

The Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization

The Convention for an Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization was drawn up at the U.N. Maritime Conference by thirty-five nations and opened for signature on March 6, 1948, at Geneva. Canada was the first country to ratify the Convention, the instrument of acceptance being deposited with the Secretary-General of the U.N. on October 15, 1948. IMCO officially came into being when, on March 17, 1958, the Convention was ratified by Japan, thus bringing to the requisite twenty-one the number of states which had ratified the Convention. The requirement that at least seven of these states should have not less than one million gross tons of shipping each had also been met by this date, with the result that IMCO became the twelfth Specialized Agency of the U.N. The first session of the IMCO Council was held in London, the headquarters of the Organization, from January 6 to 19, 1959.

Under the terms of the Convention, this "consultative and advisory agency" will promote co-operation in technical matters, encourage adoption of the highest standards of safety and navigation, discourage discriminatory action or unnecessary restrictions by governments affecting international shipping, consider matters concerning unfair restrictive practices by shipping concerns, provide for the exchange of information and take up any other shipping matters referred to it by any organ of the U.N.

IMCO has as its policy-making body an Assembly of all members which meets every two years. Between sessions of the Assembly, a Council performs all functions of the Organization except that of recommending to members the adoption of maritime safety regulations. The Council is composed of sixteen members, of which eight represent countries having an interest in providing international shipping services, and eight (including Canada) at present represent countries having an interest in international seaborne trade.

The IMCO Convention also provides for a Maritime Safety Committee consisting of fourteen members. This Committee deals with such matters as aids to navigation, rules for prevention of collisions, construction and equipment of vessels, and the handling of dangerous cargoes.

Subsequent to the First Assembly of IMCO in January, 1959, at which the Head of the Canadian Delegation, Mr. Louis Audette, Chairman of the Canadian Maritime Commission, was elected Chairman, the Organization assumed from the United Kingdom Government the responsibility of depositary power to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, the International Load Line Convention, and the Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea by Oil.

A conference to revise the 1948 Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea will be held under the auspices of IMCO in London beginning May 17, 1960.