



SLM Insights

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Pilotage in the Strait of Bonifacio: towards a new phase of experimentation?

At a recent informal hearing at the Chamber of Deputies (Environment and Transport Committee), the Italian Federation of Harbour Pilots (Federpiloti) was invited to address the issue of environmental protection and regulation of maritime transit in the Strait di Bonifacio. At this meeting, Federpiloti, after having illustrated the pilotage system operating at the Strait of Bonifacio, expressed the need to start a new experimental phase taking into account new resources, suitable to strengthen the current pilotage system.

The Strait of Bonifacio is one of the most outstanding zones in the Mediterranean in terms of biodiversity, which is protected by national and international legislation.

The first initiative to protect this area dates back to 26 February 1993, when the Italian Ministry of Merchant Marine issued a decree prohibiting sailing through the Strait of Bonifacio to laden oil tankers, gas tankers and chemical tankers flying the Italian flag. The same prohibition has been adopted by the French Government with regard to French flagged ship (Order of the Prefecture

of Toulon of 15 February 1993). However, this prohibition did not prevent the navigation of other vessels flying a flag other than the Italian or French flag by virtue of the international status of the strait (Articles 37-44 of UNCLOS).

Therefore, the need to reduce maritime traffic in view of protecting the Strait of Bonifacio led the IMO to adopt, among others, the following resolutions:

- a) Resolution A.766 of 4 November 1993 which *"recommends Governments to prohibit or at least strongly discourage the transit of the Strait of Bonifacio by laden oil tankers and ships carrying dangerous chemicals or substances in bulk liable, in the event of a casualty, to pollute the sea or the coasts, as listed in the Annex to Resolution MEPC. 49 (31) adopted on 4 July 1991, and which are flying the flag of their respective States"*.
- b) MEPC.204(62) Resolution of 15 July 2011 which designated the Strait of Bonifacio as a *"Particularly Sensitive Sea Area"* (PSSA). This designation entailed the

application of "associated protective measures" such as (i) recommended routing system, (ii) reporting obligation of ship in transit and (iii) recommended pilotage system.

In this scenario, in order to implement the above measures, the Port Authority of La Maddalena has introduced by Ordinance N° 73/2014 a recommended pilotage service which guarantee a regular watch as well the sending of information at the request of ships' masters, also with the cooperation of French pilots.

However, all this is done on a voluntary basis, with several operational difficulties and costs. It is therefore necessary, as Federpiloti suggested, to go beyond the so-called 'first experimental phase', which has now been in force for seven years. In such phase, only 36 ships have complied with the recommendation of the pilot on board, compared with more than 20,000 vessels in transit.

In view of the above, Federpiloti recommends the identification of a public body able to manage the operational start-up of the recommended pilotage system.



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