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**MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN (MAP)  
REGIONAL MARINE POLLUTION EMERGENCY RESPONSE CENTRE FOR THE  
MEDITERRANEAN SEA (REMPEC)**

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Twelfth Meeting of the Focal Points of the Regional  
Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre  
for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC)

REMPEC/WG.41/INF.9  
Date: 28 April 2017

Malta, 23-25 May 2017

Original: English

Agenda Item 15

**GUIDELINES FOR THE REDUCTION OF UNDERWATER NOISE FROM COMMERCIAL SHIPPING  
TO ADDRESS ADVERSE IMPACTS ON MARINE LIFE**

**Note by the Secretariat**

**SUMMARY**

**Executive Summary:** This document presents the Guidelines for the reduction of underwater noise from commercial shipping to address adverse impacts on marine life, as approved by the IMO's MEPC at its sixty-sixth session held in London, United Kingdom from 31 March to 4 April 2014.

**Action to be taken:** Paragraph 8

**Related documents:** MEPC.1/Circ.833, UNEP(DEPI)/MED IG.22/28, REMPEC/WG.41/INF.3

**Background**

1 The International Maritime Organization (IMO)'s Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC), at its sixty-sixth session held in London, United Kingdom from 31 March to 4 April 2014, with a view to providing guidance on the reduction of underwater noise from commercial shipping, and following a recommendation made by the IMO's Sub-Committee on Ship Design and Equipment, at its fifty-seventh session, approved the Guidelines for the reduction of underwater noise from commercial shipping to address adverse impacts on marine life ("the Guidelines"), which are set out in the Appendix to the present document.

2 The Guidelines are non-mandatory and intended to provide general advice about reduction of underwater noise to designers, shipbuilders and ship operators. They are not intended to form the basis of a mandatory document.

3 Given the complexities associated with ship design and construction, the Guidelines focus on primary sources of underwater noise. These are associated with propellers, hull form, on board machinery, and operational aspects. Much, if not most, of the underwater noise is caused by propeller cavitation, but on board machinery and operational modification issues are also relevant. The optimal underwater noise mitigation strategy for any ship should at least consider all relevant noise sources.

4 The Guidelines consider common technologies and measures that may be relevant for most sectors of the commercial shipping industry. Designers, shipbuilders, and ship operators are encouraged to also consider technologies and operational measures not included in the Guidelines, which may be more appropriate for specific applications.

5 IMO Member States were invited, through MEPC.1/Circ.833, to use the Guidelines from 7 April 2014 and to bring them to the attention of all parties concerned.

6 Moreover, in accordance with Specific Objective 13 (Reduction of marine noise caused by ships) of the Regional Strategy for Prevention of and Response to Marine Pollution from Ships (2016-2021), hereinafter referred to as the Regional Strategy (2016-2021), as presented in the Annex to document REMPEC/WG.41/INF.3, which were approved by the Nineteenth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (“the Barcelona Convention”) and its Protocols (COP 19), held in Athens, Greece from 9 to 12 February 2016 (UNEP(DEPI)/MED IG.22/28, Decision IG.22/4), all Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention are expected to raise awareness, with *medium priority*, through the dissemination of the advice contained in the Guidelines among their national designers and shipbuilders, as well as operators of ships flying their flag, urging them to implement noise mitigation strategies on board their ships.

7 Finally, the Guidelines are being disseminated to the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention pursuant to the Programme of Work and Budget of the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) of the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment), also referred to as UN Environment/MAP, for the biennium 2016-2017, which was adopted by COP 19 (UNEP(DEPI)/MED IG.22/28, Decision IG.22/20).

**Action requested by the Meeting**

8 **The Meeting is invited to take note** of the information provided in the present document.

**APPENDIX**

**Guidelines for the reduction of underwater noise from commercial shipping to  
address adverse impacts on marine life**

(MEPC.1/Circ.833)



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MEPC.1/Circ.833  
7 April 2014

**GUIDELINES FOR THE REDUCTION OF UNDERWATER NOISE FROM COMMERCIAL SHIPPING TO ADDRESS ADVERSE IMPACTS ON MARINE LIFE**

1 The Marine Environment Protection Committee, at its sixty-sixth session (31 March to 4 April 2014), with a view to providing guidance on the reduction of underwater noise from commercial shipping, and following a recommendation made by the Sub-Committee on Ship Design and Equipment, at its fifty-seventh session, approved the annexed *Guidelines for the reduction of underwater noise from commercial shipping to address adverse impacts on marine life*.

2 Member Governments are invited to use the annexed Guidelines from 7 April 2014 and to bring them to the attention of all parties concerned.

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## ANNEX

### GUIDELINES FOR THE REDUCTION OF UNDERWATER NOISE FROM COMMERCIAL SHIPPING TO ADDRESS ADVERSE IMPACTS ON MARINE LIFE

#### 1 Preamble

1.1 Concern has been raised that a significant portion of the underwater noise generated by human activity may be related to commercial shipping. The international community recognizes that underwater-radiated noise from commercial ships may have both short and long-term negative consequences on marine life, especially marine mammals.

1.2 It is important to recognize that both the technical and cost-effectiveness of measures considered, either individually or in combination, will be strongly dependent on the design, operational parameters, and mandatory requirements relevant for a particular ship. A successful strategy to reduce radiated noise should consider interactions and contributions from measures provided to achieve other objectives such as reduction of onboard noise and improvements in energy efficiency.

1.3 When efforts have been made to mitigate underwater noise, as far as reasonable and practical, evaluation should be undertaken to determine the success or otherwise of ship noise reduction efforts and to guide and enhance future activities at noise reduction. Such evaluation can include forms of radiated-noise measurements, simulations or other ways of data gathering.

#### 2 Application

2.1 These Guidelines can be applied to any commercial ship.

2.2 These Guidelines do not address the introduction of noise from naval and war ships and the deliberate introduction of noise for other purposes such as sonar or seismic activities.

#### 3 Purpose

3.1 These non-mandatory Guidelines are intended to provide general advice about reduction of underwater noise to designers, shipbuilders and ship operators. They are not intended to form the basis of a mandatory document.

3.2 Given the complexities associated with ship design and construction, the Guidelines focus on primary sources of underwater noise. These are associated with propellers, hull form, onboard machinery, and operational aspects. Much, if not most, of the underwater noise is caused by propeller cavitation, but onboard machinery and operational modification issues are also relevant. The optimal underwater noise mitigation strategy for any ship should at least consider all relevant noise sources.

3.3 These Guidelines consider common technologies and measures that may be relevant for most sectors of the commercial shipping industry. Designers, shipbuilders, and ship operators are encouraged to also consider technologies and operational measures not included in these Guidelines, which may be more appropriate for specific applications.

## 4 Definitions

4.1 *Cavitation inception speed* is the lowest ship speed at which cavitation occurs.

4.2 *Propeller cavitation* is the formation and implosion of water vapour cavities caused by the decrease and increase in pressure as water moves across a propeller blade. Cavitation causes broadband noise and discrete peaks at harmonics of the blade passage frequency in the underwater noise spectrum. The broadband noise is caused by growth and collapse of a vast amount of individual cavitation bubbles in water. The discrete noise peaks are caused by the volume fluctuations of the sheet and tip vortex cavities.

4.3 *Underwater noise, or the underwater-radiated noise level*, for the purposes of these Guidelines refers to noise from commercial ships\*.

## 5 Predicting underwater noise levels

5.1 Underwater noise computational models may be useful for both new and existing ships in understanding what reductions might be achievable for certain changes in design or operational behaviour. Such models may be used to analyse the noise sources on the ship, the noise transmission paths through the ship and estimate the total predicted noise levels. This analysis can help shipowners, shipbuilders and designers, to identify noise control measures that could be considered for the specific application, taking into account expected operational conditions. Such measures may include amongst others: vibration isolation mounts (i.e. resilient mounts) for machinery and other equipment, dynamic balancing, structural damping, acoustical absorption and insulation, hull appendages and propeller design for noise reduction.

5.2 Types of computational models that may assist in reducing underwater noise include:

- .1 Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) can be used to predict and visualize flow characteristics around the hull and appendages, generating the wake field in which the propeller operates;
- .2 Propeller analysis methods such as lifting surface methods or CFD can be used for predicting cavitation;
- .3 Statistical Energy Analysis (SEA) can be used to estimate high-frequency transmitted noise and vibration levels from machinery; and
- .4 Finite Element Analysis (FEA) and Boundary Element Method (BEM) may contribute to estimate low-frequency noise and vibration levels from the structure of the ship excited by the fluctuating pressure of propeller and machinery excitation.

5.3 The value of a modelling exercise is enhanced if its predictive capabilities are assessed in case studies under various operational conditions.

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\* Underwater-radiated noise level is reported in sound pressure levels in decibels and expressed as 10 times the logarithm of the square of the ratio of the rms sound pressure to a reference pressure of 1 micro Pascal. When it is a ship source level, the sound pressure level is adjusted to a level at 1 m from the source.

## 6 Standards and references

6.1 Underwater noise should be measured to an objective standard for any meaningful improvements.

- .1 The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has developed the (ISO/PAS) 17208-1 – Acoustics – Quantities and procedures for description and measurement of underwater sound from ships – Part 1: General requirements for measurements in deep water. This measurement standard is for deep water which implies that the water depth should be larger than 150 m or 1.5 times overall ship length (engineering method), whichever is greater. This is a temporary publicly available standard. This standard is based on the American National Standards Institute and the Acoustical Society of America (ANSI/ASA) S12.64-2009 "Quantities and Procedures for Description and Measurement of Underwater Sound from Ships, Part 1: General Requirements".
- .2 ISO is also developing ISO/DIS 16554 – Ship and marine technology – Measurement and reporting of underwater sound radiated from merchant ships – deep-water measurement, which is expected to be published in 2013. The standard would provide shipyards, shipowners and ship surveyors with a well-established measurement method for underwater sound radiated from merchant ships for use at the final delivery stage of ships.

6.2 Several research ships have been designed using the noise specification proposed by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) Cooperative Research Report No.209 (CRR 209). It should be noted that the ICES CRR 209 noise specification was designed for fishery research ships so that marine life would not be startled during biomass surveys; it was not intended to be used as a commercial ship design standard to prevent potential harm of marine life. However, certain design arrangements used to meet ICES CRR 209 may still be useful for new commercial ships to reduce underwater noise.

6.3 Other underwater noise rating criteria are available and may prove useful as guidance.

## 7 Design considerations

7.1 The largest opportunities for reduction of underwater noise will be during the initial design of the ship. For existing ships, it is unlikely to be practical to meet the underwater noise performance achievable by new designs. The following design issues are therefore primarily intended for consideration for new ships. However, consideration can also be given to existing ships if reasonable and practicable. While flow noise around the hull has a negligible influence on radiated noise, the hull form has influence on the inflow of water to the propeller. For effective reduction of underwater noise, hull and propeller design should be adapted to each other. These design issues should be considered holistically as part of the overall consideration of ship safety and energy efficiency.

### 7.2 *Propellers*

7.2.1 Propellers should be designed and selected in order to reduce cavitation. Cavitation will be the dominant radiated noise source and may increase underwater noise significantly. Cavitation can be reduced under normal operating conditions through good design, such as optimizing propeller load, ensuring as uniform water flow as possible into propellers (which can be influenced by hull design), and careful selection of the propeller characteristics such as: diameter, blade number, pitch, skew and sections.

7.2.2 Ships with a controllable pitch propeller could have some variability on shaft speed to reduce operation at pitch settings too far away from the optimum design pitch which may lead to unfavourable cavitation behaviour (some designs may be able to operate down to a shaft speed of two thirds of full).

7.2.3 The ship and its propeller could be model tested in a cavitation test facility such as a cavitation tunnel for optimizing the propeller design with respect to cavitation induced pressure pulses and radiated noise.

7.2.4 If predicted peak fluctuating pressure at the hull above the propeller in design draft is below 3 kPa (1st harmonic of blade rate) and 2 kPa (2nd harmonic) for ships with a block coefficient below 0.65 and 5 kPa (1st harmonic) and 3 kPa (2nd harmonic) for ships with a block coefficient above 0.65, this could indicate a potentially lower noise propeller. Comparable values are likely to be 1 kPa higher in ballast condition.

7.2.5 Noise-reducing propeller design options are available for many applications and should be considered. However, it is acknowledged that the optimal propeller with regard to underwater noise reduction cannot always be employed due to technical or geometrical constraints (e.g. ice-strengthening of the propeller). It is also acknowledged that design principles for cavitation reduction (i.e. reduce pitch at the blade tips) can cause decrease of efficiency.

### 7.3 *Hull design*

7.3.1 Uneven or non-homogeneous wake fields are known to increase cavitation. Therefore, the ship hull form with its appendages should be designed such that the wake field is as homogeneous as possible. This will reduce cavitation as the propeller operates in the wake field generated by the ship hull.

7.3.2 Consideration can be given to the investigation of structural optimization to reduce the excitation response and the transmission of structure-borne noise to the hull.

## 8 **Onboard machinery**

8.1 Consideration should be given to the selection of onboard machinery along with appropriate vibration control measures, proper location of equipment in the hull, and optimization of foundation structures that may contribute to reducing underwater radiated and onboard noise affecting passengers and crew.

8.2 Designers, shipowners and shipbuilders should request that manufacturers supply information on the airborne sound levels and vibration produced by their machinery to allow analysis by methods described in section 5.2 and recommend methods of installation that may help reduce underwater noise.

8.3 Diesel-electric propulsion has been identified as an effective propulsion-train configuration option for reducing underwater noise. In some cases, the adoption of a diesel-electric system should be considered as it may facilitate effective vibration isolation of the diesel generators which is not usually possible with large direct drive configurations. The use of high-quality electric motors may also help to reduce vibration being induced into the hull.

8.4 The most common means of propulsion on board ships is the diesel engine. The large two-stroke engines used for most ships' main propulsion are not suitable for consideration of resilient mounting. However, for suitable four-stroke engines, flexible couplings and resilient mountings should be considered, and where appropriate, may significantly reduce underwater noise levels. Four-stroke engines are often used in combination with a gear box and controllable pitch propeller. For effective noise reduction, consideration should be given to mounting engines

on resilient mounts, possibly with some form of elastic coupling between the engine and the gear box. Vibration isolators are more readily used for mounting of diesel generators to foundations.

8.5 Consideration should be given for the appropriate use of vibration isolation mounts as well as improved dynamic balancing for reciprocating machinery such as refrigeration plants, air compressors, and pumps. Vibration isolation of other items and equipment such as hydraulics, electrical pumps, piping, large fans, vent and AC ducting may be beneficial for some applications, particularly as a mitigating measure where more direct techniques are not appropriate for the specific application under consideration.

## **9 Additional technologies for existing ships**

In addition to their use for new ships, the following technologies are known to contribute to noise reduction for existing ships:

- .1 design and installation of new state-of-the-art propellers;
- .2 installation of wake conditioning devices; and
- .3 installation of air injection to propeller (e.g. in ballast condition).

## **10 Operational and maintenance considerations**

10.1 Although the main components of underwater noise are generated from the ship design (i.e. hull form, propeller, the interaction of the hull and propeller, and machinery configuration), operational modifications and maintenance measures should be considered as ways of reducing noise for both new and existing ships. These include, among others:

### **10.2 *Propeller cleaning***

Propeller polishing done properly removes marine fouling and vastly reduces surface roughness, helping to reduce propeller cavitation.

### **10.3 *Underwater hull surface***

Maintaining a smooth underwater hull surface and smooth paintwork may also improve a ship's energy efficiency by reducing the ship's resistance and propeller load. Hence, it will help to reduce underwater noise emanating from the ship. Effective hull coatings that reduce drag on the hull, and reduce turbulence, can facilitate the reduction of underwater noise as well as improving fuel efficiency.

### **10.4 *Selection of ship speed***

10.4.1 In general, for ships equipped with fixed pitch propellers, reducing ship speed can be a very effective operational measure for reducing underwater noise, especially when it becomes lower than the cavitation inception speed.

10.4.2 For ships equipped with controllable pitch propellers, there may be no reduction in noise with reduced speed. Therefore, consideration should be given to optimum combinations of shaft speed and propeller pitch.

10.4.3 However, there may be other, overriding reasons for a particular speed to be maintained, such as safety, operation and energy efficiency. Consideration should be given in general to any critical speeds of an individual ship with respect to cavitation and resulting increases in radiated noise.

10.5 ***Rerouteing and operational decisions to reduce adverse impacts on marine life***

Speed reductions or routing decisions to avoid sensitive marine areas including well-known habitats or migratory pathways when in transit will help to reduce adverse impacts on marine life.

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