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LC-LP.1/Circ.80
6 January 2017

**CONVENTION ON THE PREVENTION OF MARINE POLLUTION BY DUMPING
OF WASTES AND OTHER MATTER, 1972 AND ITS 1996 PROTOCOL**

Invitation to provide information on the disposal of sewage sludge

BACKGROUND

1 The disposal of sewage sludge at sea is regulated under the London Convention and Protocol and is subject to provisions of annex I, II and III of the Convention and subject to Annex 2 of the Protocol.

2 Sewage sludge is described in the Specific Guidelines for assessment of sewage sludge (see *Waste Assessment Guidance under the London Convention and Protocol: 2014 edition*, IMO sales ref. IA531) as the residue remaining from the treatment of municipal sewage. It is an organic-rich waste produced primarily by physical processes, but also involving chemical and biological treatment processes. Sewage contains aqueous domestic waste as well as surface drainage and, in many cases, a component of treated and untreated industrial effluent. Sewage sludge tends to concentrate a wide range of substances. It has a high biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and may be contaminated with pathogens and parasites.

3 Untreated sewage effluents discharged to rivers, estuaries and coastal waters can pose a high risk to environmental resources, amenities and human health. It may, therefore, create environmental, aesthetic and health problems if not managed properly. The purification process allows reclaimed water to be discharged to freshwater courses or coastal waters or used in other applications, such as irrigation, under conditions that pose a greatly reduced risk to the receiving environment and human health. Sewage sludge is, however, an unavoidable product from sewage treatment and increased levels of waste water purification lead, inevitably, to greater quantities of sludge for which environmentally sound management strategies are required.

4 Many Parties to the Protocol and to the Convention have prohibited the disposal of sewage sludge.

5 Recently concerns have been raised regarding marine litter in the marine environment, particularly litter containing plastics. It is recognized that sewage sludge may contain minute particles of plastics (microplastics such as microfibres and beads) that may enter the marine environment when disposed at sea (refer to the report "Review of marine litter in relation to the various waste streams under the London Convention and Protocol" (LC/SG 39/16, annex 5).

6 As a consequence and further to discussion held by the Scientific Groups, the Scientific Groups suggested that some guidance could be developed on this issue with a view to reduce the disposal of microplastics at sea resulting from sewage sludge.

7 In this context, the governing bodies, in 2016, instructed the Secretariat to issue a questionnaire, by way of a circular, to solicit further information on the current practices of dumping of sewage sludge and provide a report of the outcomes to the next session of the governing bodies in 2017 (LC 38/16, paragraph 9.34).

INVITATION

8 To facilitate this exercise, National Focal Points are hereby invited to submit to the Secretariat any such information which could assist in the Scientific Groups' work to develop an overview of information on current practices of managing or dumping of sewage sludge, including best practices.

9 The information should reach the Secretariat no later than **30 June 2017**. Alternatively, Contracting Parties may wish to submit an interim response directly to the Scientific Groups, as submissions under item 8 of the agenda (Coastal management issues associated with activities to prevent marine pollution), for their initial review (see LC/SG 39/1/1, paragraph 8.12).

10 A consolidated report, containing all the relevant information submitted to the Secretariat, will be submitted to the next joint session of the governing bodies, scheduled for October 2017 (LC 38/16, paragraph 9.34 refers).

11 The information should be submitted (preferably by email) to:

Office for the London Convention/Protocol and Ocean Affairs
International Maritime Organization
4 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7SR
United Kingdom

Email: olcp@imo.org