



SEMAPHORE

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Association of Australia and New Zealand



Consultation Closes on Annex VI

Public and stakeholder input on whether New Zealand should sign up to Annex VI of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) was recently invited by the Ministry of Transport.

The three-month period of consultation on the treaty, which from 2020 will require vessels to use fuel with a sulphur content of only 0.5% as opposed to the current standard of 3.5%, came to a close in early February.

Ministry of Transport international connections manager Tom Forster said the benefits of signing up to Annex XI would include reduced carbon emissions and improved air quality around the country's ports.

"It would align our maritime regulations with our trading partners and give investment certainty to domestic ship owners and fuel suppliers," he said.

However, Mr Forster added that before such a decision could be reached, a true understanding was needed of both the costs and benefits to the country's environment and economic sectors.

"Regardless of whether New Zealand accedes to Annex VI there will be an impact. New Zealand ships will need to be compliant if visiting an overseas port that is party to the treaty – this includes Singapore and Australia where many of our ships receive maintenance and repairs.

"Fuel that meets the requirements will also need to be available to overseas ships flagged to Annex VI states – this would include the majority of international ships that come here.

"We recognise many in the shipping and fuel sectors are looking for certainty and have been waiting for some time for a decision to be made on New Zealand's commitment to MARPOL."

Among those to have made submissions are the Greater Wellington Regional Council and the Marlborough District Council, which have both urged the Government to adopt Annex VI.

Greater Wellington Regional Council environment committee chair Sue Kedgley said pollution from ship emissions was a significant issue "that we must address urgently".

"We need to join other nations in reducing the harmful pollutants such as sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides which adversely affect the health of populations and our marine environment," said Ms Kedgley.

In its submission, the Greater Wellington Regional Council stated that significant gains could be made in environmental quality if ships were regulated to use more refined fuels and technologies such as scrubbing systems to reduce their emissions.

"Shipping is the largest source of sulphur dioxide in our region," it stated.

"Stack plumes from shipping are clearly visible and extensive on calm days.

"The number of log ships is increasing and containership numbers rebounded following the 2016 Kaikoura earthquake, though not to the same level. Cruise ship frequency has increased significantly, car carriers and tankers are likely to be about the same, however, the largest number of vessel movements are the five Cook Strait ferries.

“The overall increase in the number and size of ships moving on the harbour inevitably leads to greater fuel consumption and more emissions. According to the Ministry for the Environment and Statistics New Zealand’s report *Our air 2018*, ‘the size of the median vessel visiting New Zealand nearly doubled between 2007 and 2013’.”

Port Marlborough chief executive Rhys Welbourn reportedly said New Zealand’s accession to Annex VI would set a “clear standard”.

“There are implications to be worked through, such as security of supply of compliant fuels and potential increased costs of transport; but, accession will provide greater certainty for ship owners, fuel suppliers and ports to invest in new technology and practices that reduce air pollutants,” he reportedly said.

“Aligning us with the majority of the world’s shipping [it] will avoid a situation where different regions apply different criteria to visiting vessels.

“Ultimately, we believe in protecting the environment through sustainable operations and a reduction in air emissions and greenhouse gases is a positive.”

However, Picton Air Quality group spokesperson Brent Yardley reportedly criticised the Ministry of Transport’s consultation questions as having a cost-benefit analysis focused on industry, with community interests only gaining passing mention.

“It allows industry ample opportunity to account for all of their costs, while communities in the immediate vicinity of shipping have no way to determine what health costs they may be paying presently or in the future,” he reportedly said.

“The polluter pays principle seems to be missing.”

Mr Yardley also expressed concern the consultation drew a line at the 0.5% sulphur limit and did not reference the 0.1% limit that applied in special control areas such as Hawaii.

“The enclosed waterways of the Marlborough Sounds are a special environment. Rather than waiting for the MARPOL outcome, I’m hopeful that we can actually take an environmental leadership role locally, get stack emissions under control and minimise health risks to the community.”

In August last year Picton residents mooted plans to establish an air quality monitoring station atop of the pirates’ playground on Picton foreshore. The Marlborough District Council has recently stated it is in discussions with the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research about establishing a Picton-wide monitoring programme this winter.

It is understood New Zealand and Mexico are the only countries in the OECD which have not yet signed up to Annex VI, which has 91 signatory nations.

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