

Ambition Statement

Maritime governance task force

Context

The global maritime industry is governed by a framework of international treaties and conventions. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provides the legal foundation for ocean governance, while the International Maritime Organization (IMO) provides the detailed technical and operational rules that give effect to the frameworks and promote regulatory consistency across jurisdictions. The IMO is the primary regulator, with nation-states responsible for implementing and enforcing the treaties and conventions that protect human health and the environment while ensuring secure and efficient shipping. Additionally, the High Seas Treaty, a landmark international agreement to protect marine biodiversity in international waters, came into effect in January 2026.

This system, however, leaves essential governance gaps and relies on flag states, port states, and coastal states to consistently interpret, implement, and enforce their responsibilities. In recent years, with an ever more turbulent geopolitical environment, and with some countries lacking the capacity, political will, or institutional integrity to carry out their duties, the shortcomings of this system are becoming increasingly critical. Differences in how international instruments are applied locally lead to uneven outcomes across jurisdictions, creating inconsistent oversight and increasing the risk of a multi-tier system.

Despite uneven, weak, or absent enforcement of regulations, there are no tangible repercussions for states that fail to properly uphold their responsibilities. Similarly, there are few incentives for stakeholders to comply, and even fewer for going beyond compliance. These governance and enforcement gaps are being exploited by a steadily growing segment of substandard shipping that employs various deceptive practices to engage in lucrative business beyond the reach of effective oversight. This is enabling a parallel system within international shipping in which certain actors can sidestep accountability, revealing serious flaws in how the system functions in practice.

As a result, seafarers are increasingly left unpaid, stranded, or working under unsafe conditions. Substandard vessels and poor sailing practices raise the likelihood of incidents, collisions, groundings, and vessel abandonments, and coastal communities and marine ecosystems face heightened risks of oil spills that threaten both the environment and local livelihoods. Each incident erodes trust in the system that is meant to keep ships safe, crews protected, and oceans healthy. In addition to the societal hazards, this situation undermines responsible businesses and threatens the licence to operate that the maritime industry has traditionally held.

The ambition

As a task force of industry stakeholders convened by the Global Maritime Forum, we are committed to strengthening maritime governance. We envision a resilient and trusted maritime governance system that protects seafarers, safeguards the marine environment, and ensures that all ships operating in international trade meet required vessel and management standards and employ safe sailing practices. We aim to strengthen transparency, accountability, and enforcement mechanisms across the maritime governance system, reducing the space in which substandard and deceptive shipping practices can operate, while supporting responsible actors that uphold high standards.

To achieve this, we will work across the maritime value chain and with governments and international institutions to identify governance and enforcement gaps and propose and support concrete policy options within existing and emerging international frameworks. Within five years after the formation of the task force at the Annual Summit of the Global Maritime Forum in 2025, by the end of 2030, we will also implement practical market-based solutions that prepare for future compliance, including potential incentive mechanisms for quality operators, and expand and promote identified industry best practices.



GLOBAL
MARITIME
FORUM



GLOBAL
MARITIME
FORUM

Principles

To work towards the stated ambition, the task force will apply the following principles:

- **Collaborative:** We will seek to drive consensus within the maritime value chain and across geographies, and between industry, governments, civil society, and academia.
- **Action-oriented:** We will focus on developing concrete actions the industry can take—based on data, technology, and evidence—and test solutions when appropriate.
- **Accountable:** All members commit to high standards in their operations to lead by example, strengthen trust in the industry, and foster stringent policymaking.
- **Holistic:** We will consider the full life cycle of shipping, recognising that governance gaps can cause challenges to all stages, from shipbuilding to dismantling.