



IMO Briefing

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WORLD MARITIME DAY 2009
“Climate change: a challenge for IMO too!”

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IMO’s “no red tape” Committee comes of age

The International Maritime Organization’s Facilitation Committee, the focus for IMO’s work in eliminating unnecessary formalities and “red tape” in international shipping, has opened its first session as a formally institutionalized Committee of the Organization.

The Committee now has full standing, reflecting the importance of its work and the issues it addresses, following the entry into force, on 7 December 2008, of the 1991 amendments to the IMO Convention to institutionalize the Committee, which puts it on a par with the Maritime Safety, Marine Environment Protection, Legal and Technical Co-operation Committees. Participation in all Committees is open to all Member States of IMO.

The Facilitation Committee’s role is to facilitate maritime traffic by simplifying and reducing to a minimum the formalities, documentary requirements and procedures on the arrival, stay and departure of ships engaged in international voyages. Traditionally, large numbers of documents are required by customs, immigration, health and other public authorities pertaining to a ship, its crew and passengers, baggage, cargo and mail. Unnecessary paperwork is a problem in most industries, but the potential for red tape is probably greater in shipping than in other industries, because of its international nature and the traditional acceptance of formalities and procedures.

The scope of the Committee’s mandate can also be gleaned from Article 48 of the IMO Convention, which states that:

“The Facilitation Committee shall consider any matter within the scope of the Organization concerned with the facilitation of international maritime traffic ...”

Among issues the Committee addresses are those relating to implementation of the Convention on Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic. The FAL Convention was adopted in 1965 to prevent unnecessary delays in maritime traffic, to aid co-operation between Governments, and to secure the highest practicable degree of uniformity in formalities and other procedures.

Speaking at a special session to mark the Committee’s new status, under the theme “The FAL Committee – Future challenges”, IMO Secretary-General, Mr. Efthimios E. Mitropoulos, commended the work of the Committee to date and highlighted the new and ongoing challenges it faces.

“I, for one, have no doubt that the FAL Committee will increasingly be called upon to help address mounting problems encountered by the shipping industry and which have direct implications for the facilitation of maritime traffic and, in particular, for the efficiency of the shipping industry in its interfaces in ports and offshore terminals. In addition to the Committee’s work to combat illicit drugs trafficking, there are, unfortunately, other unlawful acts threatening the safety and security of ships and having an impact on property and persons on board, such as armed robbery and terrorist attacks, which the Committee should help combat with its own expertise, thus making a valuable contribution to the more direct work done by other IMO bodies” he said.

“These and other important issues, such as the disembarkation of persons rescued at sea, justify the time the Committee spends on them as they clearly disrupt efficiency in the ship/port interface resulting in inevitable and unwelcome delays in ports. More work of a coordinating nature should, therefore, be undertaken in-house and with other stakeholders, including the industry, to promote both rapid and harmonized procedures that would not only enhance the facilitation of maritime traffic but also make the whole process more predictable for all the stakeholders concerned to benefit from,” he added.

Background

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The Facilitation Committee traces its origin to an *ad hoc* Working Group on Facilitation which met for the first time in September 1967. The group held six sessions and, in May 1972, the IMO Council, noting the satisfactory work done by the Group and the desire of the Member States to broaden the facilitation activities of IMO and place them on a permanent basis, established the Facilitation Committee as a subsidiary body of the Organization's Council. The Facilitation Committee proper met for the first time in April 1973. By the end of the 1980s, the Facilitation Committee was the only IMO committee that was not institutionalized under the IMO Convention and the Council agreed to a proposal for its institutionalization, *inter alia*, "so as to ensure the complete legal reflection of the IMO's structural activities". This proposal led to the adoption of the 1991 amendments to the IMO Convention, to institutionalize the Committee.

IMO – the International Maritime Organization – is the United Nations specialized agency with responsibility for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine pollution by ships.

Web site: www.imo.org

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