

Fish farm claims in Chinese waters

01

Loss prevention



Fish farms are a recognised navigational consideration for vessels in Chinese waters. This review sets out recent case studies and loss prevention recommendations to help reduce the risk of future incidents.

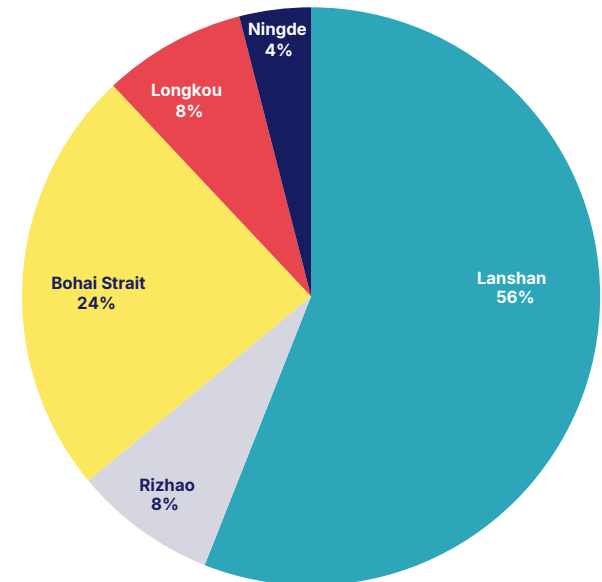
Claims relating to fish farms have notably increased from 2020 to 2025 compared to previous years, demonstrating the importance of continuous monitoring and taking appropriate action.

The vast majority of these cases (89%) happened in Chinese waters, with the remaining in the waters of Japan, South Korea and Indonesia.

This concentration underlines the value of extra vigilance in Chinese waters, and the chart below shows the distribution of fish farm-related incidents. (see pie chart opposite).

Navigational risk in Chinese coastal waters

Fish and aquaculture farms are widespread along the Chinese coast, emphasising the need for extra navigational care.



Our claims experience suggests that the Lanshan/Rizhao area is the primary hotspot, accounting for both the highest number of fish farm claims and the most severe value losses. Other high-risk areas for frequent claims include, Dalian, Tianjin, Yantai, Laizhou, Rizhao, Lanshan, Penglai, Longkou, Weihai, Ningde, Kemen, Qinhuangdao and Lianyungang – and other areas.





They're often close to:

- Port approaches and departure routes
- Designated anchorages and common waiting areas
- Navigation channels and fairways
- Traffic separation schemes (TSS) and other busy shipping routes
- Public waterways and coastal transit routes

As a result, vessels may inadvertently stray into fish farm areas – particularly during pilot boarding, course alterations, anchoring, poor visibility or deviations from the planned route. Masters and bridge teams must be aware of the risks, stay alert, and make sure the passage plan reflects the latest available fish farm information before arrival.

You can find regular updates on fish farm locations from our local correspondents, Oasis P&I and Huatai Marine, including:

China fishery farms updates London P&I

27 Apr 2026

Update on Fishery Farms around Rizhao, Lanshan and Lianyungang ports, China

15 Jun 2026

Update on Fishery Farms around the Chinese Coast

21 Jul 2025

As fish farm locations and boundaries can change without notice, always consult local agents and correspondents for up-to-date information. The Maritime Safety Administration (MSA) also issues the latest alerts and navigational guidance.



Case study #1

ECDIS not updated following local guidance

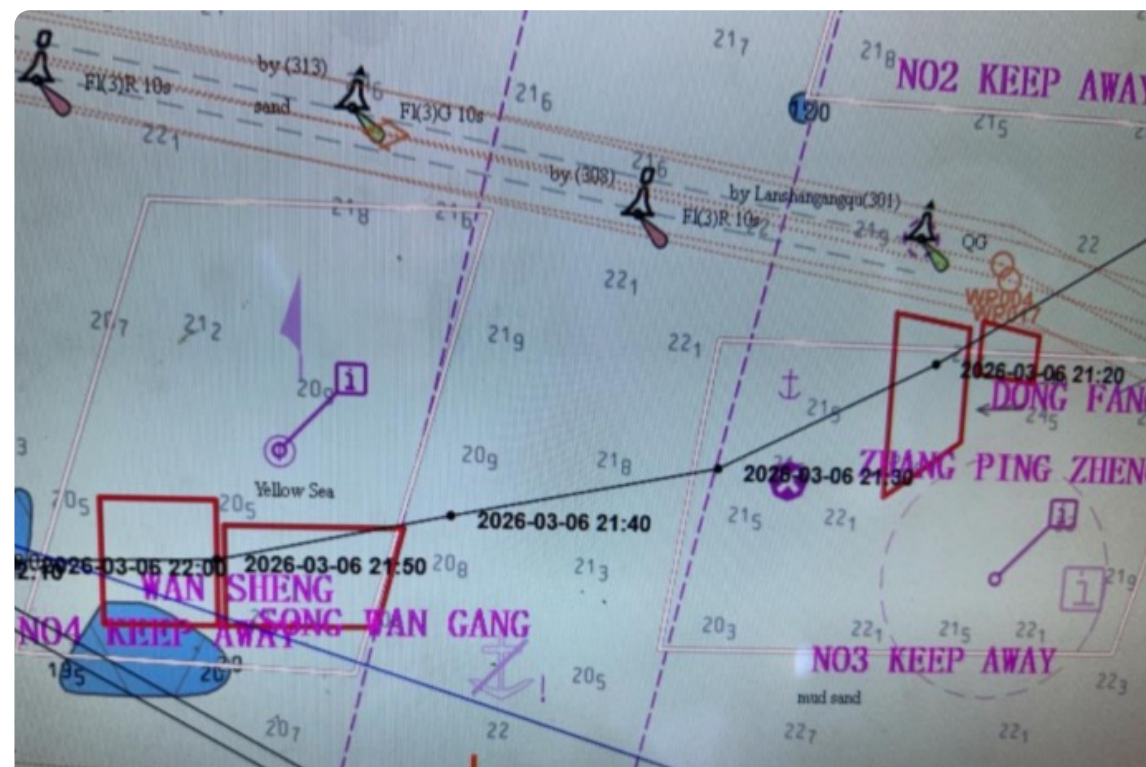
While en route to Anchorage No. 1 at Lanshan Port, China, in good visibility and slight seas, a fully laden bulk carrier transited through four fish farm areas.

On approach to the port, the vessel deviated from its original passage plan. The crew reported

no visible lights, markers or buoys indicating the presence of the fish farms, and detected no abnormalities in the main engine or propeller.

Although this was the first call at Lanshan Port for the Master and all deck officers, the local agent had briefed the crew before arrival. The agent flagged a large number of fish farms near the port fairway and recommended the crew manually plot them on the ECDIS. The subsequent investigation found this wasn't done.

Fish farm boundaries plotted on the ECDIS during the investigation





Case study #2

Failure to follow MSA-recommended route

A chemical tanker crossed two fish farm areas while approaching Lanshan Port's Anchorage No. 3 in good visibility and slight seas.

As in the previous study, this was the first port call at Lanshan for both the Master and the deck officers. Before arrival, the local agent's port guidance had identified five fish farm areas, including the one later alleged to have been damaged. The crew failed to plot all of them on the ECDIS, and the investigation found a sixth fish farm – also crossed by the vessel – that hadn't been included in the agent's guidance.

The investigation also identified a more critical contributing factor.

The vessel failed to follow the route recommended by the Maritime Safety Administration (MSA), shown below, when preparing its passage plan. Instead, the plan plotted a different route, which took the vessel through fish farm areas.

See Hutai Marine's circular for more details:

[Summary-of-the-Distribution-of-Major-Fishery-Farms-along-the-Coast-of-China - Huatai Marine](#) 23 May 2023

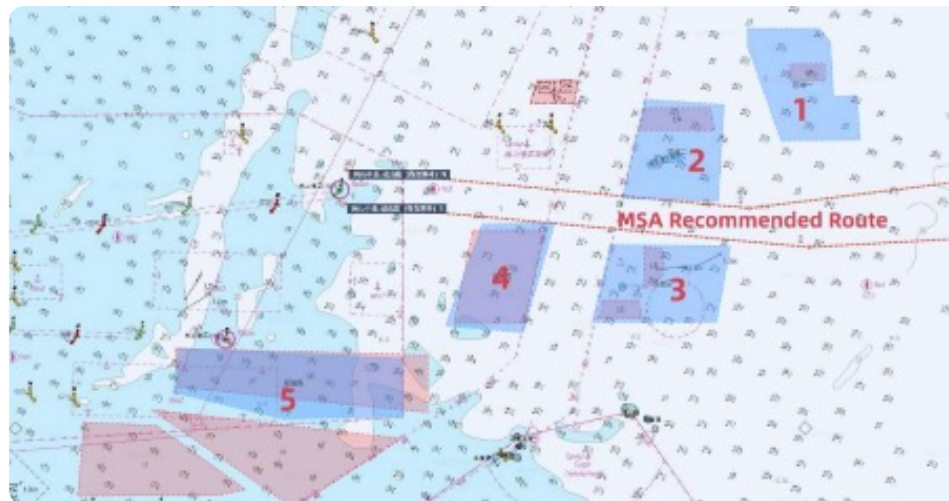
Figure 1



KEY

- Fishery farm area plotted as agent's email (before accident).
- Fishery farm areas provided by owner after accident.

Figure 2



Note: the red areas are fishery farms mentioned in PNI [2023]04 Circular.

The blue areas are the navigation obstruction nets distribution areas mentioned in the Navigation Notice of Lu Hang Tong [2023]0772.



Case study #3

Entered restricted area to avoid congestion

On a voyage to Tianjin Port, a bulk carrier encountered poor visibility – around one to two nautical miles – and transited the Tuoji Prohibition Area within the Miaodao Strait, a restricted zone.

Navigating through these restricted waters brought the vessel into contact with local fishing activity, including fish farms and fishing nets. Fishing property was allegedly damaged, exposing the vessel and her owners to liability claims.

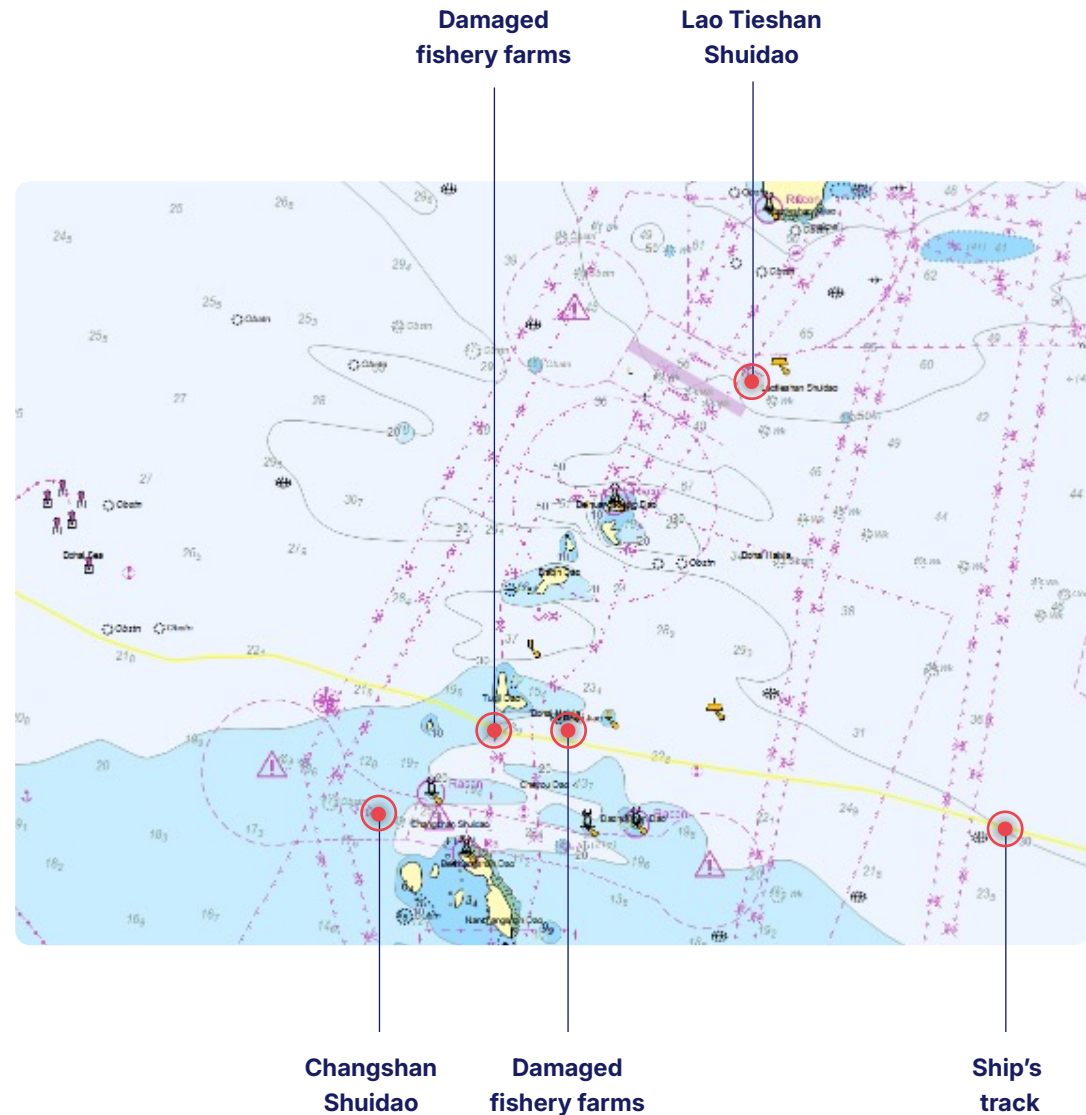
The Master later stated that he'd chosen the route to avoid congestion and heavy traffic in the Laotieshan Shuidao traffic lane, without realising it would take the vessel through the prohibited and restricted area in the Bohai Sea.

Merchant vessels are only permitted to navigate through the Laotieshan Shuidao and/or the Changshan Shuidao. The Master added that he'd received no warning, guidance or navigational advice about the restriction from the local agent or any other source before the voyage.

See Oasis' circulars for more details:

MSA offices in the Bohai Rim jointly published 27 main public routes

Navigation Restricted Areas of Miaodao Archipelago in Bohai Sea of China





Causes of incidents

Investigations indicate that fish farm incidents can be grouped into five main categories:

1. Passage planning issues

- Fish farm areas not properly identified and plotted on ECDIS (5 cases)
- Incorrect route selection and navigation through inappropriate channels (6 incidents notably in the Bohai area)
- Deviation from the original planned route, including diversions to anchorage areas (5 cases) or course alterations to avoid fishing vessels and nets (1 case)

2. Human factors and situational awareness

- Insufficient local knowledge and area awareness – particularly on infrequent or first-time calls at a port – and unfamiliarity with the complex distribution of fish and aquaculture areas (4 cases)

- Officer of the Watch (OOW) failure to identify charted fish farms despite clear ECDIS marking (2 cases)

3. Information and communication failures

- Outdated or incomplete information from local agents, including where fish farm coordinates, boundaries and other navigational information were not provided to the vessel before arrival (3 cases)

4. ECDIS presentation issues

- Fish farm boundaries marked or displayed in colours similar to depth contours, making them less conspicuous and easily overlooked (1 case)

5. External and environmental factors

- Inadequate marking of fish farms, including the absence of, or insufficient, warning signs, lights, floating buoys or beacons clearly indicating farm boundaries (8 cases)
- Poor visibility, increasing the risk of accidental entry into fish farm areas (3 cases)



Checklist

Recommendations

Most fish farm claims result from a combination of inadequate passage planning, human factors and insufficient situational awareness – often made worse by incomplete or outdated local information, poor ECDIS presentation and inadequate marking of farm boundaries. Our recommendations address seven key areas.

1. Information gathering and communication

- Request the latest fish farm coordinates, navigational restrictions and warnings from local agents, port authorities and VTS before arrival.
- Verify all locally sourced information against official charts, nautical publications and navigational warnings before including it in the passage plan.

2. Passage planning

- Identify and mark all fish farms, aquaculture zones, prohibited areas and restricted waters on ECDIS.
- Use up-to-date charts, ECDIS, Notices to Mariners, Sailing Directions and local information.
- Follow recommended routes and channels wherever practical.

Recommendations

- Carry out a risk assessment before any deviation from the approved voyage plan.
- Give Masters and bridge teams timely alerts on high-risk fish farm areas.

3. ECDIS use and route verification

- Review all relevant ECDIS layers and chart information during passage planning and execution.
- Make full use of ECDIS safety settings, alarms and route-check functions alongside manual checks to identify hazards and restricted areas.

4. Bridge team awareness and training

- Shore teams should proactively alert Masters and bridge officers to fish farm risks and navigational restrictions before arrival.
- Pre-arrival briefings should cover local navigational hazards, fish farm locations, restricted areas, and traffic conditions.

- Apply Bridge Resource Management (BRM) principles to independently verify route planning, monitoring and hazard identification.

5. Effective navigation

- Follow recommended routes where fish farm activity is less likely, but stay vigilant at all times.
- Proceed at a safe speed for the prevailing conditions and navigational risks.
- Keep a wide berth from fishing vessels, buoys and other markers that may indicate nearby farms, and avoid anchoring close to farm areas.
- Carry out a risk assessment and get the Master's approval before any deviation from the approved passage plan.
- Before altering the route because of congestion, weather or fishing activity, check the alternative avoids restricted areas and fish farm zones.

6. Increase vigilance in fishing activity areas

- Maintain enhanced bridge watchkeeping in areas with extensive fishing and aquaculture activity.
- Keep a sharp lookout by all available means. Many fish farms lack AIS transponders or radar reflectors, so post additional lookouts in restricted visibility or known farm areas.
- Avoid arrivals and departures at night or in poor visibility where possible, taking extra care where farm markers, buoys and lights are hard to detect.

7. Company-level preventative measures

- Issue fleet-wide guidance on high-risk areas and share lessons learned from previous incidents.
- Carry out regular audits to verify compliance with passage planning procedures and effective identification of fish farm-related hazards.

Acting on these recommendations should significantly reduce the risk of future fish farm incidents and the liability claims that follow.