Main issues from MEPC 71, 3-7 July 2017

The 71st session of the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) was held in London on 3 to 7 July 2017 under the chairmanship of Mr. Arsenio Dominguez (Panama) and the vice-chairmanship of Mr. Hideaki Saito (Japan).

Ballast water management
The Ballast Water Management Convention enters into force on 8 September 2017 and approx. 60 per cent of the gross tonnage of the world's merchant fleet is behind it.

The entry into force of the installation dates was approved as follows:
- New ships: Ships built (keel-laying date) on 8 September 2017 or later must meet the D-2 standard upon delivery.
- Existing ships which must have their IOPP certificates renewed for the first time between 8 September 2017 and 8 September 2019 must meet the D-2 standard at their second renewal survey of the IOPP certificate (i.e. a postponement of 5 years).
- Existing ships that are required to undergo IOPP renewal surveys on 8 September 2019 or later must meet the D-2 standard on this date.
- Existing ships below 400 GT must meet the D-2 standard in 2024.

According to the Convention, ships must replace their ballast water in accordance with the provisions stipulated in regulation D-1 of the Convention until the requirements for cleaning enter into force. MEPC 71 has approved a new circular that describes how ships are to act:
- in areas where no exchange areas have been designated,
- in areas designated as exchange areas, and
- in exchange areas where it is not possible to exchange the contents of the relevant tanks (cf. G14, paragraph 10.3).

The Committee has succeeded in revising the G7 guidelines on risk assessments of ballast water so that now they contain the method referred to as "Same Risk Area" (SRA). Previously the guidelines contained only methods for assessing specific ships' routes, but the SRA method can be used to perform risk assessments of rather small sea areas for use in connection with, for example, exemptions.

Climate
MEPC 71 reached agreement on an overall structure for and the main elements of the IMO initial strategy for reductions of greenhouse gas emissions from shipping. Furthermore, the countries started the debate on possible specific measures by means of a rough list of reduction measures, such as a strengthening of already existing requirements for ships' energy efficiency (see also below) and further research in the use of alternative fuels.
The initial strategy is expected to be adopted at the next committee meeting to be held in the spring of 2018, while the final strategy is expected to be ready in 2023. Due to the urgent nature of the case, two inter-sessional meetings have been arranged prior to the next Committee meeting – in October 2017 and in the spring of 2018, respectively.

**Energy efficiency**

The regulations on the IMO energy efficiency design index (EEDI) have been divided into three phases – phase 1 entered into force in 2015, while phases 2 and 3 will enter into force in 2020 and 2025, respectively. At MEPC 71, it was decided to establish a correspondence group tasked with carrying out another status on technological developments and – on the basis hereof – examining the possibility of shortening phase 2 and, thus, move forward the entry into force of phase 3, while introducing a subsequent phase 4 with additional energy efficiency requirements. At this session, a proposal to revise the reference lines for both ro-ro cargo and passenger ships was also adopted; thereby it will become possible to build new larger ro-ro ships that comply with the stricter requirements of the coming phases.

At the next Committee meeting, inter alia a revision of the minimum requirements for ships' output is to be considered, which will ensure that the ships are also capable of manoeuvring in adverse weather conditions for safety reasons.

**Data collection**

At the previous Committee meeting, the regulations on a new data collection system for ships' fuel consumption were adopted for inclusion in MARPOL Annex VI. The system is to apply to ships with a tonnage above 5000 GT and, from 2019, these ships are to submit information annually to the IMO via the flag State on their total fuel consumption, the distance travelled and the time spent at sea.

MEPC 71 approved guidelines for the flag Administrations, on the one hand, on how to verify the information collected and for the IMO as such, on the other hand, on how the Organization is to more specifically establish and maintain the already agreed “Ship Fuel Oil Consumption Database”.

The information from the data collection system will form part of the IMO's ongoing climate work related to reductions of shipping's greenhouse gas emissions. The system is the first step of a three-step plan, where the next steps are an analysis of the data submitted followed by a decision on which additional measures to take to reduce shipping CO2 emissions. Naturally, the latter step will be closely connected to the work mentioned above on the development of an IMO climate strategy.
**Sulphur**
MEPC 71 got one step further in its efforts to ensure effective implementation and enforcement of the 0.50 per cent sulphur requirement, which will enter into force in 2020 outside SECA areas. Thus, the Committee approved the plan for the implementation of future work towards 2020, which had been drawn up by the PPR Sub-Committee and, in this connection, no interim arrangements, etc. were accepted as proposed by a number of countries. However, the PPR Sub-Committee will – as requested by the Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) – also be required to report any safety risks related to the use of low-sulphur fuels to the MSC.

Furthermore, the Committee approved an amendment to the text of the bunker delivery note (BDN). This amendment means that, from 1 January 2020, ships cannot legally purchase fuel with a sulphur content above 0.50 per cent unless they are fitted with a scrubber or use some other kind of approved alternative technology for exhaust gas cleaning.

Finally, it was decided to dedicate extra forces to the IMO work in this field through an inter-sessional meeting on the implementation during the second half of 2018.

**NOx emission control areas (NECA)**
MEPC 71 decided to designate the North Sea and the Baltic Sea NOx emission control areas from 2021. Denmark has been striving to reach this result for several years because it will have a major positive impact on the environment and the health of human beings.

The NECA regulations mean that ships constructed after 2021 and engaged in voyages in the North Sea and/or the Baltic Sea will have to reduce their NOx emissions (nitrogen oxides) by 75 per cent. Similar provisions have been in force in the waters around North America since early 2016.

**The Hong Kong Convention**
Denmark informed the Committee that it has now ratified the Convention.

**The Arctic area**
MEPC 71 decided that the IMO is to consider the risks related to the use and carriage of Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) in Arctic regions, which Denmark supported.

The next session of the MEPC (MEPC 72) will be held during the first six months of 2018.