

MARITIME NEWS

IMO WELCOMES ENTRY INTO FORCE OF THE BBNJ AGREEMENT

The world's first global treaty to protect ocean life in international waters was entered into on 17 January 2026, bringing into effect legally-binding rules for the sustainable use and management of marine resources in the high seas.

Formally known as the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), the treaty addresses:

- Marine genetic resources, including fair and equitable sharing of benefits;
- Measures such as area-based management tools, including marine protected areas;
- Environmental impact assessments; and
- Capacity-building and transfer of marine technology.

The BBNJ Agreement enters into force following its adoption in June 2023 - a culmination of decades of negotiations and preparatory works. More than 80 nations have ratified the Agreement to date.

<https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/pressbriefings/pages/imo-welcomes-entry-into-force-bbnj.aspx>

MINISTRY FOR PORTS, SHIPPING AND WATERWAYS INAUGURATES CAPACITY AUGMENTATION WORKS OF VIZHINJAM INTERNATIONAL SEAPORT IN KERALA

Ministry for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, inaugurated the capacity augmentation works of Vizhinjam International Seaport at Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

The inauguration marked the commencement of construction works for Phases II, III and IV of the Vizhinjam International Seaport, which are being implemented under a fast-tracked and integrated development programme. The expansion aims to substantially augment India's container transshipment capacity and strengthen the country's maritime infrastructure ecosystem.

Vizhinjam International Seaport commenced commercial operations of Phase I on 3 December 2024 with a designed capacity of 1 million TEUs. Within a short period of operation, the port demonstrated strong performance, handling over 1.43 million TEUs and operating at more than 130 per cent capacity utilisation. The port has established direct connectivity with major global shipping routes across Europe, the Americas, Africa and the Far

East, reinforcing its role as a key national trans-shipment terminal.

Under the capacity augmentation programme, the existing container berth will be extended to create a continuous 2-kilometre-long container berth, the longest in India. The breakwater will be extended to 3.88 kilometres, and additional container yards will be developed through sea reclamation. The port's cargo handling capacity will be strengthened through the addition of ship-to-shore and yard cranes, enabling the handling of next-generation container vessels of up to 28,000 TEUs. On completion, the port will be capable of handling up to five mother vessels simultaneously, with an operational throughput capacity of up to 5.7 million TEUs per annum.

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2218315®=3&lang=1>

INSV KAUNDINYA REACHES MUSCAT, REVIVING 5,000-YEAR-OLD INDIA-OMAN MARITIME RELATIONSHIP

The Indian Naval Sailing Vessel INSV Kaundinya arrived in Muscat (Oman) after successfully completing its maiden voyage from Porbandar, marking a significant moment in the shared maritime heritage of India and Oman. The ship along with the crew were received by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways (MoPSW), at Port Sultan Qaboos.

The voyage of the traditionally - built stitched sail vessel highlights the deep-rooted maritime, cultural and civilizational ties between the two nations that span more than 5,000 years. It also underscores the role of oceans as connective corridors that have enabled sustained interaction between India and Oman over centuries. The expedition holds added significance as both countries commemorate 70 years of diplomatic relations.

Named after the legendary Indian mariner Kaundinya, the vessel showcases India's indigenous maritime knowledge, craftsmanship and sustainable shipbuilding practices. The project was envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and executed by the Indian Navy with the support of naval architects, archaeologists, traditional shipbuilding designers and master shipwrights. Inspired by a fifth-century CE vessel depicted in the Ajanta Cave paintings, INSV Kaundinya was constructed using ancient Indian shipbuilding techniques, including stitched-plank construction without modern nails or metal fastenings.

India and Oman continue to strengthen maritime ties through enhanced connectivity, sustainable shipping initiatives and growing collaboration across ports, shipbuilding and sea-faring sectors.

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2214685®=3&lang=1>

IWDC 3.0 APPROVES OVER ₹1,500 CRORE PROJECTS TO DRIVE GREEN MOBILITY, CARGO MOVEMENT & RIVER TOURISM

The third meeting of the Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC 3.0) concluded in Kochi, Kerala, with a comprehensive roadmap to expand India's inland water transport network, approve major infrastructure investments, and strengthen Centre-State coordination to unlock full economic potential of the country's rivers.

IWDC 3.0 identified projects worth more than ₹1,500 crore, aimed at accelerating green mobility, strengthening multimodal logistics and promoting river-led economic development. Foundation stones were laid for projects exceeding ₹150 crore, including river cruise jetties in Kerala, Gujarat, Karnataka, Odisha and Telangana, supporting the expansion of cruise tourism circuits across the country.

Kerala emerged as a key focus area at IWDC 3.0 with a series of major announcements aimed at strengthening inland water transport and logistics in the state. The Jal Vahak Cargo Promotion Scheme is being explored to be expanded to other National Waterways including Kerala, offering reimbursement of up to 35% of the total operating expenditure incurred on cargo movement through inland waterways. The scheme is expected to encourage private participation by enabling cargo owners to hire vessels operated by entities other than IWAI or ICSL, making it particularly attractive for major shipping companies, freight forwarders, trade bodies and operators handling bulk and containerised cargo. Valid initially for three years, the initiative will help optimise supply chain networks and enhance the commercial viability of water-based logistics. At IWDC, the commencement of Fixed Day Scheduled Sailing Services on commercially viable stretches to demonstrate the readiness of waterways as an efficient, cost-effective and environmentally sustainable mode of cargo transport was also announced. The Kerala package also includes the development of river cruise jetties and induction of one survey vessel, further strengthening the state's capacity for passenger movement, tourism and safe navigation.

IWDC 3.0 concluded with a shared commitment by the Centre and states to scale up inland water transport, strengthen regional connectivity, promote cleaner transport solutions and position rivers as engines of economic growth. The meeting reaffirmed inland waterways as a preferred, future-ready mode of transport for both cargo and passengers, contributing to cleaner transport, smarter logistics and a stronger India.

India's inland waterways continue to play a crucial role in decongesting road and rail networks by offering a fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly mode of transport. With 111 national waterways spread across 23 states and 4 union territories, inland waterways are increasingly

supporting initiatives such as Ro-Ro vehicle movement and cruise tourism. IWAI, under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, remains the nodal agency responsible for the development, maintenance and regulation of national waterways.

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2217807®=3&lang=1>

RAFT OF SHIPPING RULES IN FORCE FROM JANUARY 01, 2026

A set of amendments to key IMO treaties and Codes have entered into force on January 01, 2026 including:

Preventing and responding to bullying, harassment and sexual assault

Amendments to the Seafarers' Training, Certification and Watchkeeping Code (STCW Code) aim to prevent and respond to violence and harassment in the maritime sector, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault.

Strengthening safety through improved training and certification of fishing vessel personnel

Amendments to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel, 1995 (STCW-F Convention), together with the newly-established mandatory Code on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel (STCW-F Code), enforced w.e.f. January 01, 2026.

Mandatory reporting of lost containers

Containers lost overboard can be a serious hazard to navigation and safety at sea as well as to the marine environment. Amendments to the MARPOL and SOLAS Conventions on mandatory reporting of lost containers entered into force on January 01, 2026.

Safety of onboard lifting appliances and anchor handling winches

A new SOLAS regulation II-1/3-13 covers requirements for the application, design and construction, operation, inspection, testing and maintenance of onboard lifting appliances and anchor handling winches.

Enhancing the safety of ships using oil fuel

Amendments to SOLAS chapter II-2 are intended to prevent the supply of oil fuel not complying with SOLAS flashpoint requirements (60°C).

Safety measures for non-SOLAS ships operating in polar waters - Polar Code and SOLAS

Amendments to the Polar Code, together with associated amendments to the SOLAS Convention, extend the requirements concerning safety of navigation and voyage planning to fishing vessels of 24 m in

length overall and above, pleasure yachts of 300 GT and above not engaged in trade and cargo ships of 300 GT and above but below 500 GT, operating in polar waters.

Amendments to the 2011 ESP Code

New amendments to the International Code on the Enhanced Programme of Inspections during Surveys of Bulk Carriers and Oil Tankers (ESP Code) relate to the role of administration in relation to firms conducting thickness measurements of the hull structure of bulk carriers and oil tankers under the 2011 ESP Code, including audits of such firms by the Administration in order to ascertain that the firm is duly organized and managed.

International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code (IMDG)

The revised and updated consolidated International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code (IMDG) incorporating amendment 42-24 entered into force from January 01, 2026.

Grain Code

Amendments to the International Code for the Safe Carriage of Grain in Bulk (Grain Code) introduce a new class of loading conditions for special compartments.

IGF Code amendments to enhance safety

Amendments made to the International Code of Safety for Ship Using Gases or Other Low-flashpoint Fuels (IGF Code), adopted at MSC 108 to enhance safety by regulating a variety of issues, such as pump suction wells, safety relief valve discharge, fuel preparation rooms, structural fire protection and hazardous zones.

Life-saving Appliance (LSA) Code

The amendments introduced to the LSA Code provide new requirements on ventilation for totally enclosed lifeboats (installed on or after January 01, 2029).

<https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/pressbriefings/pages/raft-of-shipping-rules-in-force-from-1-january-2026.aspx>

MARITIME TERMINOLOGY

BIOTECHNOLOGY

“*Biotechnology*” means any technological application that uses biological systems, living organisms, or derivatives thereof, to make or modify products or processes for specific use.

AREA-BASED MANAGEMENT TOOL

“*Area-based management tool*” means a tool, including a marine protected area, for a geographically defined area through which one or several sectors or activities are managed

with the aim of achieving particular conservation and sustainable use objectives in accordance with this Agreement.

COLLECTION IN SITU

“*Collection in situ*”, in relation to marine genetic resources, means the collection or sampling of marine genetic resources in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

“*Environmental impact assessment*” means a process to identify and evaluate the potential impacts of an activity to inform decision-making.

MARINE PROTECTED AREA

“*Marine protected area*” means a geographically defined marine area that is designated and managed to achieve specific long-term biological diversity conservation objectives and may allow, where appropriate, sustainable use provided it is consistent with the conservation objectives.

MARINE TECHNOLOGY

“*Marine technology*” includes, *inter alia*, information and data, provided in a user-friendly format, on marine sciences and related marine operations and services; manuals, guidelines, criteria, standards and reference materials; sampling and methodology equipment; observation facilities and equipment for in situ and laboratory observations, analysis and experimentation; computer and computer software, including models and modelling techniques; related biotechnology; and expertise, knowledge, skills, technical, scientific and legal know-how and analytical methods related to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity.

SUSTAINABLE USE

“*Sustainable use*” means the use of components of biological diversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to a long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations.

UTILIZATION OF MARINE GENETIC RESOURCES

“*Utilization of marine genetic resources*” means to conduct research and development on the genetic and/or biochemical composition of marine genetic resources, including through the application of biotechnology.

<https://docs.un.org/en/a/conf.232/2023/4>