

Green group attacks IMO scrap policy

Critics say the top shipping body will fail in its objective to clean up the industry.

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The International Ship Recycling Association (ISRA), which promotes the green scrapping of vessels, has raised serious concerns over efforts by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to clean up the industry.

ISRA claims the new Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships appears unlikely to achieve its prime objective of halting substandard practices found mainly in the Indian subcontinent.

ISRA's "A" list of members includes some well-known recycling yards, mainly in China and Turkey, such as Jiang Xiagang Changjiang Shiprecycling Yard, Leyal Ship Recycling and Sparrow Point Shipyard.

ISRA is waiting to see what happens in July at the IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC62), where convention guidelines are on the agenda. But it has already drawn up a highly-critical submission for the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention. (COP 10), which meets in October in Cartagena, Colombia.

It is signed on behalf of ISRA by secretary-general Bernard Veldhoven, who tells TradeWinds that The Hague-based association wants to see the IMO formulate very strict guidelines, especially in relation to the design and construction of recycling yards.

In line with ISRA policy, this would require concrete, impermeable floors; no tidal influences and the ability to control the movement of ships throughout the dismantling process.

This is not the case with the beaching of vessels in places like Pakistan, Bangladesh and India.

Veldhoven is critical of the IMO, avoiding the term "beaching" in case member states fear it may be banned and refuse to ratify the convention. He cannot see the point, he says, in preserving rela-

tions with countries who "have no respect for the environment and human safety" in the hope that one day things will change.

At COP10 it will be decided whether the Hong Kong Convention has an equivalent level of control and enforcement as the existing Basel Convention covering the transboundary movement of waste.

Parties to Basel could, if they believe the IMO convention is equivalent or better, decide to remove ships from their waste list or alternatively, as ISRA believes, the status quo should remain. Veldhoven says much depends on what is achieved at MEPC62.

Alleged "weak points" in the Hong Kong Convention are listed by ISRA as including a failure, based on draft guidelines, to ensure that in future only environmentally-sound management (ESM) facilities will be permitted to recycle ships.

Neither does the convention guarantee responsible downstream management of waste generated from cutting ships or include a "prior informed consent" (PIC) control mechanism preventing dismantling at substandard



SCRAPPING: ISRA believes the Indian subcontinent will need at least five years to come up with new recycling solutions. Pictured, ships beached at Chittagong in Bangladesh back in 2005

Photo: Bloomberg News

facilities. It concludes that PIC clauses contained in Basel and European regulations should remain in force.

ISRA says there is no sign so far that substandard yards will be replaced by ESM facilities.

The association, whose members handle the green recycling of vessels for various European as well as Asian owners, insists for its "A" list companies, permanent or semi-permanent barriers to protect the shore, land and air from any form of emissions. It requires the "lifting" of dismantled items and their transport on properly designed equipment to areas of hard standing.

The association also questions the feasibility of leaving the authorisation of scrapping facilities by the Hong Kong Convention to so-called competent authorities in individual countries but without control at a higher independent level.

A serious threat remains of ships ending up in facilities authorised by such bodies but "clearly not suitable", says ISRA.

It concludes that the convention risks missing its goal if the shipbreaking industry continues on a substandard basis, while showing "contempt" toward those facilities that have invested a huge amount of money to upgrade and now face competition from breakers showing no respect for human safety and the environment.

"This situation should not be granted by international law," says its COP10 submission.

Speaking to TradeWinds, Veldhoven accepts there has to be a transition period.

"It needs a programme of at least five years to come up with good solutions for these [Indian subcontinent] countries," he said. "If others can do it, why should there be exceptions?"