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Circular Letter No.5116
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To: All IMO Member States

Subject: **Call for expressions of interest (EOIs): Future-Ready Shipping (FRS) in Africa project support for feasibility assessments and bankable project development for environmentally sustainable alternative fuels in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Overview of Future-Ready Shipping (FRS) in Africa

1 The 2023 IMO GHG Strategy includes levels of ambition such as achieving net-zero GHG emissions by or around, i.e. close to, 2050, and a commitment to ensuring the uptake of alternative zero or near-zero GHG emission technologies, fuels and/or energy sources by 2030. In support of this ambition and context, 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).

2 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 enabling the development of environmentally sustainable alternative fuel value chains.

3 The FRS in Africa project will support targeted feasibility assessments and the development of bankable business cases for:

- the establishment of safe and sustainable bunkering facilities for environmentally sustainable alternative fuels; and
- the development of green corridor projects linking selected African ports to regional and international maritime trade routes.

4 Through this call for expressions of interest (EOIs), IMO invites eligible Sub-Saharan African Member States to express their interest in participating in these activities by nominating ports, port clusters, or corridor concepts that demonstrate strong strategic relevance, stakeholder commitment, and potential to catalyse investment in alternative fuel value chains.

5 The selected beneficiary Member States will receive technical assistance to assess technical, operational, regulatory, and financial feasibility, and to develop robust, investment-ready project proposals that can be used to engage development partners, financial institutions, and private-sector investors, while ensuring alignment with IMO instruments, safety considerations, and national decarbonization priorities.

Assistance provided by the FRS in Africa project

6 The FRS in Africa project will provide support in:

- Assessment of port readiness and infrastructure gaps for alternative fuel bunkering and shipment;
- Safety, regulatory, and operational feasibility analysis aligned with IMO instruments and guidelines;
- Identification of viable alternative fuel pathways (e.g. hydrogen, ammonia, methanol, biofuels), considering local and regional contexts;
- Development of pre-feasibility and feasibility studies for alternative fuel bunkering and/or production facilities;
- Preparation of business cases and bankable project proposals, suitable for engagement with development partners, financial institutions, and the private sector;
- Support for stakeholder consultation and coordination across public and private sectors; and
- Capacity-building and knowledge transfer to national institutions.

7 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

8 The expressions of interest (EOIs) are invited from interested government entities in the Sub-Saharan Africa region (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.).

9 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.

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

11 The beneficiary Member State is expected to:

- Demonstrate high-level commitment to maritime decarbonization and alternative fuel uptake;
- Designate a national focal point to coordinate project activities and liaise with the Project Coordination Unit;
- Commit to facilitating access to relevant data (e.g. port operations, fuel demand, traffic flows, energy infrastructure);

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- Convene and engage relevant stakeholders, including port authorities, energy providers, ship operators, women and other underrepresented groups in maritime and financial institutions; and
 - Support monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge-sharing activities.

Submission of expressions of interest (EOIs)

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

- Brief overview of the beneficiary organization and mention of ongoing efforts (if any) or specific commitment towards the reduction of GHG emissions from the country/regional maritime industry;
- Description of the proposed port(s), corridor(s), or value chain(s) to be assessed;
- Brief justification supporting their selection including strategic relevance at a national or regional level;
- Preliminary indication of alternative fuel(s) of interest and intended maritime applications;
- Overview of key stakeholders and partners involved or to be engaged including public and private entities contributing to its execution; and
- Commitment letter from government.

13 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.

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

15 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.

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

17 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

18 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 with relevant expertise in maritime decarbonization, alternative fuels, port infrastructure, and project finance.

19 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.

20 The selection criteria will take into account:

- Readiness and commitment of the proposing Member State;
- An indicative description of needs and strategic relevance of the proposed port, corridor, or value chain;
- Potential for environmentally sustainable alternative fuel production, bunkering, and use;
- Potential for scalability, replication, and regional impact;
- Absence of prior or ongoing IMO technical cooperation activities providing similar support;
- Alignment of the proposed initiative with maritime decarbonization priorities, in line with the 2023 IMO GHG Strategy and other guidance;
- Relevance to regional or international connectivity, including green corridor potential; and
- Identified needs for institutional, regulatory, or capacity strengthening.

21 Based on this assessment, up to five (5) EOIs will be selected for the conduct of feasibility studies under the Future-Ready Shipping in Africa project.

22 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

23 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)
- Terms of References and Request for Proposal prepared for Feasibility study procurement in consultation with the selected beneficiary and procurement process initiated (by mid-May 2026).

ANNEX

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST TEMPLATE (NOT MORE THAN SIX PAGES)

- 1 General information
 - Beneficiary organization:
 - Proposing Member State:
 - Relevant Institutions / Authorities:
(e.g. maritime administration, port authority, energy authority)
- 2 Overview of the beneficiary organization and existing efforts

Provide a brief overview of the beneficiary organization, including:

 - Mandate and role within the national or regional maritime sector
 - Current or planned initiatives related to sustainability or emission reduction in the maritime industry
 - Any specific commitments, policies, or strategies relevant to reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from maritime activities
- 3 Description of the proposed port(s), corridor(s), or value chain(s)

Describe the proposed port(s), corridor(s), or maritime value chain(s) to be assessed, including:

 - Geographic scope and key characteristics
 - Role within national or regional maritime transport and logistics systems
 - Type of maritime operations involved (e.g. domestic, regional, international)
- 4 Strategic justification

Provide a brief justification supporting the selection of the proposed port(s), corridor(s), or value chain(s), including:

 - Strategic relevance at national and/or regional level
 - Contribution to trade, connectivity, or economic development
 - Alignment with broader transport, energy, or maritime strategies
- 5 Alternative fuels of interest and intended applications

Provide a preliminary indication of:

 - Alternative fuel(s) of interest (e.g. hydrogen, ammonia, methanol, biofuels, electricity, hybrid solutions)

- Intended maritime applications (e.g. domestic vessels, port operations, short-sea shipping, bunkering)
- Any initial considerations regarding feasibility or readiness (where available)

6 Key stakeholders and partnerships

Provide an overview of key stakeholders and partners involved or to be engaged, including:

- Public sector entities (ministries, maritime administrations, port authorities)
- Private sector stakeholders (shipowners, fuel suppliers, terminal operators, technology providers)
- Academic, research, or regional organizations (if applicable)
- Roles and anticipated contributions to the execution of the proposed assessment

7 Government commitment

Attach a commitment letter from the Government, confirming:

- Endorsement of the EOI submission
- Support for the beneficiary organization and proposed scope
- Willingness to facilitate stakeholder engagement and implementation of assessment activities
- Alignment with national maritime and sustainability priorities

8 Contact information

- Designated focal point:
 - Institution/Organization:
 - Email and telephone:
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