

## Secretary General's Information Bulletin for Member States during the COVID-19 Period

Period covered: April 13-17

### 1. Meetings

#### 1) IMO Official meetings

*Council conducts extraordinary session by correspondence.*

The thirty-first extraordinary session of the Council was concluded. It was held by correspondence (18 March – 15 April) and was the first IMO meeting not to be held “live” in the history of the Organization.

The meeting addressed a number of key issues including measures to ensure operational continuity, future meetings, remote working for the IMO Secretariat and budgetary implications of the current situation.

The Council:

- urged flag and port States to ensure the smooth operation of maritime traffic and availability of shipping services for world commerce, for the benefit of humanity
- further urged flag and port States to ensure the welfare of seafarers, in particular that their rights to wages, shore leave, sick leave, access to medical assistance, food supplies and repatriation were preserved
- endorsed a practical and pragmatic approach for repairs, survey and certification and licensing of seafarers and
- encouraged Governments to share best practices in keeping workers in the maritime transport sector safe from COVID-19, while taking into account national circumstances.

The Council also requested Member States to submit proposals to the thirty-second extraordinary session of the Council on measures to ensure that shipping services were not unnecessarily disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A summary of the meeting is available here:

<http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/MeetingSummaries/Council/Pages/C-ES-31-.aspx>

The record of decisions for this extraordinary session of the Council is available here:

<https://docs.imo.org/Category.aspx?cid=603>

#### 2) Other meetings such as a meeting with PRs

*Remote meeting of chairs and vice-chairs Officers of the IMO bodies*

The Secretary-General hosted a remote meeting of the chairs and vice-chairs of the Council, committees and LC/LP IMO bodies (16 April). The meeting was appraised with actions taken so far in the face of the

coronavirus, and consideration began about rescheduling the meeting programme post lockdown – priorities, working methods, deadlines, streamlining and so on.

*Seafarers and climate change - key issues highlighted during IMO virtual meeting*

The challenges faced by seafarers during the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to keep on track with IMO's work to combat climate change were two key issues highlighted during a virtual meeting organized by IMO (23 April), to brief permanent representatives and liaison officers from 78 IMO Member States and one associate Member.

IMO Secretary-General Kitack Lim thanked Member States for detailing their arrangements to address the fallout of the pandemic, in particular concerning extending seafarers' certificates, in notices that are made available on the IMO website. He highlighted the need for seafarers to be designated as keyworkers and appealed to all permanent representatives and liaison officers to convey this message to their governments. Seafarers, he said, are beneficial to the smooth operation of shipping and enable the industry to support the global supply chain.

The meeting was updated on the discussions by the IMO Council, in an extraordinary session held by correspondence, (C ES 31) and a recent meeting of the chairs of Committees, about the development of a proposal on rescheduling IMO meetings that have been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A priority list has been drawn up and will be considered by the thirty-second extraordinary session of the Council. The proposal give priority to a regular session of the IMO Council, followed by meetings of the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) - which will be preceded by the 7th meeting of the Intersessional Working Group on Reduction of GHG Emissions from Ships - and to the Maritime Safety Committee (MSC). Resuming physical meetings will depend on guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO) and UK Government guidance as well as the national situation of IMO Member States.

This priority on the MEPC and GHG working group highlighted IMO's continued commitment to moving forward with combatting climate change, without undue delay, Mr. Lim said. The meeting was also told that the 4th IMO GHG study, which will provide data on GHG emission from ships up to 2018 and future projections, is on schedule to be completed by late 2020.

The participants were briefed on work being done by the Secretariat, in liaison with other UN agencies and bodies, to explore the practicalities of holding virtual meetings, including multilingual meetings with interpretation into the six official languages of the Organization. The IMO Secretariat is also making preparations for re-opening the IMO Headquarters building, when that is permitted, including how to provide for applicable measures such as social distancing.

The participants were also briefed on COVID-19 related technical guidance IMO has issued (Circular Letter no. 4204 and addenda) to address the fall-out from the pandemic, following requests from Member States for uniform recommendations on how to address certain issues. These include joint statements with other UN agencies as well as guidance issued by the shipping industry, to ensure global distribution of such information. They were also informed that the Secretary-General has established a Seafarer Crisis Team, continuously providing world-wide assistance to seafarers in individual cases.

The next extraordinary session of the Council (C ES 32) will start on 4 May. It will be held by correspondence over two months, to allow time for Member States (Council Members and observers) to communicate on various agenda items, including holding meetings in future.

On other activities, the meeting was informed that in-country audits under the IMO Member State Audit Scheme had been paused and that the remaining audit schedule from 2020 onwards would be moved one year forward from 2021 whilst follow-up audit work will continue as usual.

Scheduled missions for technical cooperation activities had also been paused, but the IMO Secretariat was working with the IMO global institutions, the World Maritime University and the IMO International Maritime Law Institute, to develop online learning to students all over the world. Meanwhile, the process for selecting countries to participate in global projects, including *GreenVoyage* and *GloLitter*, is continuing, despite the pandemic.

Briefings for permanent representatives and liaison officers are usually regularly held at IMO Headquarters, on the invitation of the Secretary-General, but the travel and lockdown restrictions imposed because of the pandemic necessitated a virtual edition. A total of 155 participants from 78 Member States and one associate Member State attended the meeting. This was the largest virtual meeting organized by IMO to date.

## **2. Cooperation with UN systems / External Organizations**

### **1) with UN, WHO, ILO etc.**

*IMO issues joint statements with other UN agencies*

IMO issued a joint statement with the World Customs Organization on the integrity of the global supply chain during the COVID-19 pandemic, calling for cross-border trade movements not to be interrupted. It follows a joint statement with WHO, previously issued. Further joint statements with other UN agencies are expected. Full details here:

<http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/PressBriefings/Pages/12-WCO-IMO-statement.aspx>

### **2) Regional Organs like EC, African Union etc.**

### **3) with Industry**

*IMO in close contact with maritime industry*

The Secretariat is participating in meetings with the maritime industry to join in the international effort to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 to the maritime traffic and to maintain the normal flow of the goods.

Preparations were underway for the Secretary-General to host remote briefings for the so-called shipping industry “round table” during the week April 20-25.

## **3. Secretariat related information**

*Secretariat facilitates communication of Member States efforts to confront coronavirus*

The Secretariat has been assisting Member States communicate their efforts to confront the coronavirus. A special page on the public website has been created as a “one-stop shop” with links to all such communications, as well as links to advice from industry NGOs and other UN organizations. More than 80 communications from Member States have been circulated.

<http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Pages/COVID-19-Member-States-Communications.aspx><http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

#### *Work continues on 4th GHG study*

Progress continues on the 4th GHG Study. The final draft report is expected on 22 May, even under this difficult situation. An expert group has been established based on nominations from interested Member States and international organizations, to assist the Steering Group for the external QA/QC process of the Fourth Study.

#### *Audit scheme work continues*

Work with Member States under the audit scheme continued. Technical review of corrective action plans for four States began; follow up audit for one State continued and final report editing for another was completed.

#### *IMO staff use new systems to work from home*

Every effort has been made to ensure the Secretariat continues to function effectively under these circumstances. Staff are now working from home, making use of the best available technology. After a period of initial adjustment, we are, collectively, settling into our new way of working. All the divisions and departments continue to perform their regular duties, including addressing questions and support from Member States, NGOs, IGOs and the public as a whole.

## **4. Other relevant information**

#### *Secretary-General supports designation of seafarers as ‘key workers’*

The Secretary-General took every opportunity to reiterate his call for seafarers and marine personnel to be classified as ‘key workers’ providing an essential service and for travel restrictions to be loosened to allow crew changes and repatriations to take place – an issue he first raised at the beginning of April:

<http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/PressBriefings/Pages/09-seafarers-COVID19.aspx>

#### *IMO assists in gaining urgent medical care for seafarers*

The Secretariat has assisted successfully in several individual cases in which seafarers have requested help with medical care or repatriation. Many such requests are being received by the Secretariat and the Secretary-General is to establish a small unit dedicated to dealing with them.