

REPORT ON MEETINGS AT THE IMO

1. Introduction

This is a report on IMO meetings during the period 1 October 2025 to 31 March 2026 and related matters as may be relevant for ISSA. During the period under review, the maritime sector experienced remarkable instability, including escalating geopolitical conflicts; economic and trade instability; operational and logistical disruptions; security and hybrid threats; and regulatory and environmental uncertainty. Conflict continues to impact maritime operations around the world.

A new front opened on 28 February 2026 with military operations against Iran with almost immediate and ongoing effect on maritime trade and energy prices. ISSA issued a statement on the outbreak of hostilities in the Middle East on March 3, 2026. The impact on shipping and seafarers of the situation in the Arabian Sea, Sea of Oman, and the Gulf region, particularly in and around the Strait of Hormuz was the subject of an extraordinary session of the IMO Council on 18–19 March 2026.

The 2026-2027 World Maritime Day theme is: "From Policy to Practice: Powering Maritime Excellence." This is the first time that a World Maritime theme will span two years, reflecting the Organization's commitment to ensuring that the regulatory framework developed at IMO translates into effective national legislation, enforcement and day to day maritime operations. All IMO Committees and Sub-Committees are expected to collectively contribute to the objective of the theme.

2. Meetings of IMO committees and sub-committees

This report covers six (6) technical meetings of the IMO committees and sub-committees; and four (4) meetings of the two main governing bodies of the IMO: the Assembly and the Council.

2.1 2nd Extraordinary Session of the IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee, MEPC/ES, 14-17 October 2025

The 2nd Extraordinary Session of the MEPC focused exclusively on the adoption of the IMO Net-Zero Framework and associated elements. The meeting was designed to consider two amendments to MARPOL Annex VI previously approved at MEPC83 in April 2025: the IMO Net-Zero Framework (NZF) setting out a new fuel standard for shipping and a global pricing mechanism for emissions; and the designation of the North-East Atlantic Ocean as an Emission Control Area for Sulphur Oxides, Particulate Matter and Nitrogen Oxides. Despite its adoption at MEPC83, concerns were raised on the proposed NZF draft, in particular on: governance and operation of the net-zero fund; the incomplete state of the IMO Life Cycle GHG assessment (LCA) guidelines; lack of agreement on support for R&D and companies investing in low carbon solutions; and lack of alternative fuel capacity. The Committee failed to reach a consensus and a motion to adjourn the MEPC extraordinary session for one year, was adopted by a majority of 57 votes (against 49): no resolution nor other submission were therefore adopted. This was a particularly controversial meeting and while work will continue on a

number of aspects of the NZF, amendments to MARPOL Annex VI will now be considered in October 2026. The work on the guidelines for implementing of GHG emission regulations and associated elements will continue in the interim with a decision on the NZF expected for October 2026. If approved, the amendments will enter into force in March 2028 at the earliest.

2.2 12th Session of the IMO's Sub-Committee on Ship Design and Construction, SDC12, 19-23 January 2026

The SDC discusses a broad range of technical and operational requirements regarding the design, construction, and safety of ships. It reports to the Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) and focuses on ensuring safe ship construction, stability, and equipment functionality. Its work is therefore relevant to ship suppliers. The 12th session of the SDC achieved several outcomes, including: completion of the workplan for the development of a safety regulatory framework to support the reduction of GHG emissions from ships using new technologies and alternative fuels (this will be submitted to the Maritime Safety Committee in May 2026 for approval); progress on the Action Plan to reduce underwater radiated noise (URN) and lessen ships' impact on the marine environment; finalization of draft Guidelines on the use of remote inspection techniques (RIT) to support safe and efficient surveys using remote inspection tools, such as drones or robotic devices; finalization of the Guidelines for the use of fibre reinforced plastics (FRP) within ship structures; and finalization of draft Explanatory Notes for safe return to port and orderly evacuation and abandonment after fire or flooding. New initiatives were also considered, including performance standards for engine control room alert management as well as a work plan for the development of a safety framework for emerging technologies such as wind propulsion, battery power and nuclear reactors.

2.3 13th Session of the IMO's Sub-Committee on Pollution Prevention and Response, PPR13, 9-13 February 2026

The PPR plays a pivotal role in turning IMO's environmental commitments into practical, implemental standards. In his closing address to the meeting, the Secretary-General highlighted several outcomes that advance the Organization's work. These included a 2026 Strategy and Action Plan to address marine plastic litter from ships, with a view to adoption by the Marine Environment protection Committee at its next session (MEPC84) in April 2026; recommendation of a new mandatory code on plastic pellets transport by freight containers under MARPOL Annex III and/or SOLAS; and a draft MEPC circular promoting fishing gear marking systems and FAO's Voluntary Guidelines on Marking of Fishing Gear. The Sub-Committee also laid the groundwork for development of a legally binding framework for the control and management of ship's biofouling; and in relation to air pollution, draft amendments were finalized to the NOx Technical Code in relation to non-carbon containing fuels. The Sub-Committee also agreed on draft amendments to MARPOL Annex I on the handling of oily wastes in machinery spaces in machinery spaces of ships incorporating guidance notes for an integrated bilge water treatment system and the associated draft amendments to MARPOL Annex 1, along with the draft revised Guidance for the recording of operations in the Oil Record book.

2.4 12th Session of the IMO's Sub-Committee on Human Element, Training and Watchkeeping, HTW12, 23-27 February 2026

The HTW Sub-Committee deals with the human side of shipping, including ensuring that seafarers are adequately trained, competent and fit for duty, while also addressing issues such as fatigue management, crew welfare and evolving industry needs across the maritime sector. Some of the important results of the meeting were: the Sub-Committee initiated phase 2 (revision) of the comprehensive review of the STCW Convention and Code and made good progress on the preparations to proceed with the draft amendments to Chapters II and III of the Convention and Code at the Intersessional Working Group. One area receiving particular attention was the potential partial substitution of seagoing service with simulator training. The comprehensive review is expected to be finalised in 2029. In addition, with regard to the STCW oversight and verification processes, agreement was reached on additional principles and the outline for the integration of the STCW oversight system and the IMSAS framework. Another important result of the meeting concerned the development of training provisions for seafarers working on vessels using alternative fuels and new technologies. The Sub-Committee finalized: interim guidelines on training for seafarers on ships using methyl/ethyl alcohols as fuel; interim guidelines on training for seafarers on ships using ammonia as fuel; and the workplan for the development of training provisions for seafarers on ships using alternative fuels and new technologies, including the coordination of work with the comprehensive review and the progress made by other IMO bodies relevant to this work. In addition to the review of existing provisions, HTW 12 considered the introduction of new provisions addressing emerging risks and operational areas related to: violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault; and mental health, psychological safety, and gender and cultural diversity

2.5 12th Session of the IMO's Sub-Committee on Ship Systems and Equipment, SSE12, 9-13 March 2026

The Sub-Committee's agenda is generally structured around two main pillars: Life-Saving Appliances and Fire Protection. The meeting agreed on, inter alia: draft SOLAS amendments to enhance fire safety in containerships' cargo area, addressing portable infrared thermal imagers (SOLAS Regulation II-2/7) and water mist lances requirements (SOLAS Regulation II 2/10.7.3.1); draft amendments to the 2010 Fire Test Procedure (FTP) Code to accommodate new fire protection systems and materials, including finalization of draft amendments to introduce non-mandatory test procedures for plastic pipes; draft revised guidelines for the maintenance and inspection of fixed carbon dioxide fire extinguishers; draft amendment to paragraph 2.1.2.5 of chapter 5 of the Fire safety Code (FSS) on construction requirements for gaskets, with a view to approval at MSC 112 and adoption at MSC 113; draft revised guidelines for the maintenance and inspection of fixed carbon dioxide fire extinguishing systems, clarifying the testing and inspection provisions for CO₂ cylinders with a view to approval by MSC 112, (MSC.1/Circ. 1318/Rev.2); amendments to four MSC circulars related to standardized life-saving appliance evaluation and test report forms (incorporation of temperature cycling tests); the Model Course 3.06 on Survey of Life-Saving Appliances and arrangements. The Sub-Committee also made progress on: amendments to the LSA Code on ventilation requirements for partially enclosed lifeboats; a workplan for the revision of SOLAS

and the LSA Code to equip new passenger and cargo ships with automatic self-righting or canopied reversible life rafts; and, the Committee agreed a draft workplan for a safety regulatory framework for ships carrying new-energy vehicles or battery vehicles.

2.6 50th Session of the IMO's Facilitation Committee, FAL50, 23-28 March 2026

This Committee deals with facilitation of international maritime traffic, including the arrival, stay and departure of ships, persons and cargo from ports; as well as digitalization and the single window concept, which aims to ensure that the right balance is struck between regulation and facilitation of international maritime trade. Reflecting on some key achievements at FAL50, the Secretary-General highlighted: new amendments to the FAL Annex on the designation of keyworkers during a public health emergency of international concern; new amendments to FAL on Advance Passenger Information (API) and Booking and Registration Information (BRI); approval of mandatory cybersecurity measures to safeguard the maritime single windows which will strengthen the protection of systems that are critical to the seamless exchange of information between public authorities and private stakeholders in port environments; finalization of the new version of the IMO Compendium on Facilitation and Electronic Business, including new data sets; adoption of a new resolution on the revised guidelines for prevention of access by stowaways and the allocation of responsibilities to seek the successful resolution of stowaway cases; approval of the IMO Strategy on Maritime Digitalization and an ambitious Strategy Development Plan, with the view for the Strategy to be adopted at the 35th session of the Assembly in 2027; adoption of a new resolution on Guidelines on the prevention of access by stowaways and the allocation of responsibilities to seek the successful resolution of stowaway cases.

2.7 135th Session of the IMO COUNCIL, 19-21 November 2025

The 135th session of the Council preceded IMO Assembly³⁴ and considered organisational matters including: the budget for the 2026-27 biennium; strategic direction; human resources and multilingualism where, Arabic was adopted as a working language of the Assembly. Important resolutions were drafted on the IMO Identification Number Scheme aiming to reinforce shipping governance by integrating the IMO Number Scheme and the IMO Shipowner/Company Identification Number Scheme. The Council also took note of IMO instruments which have not yet met the threshold for entry into force including: the 2021 Amendments to the IMO Convention; the 2010 HNS Protocol; and the 2012 Cape Town Agreement.

2.8 34th Session of the IMO ASSEMBLY, 24-28 November 2025

The IMO Assembly, the highest governing body of the organization, met during 24 – 28 November 2025. During this session, the Assembly adopted several resolutions (list of Assembly resolutions attached). The IMO Assembly elected forty (40) new members for the IMO Council for the biannual 2026-27. The new members are: Category (a) States with the largest interest in providing international shipping services: China, Greece, Italy, Japan, Liberia, Norway, Panama, Republic of Korea, UK and US; Category (b) States with the largest

interest in international seaborne trade: Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, India, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, UAE; and, Category (c) States, not elected under (a) or (b) above, which have special interests in maritime transport or navigation and whose election secures representation of all major geographic areas of the world: Bahamas; Belgium; Chile, Cyprus, Egypt, Finland, Indonesia, Jamaica, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa and Türkiye.

2.9 136th Session of the IMO COUNCIL, 19-21 November 2025

The 136th session of the IMO Council (C 136) with the newly elected Council took place on December 3-4, 2025, immediately following the 34th Assembly, to establish the governing body for the 2026-2027 biennium. Key outcomes included: Re-election of Leadership: The newly elected 40-Member Council re-elected Mr. Victor Jiménez (Spain) as its Chair and Mrs. Amane Fethallah (Morocco) as Vice-Chair. The Council also began its work in supervising the organization, planning the budget, and setting the strategic direction for the next two years, following the decisions of the 34th Assembly.

2.10 36th Session of the IMO's COUNCIL, C/ES/36, 18 -19 March 2026

The extraordinary session of the Council was convened at the request of Council members to address the impacts on shipping and seafarers of the situation in the Arabian Sea, Sea of Oman, and the Gulf region, particularly in and around the Strait of Hormuz. In his opening remarks, the Secretary General expressed grave concern about the situation in the region where around 20,000 seafarers remained stranded, and a reportedly seven (7) seafarers had lost their lives as a result of attacks on ships. The Council adopted a declaration whereby: it reaffirmed its commitment to maritime safety, security and environmental protection; it condemned actions or threats aimed at closing, obstructing, or otherwise interfering with free navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, or maritime security in Bab Al Mandab; the Council underlined the paramount importance of the protection of seafarers; and, reiterated respect for navigational rights and freedoms. Expressing deep concern for the safety of seafarers, the Council: urged attacks on ships affecting civilian seafarers be halted immediately; reinforced the importance seafarers' safety and welfare; called on Member States to secure adequate provisions of water, food, fuel and essential supplies to ships stranded in the Persian Gulf; and requested a coordinated international approach on crew change taking into account fatigue and pressure on those onboard. The Council also urged IMO Committees to consider ways to support affected seafarers and address the implications of this situation on the application of IMO instruments. The Secretary General and the Chair are to continue to monitor closely the situation.

2.11 Briefing by Secretary General of IMO on Friday 10 April 2026 regarding the current shipping situation in the Strait of Hormuz and the Middle East

At this in person and online meeting of the IMO, the Secretary General shared information, made comments, and then invited questions from delegates attending the IMO meeting.

The focus of the meeting and the first priority was on the 20,000 seafarers in the region. The first priority, he said, is about seafarers and not about international trade. Regarding seafarers, the Secretary General referred to their supplies, including water, food, medical needs, fatigue, and mental health. The Secretary General also mentioned work on an evacuation plan for seafarers and ships.

Tolls on shipping; traffic separation schemes; international law and UNCLOS; the right of innocent passage; and sea mines were also covered by the Secretary General.

The briefing and information provided by the Secretary General and his urgent and ongoing work at the IMO and also as part of the UN system was much appreciated and recognised by States that spoke. The Secretary General thanked delegates for their attendance and closed the meeting.

3. Amendments to key IMO treaties in force January 1, 2026

During the period under review, as publicized by the IMO, a significant raft of amendments to key IMO treaties and Codes, entered into force on January 1, 2026. These included in summary:

- **Safety of Navigation:** Mandatory reporting of lost containers (MARPOL and SOLAS Chapter V) to protect the marine environment and improve navigation safety.
- **Fire Safety & Protection:** Updated regulations for vehicle, special category, and ro-ro spaces; a ban on PFOS-based firefighting extinguishing agents.
- **Operational Safety:** Mandatory electronic inclinometers on new containerships and bulk carriers (SOLAS Chapter II-1).
- **Crew Welfare:** STCW code amendments mandating training to prevent bullying, harassment, and sexual assault in the maritime sector.
- **Environmental Standards:** Amendments to MARPOL Annex VI regarding the prohibition of supplying oil fuel that does not meet strict flashpoint requirements.
- **Cargo & Technical Standards:** New regulations for lifting appliances and anchor-handling winches, along with updates to the IGF/IGC Codes for cryogenic steel and LSA codes. These amendments also strengthen the safety of non-SOLAS ships operating in polar waters and update the ESP Code (2011). These changes generally apply to new ships, though some requirements are operational.

Please see IMO website page for further details at:

<https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/pressbriefings/pages/raft-of-shipping-rules-in-force-from-1-january-2026.aspx>