



05 Oct 2022

IFC SPOT COMMENTARY 1/22 – OBSERVATIONS OF SEA THEFT INCIDENTS INVOLVING TUGS AND BARGES IN WATERS OFF TANJONG PIAI AND EASTBOUND LANE OF SINGAPORE STRAIT IN 2022

OVERVIEW

1. The IFC observed an increase in sea theft incidents involving Tugs and Barges in the Singapore Strait from Jan to Sep 2022. This spot commentary aims to provide awareness of the emerging areas of concern including the analytical insights into the incidents and the observed modus operandi of the perpetrators.

SUMMARY OF FACTS

2. Areas of Concern. There were 10¹ reported sea theft incidents involving Tugs and Barges from Jan to Sep 2022, of which one incident was successfully foiled by the Singapore Police Coast Guard². The majority of the incidents took place in (a) waters off Tanjong Piai, (b) the eastbound lane of TSS in the Singapore Strait and (c) the Phillip Channel (see **Diagram 1**). The figures recorded in 2022 thus are higher compared to the total annual figures recorded in the past two years respectively (see **Diagram 2**). Five incidents occurred in broad daylight while the other five incidents occurred during hours of darkness. Eight of the incidents reported theft of scrap metal and/or ship stores, and two incidents had nothing stolen (details of the incidents are in **Annex A**).

¹ This accounts for almost 25% of the total Theft, Robbery and Piracy at Sea numbers (41 incidents as of 29 Sept 2022) recorded by the IFC in the SS.

² Eight perpetrators and one crew were arrested by the Singapore Police Coast Guard for stealing scrap metal.

Diagram 1: Locations of Tugs and Barges incidents from Jan to Sept 2022

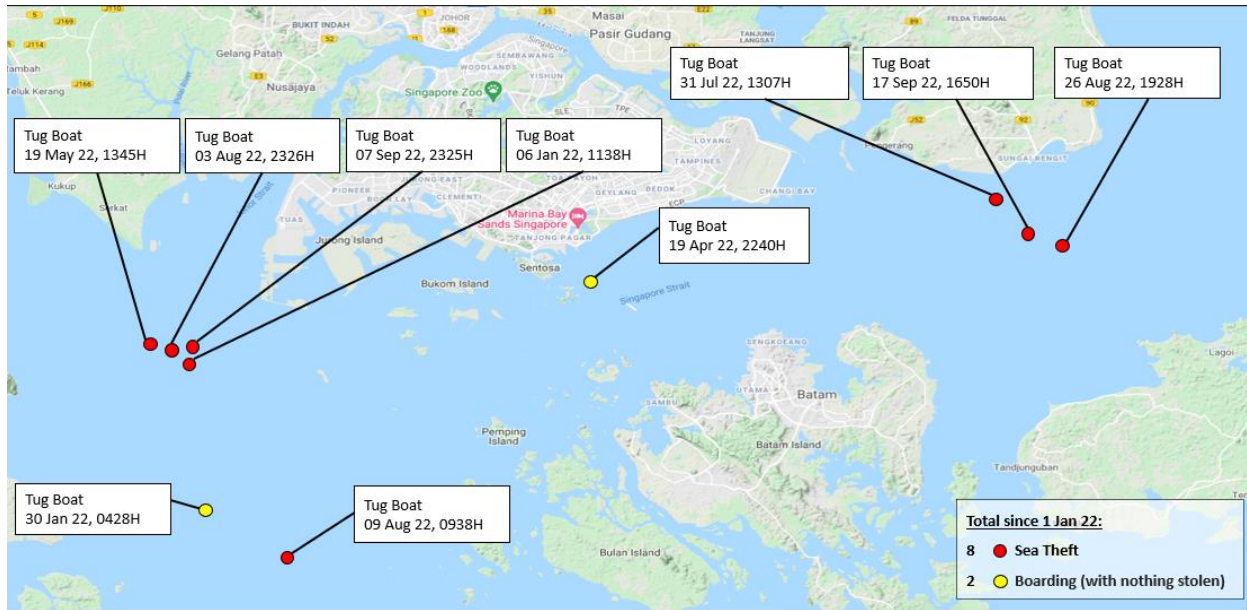
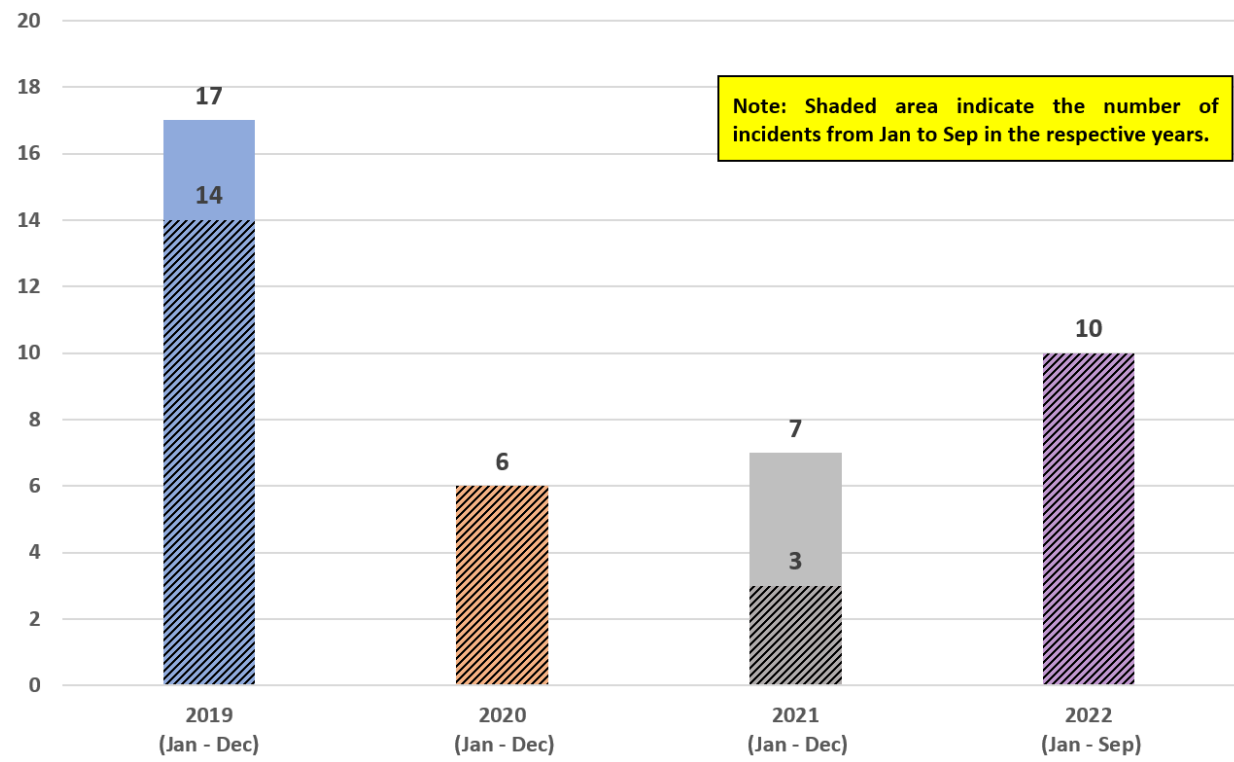


Diagram 2: Tugs and Barges incidents from 2019 to 2022

Total Incidents (Tugs and Barges) – 2019 to 2022



KEY OBSERVATIONS AND INSIGHTS

3. Assessed Modus Operandi. Based on the incident reports and IFC's engagement with the companies, the incidents in 2022 were consistent with the known modus operandi of petty crime. Specifically for Tugs and Barges,

perpetrators will usually approach them using small wooden boats or “sampan” and operate in groups of around 7-10 pax. However, perpetrators may not necessarily flee upon being sighted by crew members (perhaps due to distance between Tug from Barge), but are likely to escape only upon sighting enforcement assets.

4. Enforcement Actions. The authorities from the littoral states (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore) have increased enforcement efforts in the identified areas of concern to tackle the increased numbers of incidents. The IFC will continue to work closely with the shipping industry to raise situational awareness and provide recommendations.

5. Assessment. With the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, the monthly operations for the Tugs and Barges industry have returned to pre-COVID levels, resulting in increased Tugs and Barges activity. The IFC assesses that Tugs and Barges will continue to be targeted in the upcoming months leading up to the festive season (particularly in Nov and Dec) due to their slow speed and low freeboard.

IFC RECOMMENDATIONS

6. These incidents underscore the importance of maintaining a proper and vigilant lookout particularly when transiting the areas of concern, adhering to ship security standard operating procedures, and timely reporting of incidents to local authorities. Shipmasters or Company Security Officers (CSO) are recommended to contact the local authorities and report to the IFC immediately (see Table 1) through the Voluntary Community Reporting when they see suspicious small boats approaching. It is highly encouraged for ships or CSOs to share any picture or video footage with the authorities and IFC to assist with further investigation.

Table 1: Contact Details of Local Authorities

Country	Contact Details	
Malaysia	MMS Radio Channels	88 (VTS Johor), 16
	Phone Number	+603-89957201 / +603-89434001
Indonesia	MMS Radio Channel	16
	Phone Number	+62 21 22038176
Singapore (VTIS)	MMS Radio Channels	10, 14, 73
	Phone Number	+65 6325 2493

IFC	Phone Numbers	+65 9626 8965
		+65 6594 5728
	Email	IFC_DO@defence.gov.sg

7. Tugs and Barges are advised to adopt the Ship Protection Measures recommended in the *Tug Boats and Barges (TaB) Guide* and the *Regional Guide 2 to Counter Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia*. In particular, IFC recommends (a) shining spotlight and/or sounding ship horn to deter potential perpetrators, (b) platform modifications on barges to make it more difficult for perpetrators to climb on board, and (c) transit in company (additional tug/commercial escort craft), if possible.

CONCLUSION

8. While efforts and measures have been taken by the local authorities in the region to counter illegal activities, maintaining vigilance, adopting strong deterrence measures, and timely reporting remain key to mitigating such incidents' risks from exacerbating.

Incident Details

#	Incident Classification	DTG	Location of incident / vessel movement	Vessel Type/ Flag	No of Perpetrators/ Position of initial sighting/ Arms carried	Items Stolen	Remarks
1	Sea Theft	171650H (UTC+8) Sep 22	Lat 1° 17.57' N Long 104° 09.48' E/ Underway – West bound	Tug & Barge/ Singapore Flagged	Eight perpetrators/ Barge/ Not reported	Scrap metal stolen	No one injured
2	Sea Theft	072325H (UTC+8) Sep 22	Lat 1° 12.69' N Long 103° 32.62' E/ Underway – West bound	Tug & Barge/ Malaysia Flagged	Unknown number of personnel/ 10 wooden boats alongside barge/ Not reported	Scrap metal stolen	No one injured
3	Sea Theft	261928H (UTC+8) Aug 22	Lat 01° 17.05' N Long 104° 20.06' E/ Underway – East bound	Tug & Barge/ Singapore Flagged	Three perpetrators/ Stern of Barge/ Not reported	Scrap metal stolen	No one injured
4	Sea Theft	090938H (UTC+8) Aug 22	Lat 01° 10.15' N, Long 103° 35.23' E Underway – East bound	Tug & Barge/ China Flagged	Two perpetrators/ Unmanned supply vessel/ Not reported	Ship Stores stolen	No one injured

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#	Incident Classification	DTG	Location of incident / vessel movement	Vessel Type/ Flag	No of Perpetrators/ Position of initial sighting/ Arms carried	Items Stolen	Remarks
5	Sea Theft	032326H (UTC+8) Aug 22	Lat 01° 13.16' N Long 103° 32.8' E/ Underway – West bound	Tug & Barge/ Malaysia Flagged	Unknown number of personnel/ 7 to 10 wooden boats alongside barge / Not reported	Scrap metal stolen	No one injured
6	Sea Theft	311307H (UTC+8) Jul 22	Lat 01° 16.85' N, Long 104° 8.08' E/ Underway – West bound	Tug & Barge/ Malaysia Flagged	Six perpetrators/ Barge/ Not reported	Scrap metal stolen	No one injured
7	Sea Theft	191345H (UTC+8) May 22	Lat 01° 13.35' N, Long 103° 29.42' E/ Underway – West bound	Tug & Barge/ Malaysia Flagged	Four perpetrators/ Barge/ Not reported	Scrap metal stolen	No one injured
8	Boarding (nothing stolen)	192240H (UTC+8) Apr 22	Lat 01° 12.51' N, Long 103° 51.68' E/ Underway – West bound	Tug & Barge/ Malaysia Flagged	Eight perpetrators/ Barge/ Not reported	Was apprehended while trying to steal scrap metal	Eight perpetrators and one crew were arrested by SGP PCG
9	Boarding (nothing stolen)	300428H (UTC+8) Jan 22	Lat 01° 10.41' N Long 103° 28.70' E/ Underway – East bound	Tug & Barge/ Vietnam Flagged	Two perpetrators/ Midship port side / Not reported	Nothing stolen	No one injured

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#	Incident Classification	DTG	Location of incident / vessel movement	Vessel Type/ Flag	No of Perpetrators/ Position of initial sighting/ Arms carried	Items Stolen	Remarks
10	Sea Theft	061138H (UTC+8) Jan 22	Lat 01° 12.80' N, Long 103° 33.47' E/ Underway – West bound	Tug & Barge/ Malaysia Flagged	One perpetrator/ Barge/ Not reported	Scrap metal stolen	No one injured