



PROTECTION OF VITAL SHIPPING LANES

Draft Council resolution on the protection of vital shipping lanes, including by upholding and respecting navigational rights and freedoms for commercial ships when transiting through straits used for international navigation

Submitted by Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Jamaica, Japan, Malaysia, Morocco, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Nigeria, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, United Arab Emirates

SUMMARY

Executive summary: This document highlights the importance of upholding and respecting the navigational rights and freedoms enjoyed by commercial ships when transiting through vital shipping lanes, including straits used for international navigation. With over 80% of global trade being carried by sea, open, safe, secure and unimpeded passage through vital shipping lanes is essential to the global economy. The document also underscores the role of the International Maritime Organization as the global regulator in ensuring the safety and security of shipping, including upholding and respecting navigational rights and freedoms such as the right of transit passage as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The document further proposes a Council resolution to reaffirm this core principle and strengthen international cooperation in this regard.

Strategic direction, if applicable: 5 (Enhance global facilitation, supply chain resilience and security of international trade) and 7 (Ensure the regulatory effectiveness of international shipping)

Output: Not applicable

Action to be taken: Paragraph 7

Related documents: Resolution A.1196(34); resolution A.1158(32) and C/ES.36/D

Introduction

1 International shipping is the lifeblood of the global economy, facilitating over 80% of world trade by volume. The global landscape of international shipping and commerce has been profoundly shaped by developments over the past several years, including the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions. Amidst the complexities of these global developments,

the stability of vital shipping lanes – including straits used for international navigation – has never been more critical.

Importance of keeping vital shipping lanes open

2 These developments underscore the global impact of the obstruction of vital shipping lanes and highlight the importance of resilient global supply chains. Any measure that threatens or hampers navigational rights and freedoms, including the right of transit passage, has far-reaching impacts on the safety and security of the international maritime community. Beyond the economic costs associated with diverted routes, increased freight rates and longer port waiting times, such disruptions place immense pressures on seafarers whose safety, well-being and health are paramount. Ensuring the openness of shipping lanes is therefore not only a commercial necessity but a humanitarian and safety imperative.

3 The cumulative impact of these global developments necessitates a clear and unified reaffirmation from IMO and the international maritime community of the importance of safeguarding navigational rights and freedoms. It is in this vein that IMO should remain steadfast in upholding the principles of international law as reflected in UNCLOS and the IMO Convention. These instruments are fundamental to global trade and ensure that international shipping can continue to operate safely, securely and efficiently.

4 The right of transit passage through straits used for international navigation is a right enjoyed by all ships. It is not an abstract legal doctrine, but one with real implications for international shipping and global supply chains. Ensuring the safety and efficiency of such vital waterways requires cooperation between states, recognizing their shared responsibility to maintain unobstructed shipping lanes. One successful model of such cooperation is the Co-operative Mechanism on Safety of Navigation and Environmental Protection in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore ("Co-operative Mechanism"), established in 2007 under IMO's "Protection of Vital Shipping Lanes" initiative. The Co-operative Mechanism fosters cooperation and communication among the littoral States, user States and stakeholders of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore ("SOMS"), including through the implementation of projects aimed at promoting safety of navigation and environmental protection in the SOMS. The Co-operative Mechanism demonstrates that common interests are best served through strong cooperation, partnership, and shared responsibility, and it continues to be strongly supported by IMO.

IMO's role in upholding navigational rights and freedoms

5 As the global regulator, IMO plays a critical role in preventing unilateral measures that could set negative precedents for maritime governance. IMO is the only recognized competent international organization under UNCLOS for establishing and adopting technical standards and safety measures in straits used for international navigation, including the adoption of traffic separation schemes, other ship routing measures, and ship reporting systems in accordance with SOLAS regulations V/10 and V/11. IMO's regulatory framework also ensures that any such measures are transparent, non-discriminatory and in strict accordance with international law. This leadership is essential for maintaining the integrity and stability of global shipping.

Need for continued cooperation

6 In view of these challenges, and in accordance with the IMO Convention and UNCLOS, it is timely for IMO, its Member States, and all maritime stakeholders, to reaffirm our commitment to protecting vital shipping lanes, in particular to uphold the right of transit passage through straits used for international navigation. Such an international approach would reaffirm that IMO is committed to ensuring open, safe and secure access through vital shipping lanes,

while guaranteeing the safety and well-being of seafarers. The co-sponsors therefore propose a Council resolution to affirm our commitment to upholding and respecting navigational rights and freedoms so that vital sea lanes remain open, secure and accessible to all.

Action requested of the Council

7 The Council is invited to consider the proposal in paragraph 6 and to adopt the draft Council resolution in the annex.

ANNEX

**RESOLUTION C.XX(137)
adopted on [XX] July 2026**

**DRAFT RESOLUTION ON THE PROTECTION OF VITAL SHIPPING LANES,
INCLUDING BY UPHOLDING AND RESPECTING THE NAVIGATIONAL RIGHTS
AND FREEDOMS FOR COMMERCIAL SHIPS WHEN TRANSITING THROUGH
STRAITS USED FOR INTERNATIONAL NAVIGATION**

THE COUNCIL,

RECALLING the purposes of the Organization as set forth in Article 1 of the Convention on the International Maritime Organization, and the primary objective to promote safe, secure and environmentally sound, efficient, and sustainable shipping through cooperation,

RECALLING ALSO resolution A.1196(34), in particular strategic direction 5 to strengthen the resilience of the global supply chain and maritime industry to enable the continued flow of goods through international shipping in times of crisis,

REAFFIRMING the principles enshrined in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea which provides the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out, including the exercise of the right of transit passage through straits used for international navigation, and recognizing that the navigational rights and freedoms set out in the Convention reflect customary international law binding upon all States,

BEARING IN MIND the decisions of the Council at its thirty-sixth extraordinary session which underscored the imperative to ensure the safety and welfare of seafarers and reaffirmed that the exercise of navigational rights and freedoms must be respected and protected under international law,

RECOGNIZING the essential role of seafarers in the maintenance of global supply chains and the risks posed to their lives and welfare by unlawful actions in straits used for international navigation,

1 REAFFIRMS the need to ensure that vital shipping lanes, including straits used for international navigation, remain open and accessible to international shipping;

2 ALSO REAFFIRMS the importance of upholding and respecting navigational rights and freedoms in accordance with international law and that the right of transit passage through straits used for international navigation should not be threatened, impeded, denied, hampered, impaired or suspended;

3 URGES all Member States to ensure that any measures taken in vital shipping lanes, including straits used for international navigation, should not discriminate in form or in fact among foreign ships or have the practical effect of denying, hampering or impairing the right of transit passage in accordance with international law;

4 ALSO URGES Member States to refrain from unlawful measures that jeopardize the safety of seafarers and international shipping, or impede, obstruct, hamper or otherwise interfere with the lawful exercise of navigational rights and freedoms in vital shipping lanes including straits used for international navigation;

5 REITERATES that any measures taken by coastal States to regulate traffic in vital shipping lanes, including the implementation of ships' routing systems like traffic separation schemes, and ship reporting systems, must be in accordance with the regulations and standards adopted by the International Maritime Organization, including SOLAS regulations V/10 and V/11;

6 CALLS UPON Member States to continue their cooperation through IMO to enhance the safety and security of navigation and to address any technical or safety challenges in a manner consistent with international law;

7 ENCOURAGES Member States to take measures, as appropriate, to protect the rights and safety of seafarers in accordance with international standards, in order to safeguard the health, including mental health, safety and well-being of seafarers;

8 ALSO ENCOURAGES Member States to enhance technical cooperation and timely and effective information-sharing to bolster the resilience of international shipping; and

9 INVITES the Secretary-General, as appropriate, to continue monitoring the situation in vital shipping lanes and provide updates to the Council on the impact of disruptions, if any, on the welfare of seafarers and international shipping.
