

International Maritime Organization - UPSC Notes

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is a United Nations specialized agency that regulates shipping and matters related to shipping. This article talks about the IMO and its importance for the [IAS Exam](#).

International organizations and groupings are an important part of the **International Relations** section of the General Studies paper-2 in the [UPSC Syllabus](#).

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

The IMO is a specialized agency of the UN that engages in shipping safety and security all over the world.

- The [United Nations](#) established IMO after an agreement during the Geneva Conference of 1948.
- Ten years later, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) had its first meeting in 1959.
- With its headquarters in London, United Kingdom, the IMO is responsible for the safety and security of shipping.
- IMO also looks after the prevention of marine pollution by ships.
- The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is administered by an assembly of members.
- A separate council of members elected from the assembly looks after the funds and other financial matters.
- Currently, IMO comprises **174 member states** and three associate members.

UPSC Prelims Facts: IMO



Name: International Maritime Organization (IMO)
Specialized agency of the UN
Year of formation: 1948
HQ: London
Sector: Shipping
Is India a member?
Yes

Organizational Structure of IMO

The IMO's structure comprises the Assembly, the Council, the Maritime Safety Committee, the Marine Environment Protection Committee, the Legal Committee, the Technical Cooperation Committee, and the Secretariat, headed by a Secretary-General.

Objectives and Functions of IMO

Mission statement of the IMO

"The mission of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), as a United Nations specialized agency, is to promote safe, secure, environmentally sound, efficient and sustainable shipping through cooperation. This will be accomplished by adopting the highest practicable standards of maritime safety and security, the efficiency of navigation and prevention and control of pollution from ships, as well as through consideration of the related legal matters and effective implementation of IMO instruments, with a view to their universal and uniform application."

The objectives and functions of the IMO can be listed as follows:

- Develop and maintain a thorough regulatory framework for shipping.
- Looking after the safety and security of ships.
- Administering environmental concerns related to shipping.
- Handling legal matters for maritime cases.
- Provision of technical cooperation
- To improve the overall efficiency of shipping.

FAL Convention

The FAL Convention (Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic) was adopted in the year 1965.

The objective of the FAL Convention:

- Achieving the most efficient shipping/nautical transport system along with the provision of smooth transit in ports for Ships, Cargo as well as Passengers.
- The Facilitation Convention promotes the use of a "single window" for data, to enable all the information required by public authorities in connection with the arrival, stay and departure of ships, persons and cargo, to be submitted via a single portal, without duplication.
- Under the requirement for electronic data exchange, all national authorities should now have provisions for the electronic exchange of this information.

India and IMO

India has been a member of the IMO since 1959.

- India has had the privilege of being elected to and serving the Council of the IMO, ever since it started functioning till date, except for two years for the period 1983-1984.
- India is a party to 34 IMO Conventions and protocols and is currently in the advanced stage of ratifying the Ballast Water Convention and Bunker Convention.
- India ratified the **Hong Kong Convention** in 2019.
 - This Convention deals with designing, constructing, operating and maintaining ships in such a manner as to ensure they can be recycled safely and in an environment-friendly manner at the end of their lives.
 - **This is an important development since India is the largest shipbreaking country in the world.**
 - The full name of the Convention is the 'Hong Kong Convention for the Safe Recycling and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships'.
 - The Convention was adopted first in 2009.

- The aim of the Convention is that ships' recycling at the time of their disposal does not pose any environmental hazards.
- India continues to provide services of its expert manpower to the IMO, as and when required. The IMO's panel of auditors for the Voluntary IMO Member State Audit Scheme (**VIMSAS**) and Goal-Based Standards (**GBS**) has a number of auditors from India.
- With re-election in IMO, India will continue to engage with the international maritime community to further her maritime interests and promote the welfare of her citizens.
- India launched a Port Community System — 'PCS1x'— at ports in 2018.
 - **Port Community System (PCS1x)** is a cloud-based new generation technology, with a user-friendly interface.
 - This system will enable maritime trade to have improved communication with customs.
- However, there are concerns that India's participation in the IMO is inadequate and not facilitating its own best interests. The IMO is said to be dominated by developed countries. Notably, the post of India's permanent representative to the IMO has been lying vacant for the last twenty-five years. India's participation in the IMO is said to be far less in proportion to her stakes in international shipping.
- From January 2020, as per IMO mandate, all merchant ships should not burn fuel in which the sulphur content is greater than 0.5%.
 - Sulphur oxides are harmful to both human beings and the environment. They cause respiratory problems and harm the lungs as well. In addition, they can even cause acid rain.
 - Restricting sulphur oxides emission from ships will improve the air quality by a huge margin, thereby significantly aiding the populations living close to the coastal areas and ports.
 - This move is also in sync with the SDG 14, which deals with the conservation and the sustainable use of marine resources including oceans and seas.
 - Even though these restrictions are helpful in making the air quality better and improving the quality of life along the coastal areas, the economic price they come with is difficult to bear, especially for developing countries like India. Refineries in India are finding it difficult to meet this demand on ship fuels, and thus, the freight prices have gone up, and this, in turn, will adversely affect the retail prices.
- High-risk areas with respect to piracy
 - The IMO demarcates areas as high-risk and issues best practices on dealing with Somalia-based pirates.
 - In 2010, the organization expanded its demarcation with the result being half the Arabian Sea and almost the entire southwest coast of India being demarcated as piracy-infested.
 - This resulted in a lot of financial burden on shipping companies as the insurance costs skyrocketed for goods coming or going out of the country.
 - Also, many merchant vessels strayed close to the coast of India to avoid being in the demarcated zone.
 - This was also responsible for the Italian vessel Enrica Lexie coming in contact with an Indian fishing boat, and the subsequent shooting of Indian fishermen by two Italian marines.
 - It took a lot of effort by India to get the demarcation promulgation revoked.

UPSC Questions related to IMO

What are the most important IMO conventions?

- Some of the important conventions of IMO are:
 - International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (**SOLAS**)
 - International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (**MARPOL**)
 - International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (**STCW**)
 - International Convention for the Unification of Certain Rules of Law relating to Bills of Lading a.k.a **Hague-Visby Rules**

- Hamburg Rules

- The majority of conventions adopted by IMO usually fall into three main categories - maritime safety, prevention of marine pollution, and liability and compensation, especially in relation to damage caused by pollution.

What is the purpose of the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code?

- The International Maritime Dangerous Goods or **IMDG** Code was adopted in 1965 as per the **SOLAS** (Safety for Life at Sea) Convention of 1960 under the IMO.
- The **IMDG** Code was formed with an objective to enhance the safe carriage of dangerous goods while facilitating the free unrestricted movement of such goods and prevent pollution to the environment.