Advancing Global Biofouling Management
Towards Binding International Measures

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From Hull to Habitat: Addressing Biofouling for Healthier Oceans and Ports

June 3rd, 2026

The International Maritime Organization

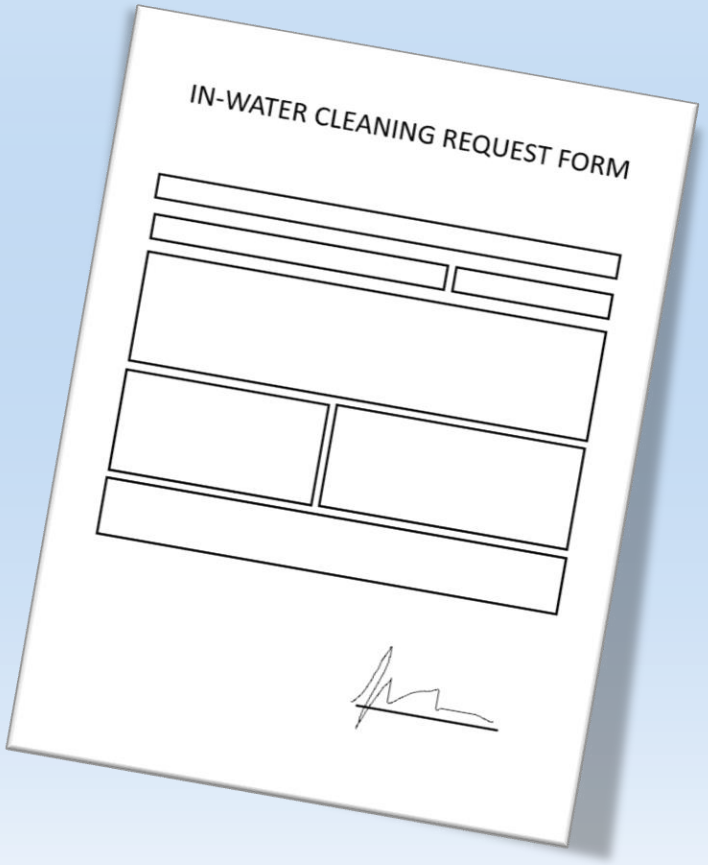
- The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is a **United Nations specialized agency** responsible for measures to improve the safety and security of international shipping and to **prevent pollution from ships**.
- It consists of an Assembly, a Council, five main Committees with a number of Sub-Committees to support the work of the main technical committees.
- Biofouling work is undertaken under the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) and its associated Sub-Committee on Pollution Prevention and Response (PPR)

Milestones & IMO Developments

2011	• IMO adopted the *2011 Guidelines for the control and management of ships' biofouling to minimize the transfer of invasive aquatic species*
2012	• IMO adopted the *Guidance for minimizing the transfer of invasive aquatic species as biofouling (hull fouling) for recreational craft*
2018	• GEF-UNDP-IMO launched GloFouling Partnerships Project
2022	• IMO-Norway Programme launched “Accelerating Transfer of Environmentally Sound Technologies through demonstration pilots to reduce biofouling and related emissions” (TEST Biofouling)
2023	• IMO adopted the *2023 Guidelines for the control and management of ships' biofouling to minimize the transfer of invasive aquatic species,* updating the 2011 Guidelines
2025	• MEPC 83 approved the *Guidance on in-water cleaning of ships’ biofouling*

Current Role of Ports

- Ports help protect the environment by ensuring cleaning minimizes the release of invasive species, biocides, plastics and other waste substances into local waters.
- Depending on local regulations, ports can set rules for their waters to assess in-water cleaning providers and approve (or refuse) ship-specific cleaning requests.
- Ports help determine when, where and under what conditions cleaning can occur, taking account of berth use, currents, visibility, weather and other port activities.
- Ports drive implementation on the ground.



Towards a Legally Binding Framework

- Canada, et al. submitted **MEPC 83/14/1** proposing a new output 7.16 to develop a unified international instrument on the control and management of ships' biofouling
- MEPC 83 approved a new output on the *Development of a legally binding framework for the control and management of ships' biofouling to minimize the transfer of invasive aquatic species*
- Output added to the 2026-2027 and 2028-2029 work programme

Terms of Reference : Output 7.16

PPR Sub-Committee is instructed to **develop a legally binding framework** to minimize the **transfer of invasive aquatic species**:

- considering the **potential release of hazardous materials and microplastics**; and
- taking into account **implications for reduction of air pollution, GHG emissions and URN**

Pollution Prevention & Response 13

January 2026

- Member States, IGOs and NGOs submitted twenty-four documents to PPR 13.
  - Proposals addressed the form of the legally binding framework, refinement of the output Terms of Reference, and Terms of Reference for the creation of a Correspondence Group
  - Identified knowledge gaps included:

- **Science & Experience**
- **Fouling Ratings**
- **Testing, Standards & Certification**
- **IWC Performance, Capture & Effluent**
- **Coatings, Compatibility & Prevention**
- **MGPS & Niche Areas**
- **Inspection & Compliance Monitoring**
- **Risk Assessment**
- **Planning, Documentation & Recordkeeping**
- **Operational Capacity & Feasibility**

- PPR 13 recommended that the legally binding framework should be a new **standalone convention**, which MEPC 84 agreed to in April 2026.
- PPR 13 Launched a Correspondence Group on *Development of a Legally Binding Framework on Ships' Biofouling.*

Correspondence Group

An IMO (sub) committee can establish a Correspondence Group to advance work between meetings among Member States and organizations under a coordinator selected by the secretariat

Iterative Correspondence Group work will explore and address **knowledge gaps** identified in PPR 13 submissions:

Work operates under approved terms of reference, which define the scope of work, deliverables, and timelines including:

.1 identify the objectives of the instrument
.2 develop the draft structure and list of articles, regulations and appendices
.3 identify a list of guidelines to be developed
.4 develop a draft work plan for the output;
.5 if time allows initiate the drafting of text for articles, regulations and appendices; and
.6 submit a written report to PPR 14

Correspondence Group : Ongoing Work

- 33 Member States, 21 NGOs, and 1 IGO have registered to participate in the Correspondence Group
- 4 Rounds total of Correspondence Group Work spanning from March until Fall 2026
  - **Early Rounds:** Biofouling-Related Hazards and Risk Mitigation, and Framework Objectives
  - **Later Rounds**: Outline of Convention, draft text for in-person consideration at PPR 14
- Final report of the Correspondence Group must be finished by October 23rd, 2026
- PPR 14 is scheduled for January 25-29, 2027

Correspondence Group : Long Term

The Correspondence Group is expected to be re-established across multiple iterations to advance the development of the legally binding framework

A finalized draft legal framework and recommendations on the way forward is to be provided to MEPC 89 (2029)

Develop guidelines identified to support the effective implementation of the standalone instrument

Looking Forward

Thank you

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