

## IMO and marine debris

### *MARPOL*

The most important aspect of IMO's work relates to the regulations on prevention of pollution by garbage from ships, as contained in Annex V to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL)<sup>1</sup>.

The revised MARPOL Annex V was adopted in 2011 by IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) by resolution MEPC.201(62), and entered into force on 1 January 2013.

The revised Annex V prohibits the discharge of all types of garbage into the sea from ships except in the cases explicitly permitted under the Annex (such as food waste and other organic matter that are not harmful to the marine environment). MARPOL Annex V has been acceded to by 148 Contracting States, representing more than 98 percent of the world's tonnage. In March 2012, MEPC 63 adopted the 2012 Guidelines for the implementation of MARPOL Annex V (resolution MEPC.219(63)) and the 2012 Guidelines for the development of garbage management plans (resolution MEPC.220(63)).

MEPC is currently considering amendments to MARPOL Annex V on Record of Garbage Discharge, aimed at addressing discrepancies between the text of the Annex and the Form of Garbage Record Book.

### *London Convention and Protocol*

Other instruments of relevance in this context are the 1972 London Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter and its 1996 Protocol, which regulate the dumping of various types of wastes at sea<sup>2</sup>. Recently, the Contracting Parties to these treaties have initiated a review of the current state of knowledge with respect to how these wastes may contribute to the presence of debris, in particular plastics, in the marine environment. The report, which concludes that dredged material and sewage sludge are the most likely of the waste streams to contribute to the presence of marine litter, highlights the need to address the upstream sources of marine litter. The policy implications of the findings of the review will be discussed by the Contracting Parties in 2016.

Under the London Convention and Protocol, the issue of abandoned or drifting fish aggregating devices (FADs), as well as polystyrene and Styrofoam buoys used in aquaculture, as sources of marine litter have also been discussed, noting that source control and best practices are important elements to reduce these problems.

### *Global Partnership on Marine Litter*

IMO is one of the partners in the UNEP-managed Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML), co-leading on sea-based sources of marine litter together with FAO. Under this partnership, several activities have been undertaken, including the development of a training package on MARPOL Annex V and port reception facilities, a review of plastics in the waste streams under the London Convention and Protocol, and the development of a kids' website for promoting awareness of shipping in relation to marine pollution.

### *GESAMP*

In 2012, the Joint Group of Experts on Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP), established a working group on 'Sources, fate and effects of microplastics in the

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<sup>1</sup> For further information refer to <http://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Environment/PollutionPrevention/Garbage/Pages/Default.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> For further information refer to <http://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Environment/LCLP/Pages/default.aspx>

marine environment: a global assessment' (Working Group 40). In 2015, the Working Group published its first report<sup>3</sup>, and had its terms of reference revised to contribute to the study of plastics in the marine environment, as requested by the First session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA Resolution 1/6). To support the implementation of this resolution, the GESAMP Working Group will deliver a second part of its global review of microplastics.

### *Challenges and future actions*

The regulations in MARPOL and the London Convention/Protocol provide a total ban on discharging or dumping plastics from ships. However, the effectiveness of ships to comply with the discharge requirements of MARPOL depends largely upon the availability of adequate port reception facilities (PRF), especially within Special Areas. Hence, MARPOL Annex V also obliges Governments to ensure the provision of adequate facilities at ports and terminals for the reception of garbage without causing undue delay to ships, and according to the needs of the ships using them. Since 2006, a Port Reception Facility (PRF) module is available on IMO's Global Integrated Shipping Information System (GISIS) website. It contains information on the available PRFs for the delivery of the ship-generated waste, as provided by the competent authorities of the IMO Member States and allows reporting of alleged inadequacies of port reception facilities<sup>4</sup>.

In addition to the environmental and health problem posed by marine litter, garbage and plastics pose a costly and dangerous problem for shipping, as a navigational hazard and from entanglement in propellers, rudders etc. Furthermore, as new routes potentially open up, e.g. in the Arctic, the compliance with these existing regulations will be important to ensure the protection of the marine environment.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.gesamp.org/publications/publicationdisplaypages/reports-and-studies-no.-90>

<sup>4</sup> For further information refer to <http://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Environment/PortReceptionFacilities/Pages/Default.aspx> and <https://gis.imo.org/Public/PRF/Default.aspx>