

Turkey ratifies Hong Kong Convention

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A leading ship recycler says Turkey has sent out a clear message that it intends to operate safe and environmentally acceptable scrapping facilities.

Dimitri Ayvatoglu of Leyal Ship Recycling says Turkey's signing of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO)'s Hong Kong Convention on ship recycling paves the way for other major nations to "act swiftly" and follow his country's example.

Turkey recently became the first of the five major ship-scrapping countries to sign the convention, which is aimed at introducing minimum standards for the handling of vessels that may contain hazardous substances such as asbestos.

Unal Cevikoz, Turkey's permanent representative at the IMO and its ambassador in the UK, signed the convention and, along with IMO secretary-general Efthimios Mitropoulos, urged others to follow.

Ayvatoglu says entry into force of the convention remains a long way off but it can be speeded up by recyclers throwing their weight behind it.

Its implementation requires 15 states, representing 40% of world merchant shipping by gross tonnage, to sign up.

The combined maximum annual ship-recycling volume of those states must, during the preceding 10 years, constitute at least 3% of their combined merchant shipping tonnage.

So far, the convention has been signed, subject to ratification or acceptance, by France, Italy, The Netherlands, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Turkey.

The other major recycling nations still to act are India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and China.

Opposition by some individual recyclers has posed obstacles, although progress appears to have been made at a specially convened meeting of leading national and industry figures in Thailand earlier this year aimed at voluntarily accelerating the intro-

duction of elements of the convention.

Turkey only has a small percentage of world ship scrapping but has some of the highest standards.

Ayvatoglu points out that the country was among the most active during the convention's negotiations stage, taking part in working groups, correspondence groups and informal discussions. It is also now contributing to the drafting of post-convention guidelines.

Turkey is said to have supported an international agreement specific to global ship recycling because of weaknesses in the Basel Convention covering the transboundary movement of waste, the relevance of which many commercial shipowners and associations do not recognise.

Turkey has been recycling vessels since the mid-1970s and today around 20 companies operate 29 plots. Roughly 200 vessels of close to 500,000 ldt were handled in 2009.