

Regulation

# Saudi Arabia wants IMO to kick climate talks further down the road

Clear differences remain as delegates wrangle over course of green shipping



The International Maritime Organization's Marine Environment Protection Committee meets to consider the Net-Zero Framework.

Photo: IMO

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Deep divisions over shipping's decarbonisation drive were laid bare on Wednesday, with Saudi Arabia calling for a further delay in the "most contentious" talks in the history of the International Maritime Organization.

The US and Saudi Arabia want further discussions on a proposal backed by major flag states Liberia and Panama.

The proposal demands axing a multi-billion-dollar fund to pay for shipping's transition to net-zero by 2050.



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The countries claim they have the backing of more than 50% of global tonnage — closing the door on any swift agreement amid continuing negotiations in the corridors of the IMO's headquarters in London.

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They were opposed by nations, led by Europe and African states, that argue that the Net-Zero Framework is the product of years of negotiations and concessions and the best way to secure an industry-wide transition.

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The framework was stopped in its tracks in October when a ferocious lobbying campaign, led by the US, resulted in the postponement of the strategy for a year.

On Wednesday, Saudi Arabia said it wanted a further delay because of the clear differences between states on the way forward. It said that alternative fuels in large amounts to drive the transition remain out of reach.

“When considering the proposals, it is clear that the one submitted by Liberia, Panama and Argentina aligns most closely with our principles,” the Saudi delegate told the Marine Environment Protection Committee.

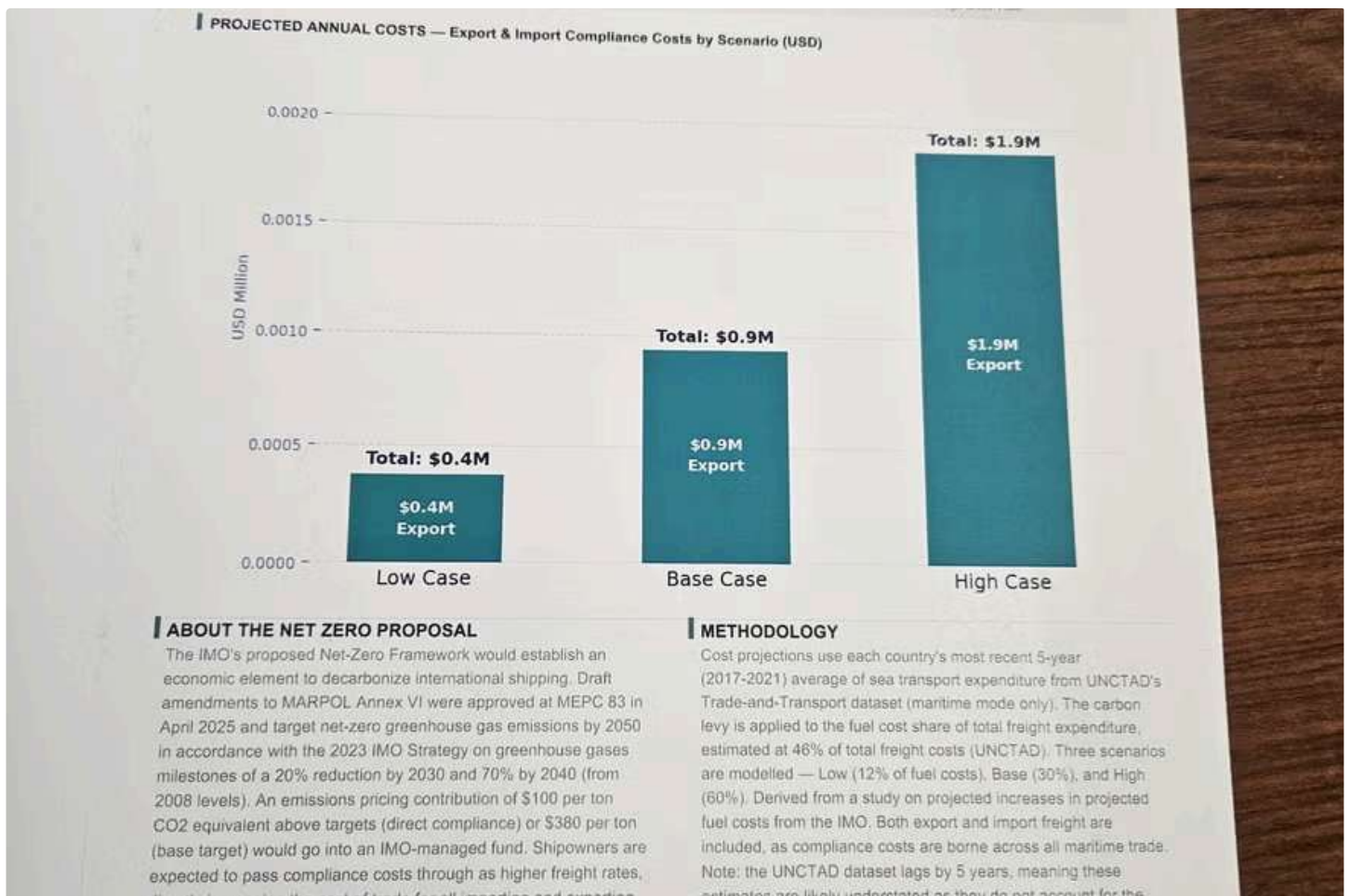
The UK said the plan failed to meet four key tests of the Net-Zero Framework strategy, including a workable mechanism that would make polluters pay for emissions and reward risk-taking first movers.

But the US and its allies showed little indication of giving ground. Liberia claimed that its proposal was a “pragmatic, practical and realistic solution” to deep divisions.

The US said it was “ready to oppose” the framework if it was “brought back” under discussion.

“We are an honest broker and want to avoid the chaos the NZF could have caused,” its delegate said.

The lobbying included US leaflet drops targeting individual countries and detailing the US economic case for dumping the framework.



A leaflet handed out to delegations by the US. (Photo: Paul Peachey)

The leaflets, published in the name of the office of the chief economist of the US state department, cites three different scenarios for costs countries face from the framework.

The leaflets were left on the desks of delegates at the meeting. The analysis has been disputed by environmental groups.

The Saudi delegation also referenced an open letter sent to member states two weeks ago, led by Greek shipowners of tanker and gas carriers, calling for a rethink of the framework strategy.

The shipowners have huge orders for traditionally fuelled tonnage.

IMO secretary general Arsenio Dominguez has called for pragmatism and realism during the talks — without the rancour seen in October.

He said at the start of the talks that negotiators face a world in a very different place from a year ago, when member states backed the Net-Zero Framework.

Since then, the conflict in the Middle East, with the blockades of the Strait of Hormuz, has increased concerns about energy security.

Major bodies, including the International Chamber of Shipping and World Shipping Council, said it was important to make progress at the meeting, with billions of dollars already invested in alternative fuels and technology.

China said it did not seek a “theoretically flawless” solution but a practical starting point that could be improved over time.

Delegates told TradeWinds that the outcome of this week’s discussions remained unclear. There is a possibility that the net-zero fund will be separated from more technical measures on fuels.

Further talks will be held before another MEPC meeting scheduled for later this year.

It is expected to be held around the same time as crunch talks that will decide if the net-zero plan goes ahead — in whatever form.

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