

IMO punts on pivotal net-zero shipping regulation



The IMO secretariat struggled with a tense and divided room at this week's London meeting of the organization's Environmental Protection Committee. Photo credit: IMO.

[Greg Knowler, Senior Editor Europe](#) | Oct 17, 2025, 1:13 PM EDT

Member states of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) voted to postpone for one year the adoption of far-reaching decarbonization plans, with the US and petrostates Saudia Arabia and Russia leading efforts to derail the adoption of the greenhouse gas cutting measures. The United States has gone as far as threatening to target the ships of IMO member states that didn't support efforts to ease fuel standards.

A visibly upset IMO secretary general Arsenio Dominguez told delegates in his remarks following the Friday vote that “there are no winners and losers in this session.”

The motion to delay the adoption of the IMO's net-zero framework, put forward by Singapore, was called to a vote by Saudi Arabia in a tense and combative session of

the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) in London this week. The vote to delay was 57 in favor, 49 against and 21 abstentions.

“The outcome is your decision, and I will always respect that, but it is the manner in which the conversations took place this week ... this was not a normal IMO meeting,” Dominguez said.

“As we come to an end, my plea to you is not to repeat the way we have approached this meeting in future discussions of this or any other meeting at the IMO,” he added. “It doesn’t help you or your organization.”

In the MEPC meeting 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).

That momentum has now been lost following this week’s ill-tempered MEPC session filled with procedural maneuvering as member states opposed to the net-zero framework attempted to delay the proceedings.

At one point, the secretary general was forced to intervene in a debate over carbon rules after the US accused the IMO secretariat of bias. Saudi Arabia and the US later attempted to further stall proceedings by proposing that the rules be accepted by explicit acceptance rather than tacit, an approach to voting that seldom delivers a result.

Aggressive US attempts to limit support

The lead up to the meeting was characterized by aggressive US attempts to limit support for the net-zero framework, with Washington threatening sanctions, port fees and visa restrictions on countries voting in support of the measure.

President Trump even weighed in on his Truth Social media platform with a post Thursday saying “the US will not stand for this Global Green New Scam Tax on Shipping. Stand with the US and vote NO in London tomorrow!”

As delegates prepared to return home empty-handed, some reflected that putting the talks on hold will give countries more time to find consensus on a flagship climate law, while others fear it was a missed opportunity and the US will simply ramp up pressure on developing countries to oppose adoption at a later stage.

Jesse Fahnestock, director of decarbonization at the Global Maritime Forum, called the adjournment a “disappointing setback for shipping.”

“The adjournment for a full year creates serious challenges for meeting the timelines in the net-zero framework agreed in April and will make delivery of the sector’s decarbonization targets even more challenging,” he said.

“We encourage member states that agreed on the framework in April to re-confirm their commitment to multilateralism and continue the urgent work of developing guidelines and adopting a regulatory framework that can deliver on the IMO’s unanimously agreed greenhouse gas strategy,” he added.

Natacha Stamatiou, manager of global shipping and IMO delegation lead at the Environmental Defense Fund, said the delay means “innovation will struggle to scale, inequities will deepen and the transition to clean shipping will become harder and more costly.”

Other climate activists were more direct in their criticism. Emma Fenton, senior diplomacy director at Opportunity Green, called the outcome “a devastating indictment of member states’ lack of courage.”

“Faced with pressure, too many governments chose political compromise over climate justice, and in doing so, abandoned the countries bearing the brunt of the climate crisis,” she said after the meeting concluded.

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