

# Leadership Insights

Insights from the global leadership community

Issue no: 27 | February 2024

**Decision Maker – Arsenio Dominguez**

A vision for the future p2

**Feature**

COP28 shipping summit hits the right note p5

**News round-up**

ESG performance impacts recruitment  
Industry reacts to increased drug smuggling  
ETS uncertainties persist p8

**News Analysis**

China's decade of electrification p9

**ICS in action**

Attacks on shipping condemned  
2023-2024 Maritime Barometer launched  
Flag performance table published  
Engine Room guide available to pre-order p10



# Evolving IMO for future challenges



New IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez speaks to *ICS Leadership Insights* about his vision for a more outwardly-facing industry and regulator – and how that can help steer shipping through a period of dramatic change.

**Q** You are beginning your role of Secretary-General of IMO during one of the biggest transitions it has witnessed in a very long time. What are your core goals and where do you see the challenges ahead?

**A** Decarbonisation is by far the biggest challenge that the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has faced in recent decades. It's not something that we can do in isolation and is very much in sync with safety, automation, and human element aspects. The decision that the IMO took last July demonstrated the pathway to get to decarbonisation. And that, as well as all these other aspects, will involve players beyond the maritime sector.

Trade may change as well in response to this challenge. But we shouldn't be afraid to face them and target the opportunities. The reality is that change is not something that maritime has probably always seen as a good thing. But for the future of IMO, we need to demonstrate that change is good and neces-

sary to meet the demands of an evolving world and an evolving shipping sector.

**Q** Can you tell us more about how you see IMO's role evolving in some of its other core areas of responsibility?

**A** The human element and safety continue to be paramount for IMO and probably haven't received the same level of outside attention as the green agenda in recent years. But the reality is that the IMO was born on safety. The main players are the seafarers, who are such a driving force of this beautiful industry, and we probably haven't brought them in as much as required into the discussions.

We are going into the STCW Convention revision, which of course is going to take into account both the need for decarbonisation and the way that technologies can support the quality of life for seafarers onboard vessels. It also needs to be recognised that

even within the environmental regulations, nothing actually can be put in place that will compromise safety, particularly of seafarers.

**Q Do you think that shipping is sufficiently prepared to cope with recent geopolitical issues and potential 'black swan' events? What can be done to improve shipping's resilience?**

**A** I learned during the pandemic how insular we sometimes are in shipping; not everybody was aware of how important shipping is, even some of the United Nations (UN) agencies. If we really want to highlight our importance, as we did during the pandemic, we need to promote ourselves, our industry, and how essential we are, continuously, before major 'black swan' events even happen, not during, when our voice could be lost in the crowd.

We also need to look at how actions and decisions made outside shipping can be used positively so the industry is not always working in isolation. Part of my vision is that IMO can lead by example with the measures we take internally, such as our internal goals on diversity and inclusion, and then work with member states to demonstrate changes that can actually support this transition. Similarly within the UN, I would like IMO to be one of the agencies that can lead the way, setting an example of how we cooperate with others. We have navigated challenges in the past, including geopolitical situations, and we can continue to do our part to keep trade flowing in a safe and environmentally sound manner, and play our part in contributing towards finding global solutions.

**Q How can shipping close the gap between commercial operating conditions and the requirements of decarbonisation, to marry those two realities together?**

**A** It's important to always listen to commercial concerns and that we always have the objective of a level playing field. But there is a realisation required that we are not all at the same level and do not all have the same capability. So we need early movers that can share experience with others to bring everyone to the stage where we all contribute. Understanding what actions need to be taken for those that are more in need will allow us to move forward, test the areas where we're still developing, bring back that experience and share it amongst ourselves. In this way, there is productivity even as we continue to develop the regulatory process.

**Q How can IMO support shipping's decarbonisation journey when some countries have limited resources to implement and enforce IMO regulations? What needs to be done to ensure that we have a just transition?**

**A** As we talked about with early movers, it is the same with member states. There are those in a position to act first, to gather information, and it's about how we translate that. This is constant work that exists within the UN in bridging the gap from north to south and east to west. As someone that comes from a developing country, I know the challenges that are there. The ambitions and the objectives are the same, the realities are slightly different.

One of the key areas that I want to work on is our technical cooperation and capacity building projects, not just to bring on board the maritime sector but also to invite other players. Whenever we go to the different regions and countries, we try to bring onboard the energy sectors, environmental agencies, and other transport sectors, so they better understand what we do.

**If we really want to highlight our importance, as we did during the pandemic, we need to promote ourselves, our industry, and how essential we are**



**Q What is the IMO doing to make sure that seafarers are prepared for these future challenges?**

**A** During a recent visit on a ship I had an opportunity to speak to a captain, who opened up about the challenges of Covid-19. How seafaring is a career that he loves, but during the pandemic it became a challenge for him to promote it. He talked about how he felt a lot more could be done and then he stopped talking because he thought he would be blacklisted from IMO. On the contrary, this is what we need to be faced with, not just what we've thought up inside this building but what we get from the people that are actually using our regulations.

Shipping is a career like no other. We need to work better on the rights of seafarers. It is important to bring them to the table. We need to look into how we make the life of the seafarer better, but that doesn't come from us sitting in our offices, it comes from dialogue and using their personal experiences on board the vessels.

**Q How is IMO looking to harness new technology to improve the safety of shipping in general? Do you think a bold target like aiming for zero accidents will ever be feasible?**

**A** Stopping accidents is a goal of the IMO. We need to be assured that we are adopting the

right technologies for the right reason. We started with navigation and SOLAS, now we're evolving the STCW Convention, which gives us another opportunity to see what else can reduce human error. It's also important to enhance the analysis of casualty investigations and transparency in reporting of safety incidents. Over the years we've talked about big data, but sometimes the data is difficult to obtain.

When it comes to accidents and analysis, I support the kind of approach others take, for example the airline industry, and give ourselves a target to reduce accidents - and yes, even aim for zero accidents. It's a welcome approach and we need to focus on the right technology to get us there.

**Q And finally as the figurehead for shipping's regulatory body, what concerns keep you up at night?**

**A** Rather than worries or concerns keeping me up at night, it is actually all the thoughts that I have to make IMO better, to make the maritime community better. Shifting the IMO to a more forward-looking one; a diverse entity that takes on board constructive criticism and looks to engage better with everyone. So what keeps me up at night really is just thinking, what else can we do? As good as we are, we can always be better.



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The Maritime Hub offers state-of-the-art meeting rooms in the heart of the City of London. Unique spaces to meet, engage and collaborate – tailored to your requirements.



The shipping summit brought together high-level participants from across the maritime sector. From left to right: Emanuele Grimaldi, Melina Travlos, Gaby Bornheim, Karin Orsel and Arsenio Dominguez.

# Flagship summit drives momentum towards decarbonisation

While diplomatic efforts focused on agreeing the nuances of the first-ever Global Stocktake, under the Paris Agreement, the maritime industry plotted a course towards achieving the International Maritime Organization's 2023 strategy to decarbonise shipping.

As the 28th Conference of Parties (COP28) negotiated a historic all-industry [consensus](#) to transition away from fossil fuels for the first time, shipping met to discuss the practical steps of achieving that zero-carbon future. Leaders from 60 organisations across the value chain congregated at the 'Shaping the Future of Shipping: Delivering a Net Zero World' summit, organised by a coalition of leading maritime industry bodies and coordinated by the ICS in partnership with the Emirates Shipping Association, to share insights and experiences, and identify priorities to address the climate crisis.

The high-profile event, which was hosted under the patronage of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Ministry for Energy and Infrastructure (MOEI), took place at the iconic Museum of the Future in Dubai. A

ministerial roundtable, with energy and maritime stakeholders in attendance, preceded the Summit to set the foundations for the discussions of the day.

As the midpoint between the 2015 Paris Agreement and 2030, and in light of the adoption of the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) 2023 strategy, COP28 provided an opportunity to evaluate progress and discuss future actions. Maritime leaders focused on how shipping can create an effective regulatory framework, collaboration and partnerships, fuel availability and financing, and preparing seafarers for the transition to low and zero-carbon emissions ships.

## **Calls for a global regulatory framework**

Addressing the flagship industry event during the *Accelerating and Scaling Global Energy Transition* panel, Bud Darr,

Executive Vice President of Maritime Policy and Government Affairs at MSC, noted how industry perceptions have changed over the past five years, acknowledging that, “in this case it [regulation] can provide certainty and a level playing field.”

During his *Refresh and Recharge* segment, Jeremy Nixon, CEO, ONE, Singapore and Co-Chair, World Shipping Council, also urged IMO and governments to set the ground rules to enable industry to “move forward the market acceleration phase” of the transition. Panellists concurred that well-crafted regulations, to create certainty and help de-risk investment, were vital for the future of the industry.

While accepting the complexity of the challenge ahead for the maritime industry, not least because it is competing with other national decarbonisation policies and sectors for reliable sources of future fuels, incoming IMO Secretary General Arsenio Dominguez remained undaunted. He told the audience: “We are already carrying out the impact assessment on the fleet and on States in order to provide the necessary information for the Marine Environment Protection Committee meetings that will take place next year (2024)”.

Acknowledging IMO’s vital role in regulating shipping during her opening keynote address, Ms Melina Travlos, President of the Union of Greek Shipowners and Chair of the Board of Neptune Group of Companies, also emphasised that: “It cannot directly regulate fuel producers, suppliers, ports, charterers, or even shipbuilders, all whose contribution to decarbonisation is indispensable.” She continued: “Collaboration, determination, and commitment



Jean-Francois Gagne, Head, Clean Energy Ministerial Secretariat, Canada. Credit: ICS

## CEM Hubs traction

**Brazil was welcomed as the latest [government signatory](#) to the joint private sector and government CEM Hubs initiative. The initiative aims to de-risk investment and transform the energy-maritime supply chain. The overarching goal is to create the conditions to construct more production facilities near ports, demand centres and in the global south, and shape a greener shipping industry to safely transport the fuel to unlock the potential of the zero-emissions fuel value chain.**

from all of us are key to successfully bringing effective decarbonisation within our grasp.”

### Retrofitting and upskilling

As regulatory frameworks and cross-sectoral dialogue progress, the global fleet must stand ready to be able to run on green alternatives. Currently, just 21% of vessels on the order book have the

potential to do so, according to UNCTAD’s Review of Maritime Transport 2023.

To expedite the process, Nick Brown, the CEO of Lloyd’s Register Foundation, stressed the importance of continuing research, and collaboration during the *Short-term Steps to a Net-Zero Future* panel. He also reminded delegates that, “every existing drydocking counts as we move forward”. Brown advocated retrofitting the fleet and improving operational practices to optimise efficiency rather than merely waiting for the vessels to be phased out. He noted there are: “Lots of simple, energy-saving devices which today’s crew can manage ... although they all need to be adopted at [a] much greater pace and scale.”

Shipping’s crewing needs also took centre stage. During the *People are the Fuel of the Future* panel, Gerardo Borromeo, CEO PTC Group, The Philippines, said that “we need people of the right capabil-

**Professor Lynn Loo, Bud Darr and Arsenio Dominguez enjoyed their panel debate. Credit: ICS**



ity and mindset to work in a transforming and transformational environment” in order for shipping to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.

Shipping will need to attract and retain talent if it is to have the skilled workers required to achieve its emissions targets. Stephen Cotton, General Secretary of the International Transport Workers' Federation, noted that the green transition could be a new starting point for shipping to address existing issues that impact short and long-term recruitment, training and retention.

“Should we replicate the industry, the training and the culture we've had in the past or take this opportunity to reflect on whether we could do it better?”, questioned Cotton. He pointed to the need to promote gender equality to enlarge the talent pool, inspire youth, offer defined career pathways and create a holistic approach to employment so that shore-based and sea-going employees enjoy similar terms and conditions. Cotton acknowledged the importance of standardisation and welcomed the [Maritime Just Transition Task Force's](#) collaborative project to develop a 'Baseline Training Framework for Seafarers in Decarbonization'.

**The Shaping the Future of Shipping: Delivering a Net Zero World [summit](#) helped to push forward vital discussions, expedite collaborations and keep the industry closely focused on the practical work and steps needed to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. In the words of incoming IMO Secretary General Arsenio Dominguez during his closing statement: “The world is changing. We all need to remember that whenever we are going to make our decisions, whenever there are risks that we have to take, that we are thinking of the future generations.”**

### External engagement key to future fuels

The summit showcased shipping's determination to remain the greenest mode of transport (based on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per tonne per mile). In her opening address, Travlos emphasised that “shipping has outperformed most other industrial sectors when it comes to reducing carbon emissions, considering that it is a fossil fuel captive industry.”

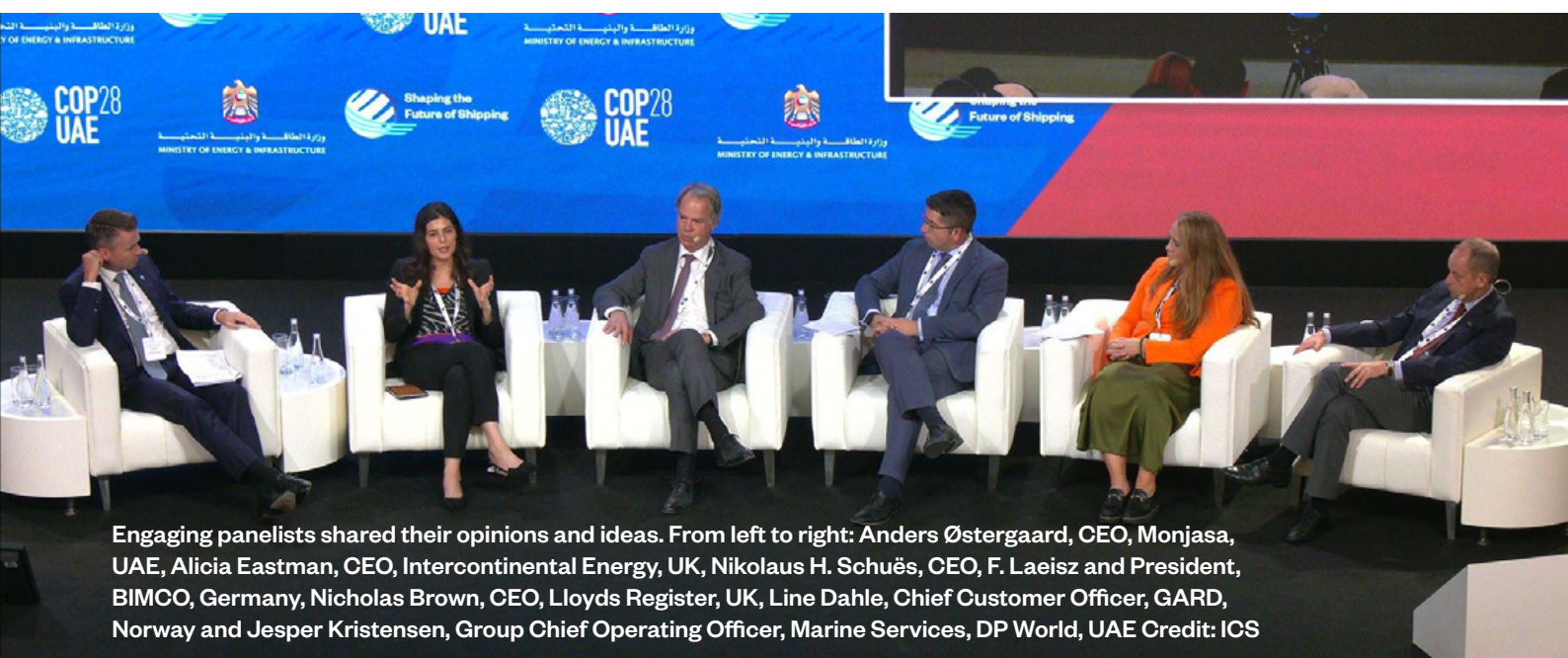
However, during the *Accelerating and Scaling Global Energy Transition* panel, Professor Lynn Loo, Chief Executive Officer at the Global Centre for Maritime Decarbonisation (GCMD), in Singapore, advocated for greater engagement outside of shipping. “If we talk to adjacent sectors, and understand their needs, then there's an opportunity to aggregate demand across sectors that also creates optionality for the fuel producers”, she said. This then reduces pressure to find

the next offtake agreement in one specific sector, she noted.

The importance of cross-sectoral collaboration was flagged by speakers throughout the conference. Moderated by Jean-Francois Gagne, Head, Clean Energy Ministerial Secretariat, Canada – a partnership of 29 energy ministries – the *Delivering Net-Zero Fuels for the World* panel discussed how engagement can help to operationalise international agreements and break down barriers to clean energy transition. Gagne said: “This year, we are going to get triple renewable energy and double energy efficiency [targets] into negotiated text. That is progress and that is how the agenda can influence the ambition ... What is needed is a transport and energy relationship ... and luckily these discussions started about a year ago”, through the launch of fora such as the Clean Energy marine Hubs (CEM) initiative.

## Should we replicate the industry, the training and the culture we've had in the past or take this opportunity to reflect on whether we could do it better?

Stephen Cotton, General Secretary, International Transport Workers' Federation



Engaging panelists shared their opinions and ideas. From left to right: Anders Østergaard, CEO, Monjasa, UAE, Alicia Eastman, CEO, Intercontinental Energy, UK, Nikolaus H. Schuëß, CEO, F. Laeisz and President, BIMCO, Germany, Nicholas Brown, CEO, Lloyds Register, UK, Line Dahle, Chief Customer Officer, GARD, Norway and Jesper Kristensen, Group Chief Operating Officer, Marine Services, DP World, UAE Credit: ICS

## ESG a key consideration for maritime talent

Environmental and social governance (ESG) performance is quickly becoming a differentiator in the maritime job market as young people in particular look for greater social and environmental impact in their work. Fortunately, as the demands around ESG have increased, so has the availability of resources for companies looking to begin or improve their ESG reporting.

Gina Panayiotou, ESG Manager at West of England P&I Club told ICS *Leadership Insights*: “The key metrics maritime companies should be monitoring are crew wellbeing, diversity and inclusion (especially within boards), talent retention, fleet efficiency, and reduction of carbon footprint, emissions, and other forms of pollution which cause harm to marine life and the health of our oceans.”

Panayiotou noted that clear guidance and supporting documentation on ESG for shipowners can be found in the various reporting standards, such as the [GRI](#) and the EU’s new ESG reporting framework the [Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive](#) (CSRD).

Demonstrating a company’s ESG action and objectives can also aid in recruitment. Speaking at the recent Salvage and Wreck conference in London, Andreas Brachel, Head of Environmental Claims at Gard said: “Young people in particular, want to work for companies that have a focus on sustainability, but also experienced, high performing professionals are looking for employers or associations that they are comfortable working with.” Read more [here](#).



### Industry leaders are pushing back on drug smuggling activity with joint ventures

Global drug activity [surged by 23%](#) from 2011 to 2021, reaching 296 million users globally, per the United Nations Organization on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Traffickers, adept at evading port detection, employ innovative methods like hacking customs systems to preclear consignments before inspections.

Chris Trelawny, Deputy Secretary General of INTERPORTPOLICE warns that seafarers risk becoming “unwitting victims of traffickers.”

Resolving the challenge is a major task. “The size of the consignments has increased significantly,” says David Caunter, Assistant Director, Criminal Networks at INTERPOL. “Additionally, destination countries rarely scan and search 100% of the containers, making this a very lucrative business model.”

The industry has launched multiple countermeasures. The EU recently allocated funds of €200m to Port of

Antwerp-Bruges (PoAB)’s proposal, *Certified Pick Up*. The digital platform was launched in January 2024 and implements an efficient and faster way of managing container transport.

“By passing the digital release right to the next party in the chain you know which parties are involved in import container flow. Also, every container needs to clear customs before it can leave the terminal and be picked up on the basis of identity,” says Kurt Van Loon, Project Manager of Certified Pick.

Meanwhile, the Port Security Project, initiated in 2021 by UNODC, IMO and INTERPOL, can tackle drug smuggling by helping countries boost port security capacity.

According to Caunter, the project has had some notable successes, including the arrest of a major drug trafficker and interventions in cases involving ivory and human trafficking. Read more [here](#).

## Clarity hard to find as ETS enters force

Uncertainties around key parts of the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) have persisted even after the scheme’s entry into force in January. Of concern is the application of the ‘polluter pays’ principle, intended to enable shipowners to claim reimbursement for EU Allowances (EUA) surrendered for emissions on voyages for which charterers buy fuel or operate the vessel.

Anna Devereaux, Specialist Counsel at law firm Wikborg Rein, warned that EU Member States have been left to implement the loosely worded clause, leaving room for significant variation in regimes between supposedly harmonised jurisdictions. “There does need to be clarity as to how risk and responsibility is allocated.”

Jeremy Nixon, Chief Executive Officer of Ocean Network Express, said that recovering the ETS cost from cargo owners was also challenging. “Due to the complexity of the instrument, its conversion into a uniform surcharge recovery mechanism for our shippers is not straightforward,” he said.

BIMCO has published five ETS clauses aiming to clarify responsibility between owners and charterers. Read more [here](#).



# Evaluating China's decade of electrification

The country's decade-long policy push offers lessons about impending onshore power supply requirements on European ports and the ships serving them.

Driven by the EU's Alternative Fuel Infrastructure Regulation (AFIR) and FuelEU Maritime, major European ports will need to offer onshore power supply (OPS) and many ship operators will begin using OPS by 2030. The past ten years of OPS development in China highlight the complexity of balancing that supply and demand.

In a rapid ramp-up of OPS provision between 2016 and 2020, as part of China's thirteenth five-year plan, major Chinese ports installed more than 400 shore power connections at berths for container ships, ro-ro vessels, cruise ships, passenger ships above 3,000 tonnes and dry bulk cargo above 50,000 tonnes. By 2022, according to a report in [China Daily](#) citing non-governmental organisation Clean Air Asia, 81% of such berths at China's 21 coastal ports – and all such berths at the seven biggest ports – had access to OPS.

Now, under the fourteenth five-year plan (2021-2025), the policy focus has shifted to increasing use of OPS. The policy push led a widely cited [academic paper](#) in 2021 to anticipate that the proportion of battery-powered ships (encompassing hybrid and fully electric vessels) serving Chinese coastal and waterway ports would rise from 0.55% in 2022 to 18.5% by 2025. While equivalent up-to-date numbers are hard to find, by 2023, researchers were more sceptical.

One such paper, [Strategies of stakeholders' selection of shore-to-ship power in China](#), neatly summarised the challenges: "The large expenditure of policy implementation, various types of wire interfaces, the high cost of the operation and maintenance of shore power facilities and the high using price have seriously hindered the effective advancement of shore-to-ship power in China."

In a [recent note](#), power industry consultancy PTR observed that "China has



Chinese carrier Cosco launched a 700 teu battery powered containership that will operate on the Yangtze River. Credit: Cosco Shipping Development

Those learnings from China find parallels in other regulatory regimes across the world. Cost of use is a central issue

overinvested in the development of its shore power infrastructure, leading to the under-utilisation of this technology on ports in the country". The company points in particular to wide discrepancies in subsidies affecting the price of electricity to ship operators at ports, driven by provincial disparities in the prioritisation of air pollution.

Those learnings from China find parallels in other regulatory regimes across the world. Cost of use is a central issue. The ineffectiveness of subsidies noted in China has been addressed in the EU, and in the US through the California Air Resources Board's At-Berth Regulation, by a requirement to use OPS. That means ports are likely to recoup their investments, but also that ship operators could be exposed to high prices.

There is a get-out clause that tilts the wheel in favour of the ship operator. In the

EU, as in the US through the California Air Resources Board's At-Berth Regulation, there is an option to use approved onboard zero-emission technologies at berth instead of OPS. That means that engines using zero-emission fuels or batteries charged elsewhere could supply power for ships' port operations – ship operators will therefore need to take account of shore power prices when weighing such technology investments.

The other similar challenge is the harmonisation of OPS technology standards – the 'various types of wire interfaces' noted by Chinese researchers. In a [joint submission to MEPC 80](#), ICS, the International Association of Ports and Harbors, Cruise Lines International Association and INTERFERRY listed areas requiring standardisation, including low-voltage OPS, onboard battery charging and requirements for technology on tankers.

China's electrification decade shows that cost of use and standardisation are key obstacles to OPS uptake by vessels. With EU requirements just six years away and with ports globally already investing heavily, regulators will need to address the challenges urgently to maximise the decarbonisation potential of onshore power.

# ICS in Action

A round-up of ICS news and activities over the last month

## Shipping associations condemn attacks on shipping

ICS, together with the World Shipping Council and BIMCO, jointly thanked the 13 nations that have condemned the ongoing illegal attacks on ships in the Red Sea and the unlawful detention of vessels and crews there.

The statement, published on 3rd January, declared the attacks unacceptable, illegal and a direct threat to the freedom of navigation that facilitates global trade.

The associations also called on nations and international organisations to protect seafarers and international trade in the Red Sea, and to support the welfare of the global commons so that attacks cease with immediate effect. Read more [here](#).

ICS continues to engage with all stakeholders and update members as well as the press on the fast-moving developments.

## ICS publishes new edition of Flag State Performance Table

On 23rd January, ICS launched the 2023/2024 edition of its *Shipping Industry Flag State Performance Table*. Aggregating different performance datasets, including Port State Control records and ratification of international conventions, the table encourages dialogue between shipowners and their flag States to facilitate improvements in the interests of safety, the environment and decent working conditions.

Improvements were seen in flag State's attendance at IMO meetings, as well as in the use of well-performing Recognized Organizations to conduct the survey and certification of ships to ensure regulatory compliance.

While some flag States continue to record large amounts of negative performance indicators, some smaller flag States, including Costa Rica, Egypt, Mexico, and Thailand, show an increase in the number of positive performance indicators compared to the previous edition of the table. Download the table for free [here](#).

## ICS launches the 2023-2024 Maritime Barometer

Following on from the success of the [2022-2023](#) ICS Maritime Barometer, ICS launched this year's survey on 30th January 2024.

The Maritime Barometer surveys risk and confidence amongst maritime leaders. It provides vital information on maritime industry trends and emerging issues for those developing business strategies or formulating the shipping policies and priorities that drive private and public sector decision-making.

With ongoing risks impacting market operations, the Special Focus topic for 2023-2024 is: Addressing Risk Through Nearshoring, Reshoring, Offshoring and Friendshoring. This special focus will sit alongside continued year-on-year tracking of risk factors and progress on decarbonisation.

C-suite level leaders across the maritime industry are invited to complete the anonymised online survey by 5th April 2024. The survey takes just 15 minutes to complete is available [here](#).

## ICS publishes updated Engine Room Procedures Guide

ICS has launched the second edition of its *Engine Room Procedures Guide*, ([pre-order here](#)), with key updates to future fuel and enclosed space entry procedures.

The guide provides an in-depth reference on safe, efficient, and environmentally responsible engine room operation, maintenance and emergency response protocols, and highlights common engine room deficiencies to help crew prepare for port state control inspections.

The easy to use guide complements the ICS Bridge Procedures Guide to provide shipowners, operators, and crew members with the latest best practices in the industry.

**ICS is the principal international trade association for merchant shipowners and operators, representing all sectors and trades and over 80% of the world merchant fleet.**

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