



ICAO

International Civil Aviation Organization

Fourteenth Meeting of the Air Traffic Management Sub-Group (ATM/SG/14) of APANPIRG

Bangkok, Thailand, 3 – 7 August 2026

Agenda Item 7: AOP, AIM, MET, SAR

ASIA/PACIFIC SEARCH AND RESCUE UPDATE

(Presented by the Secretariat)

SUMMARY

This paper presents updates on Search and Rescue (SAR) matters related to the Asia and Pacific (APAC) region, as discussed by the Asia/Pacific Search and Rescue Workgroup (APSAR/WG).

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Eleventh Meeting of the Asia/Pacific Search and Rescue Workgroup (APSAR/WG/11) was held from 5 to 8 May 2026, at the Kotaite Wing of the ICAO Asia and Pacific (APAC) Office, Bangkok, Thailand.

1.2 A SAR Workshop was held in conjunction with APSAR/WG/11 on 5 May 2026. Topics covered included an overview of System-Wide Information Management (SWIM) and SWIM information services; the Global Aeronautical Distress and Safety System (GADSS) concept; Autonomous Distress Tracking (ADT) provisions and aircraft equipage; and an introduction to the Location of an Aircraft in Distress Repository (LADR) and the OPS Control Directory, including a demonstration for registering and accessing information.

1.3 There were 64 participants registered for the Meeting, from 21 States/Administrations, one industry expert and three international organizations, including Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong China, France – New Caledonia, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, United Kingdom, United States, Viet Nam, Airbus, Cospas-Sarsat Programme, EUROCONTROL and ICAO.

1.4 All meeting documents for APSAR/WG/11 and the presentation materials from the SAR Workshop are available at: <https://www.icao.int/APAC/meetingdocs?fid=42347>.

2. DISCUSSION

Global SAR Update

Outcomes of the ICAO/IMO Joint Working Group on SAR Meeting

2.1 The United States provided an overview of the outcomes of the Thirty-Second Meeting of the ICAO/International Maritime Organization (IMO) Joint Working Group on Harmonization of Aeronautical and Maritime SAR (JWG 32, Sydney, Australia, 3 – 7 November 2025).

2.2 APSAR/WG/11 noted the following outcomes from JWG 32:

- a) JWG agreed to specific amendments to ICAO Doc 9731 *International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue (IAMSAR) Manual* Volume II, including appendices associated with Chapter 4 *Search planning and evaluation concepts*. The ad hoc correspondence group, coordinated by New Zealand, was continued and its scope of work was expanded to include additional measures to improve the use of, and content within, *IAMSAR Manual Volume II*;
- b) ICAO Council was developing an interim framework to address the extensive legal concerns associated with the use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) and other autonomous craft, and the basis on which compliant operations could be conducted. The JWG continued active discussions to enable effective use of this capability for SAR and to provide related guidance within the *IAMSAR Manual*;
- c) ADT system had become operational, but many States were still resolving the working relationships between SAR services and Air Traffic Services (ATS). Attention was focused on resolving non-distress activations of the ADT device. Mitigating non-distress activations of the Emergency Locator Transmitter (Distress Tracking) [ELT(DT)] required coordinated efforts from Civil Aviation Authorities (CAAs), airline operators, aircraft manufacturers and maintenance facilities;
- d) Australia led an initiative to establish and maintain a strategic outlook on new and emerging issues that might impact the global aeronautical and maritime SAR system environment. As a result, the JWG website on the secure portal would host a “General SAR Overview” for posting of relevant matters; and
- e) results of ICAO’s Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) Continuous Monitoring Approach (CMA) indicated that SAR continued to represent a major challenge for States in performing their safety oversight function. To help address these challenges, Australia was coordinating an ad hoc correspondence group to consider proposals for possible alternative aeronautical SAR service oversight systems.

2.1 It was noted that JWG 33 had been scheduled from 9 to 13 November 2026 in Malmö, Sweden. APAC States/Administrations were encouraged to participate and to submit working papers and/or information papers for the meeting.

2.2 APSAR/WG/11 observed that discussion of SWIM within the SAR community had been limited. The meeting agreed to recommend that SWIM be included on the agenda of the next JWG meeting to facilitate broader global discussion and information exchange with other ICAO regions.

Status of Cospas-Sarsat Programme

2.3 APSAR/WG/11 was provided with a status report on the Cospas-Sarsat system, including system operations, significant developments, space and ground segments, beacons, false alerts, reporting by Rescue Coordination Centres (RCCs) on use of the distress alert data provided, and results of Cospas-Sarsat Mission Control Centres (MCCs) – SAR Point of Contact (SPOC) communication tests.

2.4 Since September 1982, the Cospas-Sarsat system has provided assistance in rescuing at least 67,000 people from 21,000 SAR events (**Figure 1**). The distribution of all SAR events for 2024, the latest year for which statistics had been compiled and reviewed, was 17 per cent for aviation, 42 per cent for land and 41 per cent for maritime (**Figure 2**).

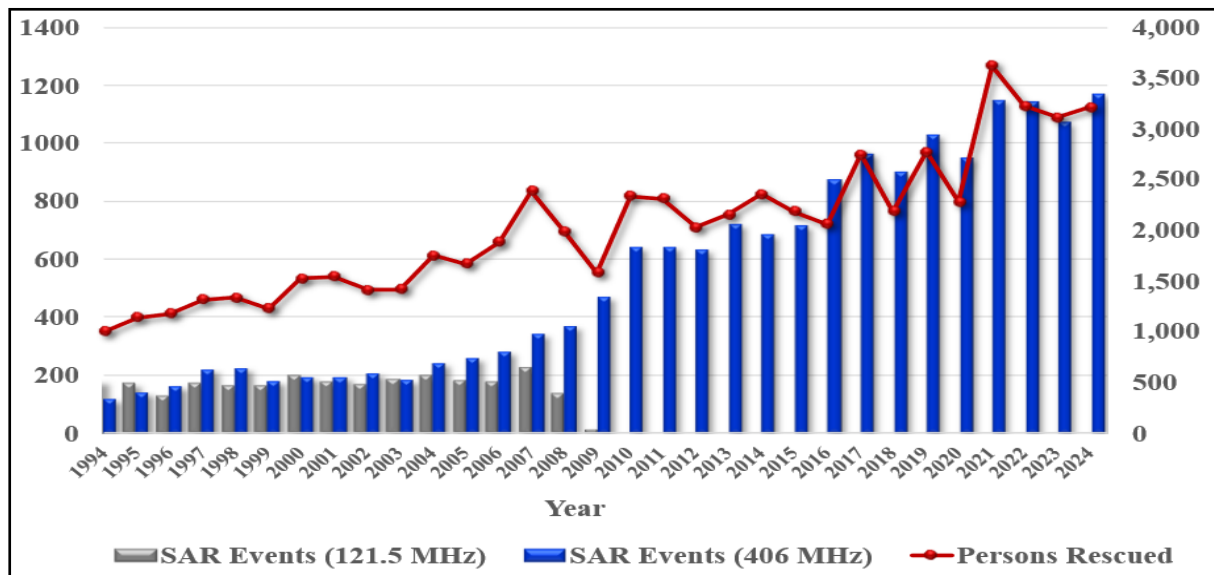


Figure 1. SAR Events with the Assistance of Cospas-Sarsat Data (Jan. 1994 – Dec. 2024)

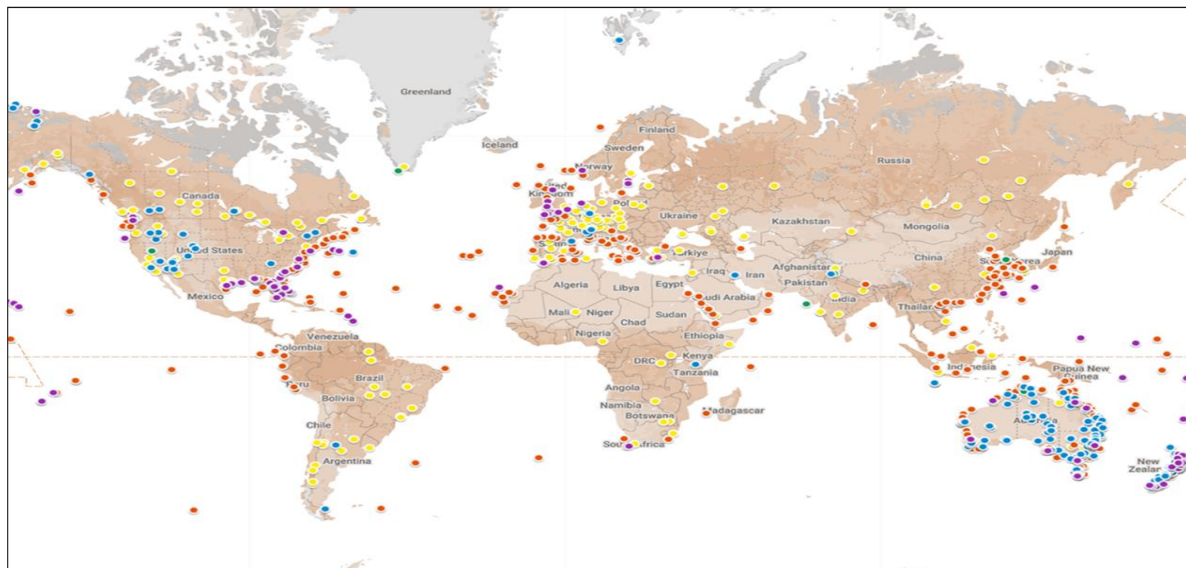


Figure 2. 2024 Geographic Distribution of SAR Events

Registration in OPS Control Directory

2.5 APSAR/WG/11 was reminded of the importance for all operators of ELT(DT)-equipped aircraft, ATS units, RCCs responsible for aeronautical distress response, and any national aviation agencies (if desired), to ensure they were properly registered in the OPS Control Directory to be notified of ADT activations of interest and to access position data stored in LADR in a timely manner, if necessary.

Regional SAR Status

2.6 APSAR/WG/11 was provided with an update of SAR implementation status in the APAC region. The ICAO APAC Office maintained records of the information provided by its accredited Administrations regarding SAR status, in order to report to APANPIRG.

2.7 An analysis of the 16 USOAP SAR-related PQs in April 2026 indicated that the overall Effective Implementation (EI) for SAR had slightly increased when compared to the previous year's assessment. States that had not undergone any USOAP CMA activities since the revised PQs would still see the previous edition results in the USOAP OLF.

- a) May 2022 – 55%
- b) May 2023 – 55%
- c) April 2024 – 54%
- d) April 2025 – 55%
- e) April 2026 – 59%

2.8 From the PQ analysis, there were still weaknesses in the major areas of SAR indicated by USOAP, in the areas of:

- a) CE-3: 7.517 (34%) – [SAR service provider] SAR coordination agreements;
- b) CE-4: 7.499 (37%) – [SAR regulatory oversight] Implementation of training plan for SAR inspectors; and
- c) CE-7: 7.505, 7.543 and 7.545 (49%, 45% and 43%) – [SAR regulatory oversight] effective regulatory surveillance oversight of SAR, detailed plans of SAR operations and checks that SAR operational personnel have regular training, including the conduct of SAR exercise.

Addressing SAR Oversight Challenges Under the ICAO USOAP CMA

2.9 APSAR/WG/11 noted that ICAO USOAP CMA continued to identify SAR as a significant challenge for States in fulfilling safety oversight responsibilities, particularly where SAR services were provided by non-civil aviation entities such as maritime authorities, coast guards, and military organizations. Additional challenges include differing ICAO and IMO audit requirements for Joint Rescue Coordination Centres (JRCCs), limited SAR-specific guidance in ICAO Doc 9734 – *Safety Oversight Manual*, shortages of qualified SAR inspectors, and difficulties in justifying additional oversight arrangements in States with historically effective SAR operations.

2.10 APSAR/WG/11 further noted that, following JWG 32, an ad hoc correspondence group coordinated by Australia was established to develop alternative aeronautical SAR oversight models. The high-level proposals under consideration include:

- a) oversight within a SAR service provider by an internal department which is independent and separate from the SAR operations and RCC function;

- b) oversight by an external agency making use of temporary secondments of SAR specialists from the SAR service provider;
- c) multi-State or regional SAR oversight, possibly aligned with the ICAO Regional Safety Oversight Organization (RSOO) model;
- d) hybrid aeronautical and maritime SAR oversight; and
- e) CAA oversight of organizations that provide SAR services other than ANSPs, for example maritime agencies.

2.11 These proposals were supported by Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and the United Kingdom, and other APAC States/Administrations were invited to provide feedback to Australia by September 2026 for inclusion in a working paper to be presented at JWG 33 in November 2026.

Regional SAR Plan Implementation Status

Asia/Pacific SAR Plan Implementation Status

2.12 As of 13 July 2026, 24 Administrations submitted the annual *Regional SAR Plan Monitoring and Reporting Form* over the MS Forms platform. **Figure 3** illustrated the *Asia/Pacific SAR Plan* implementation status as of 13 July 2026, noting that the majority of States/Administrations had achieved compliance of 70% or higher.

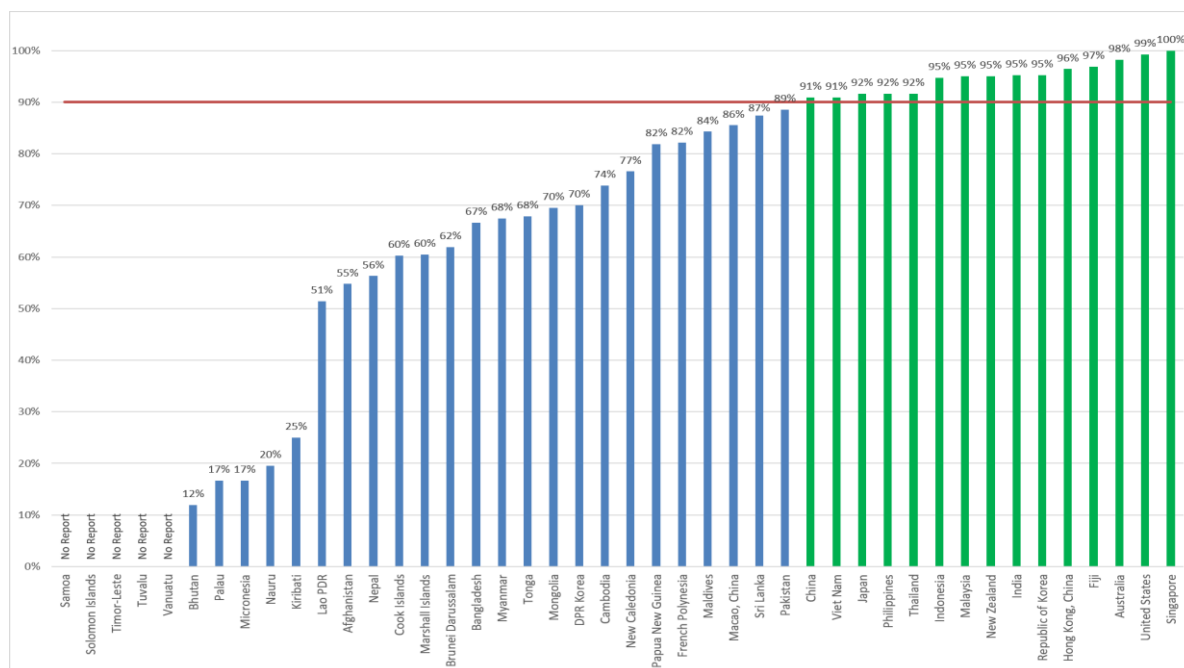


Figure 3. Asia/Pacific SAR Plan Implementation Status, as of 13 July 2026

2.13 Regional policy establishes that States/Administrations below 90% implementation of the 42 elements of the Asia/Pacific SAR Plan would be considered to have an APANPIRG ANS Deficiency recorded for SAR implementation. Only 14 States/Administration had reported implementation of 90%:

Australia, China, Hong Kong China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, United States and Viet Nam.

Asia/Pacific Search and Rescue Unit (SRU) Capability

2.14 In accordance with **Conclusion ATM/SG/13-10**, States/Administrations were requested to submit annual updates on SRU capabilities by 28 February to the ICAO APAC Office for units approved to operate in neighbouring Search and Rescue Regions (SRRs).

2.15 As of 16 April 2026, only 12 Administrations had responded:

Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Hong Kong China, Fiji, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, and Thailand.

2.16 The submitted SRU capability information had been posted on the ICAO APAC Office eDocuments webpage.

2.17 APSAR/WG/11 noted that submission of SRU capability information was voluntary and did not constitute a commitment to provide SAR assistance. States/Administrations were requested to notify the ICAO APAC Office if submission was not feasible due to sensitivity and to indicate “Not Applicable (NA)” in the annual *Regional SAR Plan Monitoring and Reporting Form* where appropriate.

Asia/Pacific Regional Implementation for Autonomous Distress Tracking

2.18 It was recalled that APSAR/WG/10 had agreed on **Action Item 10/2**, calling on APAC Administrations to intensify efforts to complete the actions required for ADT implementation. To assess anticipated improvements in APAC Administrations’ capabilities to receive, process and manage ADT notifications, the ICAO APAC Office conducted a follow-up survey in 2026. 17 APAC Administrations responded.

2.19 The 2026 follow-up survey results (**Figure 4**) indicated measurable progress in APAC Administrations’ readiness to implement ADT across all four categories (i.e. States, aircraft operators, SAR service provider and ANSP), with overall positive responses increased from 48% to 61%.

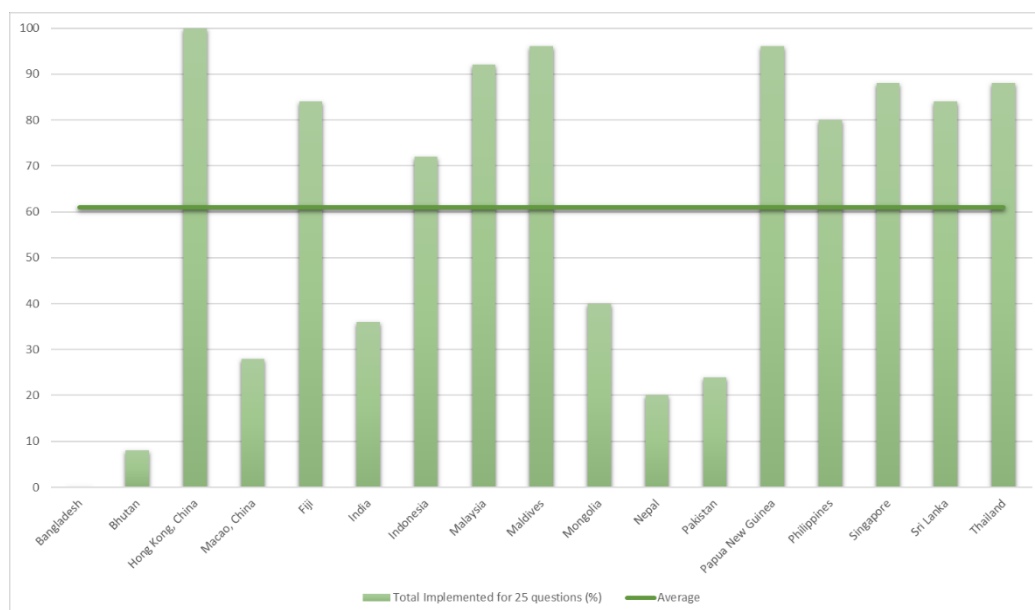


Figure 4. Overall Responses Rate for All Questions

2.20 In conclusion, the limited participation in the 2026 survey and consistently low levels of completion in procedure promulgation and training underscored the need for sustained and coordinated efforts. APAC Administrations were urged to accelerate regulatory, procedural and training actions, to achieve full and effective ADT implementation.

Aerodrome Emergency Plans and SAR Response in Vicinity of Aerodromes

2.21 APSAR/WG/11 noted Australia's review of Aerodrome Emergency Plans (AEPs) and SAR coordination for aircraft emergencies occurring in the vicinity of, but outside, aerodrome boundaries, including adjacent waterways. The review found that while ICAO SARPs and guidance material required close integration between AEP stakeholders and RCCs, Australia's National SAR Manual had not explicitly addressed AEP arrangements. It also identified the absence of a clear and common definition of an "aerodrome boundary," which had created uncertainty regarding coordination and rescue responsibilities for incidents in the vicinity of aerodromes.

2.22 It was further noted that Australia had amended its National SAR Manual to address these gaps by incorporating AEP-related provisions, clarifying response roles for on-aerodrome and vicinity incidents, and adopting the principle of the "best placed SAR authority" to coordinate responses.

2.23 APSAR/WG/11 acknowledged the need for clear procedures defining responsibilities between airport emergency services and supporting agencies, taking into account the capability and range of available rescue units, including maritime rescue capabilities where applicable. APAC States/Administrations were encouraged to share information at the next APSAR/WG meeting on their arrangements for integrating AEPs and SAR coordination within their SRR(s) for aircraft emergencies occurring in the vicinity of, but outside, aerodrome boundaries, including adjacent waterways.

APANPIRG ATM and Airspace Safety Deficiencies in the SAR Field

2.24 APSAR/WG/11 reviewed and updated SAR-related APANPIRG ATM and Airspace Safety Deficiencies.

2.25 29 Administrations had ATM and Airspace Safety Deficiencies in the SAR field recorded in 2025 (APANPIRG/36). Deficiencies remain listed for the following Asia/Pacific Administrations:

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Macao China, Cook Islands, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Lao PDR, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, Nepal, New Caledonia, Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

2.26 The updated list of deficiencies is provided in a separate working paper to this Meeting.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to:

- a) note the information contained in this paper;
- b) urge States/Administrations to submit status reports on their compliance with the *Asia/Pacific SAR Plan* reporting elements annually by no later than 28 February;
- c) urge States/Administrations to submit information on SRU capabilities for units approved to operate in neighbouring SRRs annually by no later than 28 February;
- d) urge States/Administrations to expedite the necessary regulatory, procedural, and training actions to ensure the timely, full, and effective implementation of ADT;

- e) encourage States/Administrations to share experiences, best practices, and information on the integration of AEPs and SAR coordination arrangements for aircraft emergencies occurring in the vicinity of, but outside, aerodrome boundaries, including nearby waterways, at future APSAR/WG meetings; and
- f) discuss any relevant matters as appropriate.

— END —