

Marine Environment Protection Committee 81st session (MEPC 81), 18-22 March 2024

Action Required: IR Commission members are invited to note the relevant outcomes of MEPC 81.

MEPC 81 highlights

1. Tackling climate change - cutting GHG emissions from ships and implementing the 2023 IMO GHG Strategy - “IMO net-zero framework”, life cycle GHG intensity (LCA) guidelines
2. Tackling marine litter – adoption of amendments on reporting procedures for lost containers / approval of recommendations on carriage of plastic pellets by sea in freight containers
3. Ballast Water Management Convention implementation - experience-building phase, approval of operational guidelines and adoption of amendments to the BWM Convention
4. Proposals for Emission Control Areas in Canadian Arctic Waters and Norwegian Sea approved
5. Implementation of the Hong Kong Convention on ship recycling
6. Underwater noise reduction - action plan endorsed.

Tackling climate change - cutting GHG emissions from ships

IMO has developed global regulations on energy efficiency for ships and continues to take concrete action to ensure that international shipping bears its fair share of responsibility in addressing climate change. MEPC 80 in July 2023 adopted the 2023 IMO Strategy on Reduction of GHG Emissions from Ships, with the goal of achieving net-zero GHG emissions by or around, i.e. close to, 2050.

MEPC 81 agreed on an illustration of a possible draft outline of an “IMO net-zero framework” for cutting greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) from international shipping.

Relevance to World Sailing: to be aware of these aspirations, which may potentially be extended to include vessels under the current 500GT applicability threshold.

Mandatory reporting of lost containers

MEPC adopted amendments to MARPOL Protocol I, referencing a procedure for reporting lost freight containers. Containers lost overboard can be a serious hazard to navigation and safety at sea as well as to the marine environment.

The amendments to article V of Protocol I of the MARPOL Convention (Provisions concerning reports on incidents involving harmful substances) would add a new paragraph to say that "In case of the loss of freight container(s), the report required by article II (1) (b)

shall be made in accordance with the provisions of SOLAS regulations V/31 and V/32." The amendments are expected to enter into force on 1 January 2026.

Related draft SOLAS chapter V amendments are set to be adopted by the Maritime Safety Committee (MSC 108), in May 2024, and will require the master of every ship involved in the loss of freight container(s) to communicate the particulars of such an incident to ships in the vicinity, to the nearest coastal State and to the flag State.

Relevance to World Sailing: highly relevant to the safety of small craft, which could be subject to damage, injury or sinking if in collision with a container on or near the surface. The new, mandatory incident reporting scheme is one step in a range of measures to mitigate that risk. Other measures will follow.

Ballast water management – implementation and Convention review

The International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments, 2004 (BWM Convention), entered into force on 8 September 2017 and since then the focus is on its effective implementation.

At its previous session (MEPC 80), the Committee approved the Convention Review Plan (CRP) under the experience-building phase associated with the BWM Convention, including the list of priority issues to be considered in the Convention review stage. This is guiding the ongoing comprehensive review of the BWM Convention and the MEPC is now proceeding to the corresponding development of a package of amendments to the Convention.

With regard to urgent operational matters requiring to be addressed prior to the completion of the Convention review, MEPC:

- adopted an MEPC resolution on *Interim guidance on the application of the BWM Convention to ships operating in challenging water quality conditions*;
- approved *Guidance for the temporary storage of treated sewage and/or grey water in ballast water tanks*; and
- invited interested Member States and international organizations to work intersessionally with the broadest possible participation and submit further concrete proposals to the next session with a view to finalization of guidance on modifications to ballast water management systems with existing type approval.

Relevance to World Sailing: only relevant to sailing vessels with ballast water management capability.

Proposals for Emission Control Areas approved

MEPC approved two proposals for the designation of Emission Control Areas (ECAs):

- Proposed ECA in Canadian Arctic Waters, for Nitrogen Oxides, Sulphur Oxides and Particulate Matter; and
- Proposed ECA in the Norwegian Sea for Nitrogen Oxide and Sulphur Oxides which includes a "three dates criterion" consisting of building contract, keel laid and delivery date as part of the keel-laying date requirement in the proposed amendment to MARPOL Annex VI.

The draft amendments to MARPOL Annex VI to establish the ECAs will be forwarded to MEPC 82 for adoption. The earliest entry-into-force date of the amendments would be 1 March 2026 (16 months from adoption)*.

**These amendments to establish the ECAs then come into effect from 1 March 2027. Under MARPOL Annex VI, Regulation 14 Sulphur oxides (SOx) and particulate matter, paragraph 7: "During the first 12 months immediately following entry into force of an amendment designating a specific emission control area under paragraph 3 of this regulation, ships operating in that emission control area are exempt from the requirements"*

Relevance to World Sailing: relevant to vessels over 500GT. But the direction of travel is towards reducing this applicability threshold, with potential consequences for smaller, non-commercial craft.

Implementation of the Hong Kong Convention

MEPC approved reporting protocols to assist with implementation of the Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships (Hong Kong Convention), which is set to enter into force on 26 June 2025.

The Convention is aimed at ensuring that ships, when being recycled after reaching the end of their operational life, do not pose any unnecessary risks to human health, safety and to the environment.

Article 12 of the Hong Kong Convention requires each Party to report to the Organization information on, inter alia, ship recycling facilities, competent authorities, an annual list of ships flying the flag of that Party to which an International Ready for Recycling Certificate has been issued, and an annual list of ships recycled within the jurisdiction of that Party.

Relevance to World Sailing: as above.

Underwater noise reduction

MEPC endorsed a draft Action plan for the reduction of underwater noise from commercial shipping, developed by the Sub-Committee on Ship Design and Construction (SDC 10) and included a new item on "Reduction of underwater radiated noise from commercial shipping" on its agenda for MEPC 82.

Relevance to World Sailing: applicability currently limited to commercial shipping, but this could change.

There were no other issues raised of relevance to World Sailing.