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Ship Management SIG

IMO's first press conference of 2026

Robin Russel CEO of Satva Trust gives a short report about attending the first IMO press conference of the year given by the IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez. You can find out more about Robin Russel at the end of this report.

To my existing impression of Arsenio Dominguez, Secretary-General of the IMO – calm and positive negotiator and communicator – I can now add ‘consistent’. Having found myself present for 2 of his speeches during this week (he was the guest keynote speaker at the New Year Vasilopita celebrations hosted by Lloyds Register and the Greek Shipping Cooperation Committee) and having just emerged from his first press conference of the year at the IMO headquarters, I can assure you that he really does seem committed to discussion, to engaging with and listening to all stakeholders inside and outside the IMO, including the shipping industry itself. All this in pursuit of compromise, to find a way to bring all members of the IMO together.

Given the last MEPC meeting in October your mind probably just jumped straight to decarbonisation, but we were reminded that the IMO made progress on 166 separate initiatives in 2025 across the whole range of the agency's remit, including the safety of seafarers and supporting them in the increasing trends of abandonment and criminalisation. This is a functioning entity, with clear evidence of continuing progress to answer journalist questions about the risk of the US pulling out. To a question about reports of threats personal sanctions being made to individual delegates on top of tariffs at a national level, Mr Dominguez replied that he hadn't received any formal complaints, but noted that in his closing remarks to MEPC 83 he had explicitly called for a return to the normal, respectful way of conducting business within the IMO and also that meetings since then had all proceeded smoothly. A fine, diplomatic response that we can only hope represents a reality that will continue.

Of course, decarbonisation really is on everyone's mind in shipping, so questions at the press conference focused mainly in that area. Here Mr Dominguez highlighted a number of times the continuing work on technical standards for alternative fuels (from existing options like methanol through to more distant options like nuclear), the related work of the Dangerous Goods Committee and the Legal Committee, as well as the upcoming work on crew training. During the next week Mr Dominguez will start having discussions focusing on the current Net Zero Framework on the table and the concerns voiced with a focus on MEPC 84 in April. His north star is the consensus of IMO members, so it's natural that he sees his core remit as facilitating discussion and leading efforts to find it.

And it is here that his overarching approach becomes clear. The 'around 2050' target exists, and the 2030 GHG reduction targets exist. Since the 2030 targets come first they are the first focus, with the NZF eventually setting the context and the shape of what comes next. In the same vein, MEPC 83 is the immediate focus, with the MEPC in October something to work on afterwards. In this way time opens up for the necessary negotiations. While the headlines showcase the very



real differences that have forced a postponement, on a day to day level a lot carries on. Mr Dominguez is a positive pragmatist who sees the way forward as a series of steps to be achieved in the service of a goal, rather than an immediate all or nothing argument.

Arsenio Dominguez, replying to questions

In this I agree with his world view. I also feel comfortable that an inclusive search for compromise is the best way forward. It helps that the industry has already accomplished so much since the IMO started focusing on GHGs in 2013, and that it continues to make progress. It is uncomfortable and inefficient to not yet have things settled – costs will undoubtedly move higher throughout the supply chain than they would be with clear direction and everything will take longer in the meantime – but in this current world of strongly differing opinions, is there a better way?

Robin Russel CEO

Biography of Robin Russel and Satva Trust

The Satva Trust is an award winner of Insurtech – Lloyd’s Lab Cohort 14. Robin has thirty years across financial services, real estate, shipping and construction with cross-experience in UK and Asian markets.

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