MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN (MAP)
REGIONAL MARINE POLLUTION EMERGENCY RESPONSE CENTRE FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA (REMPEC)

Sixteenth Meeting of the Focal Points of the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC)

Sliema, Malta, 13-15 May 2025

REMPEC/WG.61/4
24 March 2025
Original: English

Agenda Item 4: Developments within IMO related to the objectives and functions of REMPEC

Developments within IMO related to the Objectives and Functions of REMPEC

REMPEC
Malta, 2025

Note by the Secretariat

This document provides a summary of the latest developments within IMO in the fields of, preparedness for, and response to, marine pollution from ships. It also addresses, the recent activities of IMO related to operational pollution, marine litter, Special Areas and underwater radiated noise, as well as GHG reduction and measures for enhancing energy efficiency of shipping. Reference is made to the relevant outcomes of IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) and the Sub-Committee on Pollution Prevention and Response (PPR).

Introduction

1 The Marine Environment Protection Committee held its eighty-first session (MEPC 81) from 18 to 22 March 2024 and its eighty-second session (MEPC 82) from 30 September to 4 October 2024. The reports of these sessions have been circulated as documents MEPC 81/16 and MEPC 82/17 and addenda, respectively. During the reporting period, the Sub-Committee on Pollution Prevention and Response (PPR) held its twelfth session from 27 to 31 January 2025. The outcome of these sessions on matters of interest to the Meeting of REMPEC Focal Points is summarized hereunder.

Amendments to mandatory instruments

2 MEPC 81 considered and adopted the amendments to the following:

.1 the International Convention for the control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments, 2004, concerning amendments to regulations A-1 and B-2;

.2 the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973, as modified by the Protocol of 1978 relating thereto, concerning amendments to Protocol I of MARPOL (reporting procedures for the loss of containers);

.3 MARPOL Annex VI (low-flashpoint fuels and other fuel oil related issues, marine diesel engine replacing steam, accessibility of data and inclusion of data on transport work and enhanced granularity in the IMO Ship fuel Consumption Database (IMO DCS)); and

.4 approved the 2024 Guidelines as required by regulation 13.2.2 of MARPOL Annex VI in respect of non-identical replacement engines not required to meet the Tier III limit.

3 MEPC 82 considered and adopted the following amendments:

.1 to MARPOL Annex VI on the designation of the Canadian Arctic and the Norwegian Sea as Emission Control Areas (ECAs) for Nitrogen Oxides (NO_x), Sulphur Oxides (SO_x) and Particulate Matter (PM);

and approved the following guidance documents:

.2 Guidance on best practice on recommendatory goal-based control measures to reduce the impact on the Arctic of Black Carbon emissions from international shipping; and

.3 Guidelines on recommendatory Black Carbon emission measurement, monitoring and reporting.

OPRC and OPRC-HNS Protocol

4 The OPRC Convention and OPRC-HNS Protocol, notably articles 12 (OPRC) and10 (OPRC-HNS), designate IMO to perform a number of functions in respect of oil and HNS pollution preparedness and response. These include information services: to receive, collate and disseminate information on oil-HNS pollution incidents; education and training: to promote training and international symposia; technical services: to facilitate cooperation and support R&D, to technical advice on establishing national capacity; technical assistance: to facilitate the provision of technical assistance and advice, upon the request of States faced with major oil pollution incidents.

5 Further to requests for assistance by Member States, IMO may provide an array of services in the event of a major pollution incident, such as remote technical advice, facilitate access to expertise on technical subject experts (salvage, compensation) or bilaterally with other state Parties, or occasionally deploy specialized experts on site to support countries facing major pollution incidents.

6 In 2024 the ongoing attacks in the Red Sea presented new pollution response challenges, with two incidents requiring IMO's direct involvement to support countries in the region through the provision of onsite and remote technical assistance and advice in response to Houthi attacks on two ships transiting the Red Sea:

.1 in March 2024, **MV Rubymar** suffered a missile attack and subsequently sank off the coast of Yemen, given the inability to attempt salvage of the ship due to threats of further attack. The ship, which was laden with 200 tonnes of bunker fuel and carrying 22,000 tonnes of ammonium phosphate fertilizer, presented both a navigational and pollution threat. IMO deployed an expert onsite to provide direct technical support to Yemeni authorities in addressing the risk; and

.2 the second incident was a missile strike, followed by explosives being placed and detonated on the deck of the **MV Sounion**, a tanker carrying 150,000 tonnes of oil cargo. The resulting fire burned for almost two months causing serious concern of a major pollution incident. IMO was able to provide remote technical advice and facilitate communication between governments in the region, salvors, response organizations and other UN agencies, as the ship drifted without crew or power. The ship ultimately arrived in Eritrean waters, where the fires were eventually extinguished, and the ship was then towed to safety in Egypt in November 2024, without any resulting pollution.

Tackling marine litter

7 To further address matters related to marine litter, in 2024, the MEPC and the Maritime Safety Committee (MSC), adopted amendments to MARPOL and SOLAS to ensure prompt and detailed reporting of lost and drifting containers, which pose serious risks for maritime safety and for the marine environment.

8 Additionally, MEPC 82 approved new *Recommendations for the Carraige of Plastic Pellets by Sea in Freight Containers* to address the packaging and stowage of plastic pellets, with the aim of providing further protections for the loss of containers carrying plastic pellets.

9 In early 2025, work began to prepare for finalization and publication of the *Guidelines on good practice relating to clean-up of plastic pellets from ship-source releases*, and the *Operational Guide on the Response to Spills of Hazardous and Noxious Substances (HNS) – Volume 1 – Preparedness; and Volume 2 – Response*.

Underwater noise reduction

10 In an effort to minimize the impacts of underwater radiated noise (URN) from shipping, MEPC 82 approved the *Action Plan for the reduction of underwater noise from commercial shipping* (MEPC 82/17/Add.1, annex 8), and agreed to include this as an agenda item, to further work on this topic.

Tackling climate change

11 IMO continues to contribute to the global fight against climate change, in support of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 13, to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and curb harmful air pollution. In July 2023, MEPC 80 adopted the *2023 IMO Strategy on reduction of GHG emissions from ships* (2023 IMO GHG Strategy), confirming the ambition to reach net-zero GHG emissions from international shipping by or around , i.e., close to 2050; a commitment to ensure the uptake of alternative zero and near-zero GHG fuels and/or energy sources to represent at least 5%, striving for 10%, of the energy used by international shipping by 2030; as well as an indicative check-point to reduce the total annual GHG emissions from international shipping by at least 20%, striving for 30%, by 2030, compared to 2008; and by at least 70%, striving for 80%, by 2040, also compared to 2008. The decarbonization of shipping should be possible for all IMO Member States and may create new opportunities also for developing countries, including small island developing States (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs), to take part in the value chain of the production and distribution of zero and near-zero GHG emission fuels and/or energy sources for international shipping.

GHG emission reductions

12 During 2024, MEPC 82 and the Intersessional Working Group on GHG Emissions from Ships (ISWG-GHG) have been developing a basket of mid-term measures aimed at delivering on the reduction targets of the 2023 IMO GHG Strategy. The mid-term GHG reduction measures, to be included in MARPOL Annex VI, are scheduled for adoption in late 2025, with a view to entry into force in 2027, and should effectively promote the energy transition of shipping and provide the world fleet with a needed incentive, while contributing to a level playing field and a just and equitable transition. The measures under discussion include a technical element, namely a global marine fuel standard regulating the phased reduction of marine fuel's GHG intensity and an economic element, on the basis of a maritime GHG emissions pricing mechanism. Various proposals on the architecture of these measures, in the form of possible amendments to MARPOL Annex VI, have been put forward by Member States and international organizations. Based on these inputs, MEPC 82 produced a draft legal text, the so-called "IMO Net-Zero Framework", to be used as the basis for the next phase of discussions. MEPC 82 also noted the outcome of an impact assessment of candidate GHG reduction measures on the world fleet and States, in particular developing countries, and agreed to take these into account, as appropriate, in the further development of candidate measures, MEPC 82 also agreed to assess in particular, the potential impacts of the measures on food security, especially on net food importing developing countries.

Life cycle GHG intensity of marine fuels

13 In 2024, MEPC made significant strides in improving how to assess GHG emissions from marine fuels throughout their entire lifecycle, from primary production to carriage in a ship's tank to combustion in a ship's exhaust. Low-carbon and zero-carbon fuels for shipping have diverse production pathways, entailing significant differences in their overall environmental footprint. The effective transition to alternative low– and zero– emission fuels requires the development of a robust international framework to assess the GHG intensity and sustainability of alternative fuels in a scientific and holistic manner. The *2024 Guidelines on life cycle GHG intensity of marine fuels* (LCA Guidelines), adopted by MEPC 81, include revised methods for calculating default emission factor and improved forms for tracking emissions from production, transportation and use on ships of different fuels. A GESAMP Working Group on Life Cycle GHG Intensity of Marine Fuels (GESAMP LCA-WG) was established with the mandate to provide the best possible scientific and technical assessment of issues related to the implementation of the LCA Guidelines.

Energy efficiency of ships

14 In order to reduce the maritime industry's impact on climate change, IMO continued its efforts to enhance the energy efficiency of ships. This is essential not only for reducing emissions, but also for offsetting additional costs associated with alternative low- and zero- carbon fuels. In 2024, MEPC continued its work on the review of the 'short-term measure' currently in force to reduce GHG emissions from ships by enhancing the energy efficiency of the global fleet. The Committee analyzed data submitted by Member States gained from their experience with the implementation of the regulations over the past year, as well as various proposals to improve, in particular, the Carbon Intensity Indicator (CII) mechanism. The Committee endorsed, in principle, a way forward to address these challenges and gaps, providing, in particular, an indicative timeframe following a two-phase approach by agreeing that some challenges and gaps will be addressed before 1 January 2026 (phase 1), while some others may be considered after 1 January 2026 (phase 2). In 2024, MEPC also reviewed the report on the annual carbon intensity and efficiency of the existing fleet, covering the reporting years 2019 through 2022. This report tracks progress towards the goal of achieving at least a 40% improvement in carbon intensity by 2030.

Air pollution

Emission control areas in Canadian arctic waters and Norwegian sea approved

15 In October 2024, MEPC 82 established two new ECAs for NO_x, SO_x and PM in Canadian Arctic waters and the Norwegian Sea. These ECAs are designated maritime zones with stricter controls to minimize airborne emissions from ships, in line with MARPOL Annex VI.

Actions requested by the Meeting

4 **The Meeting is invited to**:

.1 **take note** of the information provided in the present document; and

.2 **take action** as deemed appropriate.

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