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Circular Letter No.5115
30 January 2026

To: All IMO Member States

Subject: **Call for expressions of interest (EOIs): Future-Ready Shipping (FRS) in Africa project support for enhancement of maritime single window (MSW) readiness and data-driven, digitalized maritime oversight in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Overview of Future-Ready Shipping (FRS) in Africa

1 Efficient maritime trade and transport facilitation are essential to the smooth functioning of global supply chains and the competitiveness of national ports. The IMO Facilitation (FAL) Convention establishes a framework for the simplification, standardization and harmonization of maritime transport formalities, including the mandatory implementation of a Maritime Single Window (MSW) to enable the electronic exchange of information required for ship arrival, stay and departure. Effective MSW implementation plays a critical role in reducing administrative burdens, improving port efficiency, enhancing regulatory compliance, strengthening maritime oversight, and enabling secure, data-driven decision-making across public and private stakeholders.

2 In addition to trade facilitation benefits, MSW implementation provides a foundation for enhanced maritime oversight, improved data quality, and the integration of digital systems supporting vessel monitoring, risk assessment, and environmental reporting. The FRS in Africa project is designed to support the African continent's transition towards a sustainable, decarbonized and digitally advanced maritime sector, while strengthening institutional capacity, regional cooperation and investment readiness. The FRS in Africa project is implemented by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and funded by the European Union (EU).

3 Recognizing the specific needs and opportunities of Sub-Saharan African Member States, IMO invites expressions of interest (EOIs) from eligible Member States to participate in targeted technical assistance activities aimed at comprehensive MSW readiness assessments identifying interoperability gaps, data security risks, legal and regulatory shortcomings, technical limitations, and change management challenges.

4 The Facilitation Committee, at its forty-ninth session (10 to 14 March 2025), approved the *Guidelines for setting up a Maritime Single Window* (FAL.5/Circ.42/Rev.4). The selected beneficiary Member States will receive technical assistance under the project to support readiness assessments and the development of draft MSW road maps with timelines, resource needs, and technical specifications, while ensuring alignment with IMO instruments, safety considerations, and national priorities.

Assistance provided by the FRS in Africa project

5 The Future-Ready Shipping (FRS) in Africa project will provide support in:

- Assessment of digital readiness and infrastructure gaps for implementing a Maritime Single Window (MSW);
- Mapping existing port community systems (PCS), MSW-related platforms, and IT infrastructure, including:
 - identification of interoperability gaps;
 - data security and cyber risk considerations;
 - legal and regulatory shortcomings;
 - technical limitations; and
 - change management and institutional challenges;
- Conducting situational analyses of national policy, legal and regulatory frameworks relevant to MSW implementation and maritime digitalization;
- Assessing the feasibility of adapting or integrating electronic ship and vessel registry systems to support maritime oversight, including GHG emissions data collection and reporting;
- Developing draft MSW road maps, including:
 - phased implementation timelines;
 - institutional roles and responsibilities;
 - resource and capacity requirements; and
 - high-level technical and interoperability specifications; and
- Organizing multi-stakeholder workshops to validate assessment findings and proposed road maps with public and private sector stakeholders.

6 Please note that the assistance provided does not include any form of direct cash or financial assistance. The beneficiary Member State is expected to contribute in-kind support to facilitate local coordination, stakeholder engagement and related national activities. This includes, but is not limited to, coordination support, access to data, facilitation of stakeholder engagement, organizing local meetings or workshops, venue hire, catering, interpretation services, printing of materials or domestic travel.

Eligibility and expectations from the beneficiary Member State

7 The expressions of interest (EOIs) are invited from interested government entities in Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. ministries, departments, agencies, etc.), as well as State-owned enterprises (SOEs). Government entities may be at the national or subnational level (e.g. State governments, local port authorities, etc.).

8 Private sector companies are not eligible to apply unless the proposal for a feasibility study is intended to be developed jointly with a government entity. In that case, the application should be submitted through the government entity.

9 Submissions must be made by, or formally endorsed by, the relevant government authority, such as the maritime administration, Ministry of Transport, or equivalent body.

10 Beneficiary Member States are expected to:

- Demonstrate commitment to the implementation of the IMO FAL Convention, including Maritime Single Window (MSW) requirements;
- Designate a national focal point to coordinate project activities and liaise with the Project Coordination Unit;
- Facilitate access to relevant institutional, technical and operational information;
- Actively engage relevant stakeholders, including port authorities, customs, immigration, border agencies, IT authorities, and industry representatives; and
- Support validation workshops and follow-up actions related to the MSW road map.

Submission of expressions of interest (EOIs)

11 The EOIs should provide the below information (refer to the EOI template in the annex):

- Brief overview of the proposing Member State and relevant institutions;
- Current status of Maritime Single Window (MSW) implementation and maritime digitalization efforts;
- Description of existing port community system (PCS), MSW platforms, or related digital systems (if any);
- Brief justification supporting their selection including strategic relevance at a national or regional level;
- Preliminary indication of key challenges and gaps related to MSW readiness and maritime data management; and
- Commitment Letter from the government.

12 The EOIs must be submitted by official government entities (e.g. ministries, departments, agencies). Submissions from non-government organizations or the private sector must be endorsed by the respective Member State government entity.

13 Completed EOIs, along with governmental endorsement (preferably from the maritime administration), should be sent to frs@imo.org.

14 The deadline for submission of EOIs is **9 March 2026, 23:59 hrs** UK time. However, Member States are encouraged to submit their applications as early as possible.

15 Requests for further information or clarification should be directed to frs@imo.org.

16 The Future-Ready Shipping (FRS) in Africa Project Coordination Unit will acknowledge receipt of all eligible EOIs following the closure of the submission deadline.

Evaluation and selection criteria

17 All expressions of interest (EOIs) received within the specified deadline will be reviewed and assessed by an Evaluation Committee, which will be comprised of the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) and an independent panel of technical experts in maritime facilitation, digitalization, and data governance.

18 The Evaluation Committee will compile a shortlist of applications. Shortlisted EOIs may be requested to provide additional technical or contextual information prior to final selection.

19 The selection criteria will take into account:

- commitment of the proposing Member State to maritime digitalization and trade facilitation;
- potential to improve operational efficiency and trade facilitation, including reduced administrative burden, vessel turnaround time, and duplication of reporting requirements;
- contribution to strengthened implementation of the FAL Convention, including compliance with mandatory electronic data exchange requirements;
- relevance to data-driven maritime oversight, including improved availability and quality of data for vessel monitoring, risk profiling, and regulatory enforcement;
- feasibility of leveraging MSW-related systems to support GHG emissions data collection and reporting;
- degree of interoperability and scalability of existing or planned digital systems, including integration with port community systems and other national platforms;
- demonstrated institutional readiness and inter-agency coordination, including commitment to address legal, regulatory, and change-management challenges (evidenced, for example, through the establishment of an inter-agency task force or engagement of specialized consultancy services);
- expected socio-economic and sustainability benefits, including enhanced transparency, predictability, and competitiveness of maritime trade;
- absence of prior or ongoing IMO technical cooperation activities providing similar support; and
- identified needs for institutional, regulatory, or capacity strengthening.

20 Based on this assessment, up to five (5) EOIs will be selected under the Future-Ready Shipping (FRS) in Africa project.

21 Following the evaluation, the proposed selection results will be submitted for final approval by the Project Steering Committee, in accordance with the project's governance arrangements. The PCU will notify all applicant Member States of the outcome of the selection process following the Project Steering Committee's decision.

Evaluation and beneficiary selection process

22 The selection process for the expressions of interest (EOIs) will include the following steps:

- Submission of EOIs (by 9 March 2026, 23:59 hrs)
- Review of EOIs: Initial screening and evaluation against eligibility and selection criteria (by 16 March 2026)
- Reaching out to shortlisted EOIs: Additional technical and operational information requested for shortlisted EOIs (by 23 March 2026)
- Selection of the beneficiary: Confirmation of the project beneficiary based on the overall evaluation (8 April 2026)
- Implementation of support activities starts in May 2026

ANNEX

**EXPRESSION OF INTEREST TEMPLATE
(NOT MORE THAN FIVE PAGES)**

1 General information

- Proposing Member State:
- Relevant institutions: (e.g. maritime administration, port authority, customs)

2 Overview of the proposing Member State and relevant institutions

Provide a brief overview of the proposing Member State's maritime and port sector, including:

- Role and mandate of the relevant institutions involved in MSW and maritime digitalization
- Institutional coordination arrangements for data exchange and port formalities
- Previous experience with digitalization or trade facilitation initiatives

3 Current status of Maritime Single Window (MSW) implementation and digitalization

Describe the current status of MSW implementation, including:

- Stage of MSW development (conceptual, pilot, operational, or planned)
- Alignment with IMO instruments, including the FAL Convention requirements
- Any ongoing maritime digitalization initiatives at a national or port level

4 Existing digital systems and platforms

Provide a description of any existing digital systems relevant to MSW implementation, including:

- Port community systems (PCS)
- National or port-level MSW platforms
- Customs, immigration, port authority, or other maritime data management systems
- Interoperability, data standards, and integration status (if applicable)

5 Strategic justification

Provide a brief justification supporting the proposed participation, including:

- Strategic relevance at national and/or regional level

- Contribution to trade facilitation, port efficiency, and compliance with international obligations
- Potential for replication or scaling at other ports or within the region

6 Key challenges and gaps

Identified key challenges and gaps related to MSW readiness and maritime data management, such as:

- Institutional or regulatory gaps
- Technical infrastructure and system interoperability challenges
- Data governance, cybersecurity, or capacity constraints
- Human resource and training needs

7 Government commitment

Attach a Commitment Letter from the Government, confirming:

- Endorsement of the EOI submission
- Commitment to MSW implementation in line with IMO requirements
- Designation of responsible institutions and focal points
- Willingness to support implementation, coordination, and sustainability of outcomes

8 Contact information

- Focal point name and title:
 - Institution/organization:
 - Email and telephone:
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