

Extraordinary times

The Micronesian Center for Sustainable Transport explains why the Pacific Island States will be keeping a close eye on an extraordinary MEPC meeting set to take place in October

From 14–17 October 2025, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) will meet for an extraordinary session that could reshape the decarbonisation trajectory of global shipping.

The Extraordinary Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) session will determine the fate of amendments to MARPOL Annex VI, namely the adoption of a Greenhouse Gas Fuel Intensity (GFI) regulation and a Net-Zero Transition Fund.

At stake is the sector's first binding measures for reaching net-zero emissions by 2050.

The Pacific Island States, through their 6PAC+ alliance, are watching closely—not just for adoption, but for answers.

THE PACIFIC BLOC'S CALCULATED RETURN

In April, MEPC 83 ended in acrimony. A universal GHG levy proposed by the Pacific bloc and supported by a clear majority of States was sidelined in favour of an inadequate and complicated compromise proposed by the MEPC Chair. Rather than endorse a compromised deal, Pacific States abstained from the final vote.

As Tuvalu's Minister for Transport, Energy, Communication and Innovation, Simon Kofe, said in his closing statement: 'The current proposal lacks the necessary incentives for industry to make the necessary shifts toward cleaner technologies...

The absence of robust pricing mechanism leaves us concerned that the ambition of the 2023 Strategy may not be fully realised.'

But abstention did not signal withdrawal, it signalled a recalibration. 'We are coming to deliver,' Kofe now affirms. 'This isn't about compromise. It's about execution.'

A FRAMEWORK IN NUMBERS: \$12 BILLION, 10% REDUCTIONS

The new mid-term package may be politically significant, but the numbers expose its limits. According to a UCL Shipping and Oceans Research Group report, the regulation is expected to deliver only a 10% reduc-



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tion in emissions by 2030, far short of the IMO's 2023 strategy, which targeted at least 20% striving for 30%.

Lead author Dr. Tristan Smith described the result as 'bittersweet'. While the regulatory framework is globally binding, he noted, that: 'The reason this regulation exists is to address the climate crisis... and that crisis stems from hard, physical and ultimately existential limits that should be driving much higher ambition.'

The regulation is projected to generate \$11–12 billion annually, but it is unclear whether those revenues will stretch far enough to support both early adoption of zero-emission fuels and a just and equitable transition for vulnerable states.

'The Extraordinary MEPC must be more than symbolic,' said Minister Ralph Regenvanu of Vanuatu. 'It is our chance to hardwire justice into the global decarbonisation framework. The Pacific didn't come this far to rubber-stamp weak regulation.'

WHO GETS TO TRANSITION?

The regulation includes a hybrid model of GHG pricing and credit trading. High-performing ships earn surplus units. Low performers pay into the Fund. In theory, this is a market signal. In practice, it will privilege countries with capital access and industrial infrastructure.

As Kofe noted in April: 'Clear, predictable signals need to be sent to industry to drive significant investment in decarbonisation technologies.' Without those signals, and the economic incentives to back them up, developing countries will likely remain in the waiting room of the energy transition.

Kofe also emphasised that 'the current proposal fails to fully implement Article 4.5 of the IMO's 2023 GHG Strategy', which requires a balanced approach between technical and

economic elements. The absence of a strong levy mechanism, he argued, risks undermining both climate ambition and equity.

'At this stage, we are not just negotiating emissions reductions, we are designing the foundations of a global zero-carbon

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economy,' said Ambassador Albon Ishoda of the Marshall Islands. 'The Pacific is no longer asking to be included, we are shaping the very mechanisms that will enable this transition.'

BEYOND LONDON: WHAT'S AT STAKE

The Extraordinary MEPC session in October is not just a procedural step for the Pacific, it is a pivotal moment in our fight to secure a fair stake in the energy transition. Our hope is simple but powerful: to shape a regulatory system that ensures no island, no community, and no future generation is left behind.

For the 6PAC+ and the broader global alliance of SIDS and LDCs, our mission at this session is to ensure that if the GFI and Net-Zero Fund are adopted, the most vulnerable have assurances that they will be implemented with integrity, ambition, and equity. We seek a framework that sends strong, predictable signals to industry, signals that will catalyze decarbonization and ensure the technologies of tomorrow are accessible to all, not just those with capital and power today.

We want to see clarity on revenue flows:

how they will be distributed, governed, and accessed. Without that clarity, the risk is real that the poorest nations will again bear the highest costs, while those most responsible for emissions benefit disproportionately from delay.

If we are left behind, it will not just be a missed opportunity, it will be a policy failure with deep human consequences. Higher shipping costs, disrupted supply chains, rising food insecurity, and economic exclusion are not hypothetical scenarios for our region – they are lived realities. And they will worsen without fair access to the benefits of the transition.

This moment is about more than climate, it is about fairness, legitimacy, and the future of international cooperation. We are coming to London with solutions, with partners, and with purpose. The Pacific is not asking for special treatment. We are asking for what is fair. What is promised. What is necessary.

One thing is clear: the Pacific isn't waiting to be invited to the table. It's coming to build it.

 The Micronesian Centre for Sustainable Transport (MCST) aims to help Pacific nations lead in sustainable practices and develop solutions for long-term decarbonisation.

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