

IMO Ship Numbering FAQ

We strongly recommend you read the below frequently asked questions

The proposal to increase the number of digits of the IMO Ship Number is made by S&P Global.

Q: What is an IMO Ship Number?

A: Lloyd's Register had already introduced permanent numbers for all ships in their published register in 1963. These were modified to 7-digit numbers in 1969. It is this number series that was adopted as the basis for IMO numbers in 1987.

As explained in resolution A.600(15) and its subsequently revised versions of resolutions A.1078(28) and A.1117(30), the IMO Ship Identification Number is made of the three letters "IMO" in front of a Number sequence (seven digits). It is a six-digit sequential unique number followed by a check digit. The integrity of an IMO number can be verified using its check digit.

Q: Which ships qualify for an IMO Number?

A: The International Maritime Organization (IMO) Ship Identification Number Scheme is an integral part of the shipping sector operations, providing a unique cradle to grave number for each ship.

Under the provisions of SOLAS regulation XI-1/3, the implementation of the scheme became mandatory for all passenger ships of 100 GT and upwards and to all cargo ships of 300 GT and upwards as of 1 January 1996.

It is also required that passenger ships of less than 100 gross tonnage, high speed passenger craft and mobile offshore drilling units covered by SOLAS regulation V/19-1 should have IMO numbers with regard to the long range identification and tracking of ships, which entered into force on 1 January 2008.

Initially, this Number Scheme applied only to merchant ships. With an amendment in 2013, through IMO resolution A.1078(28), the IMO Assembly agreed to a proposal, in support of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in the context of the Global Record of Fishing Vessels Refrigerated Transport Vessels and Supply Vessels, to include fishing vessels of 100 gross tonnage and above. In 2014, the Thirty-first meeting of the Committee of Fisheries (COFI) agreed that the IMO Number should be used as the Global Record's UVI for Phase 1.

Furthermore, in December 2017 the IMO Assembly, by adoption of resolution A.1117(30), agreed to a second amendment to the IMO Number Scheme by which the Scheme now applies "to ships of 100 gross tonnage and above, including fishing vessels of steel and non-steel hull construction; passenger ships of less than 100 gross tonnage, high speed passenger craft and mobile offshore drilling units covered by SOLAS regulation V/19-1; and all motorized inboard fishing vessels of less than 100 gross tonnage down to a size limit of 12 metres in length overall (LOA), authorized to operate outside waters under the national jurisdiction of the flag State".

Applicable Ships

Administrations should apply the Scheme to new and existing ships under their flag engaged in international voyages. Administrations may also wish to assign IMO Ship Identification Numbers (IMO numbers) to ships engaged solely on domestic voyages and to insert the number in the national certificates.

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- .1 ships without mechanical means of propulsion;
- .2 pleasure yachts;
- .3 ships engaged on special service;¹
- .4 hopper barges;
- .5 floating docks and structures classified in a similar manner;
- .6 ships of war and troop ships; and
- .7 wooden ships, other than fishing vessels.

If a ship does not qualify to have an IMO number, S&P Global will give a brief explanation as to why.

Q: How many IMO Numbers are there today?

A: The current IMO Number algorithm created approximately 900k 7-digit number combinations between 1000000 and 9999999. As of 30th September 2022, 453,524 (50.4%) had been assigned leaving 446,467 free (49.6%).

Q: Why will the format of the IMO Ship Number need increasing from 7 digits in the near future?

A: As the IMO Ship Numbering scheme continues to evolve, we must recognise the need to ensure it can be sustained well into the future, whilst ensuring as little disruption to its use within the shipping sector as possible.

The IMO Ship Number does not need to see the number of digits extended imminently. However, developing Maritime Single Window (MSW) technologies and other digitisation strategies provide an opportunity to adopt flexibility. The earlier stakeholders know of any decision to increase its format the better. Creating

¹ For example lightships, floating radio stations, search and rescue vessels.

awareness is of paramount importance and ahead of any necessity.

Q: What proposals are being considered?

A: There are growing pressures to assign numbers to fishing vessels and other shiptypes, currently excluded from the scheme. S&P Global, as managers of the numbering schemes propose that an increase in digits to the IMO Ship Number be considered.

Since December 2013, when the IMO Number scheme extended to include fishing vessels, 32,410 IMO Ship Numbers have been issued. Between 2018 and 2022 year to date, approximately 32% have been related to fishing vessels.

Proposal 1	Proposal 2
S&P Global propose that the IMO Ship Number format be increased to 8-digits. Alphanumerical options can be supported.	S&P Global propose that the IMO Ship Number format be increased to 10-digits. Alphanumerical options can be supported.

Q: What will be the impact to Industry?

A: The scale of impact is unknown at present. An impact study will be held from November 2022 through to April 2023. The impact study aims to assess any impact the extension may have. It will target stakeholders across the industry.

Q: Who will manage the impact study?

A: The impact study will be managed by S&P Global, who are the sole authority responsible for issuing and managing the IMO Ship Numbering on behalf of the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The lead on the initiative will be Ms Ashlee Williams, Vice President within the Maritime & Trade business of S&P Global's Market Intelligence division.

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Q: What will the impact study include?

A: The impact study will survey stakeholders across the sector. This will be completed by an online survey. The survey will be shared by S&P Global.

When concluded, analysis will provided to the relevant IMO bodies. A report containing the analysis will be shared as well with every participant.

Q: Will there be an option to discuss concerns related to the increase in digits?

A: An option to request a telephone consultation and/or to participate in a discussion group will be made available in the survey form. Any stakeholder can reach out directly to Ms Ashlee Williams at S&P Global with any questions/feedback.

Q: Can we re-use IMO Ship Numbers of inactive Ships?

A: No. A ship IMO Number remains with the ship for life. Regardless of its status, activity, etc. If the ship changes owner, or changes name it will also retain its IMO Ship Number.

Q: How much does it cost to apply for an IMO Ship Number?

A: The IMO Ship Number Applications are reviewed, processed, and issued by S&P Global free of charge.