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COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF THE
SEA-BED AND OCEAN FLOOR BEYOND THE
LIMITS OF NATIONAL JURISDICTION

Note by the Inter-governmental Maritime Consultative
Organization (IMCO)*

1. The Committee may wish to recall that the Economic and Technical Sub-Committee, in its Interim Report (A/AC.138/SC.2/6, paragraph 98), proposed that the International Conventions under the auspices of IMCO, i.e. the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea by Oil, 1954 (as amended) and the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, 1960, be complemented so as to take into account problems relating to:

- (i) the safety of construction, equipment and operation of drilling rigs, production platforms, submersibles, and other devices used for the exploitation and transportation of sea-bed resources;
- (ii) the safety of the people working on them;
- (iii) the danger arising from ships navigating in the area where underwater operations take place;
- (iv) the spillage of oil and other noxious or hazardous substances into the sea due to the exploitation of sea-bed resources.

2. In respect of these matters, the Committee may wish to note that the Maritime Safety Committee of IMCO, which is a constitutional body, elected by the Assembly and responsible for dealing with all technical and safety matters affecting international shipping, has taken action as outlined in the following paragraphs.

* Circulated at the request of the representative of the Inter-governmental Maritime Consultative Organization.

Safety of Personnel

3. Certain measures for improving the safety of personnel working on drilling rigs and production platforms have already been formulated by the Maritime Safety Committee. These deal with:

(a) life-saving appliances and equipment as well as emergency measures and procedures for mobile off-shore units; these were communicated, to Member Governments as provisional guidelines on the subject;

(b) recommendations regarding radiocommunication requirements intended to achieve uniformity and to allow such units to integrate efficiently into the existing system for maritime distress; these recommendations will be considered by the Assembly at its sixth regular session in October 1969.

Safety of Navigation

4. The navigational problems arising from the operation of such platforms include:

(a) protection of ships navigating in the area and the units themselves;

(b) measures to prevent obstruction of fairways and shipping lanes in the areas where such platforms are operating or may subsequently move.

The measures recommended for the first purpose provide for dissemination and charting of information regarding the position of the platforms through the issuing of Notices to Mariners and other methods familiar to mariners. The establishment of fairways through off-shore exploration areas, which will have to take into account relevant principles adopted by IMCO with respect to routing of ships, is the subject of another recommendation formulated by the Maritime Safety Committee. These recommendations will be submitted to the sixth regular session of the Assembly (October 1969) for adoption.

5. In addition to the above, appropriate light and sound signals, based on relevant recommendations issued by the International Association of Lighthouse Authorities, are under consideration by the Maritime Safety Committee and its Sub-Committee on Safety of Navigation.

Safety of Construction

~~6. The Maritime Safety Committee has further decided to initiate studies on the constructional and fire protection aspects of drilling rigs and production~~

platforms. To this end the Committee instructed certain of its Sub-Committees to include in their Terms of Reference the following:

(i) Sub-Committee on Subdivision and Stability

Study of the stability, subdivision and load lines of drilling rigs and production platforms.

(ii) Sub-Committee on Ship Design and Equipment

Study of the design criteria and construction of drilling rigs and production platforms.

(iii) Sub-Committee on Fire Protection

Fire safety of drilling rigs and production platforms, including structural fire protection, fire-fighting equipment, electric installations, alarm systems and emergency lights, machinery not related to the drilling operations, including pumps and emergency generators, etc.

7. The Maritime Safety Committee felt that, as a first step studies should be carried out by above-mentioned Sub-Committees on all types of drilling rigs and production platforms, taking into account the work already done by various organizations including Classification Societies, in order to determine to what extent action by IMCO might be required with reference to safety measures for the different types of drilling rigs and production platforms.

Prevention of Pollution

8. The Maritime Safety Committee also instructed its Sub-Committee on Marine Pollution to study the problems raised in A/RES/2467(B) (XXIII) and to make proposals for the prevention and control of pollution of the sea, land and air by ships, vessels and other equipment operating in the marine environment.

9. The Sub-Committee on Marine Pollution noted the information contained in the Interim Report of the Economic and Technical Sub-Committee (A/AC.138/SC.2/6) particularly that contained in paragraph 98 and paragraphs 44 and 45 concerning the

possible causes of pollution arising from sub-sea mineral exploitation. With a view to formulating suitable international control measures dealing with such pollution, the Sub-Committee initiated the collection of information from the member States of IMCO on the following aspects:

- (i) the main types of exploration and exploitation of the sea-bed at present being carried out;
- (ii) the extent to which pollution, occurring in the course of these activities, gives rise to difficulties;
- (iii) the instances in which pollution has resulted from accidents during these activities;
- (iv) the pollutive substances which have been involved;
- (v) the action taken to deal with the pollution;
- (vi) regulations or other national measures which have been introduced with a view to ensuring that such pollution is reported and to provide the means of preventing it.

10. IMCO is a co-sponsoring agency, with FAO, UNESCO, and WMO, of the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Pollution and co-operates with the United Nations, other specialized agencies of the United Nations system and a number of international inter-governmental organizations interested in marine pollution. The Group of Experts at its first session held at IMCO Headquarters London, from 17-21 March 1969, noted that participation as co-sponsoring agencies was open to other United Nations organizations having particular responsibilities in marine pollution and expressed the view that co-sponsorship by WHO and IAEA would be particularly useful.

11. One of the principal objects of the Group is to advise the sponsoring agencies on the scientific aspects of the needs and criteria for inter-governmental instruments for the control of marine pollution. It is in this context that IMCO has asked the advice of the experts on such problems as the identification of pollutants other than oil, the effects of pollutants, including oil, on marine organisms and the use and effects of chemical means for absorbing, precipitating and removing such pollutants from the sea.

12. At its first session, the Group noted Part B of United Nations General Assembly resolution 2467 (XXIII) with particular reference to the study mentioned

in paragraphs 2 and 3 of that Part with a view to clarifying all aspects of protection of the living and other resources of the sea-bed and ocean floor against the consequences of pollution and other hazardous and harmful effects arising from the various methods used for exploration and exploitation of such resources.

13. In particular the Group noted that there are indications that underwater mining activities will be extended in the future and emphasized the need for research into survey techniques and the methods used in such operations to ensure that serious pollution problems do not develop. The removal of gravel and sand from the sea bed, for example, was mentioned as having a number of deleterious effects on fishing and fishery resources. The Group felt that a long-term study would be required to indicate the extent of disturbances in the ecological system caused by such operations. In preparation for the second session, set down for February 1970, a paper is being prepared on the problems produced by the increase of suspended solids caused by dredging or underwater mining, with special reference to tropical waters. The outcome of the Group's discussion, as shown in the report of its first session (GESAMP I/11), has been brought to the attention of the IMCO Sub-Committee on Marine Pollution in connexion with the preparation of future international agreements.

14. IMCO has also participated with UN, UNESCO, WHO, WMO and IAEA in an Inter-Secretariat meeting, held at Geneva in July 1969, which prepared a draft outline of a study on marine pollution which might arise from the exploration and exploitation of the sea bed and ocean floor as required by Part B of General Assembly resolution 2467 (XXIII). The sponsoring agencies of the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Pollution offered the assistance of that Group in drafting these sections of the study which fall within its terms of reference (see A/AC.138/13).

Other IMCO contributions to oceanographic research and related matters

15. In conjunction with the United Nations, UNESCO and WMO, IMCO will participate in the Inter-Secretariat Committee on Scientific Programmes Related to Oceanography. The Committee will examine questions of co-ordination concerning the scientific programmes relating to oceanography of the participating

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organizations and will develop agreed proposals for the joint action needed for the expeditious achievement of the goals of resolutions 2414 (XXIII) and 2467 D (XXIII) relating to the long-term and expanded programme of oceanic exploration and research, of which the International Decade of Ocean Exploration is an important element.

16. In addition to the matters mentioned in paragraphs 3-14 above, IMCO is giving specialized attention to problems the solution of which will greatly benefit the expanded programme of oceanic research.

17. As an example, the organization has undertaken to encourage the simplification of formalities and other requirements relating to the operation of ships engaged in scientific services.

18. In addition, the IMCO Legal Committee has been seized of matters concerned with the obligations and liabilities of States involved in the exploration, use and exploitation of the area concerned (see paragraph 28, sub-paragraphs (ii), (v) and (vii) to (x) of A/AC.138/SC.1/4) and has determined that its work in the 1970-1971 period should include consideration of:

- (a) legal problems arising from scientific oceanic research and the exploration and exploitation of the sea-bed and ocean floor, including
 - (i) the legal status of manned and unmanned devices used in oceanographic investigations, ODAS (Ocean Data Acquisition Systems);
 - (ii) legal matters within IMCO's competence concerning the peaceful uses of the sea-bed and ocean floor beyond the limits of national jurisdiction;
 - (iii) legal problems relating to the preservation of the human environment (in connexion, inter alia, with the prospective United Nations Conference on the Preservation of the Human Environment).

19. Of the matters mentioned immediately above, IMCO, in collaboration with UNESCO and the IOC, has been engaged since 1962 on both the legal and the safety aspects of the operation of scientific stations at sea. In 1971 or 1972, UNESCO/IOC intends that the results of this long-term study will be placed before a Conference of Governments for the elaboration of a comprehensive convention on these aspects of oceanic research.