

4 ALBERT EMBANKMENT
LONDON SE1 7SR
Telephone: +44 (0)20 7735 7611 Fax: +44 (0)20 7587 3210

Circular Letter No.4391
15 March 2021

To: All IMO Member States and Associate Members

Subject: **Call for Expressions of Interest to become a Pilot Country of the IMO-Singapore Single Window for Facilitation of Trade (SWiFT) Project**

Introduction

1 IMO, in partnership with Singapore, is commencing the implementation of a project entitled "Single Window for Facilitation of Trade (SWiFT) Project" (hereinafter referred as "the Project"), aiming to assist developing countries in complying with their obligations under the Facilitation (FAL) Convention to establish systems for the electronic exchange of information in ports for ship clearance. Specifically, the Project aims to develop and implement a Maritime Single Window (MSW) system in a medium-size port in a selected Pilot Country.

2 Shipping companies engaged in international trade regularly submit large volumes of documents to ports and governmental authorities, in order to comply with regulatory requirements. These documents often have to be submitted to several different agencies, each with its own specific systems and paper forms, which may at times be duplicative. This, together with the associated compliance costs, constitutes a burden for both governments and the business community and can be a major barrier to international trade, particularly in developing countries.

3 Under IMO's FAL Convention, the electronic exchange of information for clearance processes in Contracting Parties' ports has become mandatory on 9 April 2019, and the Convention recommends using the Single Window concept. Establishing an MSW can enhance the availability and handling of information, thereby simplifying and expediting information flows between trade and government. It can also bring about greater harmonization and better sharing of the relevant data across governmental systems, with meaningful gains for all parties involved in cross-border trade.

4 The development of such systems can be both complex and costly, and IMO has encouraged Member States advanced in MSW implementation to cooperate in exchanging know-how and experiences with other Member States seeking assistance in developing their own MSW.

5 Based on their experience in electronic facilitation of maritime trade, Norway provided in-kind and financial support to implement an MSW system in Antigua and Barbuda in 2018. The system, which was implemented in 19 months, is working well in Antigua and Barbuda, and its design should be of interest to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in particular. The source code developed for this system by Norway is available free of charge to other interested Member States. IMO is currently in discussions with a number of donors to mobilize resources to support replication of such a system in ports of similar size in other SIDS.

6 While the system developed for Antigua and Barbuda proved to be successful, it can be expected that the technical requirements for larger medium-size ports and for ports that would like to incorporate port to port communication protocols in an MSW may be different.

Details of the SWiFT Project

7 The Government of Singapore, having recently successfully implemented digitalPORT@SG™, an MSW that streamlines submission of documents for port clearances, agreed to make the experience gained in building and operating their MSW available to IMO to support capacity-building efforts to accelerate the digitalization of ports and shipping globally. This partnership aims to support Member States to implement an MSW system suitable for medium-size ports that can help them to meet the requirements of the FAL Convention and also facilitate interconnectivity between ports worldwide. The system will utilize open-source codes from Norway's Antigua and Barbuda project as the baseline, extended to include electronic data exchange capabilities enabling connectivity and interoperability with other MSWs and digital platforms. It will also facilitate the implementation of key cybersecurity requirements, including confidentiality, integrity and availability of information. The system will then be configured according to the specific needs of the pilot port of the recipient country.

8 The SWiFT Project's objectives are to:

- .1 support the digitalization of ship clearance in ports to meet the mandatory requirements of the FAL Convention through an MSW system;
- .2 build human, organizational and technological capacity to allow public authorities and trade to benefit from the MSW system;
- .3 promote further collaboration and information sharing between maritime transport stakeholders to capture the benefits of the MSW system; and
- .4 support the efficiency and resilience of maritime transport and ports in recipient countries.

9 The Project embraces the following key elements:

- .1 provision of relevant inputs for the legal, policy and institutional reforms necessary for the MSW system;
- .2 implementation of a generic and secure MSW system that can be configured to meet the specific needs of the port(s) in the recipient country;
- .3 provision of training programmes to prepare the recipient country for implementation of the MSW system (comprising knowledge of the FAL Convention, MSW concept, technical skills required to operate and maintain the system and assistance in establishing structured inter-agency coordination); and
- .4 advice for recipient countries with regards to further development of MSW services and maintenance of the system.

10 Recipient countries will be expected to contribute in-kind and financially as follows:

- .1 providing in kind resources (manpower) to support the MSW implementation on an organizational, technical and operational level;
- .2 bearing the associated cost of the hardware or cloud-based solution. Financial assistance for this may be considered by IMO on a case-by-case basis and subject to donor interests to support such costs. Singapore is prepared to cover these costs "in-kind" for the Phase 1 Pilot Country, should this be requested; and
- .3 covering the costs of maintenance and operation of the MSW once it is up and running (e.g. power, network connectivity, IT staff).

Phase 1: Selection of a Pilot Country

11 To test the project approach, a Pilot Project will be undertaken which will implement an MSW system in a chosen medium-size port in one Pilot Country. This Pilot Project will constitute Phase 1 of the SWiFT Project and will be funded by Singapore via in-kind contributions and with contributions from IMO's Integrated Technical Cooperation Programme (ITCP). The Pilot Project will factor the legal, policy and institutional reforms necessary for the MSW system as determined by the pilot recipient country, provide the upgraded MSW software, hardware and/or IT services, configured to the country's needs, and training supported by the ITCP.

12 To ensure the successful implementation of the Pilot Project, the commitment of the recipient country to organize necessary national activities and coordinate communication between different government entities and stakeholders are key elements. An inter-ministerial/inter-agency National Task Force (NTF) team is expected to be formed to act as the coordinating and implementing body for the implementation of the national project. A technical working group and an operations working group would need to be established to carry out the technical and operational work related to the project.

13 The pilot recipient country will be responsible for the legal, operational and technical aspects of the domestic implementation of the MSW and for coordinating cooperation among different government entities and private sector stakeholders.

14 The SWiFT Project is currently in the preparation phase during which IMO and Singapore will be identifying a pilot recipient country which is interested and committed to implement and maintain an MSW system in a chosen national medium-size port.

15 The implementation of specific activities of the Pilot Project is expected to commence by 15 June 2021.

Phase 2: Scaling up

16 Subject to funding availability, Phase 2 will include the replication of the Pilot Project in Member States in need of similar technical assistance and committed to similar objectives. If the pilot phase is successful, potential donors and investors will be contacted for financial and in-kind contributions. Depending on the number of Member States requesting support and the amount of funding to be raised, the scaling-up project may be implemented in additional phases. In this regard, noting that the heavy resource costs of implementing MSWs could be a deterring factor, the IMO-Singapore project endeavours to springboard countries in their digitalization journey and unlock the full potential of their maritime sectors. It is only when most, if not all, ports undergo digital transformation, that the full benefits of digitalization can be realized by the maritime community.

Call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) to join and benefit from the SWiFT project as Pilot Country

17 To enable the selection of a pilot recipient country, Expressions of Interest to participate in the SWiFT Project as a Pilot Country are invited from Member States. They will be requested to provide reasons for their participation through the provision of information. The criteria for the selection of the Pilot Country will include aspects such as the existing baseline situation of the country with respect to digitalization initiatives and their aspirations to change the baseline; the country's commitment and capacity to engage in the project; the country's policy commitment towards implementation of the FAL Convention; their willingness to initiate legal, policy and institutional reforms and to share experience with other countries; and the relative importance the country attaches to the development of MSW systems.

18 The Pilot Country should meet the eligibility criteria for IMO ITCP support.

19 Member States interested in participating and benefiting from the Project as a Pilot Country should inform the Secretariat of their interest by completing and submitting the questionnaire included in the annex to Julian Abril, Head Facilitation Section, Maritime Safety Division, at jabril@imo.org, copy to falsec@imo.org. The closing date for submitting the completed questionnaire is 30 April 2021. Member States are invited to send their documentation electronically as soon as possible.

Evaluation and selection of Pilot Country

20 The selection of the Pilot Country will be undertaken by the Secretariat in three stages, as follows:

- Stage 1:
- All submissions from Member States will be reviewed and assessed based on the information provided in the questionnaire. The EOI should come from the IMO Focal Point of the interested country, following an internal consensus on participating in the project among the relevant agencies/ministries expected to be involved. The EOI may therefore highlight this aspect. In the first instance, all EOIs will be subject to the country's ITCP eligibility. Other evaluation criteria will include:
- .1 identification of a medium size port which can benefit from the implementation of the MSW concept formulated by Singapore;
 - .2 suitable IT baseline situation of the recipient country, in terms of IT and digital skills and resources available in the port and in the relevant administrations (e.g. harbour master, onshore authorities, shipping industry);
 - .3 level of political commitment of the country to prioritize matters related to the FAL Convention and a strong policy agenda on maritime transport;
 - .4 level of commitment and coordination from relevant Ministries and agencies (e.g. customs, health, immigration, agriculture, maritime, port);
 - .5 countries' dependence on maritime transport and port activities;

.6 the extent to which countries' maritime and port activities could benefit from the project; and

.7 range and level of stakeholder interest in participating in the project.

Stage 2: By 15 May 2021, the selected country will be contacted to further assess their requirements and discuss the activities and deliverables to be achieved during the project. Following a successful review of the above, the country will be identified as the recipient Pilot Country.

Stage 3: By 30 May 2021, the selected Pilot Country will be requested to submit a letter of support confirming their commitment to deliver the agreed deliverables of the Project at national level and related co-financing (in-kind). In the letter, the Pilot Country would also name a Lead Agency, a National Focal Point and a National Project Coordinator. Upon receipt of the letter, IMO and Singapore will confirm the Pilot Country's onward participation in the project implementation plan.

ANNEX

COUNTRY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST – PILOT COUNTRY

Name of country:
Contact (name, position, email):
Lead Agency/National Focal Point:

Brief description of maritime and port activities in the country

This should briefly explain the importance of maritime/port activities for the national economy.

Country baseline (policy, regulatory, enforcement) in terms of FAL Convention

This section should give an overview of the established policy and regulatory framework at the national level, such as strategies, policies, legislation and action plans, related to implementation of FAL as well as the current level of capacity to enforce or follow up on relevant policies/frameworks.

Candidate medium-size port for piloting the MSW system

This section should provide the reasons for choosing the candidate port for installing a MSW system and describe the candidate port's cargo volume and market share in the region, its international connectivity and its hinterland function as gateway for the country/region.

IT baseline situation of the country

This section should describe the IT situation of the port and of the relevant onshore authorities, in terms of IT and digital skills and resources (e.g. is there an IT department, existing digital port clearance systems or technology in place that will be connected to the MSW).

Relevant inter-ministerial level of engagement and collaboration in Facilitation related activities

This section should describe the existing mechanisms and/or platforms used for engagement and collaboration in Facilitation related activities as well as examples of past initiatives. This section may also describe any consultation undertaken regarding this EOI with other ministries and agencies who will be involved in the Pilot Project.

Commitment, capacity and coordination

Elaborate on country commitment, capacity to deliver the project activities and inter-ministerial coordination. Provide information on the human resources available to implement the MSW project domestically both at operational, technical and legal levels, the capacity to sustain the maintenance and operation of the MSW after the completion of the project.

Stakeholders

List the various stakeholders (public and private) who will participate in the project at national level.

Expected impact of the project in improving maritime trade in the country

Briefly explain how a project of this nature can assist the country in contributing to maritime trade at national level

Are there any existing related initiatives that the project can complement? (e.g. PCS, Customs single window, digitalization strategy)