

IMO goes carefully on single hulls

A summary of the principal decisions impacting tanker shipping taken at the 49th Session of the IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC 49). The meeting focused on IMO's increasing policing role

The chief agenda item before the 49th Session of IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC 49), which was held in London on July 14-18, 2003 was the proposals tabled by the 15 member states of the European Union for an accelerated phaseout of single-hull tankers.

These measures, which are being implemented by the EU irrespective of the outcome of IMO discussions, were prompted by the breaking up and sinking of the tanker Prestige off Spain in November 2002, and call for a faster pace of phasing out single-hull tankers than was agreed by IMO following the sinking of the tanker Erika in the seas off the French coast in December 1999.

Amongst many other notable achievements during the week-long meeting chaired by Andreas Chrysostomou of Cyprus, MEPC 49 also finalised a new proposed draft convention on the management of ballast water and agreed ship recycling guidelines.

Changes afoot

The proposals by the 15 EU member states considered at MEPC 49 called for not only a further acceleration of the phaseout timetable for single-hull tankers, but also an immediate ban on the carriage of heavy grades of oil in single-hull tankers and for the Condition Assessment Scheme, which was adopted in 2001 in the wake of the Erika sinking, to be applied to tankers of 15 years of age and above. All the proposed changes would necessitate amendment of the 1973/78 Marine Pollution (MARPOL) Convention.

The principal decisions reached at MEPC 49 on this issue can be summarised as shown below. The decisions are subject to further discussion at an extra MEPC session to be held on December 1-4, 2003, to be called MEPC 50.

1. The phaseout of Category 1 (pre-MARPOL) tankers will be further accelerated, bringing forward the final phasing-out date for these tankers from 2007 to 2005.
2. Although there was substantial support for the proposal to bring forward the phasing-out of Category 2 and 3 ships, i.e. MARPOL and smaller tankers, from 2015 to 2010, there was also concern about the implications of such a measure for tankers of less than 20 years old in 2010. A counter proposal, for further consideration in December, suggests that the operational life of such tankers be extended to 2015 or until the ship reaches a specified age, e.g. 20, 23 or 25 years, subject to satisfactory results from the Condition Assessment Scheme (CAS).
3. MEPC 49 agreed, in principle, that CAS should be applied to single-hull tankers of 15 years or older, as against being applicable to all Category 1 vessels continuing to trade after 2005 and all Category 2 vessels after 2010. MEPC 49 agreed to circulate the proposed CAS amendments so that they could be considered for adoption at the MEPC 50 session in December.
4. MEPC 49 delegates noted the proposed consequential enhancements to the CAS scheme which would be needed. The Committee further noted that in order to ensure that CAS is capable of meeting future challenges, such as its possible application to double-hull tankers or enhanced requirements for tankers carrying heated cargoes, intensive further development work is needed. The UK has offered to host an informal meeting on these CAS issues prior to the extra MEPC meeting in December.

5. MEPC 49 considered the proposed draft regulation calling for a ban on the carriage of heavy grades of oil (HGOs) in single-hull tankers. The Committee agreed that further technical discussion was required at the December meeting on the proposed new MARPOL Annex I Regulation 13H dealing with the prevention of oil pollution when HGOs are carried. In particular, the implications for pollution combating need to be reviewed, as does the impact of basing criteria on physical properties of heavy grades of oil such as density and kinematic viscosity.
6. After considering the issue of tankers carrying HGOs engaged in domestic trades, and possible exemptions for tankers on local voyages, MEPC 49 agreed this was a policy matter for a decision later.
7. MEPC 49 agreed that the Informal Group of Experts should be re-established to review the impact of the above proposals.

Revised text approval

The new versions of Annex I and Annex II of the MARPOL Convention were approved, in principle, together with the proposed new four-category system for assessing the pollution threat posed by noxious and liquid substances (NLS) carried as cargo on tankers. The revised texts of both Annexes will be reconfirmed at MEPC 51 in March 2004 and will be considered for adoption at MEPC 52 in October 2004.

Form of the Oil Record Book

Port state control authorities have issued a number of deficiencies to ships relating to the Form of the Oil Record Book Part I which shipowners have queried. The problems have arisen due to consequential editing of the Form of the Oil Record Book Part I in the Consolidated 2002 Edition of the MARPOL Convention, resulting in differences between the Form of the Oil Record Book Part I in that and in the 1997 Consolidated Edition.

MEPC 49 agreed that the Form of Oil Record Book Part I as contained in both the 1997 and 2002 Consolidated Editions of MARPOL should be accepted for port state control purposes until the draft revised MARPOL Annex I containing the amended Form of Oil Record Book Part I has been adopted by the Committee and entered into force.

Draft convention for ballast water

MEPC 49 agreed a finalised draft of the proposed International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments, and agreed to hold a diplomatic conference on February 9-13, 2004 to adopt the Convention in accordance with the timetable approved by the IMO Council. The Committee conducted an article-by-article review of the draft, taking into account the report of the second intersessional meeting of the Ballast Water Working Group.

Ship recycling

MEPC 49 also approved the draft Guidelines on Ship Recycling and the associated IMO Assembly resolution, for submission to the 23rd Assembly in November 2003 for adoption.

The draft guidelines recognise that, while the principle of ship recycling may be sound, the working practices and environmental standards in ship scrapping yards often leave much to be desired. While ultimate responsibility for conditions in the yards has to lie with the countries in which they are situated, other stakeholders must be encouraged to contribute towards minimising potential health, safety and environmental protection problems in the recycling facilities.

The guidelines provide advice to all stakeholders in the recycling process, including administrations of shipbuilding and maritime equipment supplying countries, flag, port

and recycling states and industry groups such as shipowners, shipbuilders, repairers and recycling yards.

There are also existing regimes of relevance to ship scrapping, most notably technical guidelines for specific disposal operations and for specific wastes developed under the Basel Convention, and existing ILO conventions and codes relating to occupational safety and health hazards and worker protection. MEPC will recommend to the International Labour Organization and the Basel Convention secretariat that relevant information be made available on their web sites.

Greenhouse gases

MEPC 49 finalised a draft Assembly resolution on IMO Policies and Practices related to reduction of Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Ships, for submission to the 23rd IMO Assembly in November 2003.

Entry into force of MARPOL Annex VI

MEPC 49 noted that the requirements for entry into force of Annex VI of the MARPOL Convention, covering air pollution from ships and which were adopted in 1997, were nearly satisfied. As of 20 June 2003, Annex VI had been ratified by 11 states representing well over 50 per cent of the world's merchant fleet in gross tonnage terms. Thus, ratifications by only four more states are required to satisfy the conditions for entry into force. Cyprus, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands and Spain stated that they were in the final stages of their national implementation procedures. This would mean that the Annex might satisfy the ratification requirements before the end of 2003, and would enter into force twelve months later.

Anti-fouling systems

MEPC 49 adopted two sets of guidelines relating to the 2001 International Convention on the Control of Harmful Anti-fouling Systems on Ships, i.e. (a) guidelines for brief sampling of anti-fouling systems and (b) guidelines for inspections of ships anti-fouling systems. The AFS Convention is not yet in force; it requires ratification by 25 states representing 25 per cent of the world's merchant shipping tonnage before it becomes mandatory. To a great extent the shipping industry already voluntarily implements the regime.