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Circular Letter No.5103
4 February 2026

To: IMO Members and other Governments
United Nations and specialized agencies
Intergovernmental organizations
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status

Subject: **World Maritime Day 2026-2027**

1 The Secretary-General has the honour to advise that the **World Maritime Day** will be celebrated at the IMO Headquarters on Thursday, 24 September 2026, and that the **World Maritime Day Parallel Event** is expected to be celebrated in the Republic of Korea, on 26 and 27 October 2026. Arrangements will be announced in due course.

2 The IMO Council, at its 134th session, decided to adopt, for a trial period, a World Maritime Day theme for a biennium in order to provide all stakeholders more time to plan, promote the theme and align their activities with it. The Council further decided that the World Maritime Day theme for the 2026 and 2027 biennium will be:

"From Policy to Practice: Powering Maritime Excellence"

3 Annex 1 to this circular letter contains a background paper that may assist Member Governments and international organizations in preparing their own activities and communications related to the theme, while celebrating the World Maritime Day.

4 Visual materials for the promotion of the theme, including the Secretary-General's launch message, are being made available at the [IMO website](#). The text of the message may be found in annex 2 to this circular letter.

5 In order to promote the theme more widely, Member Governments and observer organizations are encouraged to organize, wherever possible, suitable events throughout the biennium and inform the Secretariat of any planned activities. Social media participation is also encouraged, using the hashtags **#WorldMaritimeDay** and **#MaritimePolicytoPractice**.

ANNEX 1

WORLD MARITIME DAY THEME FOR THE 2026-2027 BIENNIUM

"From Policy to Practice: Powering Maritime Excellence"

Background paper

INTRODUCTION

For over seven decades, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has been developing a comprehensive framework of global maritime rules – conventions, codes, guidelines and recommendations – covering safety, security, environmental protection and facilitation. The full benefits of this framework are realized through the broad ratification of IMO instruments, effective and uniform implementation, and enforcement.

The IMO Member State Audit Scheme (IMSAS) has repeatedly identified gaps in national legislation and enforcement as a common deficiency, which undermines regulatory effectiveness and heightens the risk of non-compliance and substandard shipping. The theme of IMO's World Maritime Day (WMD) for 2026-2027 – *"From Policy to Practice: Powering Maritime Excellence"* – is therefore both timely and urgent. It focuses global attention on translating adopted policies into concrete actions and measurable results, supported by capacity development and technical cooperation.

Henceforth, the WMD theme is intended to follow a biennial cycle (2026-2027) to provide Member States and other stakeholders with more time to plan, promote and align activities with the theme, deepening engagement and strengthening impact.

The theme underscores three key messages:

- **From Policy to Practice:** Ensuring globally agreed rules are implemented through national legislation, effective enforcement, and day-to-day operational reality across the maritime sector.
- **Powering:** Providing needs-based capacity-building, technical cooperation, training, and knowledge sharing to drive implementation.
- **Maritime Excellence:** Striving for consistently safe, secure, efficient, and environmentally sound shipping, operating to the highest international standards and continuously improving.

It reflects IMO's commitment to further develop Member States' capacity to put policies into practice, noting the importance of technical assistance to strengthen confidence in the global rules agreed at IMO.

In 2014, IMO adopted the World Maritime Day theme – "IMO Conventions: Effective Implementation". Over a decade later, it is both timely and urgent to renew the focus on effective implementation.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE IMO STRATEGIC PLAN AND THE SDGs

The proposed WMD theme directly supports IMO's Strategic Plan (2024-2029) and more specifically, strategic direction 1, *Implementation of IMO instruments supported by capacity development*, and reinforces cross-cutting priorities, including the human element (training and skills), innovation (technology and digitalization), and partnerships (inter-agency, regional and industry collaboration).

Activities undertaken within this WMD theme are closely aligned with the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

- SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure): Through fostering innovation and resilient maritime infrastructure through capacity-building.
- SDG 13 (Climate Action): Through enabling implementation of measures to combat climate change (e.g., IMO's GHG reduction efforts).
- SDG 14 (Life Below Water): Through supporting the enforcement of instruments that protect the marine environment.
- SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals): Through emphasizing international cooperation and capacity development to achieve uniform compliance.

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: KEY PILLARS FOR 2026-2027

1. Implementation, capacity and technical cooperation

Ensuring the uniform application of IMO instruments hinges on practical implementation capacity at national and local levels. The WMD theme promotes work towards delivering:

- Targeted technical assistance to draft and/or update national legislation, establish administrative frameworks, and strengthen enforcement.
- Training programmes for administrations, ports and seafarers, supported by regional centres and partnerships.
- Peer learning and knowledge exchange, leveraging IMO projects and global networks.

2. Policy to practice from the SIDS/LDCs perspective

Small island developing States (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs) face unique maritime challenges towards the effective implementation of IMO instruments, including geographic isolation, limited institutional capacity, vulnerability to climate impacts, high dependency on maritime transport, and constrained fiscal resources.

The 2026-2027 WMD theme highlights the importance of ensuring that no Member State is left behind in the journey from policy to practice. Tailored support for SIDS and LDCs will therefore remain a core priority across the biennium. This includes legislative assistance, training and skills development, support for digitalization and Maritime Single Windows, decarbonization readiness, port resilience, safety and security frameworks, and marine environmental protection measures.

During the biennium, this work will also provide a strategic opportunity to show "*policy to practice*" achievements in the context of SIDS/LDCs. Showcasing the work and successes of Member States, with IMO's support, will be important in order to:

- build national and regional policy and practice momentum;
- provide a unified platform for political leaders to articulate priorities and announce national and regional initiatives;
- facilitate donor commitments, new partnerships, and long-term financing for implementation; and
- build confidence and demonstrate how SIDS/LDCs are giving effects to IMO frameworks through tangible, operational improvements.

3. Safety first through innovation

Goal-based regulations that can safely accommodate rapid technological change are required for new fuels, digitalization, and automation. Building on recent work, such as the non-mandatory Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships (MASS) Code, leading to a mandatory code, safety frameworks for alternative fuels and cybersecurity guidance, the focus on the theme will translate standards into operational practice – including training, oversight and risk management. A comprehensive review of the STCW Convention will further improve safety standards and ensure that seafarers have the requisite training, skills and competencies to effectively integrate new technologies into daily onboard operations.

4. Regulatory readiness for decarbonization

Following the adoption of the *2023 IMO Strategy on the reduction of GHG emissions from ships*, further work will focus on the implementation of the Strategy, existing measures in MARPOL Annex VI, and the development of the next set of IMO's greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction measures. Work includes establishing a clear life cycle GHG assessment (LCA) framework for alternative fuels, the development of a practical regulatory framework for onboard carbon capture and storage systems (OCCS), and a robust reporting system (IMO data collection system) for ships to record their annual fuel consumption. These developments must balance ambitious climate objectives with safety, operational feasibility, and regulatory coherence. Emphasis is placed on fuel and technology-neutral frameworks, iterative learning, and enhanced cross-committee coordination (MEPC/MSC/LEG).

5. Strengthening measures against fraudulent ship registration and maritime fraud

With the growing number of fraudulent registries and fraudulent registration cases – in which the least developed countries are often the most affected – strengthening the global framework for ship registration has become essential. Ensuring robust due-diligence processes, closing regulatory and technical gaps, and promoting transparency in the use of IMO identification number schemes are central to safeguarding the integrity of flag State responsibilities. Enhanced data-sharing, digital verification tools and targeted capacity-building will support administrations in detecting unlawful practices and preventing the misuse of national flags. Developing common principles and practical guidance will help ensure consistent standards across registries, reduce opportunities for abuse, and reinforce safety, security and environmental protection throughout the maritime sector.

6. Audit driven – improvement (IMSAS)

The IMSAS first cycle (mandatory since 2016) has highlighted recurring deficiencies, notably gaps in national implementing legislation and enforcement. The implementation-focused WMD theme encourages States to utilize audit outcomes to prioritize reforms, strengthen oversight, and prepare for the second cycle, including considerations around continuous monitoring and prioritization.

7. Facilitation, digitalization and resilience

Effective implementation of IMO instruments also concerns facilitation and digitalization requirements under the FAL Convention and related frameworks. Initiatives such as Maritime Single Windows, standardized data models through the IMO Compendium, and Just-in-Time arrival practices are prime examples of policies that must be implemented in practice. Embedding these WMD theme-based measures into day-to-day port and ship operations will contribute to power maritime excellence through improved efficiency, reduced emissions, and enhanced resilience in the face of disruptions, such as public health emergencies.

8. Cybersecurity and maritime security

As the maritime sector accelerates digitalization through electronic data exchange, automation, and smart port systems, the risk of cyberattacks and security breaches grows. IMO has adopted guidelines on maritime cyber risk management and is revising them to keep pace with evolving threats, alongside delivering enhanced training under the Global Enhancement of Maritime Security programme.

The 2026–2027 theme, "*From Policy to Practice: Powering Maritime Excellence*," underscores the need to move beyond policy adoption to operational integration. This means integrating cybersecurity measures into Safety Management Systems, conducting regular drills and vulnerability assessments, and ensuring continuous improvement at national and port levels. Effective implementation will safeguard digital infrastructure, protect trade flows, and maintain trust in global shipping — making cybersecurity a cornerstone of maritime excellence in an increasingly connected world.

9. Marine environment protection beyond carbon

While decarbonization remains high on the IMO agenda, the 2026-2027 theme calls for effective implementation of all other IMO environmental instruments. Key areas towards the protection of the marine ecosystem include:

- **Marine litter and plastics:** Implementing MARPOL Annex V provisions and the IMO Action Plan to Address Marine Plastic Litter, supported by partnerships such as GloLitter.
- **Underwater radiated noise:** Applying revised MEPC guidelines and building capacity through initiatives like GloNoise, ensuring these standards are integrated into ship design and port operations.
- **Ballast water and biofouling:** Enforcing the Ballast Water Management Convention and the 2023 revised Biofouling Guidelines to prevent invasive species transfer.

- **Special Areas and PSSAs:** Strengthening national frameworks to designate and protect ecologically and socio-economically significant waters under MARPOL.
- **Ship recycling:** Assisting States in the implementation and enforcement of the Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships (the Hong Kong Convention) technical standards.

The theme focuses the attention of national authorities to adopt legislation, develop enforcement mechanisms, and coordinate across agencies to ensure these environmental protection measures are implemented in day-to-day maritime operations, thus delivering tangible benefits for biodiversity, climate resilience, and sustainable shipping.

THE UNITED NATIONS AND IMO

Towards ocean health, under the 2026–2027 theme, IMO commitments within UNCLOS, BBNJ, UNEA, and the Ocean Decade will continue through capacity-building, training, audits, as well as assistance with legislative and regulatory frameworks.

- **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS):** IMO will continue ensuring that its technical standards make UNCLOS provisions effective in practice, particularly in areas of navigation safety and marine environmental protection.
- **Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement):** following the entry into force of the BBNJ Agreement on 17 January 2026, IMO is supporting States in aligning shipping activities with biodiversity protection measures – providing guidance and capacity-building for compliance.
- **UN Ocean Decade (2021–2030):** IMO will leverage scientific advances and innovation to deliver implementation-ready solutions, ensuring that regulatory frameworks keep pace with emerging technologies and environmental priorities.
- **Global Plastics Treaty (UNEA):** IMO's experience in regulating ship-sourced plastic pollution will inform practical measures for States to integrate treaty obligations into maritime operations, complementing MARPOL and related initiatives.

CONCLUSION

"*From Policy to Practice: Powering Maritime Excellence*" encapsulates IMO's mission at a pivotal moment with *implementation* being the guiding principle. With dedicated effort in the two-year period, Member States and partners can consolidate national legislation, strengthen enforcement, enhance training, and operationalize digital and environmental measures, translating global decisions into tangible outcomes that advance safety, security, efficiency, and the protection of the marine environment.

Through audit-informed reforms, capacity development, and goal-based regulation, the maritime community can power Maritime Excellence by applying international standards, thereby delivering tangible benefits and prosperity to people and the planet.

ANNEX 2

**WORLD MARITIME DAY 2026-2027
"From Policy to Practice: Powering Maritime Excellence"**

**A message from Arsenio Dominguez
Secretary-General, International Maritime Organization**

For nearly 80 years, IMO has built the framework for global shipping – more than 50 international conventions shape the everyday of maritime life.

However, we must be honest – experience shows that the true value of these instruments is realized only when they are effectively applied, delivering practical benefits on board ships, in ports and throughout the global maritime domain.

The real test and the real responsibility lie in implementation, how we transition "From Policy to Practice: Powering Maritime Excellence".

This theme reflects our mission: ensuring that the global regulatory framework we develop is not merely adopted in principle, but translated into concrete actions and real-world results that deliver tangible benefits for all.

When we talk about "practice", we are talking about people. The seafarers on the ship; the people in the port; those managing ship operations, ship recycling workers, port State control officers and flag State administrators.

To make the maritime industry truly sustainable, we must ensure these high standards are felt in every port and on every deck – not selectively, not unevenly, but globally. IMO is committed to powering this transition through technical cooperation and direct support.

Let us move beyond the conference room and turn our collective decisions into real-world results that benefit everyone.

It is time to move decisively from policy to practice.
