

# Shipping can't follow Trump's lead and slow-steam on climate change

The US president may be able to ignore the effects of global warming. Other world leaders don't have that luxury, and nor does our industry

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The Marshall Islands is the second-largest ship register in the world, accounting for 230 million tonnes of vessels on the water or on order.

The national flag is ocean blue to reflect the Pacific, while a white-and- orange stripe runs through the middle to represent its chain of hundreds of islands.

And yet the highest point of this country is just a few metres above the current sea level, making it one of the most vulnerable on the planet.

The Marshall Islands is, with Fiji and other low-lying Pacific island states, already discussing where their populations could be evacuated to in the event of being overwhelmed by water.

This, then, is the front line in the battle against climate change. In a nutshell, failure to seize control of rising carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions will render the Marshall Islands register and its population homeless.

This is one example of the reasons why this week's talks at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in London are so important.

Donald Trump may think the UN climate change agreement hammered out in Paris at the end of 2015 is something the US can opt out of. But the vast bulk of world political leaders think otherwise, and most responsible business leaders concur.

That is why it was encouraging to see the establishment of a Global Industry Alliance of shipowners, oil companies and classification societies getting together to tackle carbon emissions, in the run-up to the IMO's critical Marine Environment Protection Committee sessions over the past few days.

It should be said that I have not met shipowners, operators or maritime states who think, like Trump, that we can all put our heads in the sand.

Even developing countries such as Brazil, India and Nigeria that submitted their written and combined contribution to the debate seem convinced action must be taken. But they are also understandably concerned that their own economic progress should not be unduly undermined.



They want any IMO plan to reduce carbon

IMO secretary-general Kitack Lim (second from left) receives ministers from the Pacific micro-states of Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands at the organisation's London headquarters this week for climate change talks

emissions to be ambitious but realistic. They do not want an absolute cap on the maritime sector, claiming it would be an “undesirable hindrance on world trade and the development of all countries”.

These are nations, let's be honest, that did not create the greenhouse gas problem in the first place.

But there is also a danger that the concerns of the developing countries become a stalling mechanism at a time when more and more policymakers are losing patience with our industry.

The European Union has already warned that the IMO must have a credible action plan in place or face tough measures being imposed unilaterally.

A more progressive approach submitted in writing ahead of the IMO meeting came from the University of Central London, with input from Lloyd's Register. This accepts that net carbon emissions will need to peak in 2025 and warns that this cannot be done by offsetting — buying a credit for someone else's CO2 reduction.

The report admits there is a “high level of uncertainty” over the costs for energy-efficiency technologies and new fuels but is in no doubt there will be a role for hydrogen and biofuels as bunkers of the future.

The fact is that while heated discussions go on inside that IMO room and outside, shipowners need to be acting.

Slow steaming — adopted by many companies in reaction to over-tonnaging and the lack of growth in world trade following the financial crisis — has shown itself to be a significant method of reducing carbon in shipping.

This is, after all, a way of also cutting operating costs, although clearly slower journey times can undermine competitiveness and trim profitability at times too.

There  
are a  
host of  
other



A devastating king tide hits the Marshall Islands, whose highest point is only 33 feet above sea level

relatively low-cost ways shipowners can help themselves, such as bulbous bows, innovative propellers and anti-fouling paints.

But this will not be enough. More R&D cash and working models are urgently needed to find other ways of improving energy efficiency and developing new fuels.

There is still the ultimate threat of imposing ferocious carbon taxes and other non-market-based solutions that are outside the control of the industry. Slow steaming on change is not an option for shipping. The Marshall Islands certainly needs our help.

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