



ICPC News Release

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ICPC comments on submarine cable security around the world

LYMINGTON, UK—Fibre optic submarine cable security is one key priority among cable owners, operators, and chartered vessels. The [International Cable Protection Committee \(ICPC\)](#) represents member companies that own or operate about 98% of the world's submarine cable systems as well as the cable ship companies laying and maintaining cables.

Submarine cables are laid and routed to maximise security, while providing fast, reliable and cost-effective communications worldwide. Of the 200 or so submarine cable faults (incidents of physical damage) that occur each year, most are from human activities (fishing, ship anchors), and are less likely to be from natural hazards (earthquakes, typhoons). Whether due to environmental, man-made or (occasional) deliberate acts of external aggression, the ICPC works to improve cable security by participating in global security workshops, authoring papers, and engaging with states and regional inter-governmental organisations including: the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). The ICPC also actively collaborates with research organisations to better define the risks posed by natural hazards and hence improve cable security in earthquake and storm-prone regions of the globe.

Throughout the oceans, there are decentralized international commercial submarine cable systems that provide robust and resilient communications between many countries, their citizens and businesses and are generally owned: 1) privately by joint ventures; 2) by consortia of companies; or 3) by a single entity. Because of the decentralized nature of the global telecommunications network, the ICPC defers to the system's owner(s) or cable ship operators to supply accurate information on specific security matters when involving a particular system. However, the ICPC notes that resilience to such faults comes from two core principles that are common industry practice:

1. Prompt repair by cable ships that are strategically based around the world, under retainer contracts, and;
2. Owner-users implementing restoration of critical traffic on other cable systems, since each system can act as a backup for another individual cable network when a fault occurs.

In addition to considerable actions taken by cable owners and ship operators to protect their systems and vessels, there is a widespread recognition in the industry that adequate

security also requires close cooperation with the countries where cables land and the flag States of cable ships.

The ICPC has led the way in identifying major security gaps that need to be addressed:

- Under international law, neither the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) nor the various United Nations treaties are designed to suppress unlawful acts outside of national waters to address the intentional destruction of international submarine cables by terrorists or others.
- A majority of States have not enacted laws, or have obsolete laws, to punish wrongdoers who intentionally (or through culpable negligence) injure international cables.
- States should not impede prompt repair of international submarine cable systems outside of territorial seas by delaying cable ships with cabotage restrictions, taxes, customs, permits, and other actions that keep cable ships idle instead of carrying out emergency repairs.
- In most States, there are multiple government agencies that regulate aspects of submarine cables, but no agency has been tasked to be a single point of contact for threats to international cables. Australia and Singapore have demonstrated that this procedural weakness can and should be corrected so that threats on an international basis can be addressed in a timely manner.
- There should be desktop exercises by like-minded States and the ICPC to work out procedures for repairing submarine cables that are damaged by hostile actions or natural disasters.

The ICPC not only encourages close cooperation between cable owners and agencies responsible for infrastructure security, but also welcomes governments to join ICPC as members, to further reduce the risk of man-made and natural hazards to submarine cables.

About ICPC: The [International Cable Protection Committee \(ICPC\)](http://www.iscpc.org) was formed in 1958 and its primary goal is to promote the safeguarding of international submarine cables against man-made and natural hazards. The organisation provides a forum for the exchange of technical, legal and environmental information about submarine cables and, with 160 members from over 60 nations, including cable operators, owners, manufacturers, industry service providers, as well as governments, it is the World's premier submarine cable organisation. For further information about ICPC, visit: www.iscpc.org.

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