

ROUTEING OF SHIPS, SHIP REPORTING AND RELATED MATTERS

New mandatory traffic separation scheme off the coast of Norway from Vardø to Røst

Submitted by Norway

SUMMARY

Executive summary: This document presents a proposal for a mandatory ships' routeing system in international waters off the coast of northern Norway, from Vardø to Røst. The proposed traffic separation scheme will establish a safe route for sea transport, and in particular for the transport of oil from increased petroleum activity in the Barents Region, thereby reducing the environmental risk related to ship movements in the area, especially with regard to tanker traffic. The traffic separation scheme is not likely to cause a disproportionate burden to the shipping industry.

Action to be taken: Paragraph 12.

Related documents: General provisions on ships' routeing (Res. A.572(14), as amended); MSC/Circ. 1060

Introduction

1 Oil and gas exploration and production in the Barents Region is already taking place and the activity is expected to increase considerably in the coming years. As a result the ship transport along the northern coast of Norway has changed from local transport and fisheries to i.a. oil transport and shipping related to offshore oil and gas exploration. This development will probably continue, resulting in increased traffic intensity. The number of tankers passing the northern coast of Norway is expected to increase considerably in the near future. It is also expected that the average size of the tankers will increase.

Norwegian White Papers

2 In the Norwegian Government's White Paper to the Parliament on Safety at Sea and Oil Pollution Preparedness (White Paper no. 14 (2004-2005), presented 21 January 2005) it was considered important to establish a safe transport route for oil along the coast. Several risk reducing measures are already operational and others will be operational in the near future. In order to complete an overall system for safe oil transport along the northern coast of Norway it was proposed to apply to IMO for a mandatory ships' routeing system including a traffic separation scheme for tankers and other cargo ships off the coast of Northern Norway from Vardø to Røst.

3 In 2005 a proposal for a mandatory ships' routeing with a traffic separation scheme in the area was submitted for comments to the shipping industry, the fishing community and others. On this background the Government's White Paper to the Parliament on an Integrated Management Plan for the Barents Sea and the sea areas off Lofoten (White paper no. 8 (2005 - 2006) presented 30 March 2006), concludes on applying to IMO for a mandatory ships' routeing system and

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traffic separation scheme for oil tankers and other cargo ships off the coast of Northern Norway from Vardø to Røst.

Environmental issues in the area

4 In addition to shipping routes the area contains some of the most important breeding, nursing and fishing areas in the world (i.e. the Lofoten Cod fisheries, the fisheries for North East Atlantic Herring, and the Capelin fisheries). The area also comprises some of Europe's most abundant populations of sea birds, which are vulnerable to oil spills from ships.

The proposed measure

5 The proposed ships' routeing system implies moving the routes of tankers and other cargo ships away from the coast, in order to avoid groundings and to separate north and southbound traffic in order to avoid collisions. The traffic will be monitored from the Vardø VTS (operational in 2007). By moving the ships further away from the coast, compared to today's average route for passage, there will be more time to prevent potential groundings by using the emergency towing preparedness which is already established in the region.

6 The routeing system is proposed as a mandatory traffic separation scheme for tankers of all sizes, including gas and chemical tankers, and for all other cargo ships of 5000 gross tonnage and upwards, in transit or on international voyages to or from Norwegian ports. The detailed proposal is set out in the Annex to this document.

Risk reducing effect

7 An assessment of risks and mitigation measures has been conducted by Det Norske Veritas (DNV) according to the Formal Safety Assessment (FSA) methodology approved by IMO. The assessment clearly shows that the proposed measure in combination with the other risk mitigation measures that Norway has implemented (i.a. towing contingency, monitoring of the traffic by using AIS) and is presently establishing (i.a. VTS, Electronic Charts) will reduce the risk of pollution or other damage to the marine environment.

8 A mandatory ships' routeing system is important to achieve the maximum risk reducing effect of the above mentioned combination of measures. The proposed new measure is limited to what is essential in the interest of safety of navigation and protection of the marine environment.

Consultations

9 As noted in paragraph 3, the proposal for a mandatory traffic separation scheme has been submitted to the shipping community, the offshore oil and gas industry, the fishing community, environmental organisations, various state and local authorities etc. in Norway for comments. Comments received have been taken into account in the design of the present proposal.

10 A dialogue with Russia on the proposal for a mandatory traffic separation scheme is established.

Entry into force

11 The proposed measure should enter into force 6 months after the Maritime Safety Committee has adopted it.

Actions requested of the Sub-Committee

12 The Sub-Committee is invited to discuss the proposal detailed in the Annex to this document, and decide as it deems appropriate.
