



Treaties Committee to review the Baltic Sea Special Area

Federal parliament's Treaties Committee will examine a treaty that will prevent ships from releasing untreated sewage into the Baltic Sea.

International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) defines certain sea areas as 'special areas' in which the adoption of special mandatory methods for the prevention of sea pollution is required. Under the Convention, these special areas are provided with a higher level of protection than other areas of the sea.

This treaty, although specifically about the Baltic Sea, is part of a broader series of agreements under MARPOL establishing 'special areas' in order to protect to maritime environment.

The Baltic Sea is characterised by a particular set of geographic and environmental circumstances that made this treaty necessary. Ninety million people are estimated to transit the Baltic Sea on ships each year, making it the busiest sea in the world.

In addition, the Baltic Sea is an enclosed sea with only a narrow channel, the Denmark Strait, linking it to the Atlantic Ocean. Consequently, untreated sewage in the Baltic Sea cannot disperse.

This treaty will require all vessels of over 400 gross tonnes that sail in international waters to either treat sewage on board or store sewage to be offloaded when the vessel makes port.

Untreated sewage in the Baltic Sea has been blamed for the growth of blue green algal blooms, and consequent significant fish deaths.

"The Committee will be examining whether this treaty is being considered for other areas of the ocean at similar risk. The Committee will also be interested in the level of acceptance of the treaty provisions internationally, and the costs of implementing the requirements of the treaty," Acting Committee Chair Senator Birmingham said. "All these issues will be of interest to the Australian Government in assessing the value of applying this treaty to an area within Australia's region of interest, should such a proposal be made."

Public Hearing: Monday 21 November 2011, Committee Room 2R1, Parliament House Canberra — All welcome

9.00 am Resolution MEPC.200(62): Amendments to the Annex of the Protocol of 1978 Relating to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973 (Special Area Provisions and the Designation of the Baltic Sea as a Special Area under MARPOL Annex IV) Adopted at London on 15 July 2011

Copies of the *National Interest Analysis* and treaty texts are available under Treaties tabled on 13 October 2011 at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jsct/reports.htm>

Alternatively, interested parties may email jsct@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 4002.

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