

'High stakes' IMO decarbonization meeting begins in London



The IMO on Tuesday began a closely watched four-day meeting at its London headquarters to vote on shipping decarbonization measures. Photo credit: IMO.

[Greg Knowler, Senior Editor Europe](#) | Oct 14, 2025, 1:51 PM EDT

Member states of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) gathered in London Tuesday to begin four days of meetings meant to finalize the adoption of far-reaching decarbonization plans that have sharply divided nations and sectors within the shipping industry.

While Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez acknowledged the “high stakes” nature of this week’s session of the IMO’s Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC), he refused to be drawn on Washington’s increasingly aggressive opposition to the “net-zero framework” of measures that include a pricing mechanism and a fuel standard.

“We are here to finalize the adoption of the net-zero framework,” Dominguez told reporters at IMO’s London headquarters. “Every country has the right to express their opinion, and the IMO will always engage with them.”

Asked what the next step would be should the net-zero framework fail to be adopted this week, Dominguez declined to speculate, emphasizing the IMO’s commitment to engaging all 176 member states and organizations despite differing opinions.

“The IMO is working on behalf of the member states to reach adoption,” he said. “We understand the magnitude of the work we are doing, but my message is that we have had these discussions for many years, and I would encourage member states to focus on what we have in front of us.”

Among US threats made last week were the imposition of sanctions on officials “sponsoring activist-driven climate policies that would burden American consumers.” The Trump administration has also threatened to impose visa restrictions and revise maritime crew visas quotas, and impose additional port fees on ships owned, operated or flagged by countries supporting the net-zero framework.

The White House also said flag states supporting the IMO measures may have their registered vessels blocked from calling US ports, with the US also evaluating the imposition of financial penalties on the flag states.

A path toward net-zero emissions

The net-zero framework includes a package of technical and economic elements that puts the sector on a transition path to net-zero emissions by 2050. They include a global fuel standard that sets greenhouse gas intensity reduction targets for each year through 2035 and penalties for failing to meet them.

It also establishes a credit trading scheme through which vessels with lower emissions can generate credits to sell to owners of higher-emissions vessels. Revenues generated by the penalties will fund a reward mechanism for zero- and near-zero emission fuels and support “a just and equitable transition.”

IMO’s plenary session on Tuesday featured member states reiterating their positions, with support led by the European Union and Pacific Islands and opposition led by the US delegation that stated the net-zero framework was a thinly disguised carbon tax and an environmental “slush fund.”

“There will be a lot of theatrics this week, but there is real optimism in the room that we will still be able to adopt the measures by the end of the week,” one delegate said.

US threats are 'unjust'

Not everyone shared the delegate's sunny viewpoint. Rico Luman, senior economist for transport, logistics and automotive at global bank ING, said the US threat of retaliatory tariffs on countries supporting the IMO measure cast "significant uncertainty" over the outcome of the MEPC session.

"The US is clearly pressuring other member states to reject the agreement and is threatening retaliatory tariffs," Luman told the *Journal of Commerce* Tuesday. "This essentially amounts to coercing countries into aligning with its position, which is unjust."

Luman noted that in April there was a clear majority in favor of the net-zero framework among IMO member nations, as well as from container carriers, major ports and shipping associations such as BIMCO, the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and the World Shipping Council (WSC).

"It would be a major setback if [US threats] derail the adoption and implementation of the new climate strategy, which was intended to be a global breakthrough and a replacement for fragmented regional initiatives," he said.

Lars Jensen, CEO of Vespucci Maritime and a *Journal of Commerce* contributor, questioned the wisdom behind the retaliatory measures outlined by Washington that he said would penalize US supply chains.

"Similar to the continuing wrongful claim that foreign countries are paying [US] tariffs, the [threats] from the US State Department promote the view that these penalties on shipping will be paid by the countries voting 'yes,'" Jensen wrote in a LinkedIn post.

"But imposing fees or restrictions on ships or shipping will merely increase the cost of shipping to and from the US and hence place the financial cost on the US exporters and importers," he added.

Contact Greg Knowler at greg.knowler@spglobal.com.

© 2025 S&P Global. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.

You are permitted to print or download extracts from this material for your personal use only. None of this material may be used for any commercial or public use. For more information on reprints/eprints, please visit <https://subscribe.joc.com/mediasolutions/>.