OUTCOME document

of the International Conference on Autonomous Shipping in Asia and the Pacific

(Bangkok, 28-29 February 2024)

On 28-29 February 2024, more than 160 participants from 22 countries and 18 organizations, including shipping industry representatives, research institutions and academia, gathered in Bangkok (Thailand) and online with the aim to exchange on good practices and relevant global and regional initiatives on the innovative autonomous shipping technologies, which have important potential benefits of economic, social and environmental nature and which carry specific implications for the Asia-Pacific region.

The objectives of the conference were to:

- Review the findings of the studies and expert discussions on the matters of autonomous shipping conducted under the project on “Improving the safety of navigation and the sustainability of shipping through the introduction of innovative autonomous shipping technologies in the Asia-Pacific region” implemented by the ESCAP secretariat

- Discuss the directions of further promotion of autonomous shipping technologies in the context of the Asia-Pacific region

The conference reviewed the current status of the implementation of the autonomous shipping technologies, including:

- Technological preparedness of the countries of the Asia and the Pacific region to introduce autonomous shipping for maritime and inland waterway transport operations

- Potential benefits to the countries of the region that autonomous shipping can bring, including economic benefits and indirect contribution to reduction of greenhouse
gas emissions and digitalization

- Institutional arrangements and legal frameworks required for the introduction and operation of autonomous shipping technologies
- Social dimension of introduction of autonomous shipping technologies, including implications to traditional maritime transport jobs, as well as new opportunities for women and other social groups currently not represented in maritime transport profession
- Economic limitations that some countries may experience in implementing autonomous shipping at sea and ports

When discussing these key levers of change, the Conference participants noted that:

- Autonomous shipping is a major emerging direction of the use of new technologies and digitalization in transport, directly relevant to the Asia-Pacific regional priorities in transport, as set out by the Regional Action Programme on Sustainable Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific 2022-26
- This advanced technology will find increasing application in maritime transport worldwide as a part of ongoing rapid digital transformation and countries of the Asia and the Pacific region should start planning arrangements for the introduction of autonomous shipping, at both national and inter-country levels

In this context and based on the expert discussions on this issue at the national and the regional levels in 2023 and 2024, the Conference identified the following key matters to be addressed for the introduction of autonomous shipping at national level in Asia and the Pacific:

- introduction of autonomous shipping at national level requires a development of comprehensive national plans, taking into account various dimensions of autonomous shipping
- The process should proceed step by step, duly addressing related matters, including, but not limited to, commercial, financial, legal, environmental and social dimensions of this rapidly developing technology
• It should also be carried out taking into account, as appropriate, the standards established at the platforms of relevant specialized international organizations, while fully considering the diversity and characteristics of the region.

• The process should go hand in hand with broader aspects of transport digitalization including:
  
  o digitalization of ports and shipping industry, along with investment in relevant maritime transport facilities and infrastructure
  o interoperability of autonomous shipping systems
  o Information sharing platform for efficient communication between ships and ships and between ships and onshore
  o governance and legal system overhaul which should be addressed to the same extent as technical factors.

Against this background, the Conference also emphasized the importance of the regional cooperation on this issue and, in that context:

• Encouraged the target countries involved into the implementation of ESCAP’s project on “Improving the safety of navigation and the sustainability of shipping through the introduction of innovative autonomous shipping technologies in the Asia-Pacific region” to pioneer in this direction.

• Underscored the importance of development, along with national-level plans, of a regional approach and to implement regional collaboration initiatives in the introduction of innovative autonomous shipping technologies.

• Highlighted the necessity of extensive information on good practices, as well as relevant global and regional initiatives on autonomous shipping. Invite countries to utilize various platforms both under ESCAP and at national level to conduct cooperation and exchanges in the area of autonomous shipping.

• Expressed the opinion that inter-country level pilot projects on autonomous shipping operations, both embracing maritime and inland waterway operations, could be an instrumental step to facilitate practical cooperation of the countries of Asia and the Pacific in this area.

• Noted the invitation from China to consider establishment of a cooperation network on “Just-in-Time” arrival initiative within the Asia-Pacific region.
Considering the due follow up to its deliberation, the Conference:

- Thanked ESCAP and its development partners for its support to developing capacity of the countries of Asia and the Pacific to introduce autonomous shipping technologies and encouraged to continue its activities in this field, including the Government of the Russian Federation for its financial support to the Conference.

- Requested the ESCAP secretariat to facilitate development of the policy recommendations at the expert level, mindful of key matters identified by the Conference.

- Further requested the ESCAP secretariat to report on the final results of this work to the Committee on Transport at its Eighth session to be held in November 2024 and inform the Regional Dialogue on Sustainable Maritime connectivity organized pursuant to the ESCAP Commission Resolution 76/1.