



# VINSON MAKES HISTORY WITH OMSI



## STORY BY

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Carl Vinson and Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 1 will become the first carrier strike group to participate in the Oceania Maritime Security Initiative (OMSI) during Vinson's operations in the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet area of responsibility (AOR).

OMSI is a Secretary of Defense executive order which leverages Department of Defense assets transiting the region to increase maritime domain awareness and support for maritime law enforcement operations. Illegal fishing has the potential to harm the economies of Pacific Island countries, and it is combated by conducting surveillance for maritime domain awareness (MDA) of the region.

"If the U.S. Navy has any ships passing through the Oceania AOR and they can assist with respect to MDA, you're more than welcome to a Coast Guard Liaison Officer (CGLO), which is what I'm doing now," said Cmdr. Mark Morin, Chief, Incident Management Branch, United States Coast Guard (USCG). "You provide us with the intelligence we need to make the appropriate decisions with respect to our assets on where to put them for maritime domain awareness and situational awareness of our Pacific Island countries in our exclusive economic zones (EEZs) – foreign EEZs as well as U.S. EEZs."

Since the initiative's issue in 2007, the Navy has conducted 10 patrols supporting OMSI, logging approximately 89 sightings, of which eight were potential Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing vessels.

"The IUU vessels are the ones that don't have permits in the foreign and U.S. EEZs," Morin explained. "They basically are harvesting tuna resources from both U.S. and foreign EEZs."

From Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia in the West, to Kiribati and the Cook Islands in the East, Oceania spans a vast region, more than 12 million square miles. This makes patrol and security markedly difficult, and the Navy's involvement especially promising.

"We don't have the cutter coverage in the AOR that we need," Morin explained. "We have 90 days a year allotted for a cutter to go downrange and do their patrols throughout the region. OMSI, basically, is a force-multiplier."

"We're talking about such a huge area and one that's very difficult to cover," added Lt. Cmdr. Erich Schaller, CSG-1's assistant surface operations officer (N32 A) and liaison for OMSI. "OMSI makes sense because here you have a Navy strike group transiting through – which is the first opportunity since 2007 that we've actually had a strike group transiting through this area – that is able to provide that robust assistance to the Coast Guard and our partner nations here in the Western Pacific region." With the strike group covering a wide swath of ocean as it transits the region, CSG-1 is well-set for success in supporting OMSI, Schaller added.

The scope and flexibility of mission capabilities, derived from their multiple ships and aircraft, grants strike groups a unique ability to assist with MDA. The potential amount of information which can be collected by strike groups can affect the whole AOR.

Utilizing Vinson's many radar and communication systems, Morin can connect with maritime security agents throughout the Oceania region, passing them real-time intelligence to affect their operations, i.e. whether or not to respond to a particular vessel sighting. This direct link, conveying the substantial information-gathering potential of a strike group, will benefit anyone in the AOR, Morin said.

Morin hopes the benefit will be seen in the reduction of Oceania's \$1.7 billion annual regional gross domestic product (GDP) loss to IUU fishing, citing the regional security is tied to environmental sustainability. With 57 percent of the world's tuna fish caught in this region, particularly a belt five degrees above and five degrees below the equator, the tuna fishery has a profound impact on Pacific Island countries, Morin said.

"The Pacific Island countries rely on the fish for three reasons: they catch it to eat it; they catch it to sell; and they also sell the permits to fish, which are worth a

lot of money in that particular region," he explained. "If they don't have us to help them, if they don't have a carrier strike group passing through providing domain awareness and seeing who the bad guys are and what they're doing out there, there's a chance that these states could become failed states, like Somalia."

Though not the initial thrust, a tactical reason behind OMSI is to prevent the openings and vulnerabilities failed states are susceptible to. If they lose their legitimate ways to make money, they're going to look for ways to make a living, possibly illegitimately, Morin said. "If they make connections with the wrong people, they [might] start paying them money to come into their ports, using it as a staging area, off-loading area, possibly a terrorist training camp, things like that."

"My hope for our OMSI patrol, and I'm very confident in this, is that, first off, we make a positive and profound impact as we execute this mission," Schaller added. "It's very important to us and it would be very beneficial for our partners in the Western Pacific in combating illegal fishing and that exploitation."

Another objective of this initial OMSI mission involving a strike group is to forge a way ahead, and formulate an operating plan for future strike groups to follow, Morin noted. "How are we going to employ this particular OMSI mission using a strike group?" he asked. "It's easier when you go to a DDG or a cruiser – you get on an SH-60. You launch the SH-60 into this area and go. You get a carrier strike group, you've got a lot of assets and you don't want to waste their time – you don't want to be redundant."

"Because this is the first time we've really employed a carrier strike group in doing this, I hope we're going to set the benchmark and set it high for how they do it," Schaller added. "As we are going along, we're going to be thinking about observing lessons, building on previous lessons learned, thinking about how we can do it better and how that next strike group is going to do it better as they come through. This has been signed and this is going to be a future mission for our ships as they pass through this area, so they will undoubtedly benefit from our experiences on this patrol." ●