

The International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments and Current Management Options

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In the last ten years or so, scientists, governments, the community and industry have come to increasingly recognize the issue of transfer of harmful aquatic species and pathogens between ecosystems through ships' ballast water and sediments. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the shipping industry have taken concerted action to find ways to address this issue. IMO has been working on this issue for more than 15 years, developing two sets of guidelines and devising a new, legally binding international regime to meet the new challenges. In February 2004, IMO's efforts were rewarded with the adoption of the new International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments by its member States. Considering the enormous scientific and technological challenges, and the highly complex and multi-disciplinary nature of the problem, development of this new instrument is perhaps one of the most significant global environmental achievements in the early part of this century. The new Convention builds on the complementary roles of coastal, port and flag States as well as the shipping industry in protecting the marine environment by embracing effective ballast water management measures, which include ballast water exchange, new shipboard treatment technologies, new infrastructure such as sediment reception facilities, to name a few. The private sector has been rising to the challenge by developing a number of ballast water treatments and monitoring technologies to address the issue. Several of these technologies have been approved by IMO. Despite the progress achieved by the international community to address ballast water issues, the challenges of managing ballast water discharges continues to be a complex in the East Asian Seas, considering the high shipping intensity and the large number of ports located in close proximity to some of the biodiversity hotspots of the region. The new IMO Convention and associated guidelines, however, provide the much needed framework for developing an integrated systems approach to ballast water management which includes sampling and monitoring tools, ballast water treatment technologies, verification and approval of engineering systems, risk assessment tools among several other sub-components. The presentation will cover the salient features of the BWM Convention and also the various



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management options that are currently available to address this serious marine environmental issue.