



World Maritime Theme 2023

“MARPOL at 50 – our commitment goes on”.

A message from Kitack Lim

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Today, shipping delivers over 80% of world trade and carries millions of passengers to destinations across the globe. Maritime transport continues to be the safest, and most energy-efficient mode of transport. Shipping is a crucial part of the global supply chain. This is a certainty, even in uncertain times.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is fulfilling its role as the global regulator for shipping ensuring that the maritime sector delivers cargo safely and in an environmentally sustainable manner.

The voyage towards an environmentally sound shipping sector started over 50 years ago. At the time the world recognized the need to protect our planet and, in particular the marine environment from all sources of pollution. A number of maritime pollution incidents were a strong catalyst for action.

Against this background, IMO decided to adopt a treaty to prevent pollution from ships into the marine environment: the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships – or MARPOL.

Over time, the IMO Member States expanded MARPOL’s coverage starting from accidental and operational oil spills from tankers to the prevention of pollution from chemicals carried in bulk, packaged dangerous goods, sewage, and garbage, and ultimately, the prevention of air pollution from ships.

This year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of this landmark environmental treaty. To mark this special occasion, our World Maritime Theme for 2023 is “MARPOL at 50 – our commitment goes on”.

Through these decades, MARPOL has constantly advanced to keep up with lessons learned and new demands – such as the imperative to tackle climate change and to accommodate new technology.

Its rules are continuously upgraded as we look to a sustainable future and enhance the protection of our planet and ocean.

MARPOL has had a positive impact on the marine environment. It has changed how ships – like this one – are designed and operated. The number of oil spills fell by over 90% over the last 50 years due to this and other targeted interventions.

Thanks to MARPOL, the discharge of plastic garbage into the sea is banned and operational wastes, such as garbage and sewage, cannot simply be disposed of at sea, and are very strictly regulated.

Air pollution rules have also immensely cut sulphur oxide emissions from ships. The latest efforts focus on driving the decarbonization of shipping supporting the global fight against climate change.

Of course, there is still more work to do.

As we mark 50 years of MARPOL, I invite all stakeholders to promote further dialogue on the next phase of IMO's work to enhance sustainable shipping and protect our planet and oceans.

Shipping is evolving. Shipping must embrace decarbonization, digitalization and innovative technology, including automation – while ensuring the human element is kept front and centre of the technological and green transition to ensure a sustainable planet for future generations.

MARPOL has made a difference to shipping – and to the health of our ocean – and will continue to do so, as we look ahead to the next 50 years.
