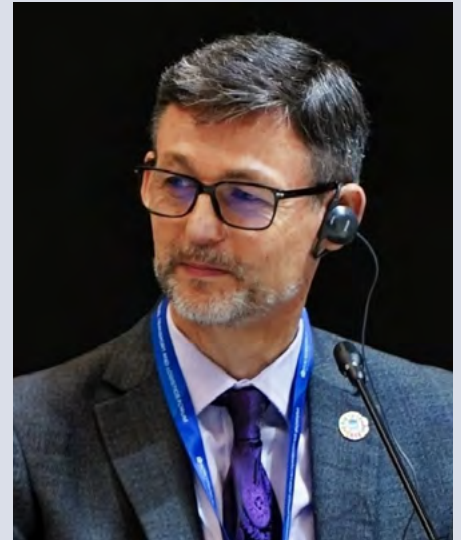


Q&A with Damien Chevallier

In this extended Q&A we talk to Damien Chevallier who, last year, took over as Director of the Maritime Safety Division at IMO.



How would you explain the role of the IMO Maritime Safety Division?

The Maritime Safety Division (MSD) is the technical division of the IMO Secretariat which focuses on the areas of safety of shipping; the human element - including seafarer training; navigation; search and rescue; cargo safety and operational safety; maritime security; and facilitation of international maritime traffic.

Technical officers support Member States with the processing of submissions to the Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) and the Director, MSD performs the role of Secretary to the MSC, working closely with the chair. The MSC deals with all matters related to maritime safety and maritime security which fall within the scope of IMO, covering both passenger ships and all kinds of cargo ships. This includes updating the SOLAS Convention and related codes, such as those covering dangerous goods, life-saving appliances and fire safety systems. The MSC also deals with human element issues, including amendments to the STCW Convention on training and certification of seafarers.

The MSD also provides the Secretary for the Facilitation Committee (FAL) which deals with matters related to the facilitation of international maritime traffic, including the arrival, stay and departure of ships, persons and cargo from ports. The Committee addresses electronic business including the single window concept and aims to ensure that the right balance is struck between regulation and the facilitation of international maritime trade.

MSD technical officers support the work of the Sub-Committees which report to the MSC and provide the Secretary role for five of those Sub-Committees, namely:

Sub-Committee on Carriage of Cargoes and Containers (CCC)

Deals with the safe handling, stowage, and transport of dangerous goods, bulk cargoes, and containers.

Sub-Committee on Human Element, Training and Watchkeeping (HTW)

Focuses on seafarer competency, training standards, and all aspects related to the human element.

Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communications and Search and Rescue (NCSR)

Manages routing systems, navigational aids, communication systems, and global maritime search and rescue coordination.

Sub-Committee on Ship Design and Construction (SDC)

Covers the structural integrity, intact/damage stability, and design specifications of various ship types.

Sub-Committee on Ship Systems and Equipment (SSE)

Handles onboard machinery, fire protection, life-saving appliances, and electrical installations.

MSD technical officers may also be involved with the other two sub-committees, namely:

Sub-Committee on Implementation of IMO Instruments (III)

Focuses on the consistent global enforcement and implementation of IMO treaties and regulations, casualty analysis and lessons learned.

Sub-Committee on Pollution Prevention and Response (PPR)

Addresses marine pollution, oil spill response, emissions, ballast water management and any other marine pollution related topics.

What is currently top of the agenda at the Maritime Safety Committee?

The MSC and its Sub-Committees continue to address key safety issues arising from the ongoing and future energy transition in shipping. This includes the safety regulatory framework for ships using new technologies and alternative fuels – including developing guidelines for the safety of ships using alternative fuels such as hydrogen and ammonia; and guidelines for the training of seafarers who need to develop new skills while addressing the specific risks of each fuel type.

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At the same time, the HTW Sub-Committee has embarked on the comprehensive review of the STCW convention and Code, following instruction from the MSC. This review is expected to take several years given that the initial gap analysis identified more than 400 gaps which need to be addressed to ensure the training treaty is fit for the needs of today's and tomorrow's seafarers.

There is continual review and update of regulations stemming from casualty analysis or new technology, as well as updates to mandatory Codes, including: the International Maritime Solid Bulk Cargoes (IMSBC) Code; the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code; the International Code for Fire Safety Systems (FSS Code); and the International Life-Saving Appliance (LSA) Code.

What successes has the MSC had in recent years?

The decisions of the MSC often stem from work carried out in the Sub-Committees, correspondence groups and working groups.

This year, in May 2026, the MSC adopted the new International Code of Safety for Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships (MASS Code) to support the safe integration of AI-enabled and remotely operated commercial ships into global shipping. The MASS Code sets out a comprehensive, goal-based framework to ensure that remotely controlled or autonomous ships are designed and operated to a level of safety, security and environmental protection equivalent to that expected of a conventional ship. This followed intensive work, including a comprehensive regulatory scoping exercise to identify which regulations would need to be reviewed or addressed for varying degrees of autonomy.

Another key area of achievement is the development and progressive adoption of regulatory frameworks for alternative fuels. This includes ongoing amendments to the IGF and IGC Codes, as well as the approval of interim guidelines for fuels such as ammonia, hydrogen and methanol. These instruments provide a robust, goal-based safety framework that enables innovation while ensuring that new fuels meet the same high standards of safety and environmental protection as conventional fuels.

In parallel, the MSC has also initiated forward-looking work on emerging propulsion technologies. This includes the early stages of revising the existing regulatory framework for nuclear-powered ships, recognizing renewed interest in nuclear propulsion. The Committee has also advanced consideration of ships powered by batteries, including safety aspects related to energy storage systems, as well as wind-assisted propulsion technologies, supporting the safe uptake of wind propulsion as part of the decarbonization pathway.

Other important steps include the decision to launch a comprehensive revision of the IMO guidelines on the implementation of the International Safety Management (ISM) Code, for both Administrations and companies. The revision aims to address gaps in the Code's implementation and will take into account recommendations from an independent study commissioned by the IMO Secretariat on the ISM Code's effectiveness and effective implementation.

There are many other decisions of the committee, including adoption of amendments and approval of various guidance documents and guidelines on many different aspects of maritime safety and security.

The key success of the MSC is the way it brings together all IMO Member States to discuss all matters impacting maritime safety, while bringing in experience and expertise from the many international non-governmental organizations in consultative status with IMO.

How does the MSC impact on the world of marine insurance?

Marine insurance protects ships, cargo and related maritime assets against loss or damage during transport – and marine insurers encourage proper risk management and adherence to safe operating practices. So the MSC's work has a huge impact on marine insurance because all of its work aims to support safer shipping.

Reviews and updates to regulations — and the adoption of new regulations — are all aimed at enhancing the safety of life at sea and reducing the risk of damage and loss of life at sea.

Investigations into marine casualties are fed into an analysis process under the IMO Sub-Committee on Implementation of IMO Instruments (III) and relevant recommendations filter through to the MSC as needed, in case a review or amendment to regulations is required.

So IMO's continuous work to maintain high safety standards on ships is highly relevant to the world of marine insurance and we are grateful for the expertise and input provided by the insurance sector — in particular through the NGOs with consultative status at IMO, including IUMI.

How did your career path take you to become Director of the Division?

My career has been shaped by a progressive transition from technical expertise to leadership in maritime safety and international regulation. I started in shipbuilding and defence, working on complex programmes involving submarines, aircraft carriers and frigates, which gave me a solid foundation in engineering and risk management.

I then joined the French maritime administration, where I took on increasing responsibilities in maritime safety leadership, notably as Deputy Director of Maritime Safety, overseeing key areas such as flag State responsibilities, port State control and safety of navigation.

As Deputy Permanent Representative to the IMO, I played an active role in multilateral negotiations and European coordination, including on greenhouse gas reduction, one of the most strategic transformations of the sector.

I later joined the IMO Secretariat as Chief of Staff to the Secretary-General, further strengthening my strategic and organizational perspective.

This path has allowed me to combine technical credibility, regulatory experience and international leadership, leading to my current role as Director of the Maritime Safety Division, where I contribute to shaping the global maritime safety agenda.

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Continued

What would you like to achieve whilst in post?

My first priority is to strengthen the resilience of international shipping in an increasingly complex and uncertain environment, marked by geopolitical tensions and evolving risks. This requires a global safety framework that is robust, adaptable and capable of ensuring the continuity of maritime trade even in times of crisis.

Secondly, I am committed to maintaining a coherent and consistent regulatory framework that upholds the highest standards of safety. It is essential that regulations are developed not only with technical robustness in mind, but also with their end users at the forefront — seafarers, operators and administrations. Regulations must be practical, clear and implementable, particularly when addressing innovation and alternative fuels, while always keeping the human element at the centre.

Finally, I would like to further enhance the services provided to Member States, notably through increased digitalization. This includes modernising tools such as GISIS, improving access to IMO instruments and simplifying how information is shared, so that Member States can more easily navigate and implement the regulatory framework.

What do you like to do away from the office?

Away from the office, I make a point of staying active and maintaining a good balance, both physically and mentally. I particularly enjoy spending time in nature, which helps me disconnect and maintain perspective in what can be a demanding role.

Sport plays an important part in that balance. I enjoy running regularly, and I am also very fond of windsurfing, which allows me to combine physical activity with being at sea.

And, quite naturally, I am never very far from the sea — it has always been a constant in both my professional and personal life and remains an important source of inspiration and balance for me.



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