Action Required: IR Commission members are invited to note the relevant outcomes of MSC111.

The Maritime Safety Committee held its 111th session at IMO Headquarters in London from 13 to 22 May 2026.

Key Outcomes

1. MASS Code for autonomous ships adopted

The Committee adopted a new non-mandatory International Code of Safety for Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships (MASS Code) to support the safe integration of AI-enabled and remotely operated commercial ships into global shipping.

The MASS Code sets out a comprehensive, goal-based framework to ensure that remotely controlled or autonomous ships are designed and operated to a level of safety, security and environmental protection that is expected of a conventional ship. They will also be required to comply with the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) and other applicable mandatory IMO instruments.

The Code applies to cargo ships that fall under SOLAS Chapter I and will take effect from 1 July 2026. As it is a non-mandatory instrument, Member States are given the opportunity to test its use while paving the way for making it mandatory under the SOLAS Convention.

The next steps for the Code are outlined below:

- December 2026 – MSC 112 to re-establish MASS Working Group for the Development of a framework for an Experience-Building Phase (EBP) of the non-mandatory MASS Code;
- 2028 - Development of the mandatory MASS Code, based on the non-mandatory Code and results from the EBP and review conducted by the relevant sub-committees. Consideration of amendments to SOLAS (new chapter) for the Code's adoption;
- By 1 July 2030 - Expected adoption of the IMO's first mandatory MASS Code, for entry into force on 1 January 2032.

2. Situation in the Strait of Hormuz

The Committee adopted a resolution requesting the support of IMO Member States for the Secretary-General's ongoing efforts to facilitate the safe evacuation of ships and seafarers trapped in the Persian Gulf.

3. Guidelines for ships using alternative fuels

The Committee continued work on the safety regulatory framework for ships using new technologies and alternative fuels. The Committee approved new guidelines to promote the safety of ships using hydrogen and ammonia as fuel; and provisions for training seafarers on ships using methyl/ethyl alcohol or ammonia as fuel.

4. Progress towards free ship tracking data for coastal States

The Committee approved amendments to the SOLAS Convention to change how the Long-Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT) system works, aiming to make global ship tracking data easier to access, while improving safety, security and environmental protection at sea. The amendments will be considered for adoption by MSC 112 in December. LRIT is a worldwide system that allows governments to track ships by receiving regular updates on their position and identity.

The amendments will allow coastal States to receive standard ship position reports free of charge, removing a major barrier to using the system. This is expected to help countries better monitor maritime activity, support search and rescue operations, and respond to issues such as illegal shipping and marine pollution.

5. Improving security of ship communications through VDES

The Committee adopted a resolution to introduce the VHF data exchange system (VDES) into the IMO regulatory framework, as an alternative to the current AIS tracking system current required of ships. The regulations expect to enter into force on 1 January 2028.

VDES is a more advanced version of AIS that allows ships and coastal authorities to send and receive more data, more quickly and more securely. VDES is designed to make ship tracking more secure by adding authentication, helping to reduce the risk of spoofing. The Committee also adopted revised Performance standards for shipborne VDES and approved Guidelines for the onboard operational use of shipborne VDES.