

## **CANDIDATURE OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS FOR RE-ELECTION TO THE IMO COUNCIL, CATEGORY 'C'**

The 26<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Assembly of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) is scheduled to be held in London from 23 November to 4 December 2009. Elections for the 40 members of the Council will be held during this Assembly.

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas has served on the Council from 1991 – 1995 and from 1999 – 2009 and has decided to seek re-election to the Council under Category "C" at the forthcoming Assembly.

As an archipelago of some 700 islands, about 30 of which are inhabited, maritime transport of goods and people has always been an essential part of Bahamian life. At the same time, The Bahamas' geological structure as one of the world's largest areas of coral reef has ensured that the protection of the marine environment has been given a high priority. The importance of safe, economical sea transport and the need for environmental protection have therefore been the main themes pursued by The Bahamas at the IMO as well as other international and regional bodies.

Recognising the importance of the work of the IMO, the Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas became a member of the Organization in 1976 soon after gaining its Independence in 1973. Since that time The Bahamas has acceded to the major international Conventions administered by the IMO, including the SUA Conventions and their Protocols, as well as the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS) and the 1958 United Nations Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards. Most recently The Bahamas acceded to the International Convention on the Control of Harmful Anti-fouling Systems on Ships, 2001 (AFS Convention) and the International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage, 2001 (Bunkers Convention). The Bahamas has also acceded to the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Maritime Labour Convention 2006 and ILO 185 (Seafarers Identity Documents). Since joining the IMO, The Bahamas has maintained active representation in all of its Committees and Sub-committees.

In addition to adhering to the legal framework developed by the IMO, The Bahamas has also participated in other IMO initiatives aimed at achieving the goals of safe economical transport and protecting the marine environment, and strongly supports the IMO's Voluntary Audit Scheme. Accordingly, The Bahamas has submitted itself for audit.

The Bahamas now has approximately 51 million gross tonnage on her register and retains her position as the third largest in the world. The Bahamas' Registry continues to grow and her ships have a decreasing average age. The Registry's port state control detention record remains well below the industry average and consistently improves each year. As the size of The Bahamas' fleet has grown so also has her contribution to the IMO's budget, making The Bahamas at present the third largest financial contributor to the IMO.

In July 1995, the management of Bahamian maritime affairs was re-organized. A government-controlled body, The Bahamas Maritime Authority (BMA), was established to supervise and control safety and environmental protection on Bahamian ships. Many statutory surveys are delegated to ten of the leading Classification Societies but, in addition, a worldwide network of inspectors carries out inspections of all Bahamian ships every year. One of the functions of these inspections is to monitor the quality of work carried out by the Classification Societies as well as providing the BMA with an up-to-date picture of the quality of the fleet. Indeed, quality is the underlying theme behind all of The Bahamian government's policies connected with the country's industries, whether it is tourism, finance

or the maritime sector.

The two major ports in The Bahamas, Nassau and Freeport, have undergone important developments in recent years. Nassau has greatly increased and improved its facilities for cruise ships, making it one of the favourite ports of call in the Caribbean region, including for the latest generation of cruise liners.

Freeport is now one of the region's major container terminals. It also operates two floating dry docks, one of which is among the largest in the world, and a wet berth ship repair facility. It was named "Yard of the Year" for 2002, and given an award of excellence in 2003. The yard can justifiably claim to be one of the world's premier cruise ship repair yards. This shipyard has dry docked the Voyager class of cruise ships, which are among the largest cruise ships in the world. The Bahamas' ship repair facility has full accreditation, based on audits by Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance Inc., under the International Standards Organization (ISO) 9001 Quality and ISO 14001 Environmental Standard. Not only do these Standards represent an internationally acclaimed benchmark, being held by very few ship repair yards globally, but the yard is considered by some industry experts to have the most advanced environmental treatment scheme of any shipyard in the world.

Freeport has continued to improve its cruise ship facilities and to expand its range of maritime activities. The Bahamas, recognising the importance of Freeport and wishing to maintain and enhance its competitiveness in the maritime industry, recently hosted the first International Maritime Conference and Trade Show in Freeport in November 2008 under the theme 'Opportunities in Trade and Maritime Services'. The event served as a platform to showcase the multiple facets of The Bahamas' maritime industry, including transshipment, trade, ship ownership, registry services and ship repair. As a part of this ongoing effort to remain competitive in the maritime industry, The Bahamas also plans to establish a world class Maritime Training Institute in Freeport to train seafarers of all ranks.

Following her re-election to the Council in 1999, The Bahamas has worked assiduously with other Council members towards the implementation of IMO resolutions and continues to submit constructive, forward-looking proposals to foster the Organization's goal of maintaining the highest standard of maritime safety, efficiency of navigation and protection of the marine environment.

For example, The Bahamas submitted a paper to the Council to make a constructive contribution to ongoing discussions at the IMO regarding Council reform, particularly the need to ensure that the Council is representative of and can respond to the interests and needs of all IMO Members, and to promote greater transparency and contestability in Council elections. Another important example of the initiatives introduced by The Bahamas is the proposal to develop Goal-Based Standards for the construction of new ships. Conducted in association with Greece, this move is now widely recognised as a major step forward in ship safety. Other examples of Bahamian initiatives include means of access for tankers and bulk carriers, papers on Places of Refuge, a proposal for the IMO to draw up guidelines on the control of ships in an emergency at sea, guidelines relating to long range tracking and identification of ships and operational measures relating to passenger ships, each of which has resulted in a positive result. In addition, a submission by The Bahamas to the Council to involve all members of IMO, not only Council members, in the strategic policy-making of the Organization, culminated in the adoption of Assembly Resolution A909 (22). The fruits of this Resolution are now to be seen in the Council's Strategic Policy document and High Level Action Plan.

For many years The Bahamas has worked closely with its Caribbean neighbours in a number of areas, relating to flag, port and coastal state responsibilities. The Bahamas is an active member of the Caribbean Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control (CMOU) where it holds the

position of Chairmanship of the MOU Technical Committee which has developed safety standards for small ships trading in the Caribbean region. Through active involvement in the CMOU activities and the provision of technical expertise to regional Seminars/Conferences, The Bahamas remains committed to ensuring and enhancing the level of maritime safety, security and environmental protection in the Caribbean region.

In keeping with this commitment to enhancing environmental protection in the Caribbean region, The Bahamas is also a part of the GEF-UNDP-IMO GloBallast Partnerships Project as a Lead Partnering Country (LPC) in the Wider Caribbean region, and recently organized the first National Task Force (NTF) meeting and Ballast Water Management Seminar in Nassau.

Recognising the fundamental aim of enhancing maritime security and the expanded scope of maritime safety and protection of the marine environment, The Bahamas has actively participated in all of the IMO meetings pertaining to Long Range Identification and Tracking of ships (LRIT) and submitted or co-sponsored several papers. The Bahamas was one of eight countries which participated in the prototype testing of the LRIT system, and these efforts were formally recognised with the signing of an agreement on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2008 with the IMO, on the occasion of MSC 85, confirming that The Bahamas' proposed system was fully compliant with the international requirements. The Bahamas has submitted all the required LRIT information to IMO, and was one of seven countries whose LRIT Data Centre was fully operational and integrated into the international LRIT system by the SOLAS compliance date. The Bahamas recognises the importance of technical co-operation and in this regard, has led the Caribbean regional initiative to assess the development of a regional/co-operative LRIT Data Centre. The Bahamas has also offered its services to assist any SOLAS Contracting party which is engaging in prototype testing of their LRIT Data Centre.

The Bahamas Maritime Authority also developed a research programme (ALERT) to investigate the lifetime effects of repairs on tankers. The European Commission provided funding for the project which was carried out by eight partners together with the BMA. The purpose of the work was to examine the cumulative effects of repairs over the life of a ship. The outcome of the research will result in measures to ensure that ships will be safer throughout their entire life. The IMO was an observer on the project.

The Government of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas would greatly appreciate the valuable support of IMO Member States for its candidature for re-election to the Council of the IMO under the provisions of Article 17 (C) of the IMO Convention.