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**INTERIM GUIDANCE TO FACILITATE REMOTE SESSIONS OF THE  
COMMITTEES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

1 The Maritime Safety Committee, at its second extraordinary session (16 to 21 September 2020), the Legal Committee, at its first extraordinary session (16 to 21 September 2020), the Marine Environment Protection Committee, at its first extraordinary session (16 to 21 September 2020), the Technical Cooperation Committee, at its first extraordinary session (16 to 21 September 2020), and the Facilitation Committee, at its first extraordinary session (16 to 21 September 2020), approved the *Interim guidance to facilitate remote sessions of the Committees during the COVID-19 pandemic*, as set out in the annex, taking into account the *Interim guidance to facilitate remote sessions of the IMO Council during the COVID-19 pandemic* (C/ES.32/D, annex 3), which was adopted by the Council at its thirty-second extraordinary session (4 May to 3 August 2020).

2 Member States are invited to apply the annexed Interim Guidance with immediate effect, as appropriate, and to bring it to the attention of their representatives attending remote sessions of the IMO Committees and their subsidiary bodies, advising them to strictly observe its provisions.

3 The Committees agreed to keep this Interim Guidance under review, based on experience gained in conducting remote sessions.

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## **ANNEX**

### **INTERIM GUIDANCE TO FACILITATE REMOTE SESSIONS OF THE COMMITTEES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

#### **Introduction**

1 The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic crisis has affected many countries around the world and has resulted in the temporary closure of the IMO Headquarters building, thus preventing the possibility of physical meetings being held. Associated travel restrictions and lockdown conditions have limited movement and travel of staff and delegates, requiring important adjustments to the methods of work of IMO.

2 Being aware of the challenges ahead with remote sessions, a cautious approach has been taken in developing this Guidance. The Guidance is based on the experience gained by the Council in the conduct of remote sessions in these extraordinary times. The experiences of the United Nations and other United Nations agencies have also been noted in this regard.

3 This Guidance should be kept under review, as necessary, to incorporate experience gained in the conduct of remote sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4 It is noted that the existing rules of procedure of the Committees and the organization and method of work of the Committees and their subsidiary bodies, as appropriate, continue to be applicable and should only be waived when necessary.

5 It is also noted that, in order to ensure full participation and understanding by all delegations, the normal established practices for the conduct of committee meetings should be maintained as far as possible.

#### **Purpose**

6 The purpose of this Guidance is to facilitate the work of the Committees using a structured and transparent methodology aimed at standardizing the conduct of remote sessions in view of the exceptional circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic.

7 This Guidance is for temporary use during the COVID-19 pandemic and is not intended to provide an interpretation of the IMO Convention or the rules of procedure of the Committees or to set a precedent for the methods of work of the Organization.

#### **Invitation to a remote session**

8 The rules of procedure of the Committees on the requirements for convening a session (regular or extraordinary) remain applicable for the invitation to a remote session. A remote session is one that contains both meetings by correspondence and virtual meetings during the session.

9 The circular letter containing the invitation to a remote session should indicate that the session is proposed to be conducted remotely necessitating the waiver of rule 3 of the rules of procedures of the Committees with respect to the requirement for the session to be held at IMO Headquarters. The circular letter should provide the opportunity for Member States to comment on the waiver indicating their objection, if any, before adopting the agenda at the start of the session.

10 The circular letter should also indicate the date of the session and the chair's proposal of the modalities and timelines for the conduct of the remote session, including the provisional agenda.

11 Before holding a remote session, the chair, in consultation with the Secretariat, should publish information regarding the submission of additional documents to any postponed sessions of the Committees as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a predetermined format for holding remote sessions, delegates would be given foresight of the relevant milestones for the session and would also support the chair and the Secretariat in organizing the logistical arrangements.

### **E-conferencing platform for the virtual meetings of a remote session**

12 Virtual meetings should cater for data security, confidentiality and simultaneous interpretation requirements.

13 Virtual meetings should be of maximum 3 hours' duration with a 15-minute break. Consideration should be given to rotation of the commencement timing of virtual meetings within a remote session.

14 With the aim of ensuring equal and full participation for virtual meetings scheduled in a remote session, the Secretariat should provide a manual on how to use the e-conferencing platform and connectivity testing, as well as make arrangements for alternative means of communication with the Secretariat in case of technical problems.

### **Conduct of business**

#### ***Credentials***

15 For credentials, the existing rules of procedure of the Committees should apply to remote sessions. Provisional acceptance of electronic copies of credentials should be permitted.

#### ***Registration***

16 The registration of delegates for remote sessions should be the same as for physical sessions, that is through the Online Meeting Registration System (OMRS). When a remote session includes virtual meetings, OMRS should be used to draw up the distribution list for the link to participate in virtual meetings in a remote session and specific instructions regarding the distribution of links should be provided to all registered attendees. The distribution list should also be circulated to all participants as an information document to facilitate communications between Member States during a remote session.

#### ***Quorum***

17 A meeting scheduled in a remote session would commence when the quorum is achieved according to the existing rules of procedure of the Committees.

#### ***Agenda***

18 For remote sessions, consideration of the agenda should be taken as a matter of priority during the meetings and urgent agenda items should be prioritized.

### **Decision-making process**

19 In keeping with the IMO spirit, every effort should be made to take decisions in a remote session by consensus. The decisions taken by the committee during a remote session will be included in the draft report for consideration in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 21 below. In some cases, on specific matters during a meeting, the chair of the committee may prepare a draft summation and/or proposed solutions, as necessary, with the aim of achieving consensus, to be circulated on IMODOCS for further review by the committee during the remote session.

20 Should a need for voting arise, the Secretariat should be requested to submit options to facilitate remote voting for consideration. Such voting should be made in writing.

### **Report and adjournment of the remote session**

21 After consideration of the draft report of the committee in a virtual meeting, the Secretariat will prepare the final draft report for publication on IMODOCS. Delegations will have 5 working days from publication of the final draft report to comment by correspondence. Comments should address whether the report accurately reflects the decisions taken during the remote session and should not reopen discussion on decisions taken during the remote session. The chair, supported by the Secretariat, will facilitate resolution of any comments received, as necessary. After the conclusion of the 5-day correspondence period, the Secretariat, in consultation with the chair, will publish a document on IMODOCS containing the comments received, together with an explanation of how they have been addressed. After the above document has been published, the final report will be prepared in due course for publication on IMODOCS.

22 The Secretariat will circulate the final report on IMODOCS. Should errors in the report be detected by the Secretariat or by any delegation, those errors will be corrected through the normal processes used for physical meetings.

### **Statements made during a virtual meeting**

23 Statements or interventions made in a virtual meeting are considered as official statements and need not be submitted in writing to the Secretariat, unless a delegation specifically requests their statement be included in the report.

### **Recording of virtual meetings**

24 The existing rules of procedures on publicity should apply to virtual meetings. All virtual meetings should be recorded and made available on IMODOCS by the Secretariat, except for those parts of a meeting that are held in private. This includes whether the meeting will be recorded and how the recording may be used.

25 The existing terms and conditions of media attendance at meetings of the IMO Assembly, Council and committees and their subsidiary bodies should apply to remote sessions.

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