



IMO: 60 Years in the Service of Shipping

In co-operation with the
Round Table of international
shipping associations



This commemorative brochure has been produced by the Round Table of international shipping associations



Sixty Years of IMO



March 2008 saw the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention creating the International Maritime Organization, or IMCO (Inter-governmental Maritime Consultative Organization) as it was then known. Ten years later, the Convention came into force, giving the new agency effective life, and IMO embarked on its regulatory role in 1959. ICS and ISF headed the first list of non-governmental organisations granted consultative status in 1961, with BIMCO, INTERCARGO and INTERTANKO joining IMO very soon after.

Since this time, the activities of what is now known as the Round Table of international shipping associations (BIMCO, INTERNATIONAL CHAMBER OF SHIPPING/ INTERNATIONAL SHIPPING FEDERATION, INTERCARGO and INTERTANKO) have been closely linked with those of IMO, and it is interesting to recall the opposition which shipowners originally voiced to IMO's creation! But with almost fifty productive years behind it, it is now very difficult to imagine a world without IMO, and the shipping industry's attitude to IMO has since been clear and consistent.

As strong supporters of the principle of international, as opposed to regional or domestic, regulation of an essentially international industry, the Round Table organisations have pressed for a proper balance between regulation and self-regulation, recognising the need for effective controls as well as the dangers of stifling technological innovation. The shipping industry can fairly claim to have brought a high level of professional competence to IMO discussions and to have contributed positively to a generation of IMO standard-setting.

During its years, IMO has had to weather the storms. It has emerged from being a rather small group of traditional maritime nations - meeting in cramped headquarters in Piccadilly - to a fully international

UN agency with over 160 members, and a prestigious headquarters opened by Queen Elizabeth II in 1983, opposite the host nation's Houses of Parliament.

The range of maritime administrations that now positively contribute to the work of IMO, both in terms of finances and technical expertise, includes the open register nations, which first became active in the 1940s, and the significant and, in many cases, now fully established maritime administrations that have emerged since the 1980s - reflecting a particular shift in the centre of gravity of the shipping industry towards Asia.

During its history, IMO has faced, and largely overcome, severe financial challenges; it has fought off damaging initiatives from individual administrations or regional groups determined to pursue their own agenda against the international consensus. Today it has to face the challenge of persuading a significant minority of flag states to fulfil more diligently their responsibilities as signatories of the principal technical and legal Conventions.

A significant recent success has been the Voluntary IMO Member State Audit Scheme which is now up and running, and probably represents one of the major achievements of IMO under the current Secretary-General, Efthimios Mitropoulos. Equally impressive, however, is the prospective deal on air emissions, whose adoption by IMO in late 2008 will be another of its finest moments. The industry is also confident that IMO will manage to deliver, by 2009, an international agreement for reducing shipping's CO₂ emissions, to ensure shipping plays its part in addressing the pressing challenge of reducing global carbon emissions.

IMO has had to adapt to the changing structure of the global shipping industry, and the fact that today's major shipping nations (and financial contributors to IMO) are not those of sixty years ago. IMO has also come to terms with the wider and far more ambitious demands placed on it by society as a whole, particularly with regard to the protection of the environment.

But for all the pressures, IMO has stuck to its stated objective of safe, secure and efficient shipping on clean oceans, and for that it has the unqualified support of the Round Table of international shipping associations and the entire maritime community.

Global Regulation for a Global Industry

Shipping is an international industry which depends upon a global regulatory framework to operate efficiently. This framework is principally provided by IMO which has developed a comprehensive range of globally enforced Conventions addressing safety of life at sea, protection of the environment, maritime security and shipowners' liabilities.

Shipping today enjoys a relatively level 'playing field' between maritime nations, as well as healthy competition between individual shipping companies, of which there are around five thousand involved in international trades, operating about fifty thousand ships.

It is vital that regulations on matters such as construction standards, navigational rules and crew qualifications are common to all ships in international trade. When a ship sails from Brisbane to Buenos Aires, the same rules need to apply at both ends of the voyage. The alternative would be a web of conflicting national regulations, resulting in market distortions and administrative confusion that would compromise the efficiency of world trade.

The level of ratification and enforcement of IMO Conventions is very high in comparison with international rules adopted for land based industries. For example, the provisions of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) have been implemented by virtually every maritime country. IMO regulations are adopted on a global basis but enforced nationally and countries have the power to detain foreign ships in port if they do not conform to international rules.



IMO HQ, London

The safety record of the industry and its environmental performance are impressive. National and regional policy makers occasionally question the efficiency of the international regulatory regime under which shipping operates. But when consideration is given to the difficulties involved in securing international agreement on complex technical requirements, IMO is a model of efficiency.

Different types of ships in the world fleet today

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The shipping industry has benefited greatly from the development by IMO of a global regulatory framework, complemented by new technology and significant advances in ship construction and operational best practices. Most important, perhaps, has been the successful commitment of the regulators, the industry and the people it employs to strive for 'continuous improvement' as a means of significantly reducing maritime accidents and pollution incidents. This real improvement is all the more impressive given that the amount of cargo transported by sea has increased by over 300% since the 1970s.

The Round Table of international shipping associations, working together with IMO, is very proud of this progress and the industry's current record - see www.shippingfacts.com - although the goal remains one of zero incidents.



Container Ships carry most of the world's manufactured goods and products, usually on scheduled liner services.



Bulk Carriers are the work horses of the fleet, transporting raw materials such as iron ore, coal and foodstuffs, and are identifiable by the hatches raised above deck level which cover the large cargo holds.



Tankers transport crude oil, chemicals and petroleum products. More than 70% of the world's ocean going tankers now have double hulls.



Other Ships include car carriers, gas carriers, heavy lift vessels and ships supporting the offshore oil industry. There is also a large number of smaller general cargo ships.



Ferries and Passenger Ships
Ferries usually perform shorter journeys for a mix of passengers, cars and commercial vehicles. Many of these ships are Ro-Ro (roll on-roll off). The number of luxury cruise ships has also expanded greatly in recent years.

**The Round Table
of international shipping
associations**



For an electronic version see:
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Front cover: modern containership and 1940s 'Liberty Ship'