

What's the procedure for amending MARPOL Annex VI (in the case of the IMO Net-Zero Framework)?

Fact Sheet | 01 May 2025

General Decision Making at the MEPC

In general, decisions made at the meetings of the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) and Intersessional Working Group on Reduction of GHG Emissions from Ships (ISWG-GHG) are made by consensus, based on the Chair's understanding of the views expressed during the meetings. Member States must attend and intervene, or / and make written submissions to the meetings, to have their views considered. Votes are usually avoided, although not impossible. The Rules of Procedure for the MEPC provide further information on decision making procedures, including voting requirements, as applicable.¹

In the case of amendments to the International Convention on the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL),² a distinct procedure is followed. This is because it is an international treaty with a specific clause providing for the amendment of its annexes and protocols.

¹ At MEPC 83 in April 2025, the existing Rules of Procedure (available in Document MEPC 71/17/Add.1, Annex 22) were amended and an updated version will be circulated by MEPC Circular. In the interim, the draft revised Rules of Procedure (MEPC 83/13, annex), together with the further modifications to rule 37 (MEPC 83/WP.13, annex 1), and the text of the covering draft MEPC circular (MEPC 83/WP.13, annex 2) are available on IMO Docs.

² The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973, as modified by the Protocol of 1978 relating thereto (MARPOL).

For the IMO Net Zero Framework, approved by vote at MEPC 83, the procedure, detailed in this document, will be followed to amend Annex VI of MARPOL.

Fact box: 'Approving' the IMO Net-Zero Framework at MEPC 83

The IMO Net-Zero Framework was approved by a majority vote at MEPC 83 in April 2025. Many spectators felt the action of a vote itself was a historic moment because a vote is so rarely called.

The IMO Net-Zero Framework is intended to be included as an amendment to MARPOL. The procedure for adoption, acceptance and entry into force of an amendment to MARPOL is set out in the text of that convention. However, nothing is said about 'approval'. This is because approval is not required by the amendment procedure in MARPOL, but it is established practice at the IMO.

Because there are no specifications for approval in the text of MARPOL, the Rules of Procedure for MEPC were applied at MEPC 83. The Rules of Procedure state that:

- The Committee votes by show of hands by default. However, an oral roll call can be requested. In that case the names of present Member States are called alphabetically (in English), starting with a State chosen by lot – the roll call process was followed at MEPC 83.
- All Member States of the IMO who are present at the meeting in question are entitled to vote, irrespective of whether they are parties to MARPOL Annex VI.
- Every State has one vote. When called, a State will vote yes, no or abstain.

Procedure for adoption, acceptance and entry-into-force of amendments to MARPOL Annex VI

Summary of the Amendment Process for MARPOL	
Approval ³	The approval is not a required stage under MARPOL but is accepted practice. Decision making will follow the general decision-making procedure for the MEPC (above).
Adoption	Requires a two-thirds majority of Parties to the Convention present and voting, although, if consensus in the room can be assumed, a vote may not be needed.
Acceptance	One of two procedures could be followed, explained below.
Entry into Force	The amendment enters into force six months after the date of its acceptance.

Article 16 of the 1973 MARPOL Convention provides the procedure for amendment of the Convention and its Annexes.

Adoption: The measures will be adopted at an Extraordinary MEPC in Autumn 2025, six months after MEPC 83. As mentioned above, decisions at these meetings are usually made by consensus. However, MARPOL amendments can only be adopted by a two-thirds majority of Parties to the Convention present and voting –⁴ in this case, Parties who have ratified Annex VI. While the necessary majority could be assumed on the basis of an understanding by the Chair of consensus in the room, (and therefore does not need a vote), MARPOL Annex VI Parties must be present (in-person or online) at the Extraordinary MEPC to have their vote counted, if it does go to a vote. Member States who are not party to Annex VI cannot vote. That being said, they are still entitled to participate in the proceedings.⁵

Acceptance and entry-into-force: After ‘adoption’ of the measures by the MEPC, the amendments to MARPOL Annex VI must be ‘accepted’ by MARPOL’s Annex VI Parties before entering into force. There are two procedures for acceptance:

³ Approval is not a part of the formal amendment procedure in MARPOL.

⁴ MARPOL, Article 16(2)(d).

⁵ MARPOL, Article 16(2)(c).

- **The accepted unless rejected procedure (tacit acceptance procedure):** The amendments to Annex VI can be deemed to have been accepted without a formal vote at the end of a period – to be determined by MEPC at the time of its adoption in the Autumn session.⁶ This period shall be not less than ten months. The amendment will then be accepted, unless, during the period established by the MEPC, an objection is communicated to the IMO by not less than one third of the Parties to Annex VI or by a group Parties whose combined merchant fleets constitute no less than 50% of the gross tonnage of the world's merchant fleet. Nonetheless, the MEPC, at the time of its adoption, may still decide that the amendment should be accepted using the 'rejected unless accepted' procedure.⁷

Fact box: Gross Tonnage

For the purposes of MARPOL Annex VI, 'gross tonnage' is calculated based on the tonnage registered under each State Party's flag, in accordance with the tonnage measurement regulations contained in Annex I to the International Convention on Tonnage Measurements of Ships, 1969, or any successor

- **The rejected unless accepted procedure (explicit acceptance procedure):** An amendment to an article of the Convention shall be deemed to have been accepted on the date on which it is accepted by two thirds of the Parties to Annex VI, the combined merchant fleets of which constitute not less than 50% of the gross tonnage of the world's merchant fleet.⁸ The amendment shall then enter into force six months after the date of its acceptance with respect to the Parties which have declared that they have accepted it.⁹

The timeline for the development of the mid-term measures accommodates the accepted unless rejected procedure. The timeline allows for the measures to enter into force 16 months after their adoption in October 2025. This accounts for the ten-month minimum time-period after which an adopted measure can be accepted unless rejected, and the six-month entry-into-force period after that.

⁶ MARPOL, Article 16(2)(f)(iii).

⁷ MARPOL, Article 16(2)(f)(ii).

⁸ MARPOL, Article 16(2)(f)(i) and (ii).

⁹ MARPOL, Article 16(2)(g)(i).