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Barcelona Convention for the protection of the Mediterranean: Initiative towards mandatory limitation of emissions from shipping



Mediterranean Action Plan
Barcelona Convention



United Nations
Environment Programme

'International shipping, otherwise vaunted for its efficiency, remains 'a real fossil' in one key area: air pollution'.

Olaf Tschimpke, president of the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU), 2012

Shipping has increasingly become an important factor in air pollution and (indirectly) in water pollution, example SO₂ emissions: until recently, most marine fuels contained around 2.5 to 3% sulphur, 3000 times the amount allowed in EU road diesel (0.001%). As from 1 January 2020, an IMO requirement (MARPOL Convention, Annex VI) is to reduce the sulphur content permitted in ships fuel-oil globally from 3.5 per cent to 0.5 per cent. In most EU coastal waters already now 1% is prescribed, within Special Emission Control Areas under the IMO MARPOL Convention the percentage remains distinctly higher than for road diesel in the EU, with a limit of 0.1%.

Following the provisions of the MARPOL Convention, the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean have now, at their December 2019 Meeting of the Parties, requested the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to designate the Mediterranean Sea as an Emission Control Area for sulphur oxides (SO_x ECAs).