. The most serious maritime environmental crime, IUU fishing depletes fish stocks, jeopardizes food security, and exacerbates maritime disputes. While [new bilateral partnerships](#) are important—including Indonesia-Japan cooperation to improve the traceability of Maluku fishery products—lack of regulation and enforcement are still the top reasons [cited](#) for the thriving of IUU fishing across the Indo-Pacific.

Moreover, despite decades-long efforts by local environmental defenders and international monitoring organizations, other maritime environmental crimes like wildlife trafficking persist according to a recent UNODC [World Wildlife Crime Report](#). Wildlife trafficking severely undermines

biodiversity, fosters corruption, and funds organized crime, posing significant threats to ecosystems and to states' goals for sustainable development. Many challenges remain in combating wildlife trafficking due to complex networks, insufficient enforcement, and high profitability. Maritime crimes also include plastic pollution, oil spills, tourism pollution, and crimes of convergence such as human trafficking and weapons smuggling, all of which impact coastal communities' livelihoods and foster instability.

The health and stability of the Coral Triangle region—shared by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste, and the Solomon Islands—remains under threat due to these serious maritime environmental crimes. Women play pivotal roles in fisheries management, marine conservation, and community resilience-building. They hold significant traditional ecological knowledge, yet have their contributions and leadership potential frequently marginalized or rebuffed.

Aiming to advance the integration of gender perspectives in maritime security efforts, Pacific Forum International recently facilitated the workshop series “Cross-Border Cooperation on Women, Peace, and Security and Maritime Environmental Crimes in the Coral Triangle.” Sponsored by the US Indo-Pacific Command's Office of Women, Peace and Security, the workshops focused on enhancing maritime environmental security cooperation among Indonesia, Timor-Leste, and Papua New Guinea, as well as the United States. The project emphasized the importance of fostering dialogue between women's civil society organizations (CSOs) and the security sector to identify and co-construct strategies for embedding gender-responsive approaches.

In addition to the workshops—taking place both virtually in February and in Bali, Indonesia in April 2024—the group produced a [report](#), “Empowering Women, Peace and Security in the Coral Triangle: Bridging Civil-Military and State Boundaries to Tackle Maritime Environmental Crimes.” The report distills the essential findings and recommendations from the workshops, investigating the complex dynamics of IUU fishing, maritime crime, and their

adverse effects on the marine environment and human security within this important biologically diverse region. It emphasizes the pressing need for a comprehensive strategy integrating the principles of the WPS agenda into strategic frameworks, promoting collaboration across state boundaries and between civil and military organizations to empower women and combat maritime environmental crimes more effectively.

Crucially, the report notes the necessity of mainstreaming gender perspectives into strategies aimed at combating maritime environmental crimes. By adopting a WPS lens, policymakers and practitioners can leverage the expertise and agency of women to enhance enforcement efforts, promote sustainable resource management, and foster inclusive governance mechanisms that elevate and economically develop coastal communities.

Moreover, the WPS agenda offers a framework for designing and implementing civil-military (civ-mil) partnerships. Through collaborations between CSOs, law enforcement bodies, and defense and security agencies, stakeholders can strengthen surveillance, enforcement, and regulatory frameworks while promoting trust-building measures between security forces and local communities.

A gender-responsive civ-mil approach to combating maritime environmental crimes can also enhance regional cooperation and coordination in addressing transboundary maritime environmental crimes in the Coral Triangle. The maritime domain is ever-changing, with criminal networks operating across multiple jurisdictions, exploiting regulatory gaps and weak enforcement capacities. By fostering cross-border collaboration among neighboring states and integrating a WPS lens, it is possible to develop more effective, sustainable maritime domain awareness, deter illicit activities, and facilitate swift responses to maritime environmental emergencies. However, the limitations inherent in building civ-mil relationships for maritime environmental security *must* be engaged critically and openly to ensure all partnerships and actions genuinely aim to transform harmful gender norms and advance gender equality.

Combating maritime environmental crimes in the Coral Triangle requires a paradigm shift toward a more holistic and inclusive approach that fosters focused civ-mil collaboration and regional cooperation measures that fully integrate human security and gender perspectives. Developing approaches to maritime security that address the root causes of environmental degradation, strengthen maritime security, and promote sustainable development in the region become more effective and sustainable when the principles of the WPS agenda are applied.

A new community of practice was established through this project, composed of workshop participants who are committed to reconvening virtually to discuss next steps in mid-2024. This community of practice will aim to develop practical recommendations that account for the diverse contexts within the Coral Triangle, ensuring that strategies are inclusive and reflect the needs of local populations, particularly women. This collaborative effort will help bridge gaps in current practices, promote shared learning, and foster a cohesive approach to maritime environmental security that leverages the unique strengths of both civil society and military actors. The commitment to regular meetings and continuous dialogue underscores the community's dedication to advancing these goals, setting the stage for innovative and impactful initiatives in the region.

Read the [full report](#) or the report in brief (which is available in [English](#), [Tetum](#), and [Bahasa Indonesia](#)) to see the community's recommendations and next steps.

*PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.*