

US steps up attempts to derail IMO's 'net-zero' ambitions



Next month's meeting of the IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee will decide the way forward for the decarbonization of global shipping. Photo credit: International Maritime Organization.

[Greg Knowler](#) | Sep 5, 2025, 10:47 AM EDT

Liberia, Panama and other small nations that control much of the world's shipping tonnage will likely be in the crosshairs of the Trump administration as the US steps up efforts to derail the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) "net-zero" emissions framework that is up for adoption next month.

That is according to a global shipping source who did not want to be identified, citing serious consequences facing those speaking out against the US position. Those consequences were spelled out by the US State Department this week, which threatened to impose tariffs, port duties and even visa refusals on IMO member states supporting the net-zero framework, according to a report from Reuters.

The flag states of Liberia, Panama and the Marshall Islands are home to almost half of the world's gross tonnage, and that could play a crucial role during the meeting in October of the IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC), the shipping source said.

The proposed net-zero framework, agreed in principle by a majority of IMO member states at MEPC's meeting in April, will be up for formal adoption at the IMO session scheduled Oct. 14-17 in London. While much has been made about the need for a two-thirds majority vote in favor of the framework for it to pass, the source said the outcome will be decided by member states controlling the bulk of global tonnage.

"It is a yes or no vote and two-thirds must vote yes for adoption, and if the states voting yes constitute 50% or more of the world's tonnage, then it's a done deal," the source told the *Journal of Commerce*.

"Marshall Islands, Liberia and Panama constitute more than 45% of the global tonnage and with China it is more than 50%, but it's probably more possible that smaller states will bow to the US pressure than a big state," the source added. "It's not about the big economies. It's about some very small states that have most of the fleet, and this new US bully policy is certainly a huge vulnerability within the whole system at the IMO."

US escalates opposition

The greenhouse gas emissions-cutting proposal is regarded as crucial in enabling global shipping to reach climate neutrality around 2050 by introducing fuel standards and levies on ships that fail to meet strict targets.

But the IMO measure has faced escalating pushback from Washington, with the US delegation walking out of the MEPC meeting in April in protest over the decarbonization talks.

And in August, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, Energy Secretary Chris Wright and Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said in a joint statement that President Donald Trump would not accept "any international environmental agreement that unduly or unfairly burdens the United States or harms the interests of the American people."

Asked to respond to the latest US attempt to stop the net-zero proposal, the IMO said the October meeting was the appropriate platform to address any concerns from member states.

"The IMO Net-Zero Framework was approved in April 2025 and represents a collective commitment by member states to deliver on shared goals outlined in the revised IMO

strategy on the reduction of GHG emissions that was adopted in 2023,” a spokesperson told the *Journal of Commerce*.

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