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IMO pushes ahead with HNS draft protocol

DEBATES at the International Maritime Organization this week have borne fruit with a draft protocol to the Hazardous and Noxious Substances convention due to go forward to a diplomatic conference next year, *writes Sandra Speares.*

The agreement raises hopes that the final pillar of the liability regime may finally come into force after many years of discussions.

However, concerns remain over the definition of HNS products, which is likely to give rise to further debates at next year's diplomatic conference.

At issue are cargoes like direct reduced iron, which present hazards when moisture is present in cargo holds.

The HNS convention has proved more complex to negotiate in part due to the numbers of receivers of HNS products.

The International Oil Pollution Compensation Funds is deemed the most likely candidate to administer the new regime when it comes into force, although this has not yet been formally confirmed.

Other issues on the agenda at the IMO's Legal Committee deliberations have included discussions of legal issues relating to piracy. IMO secretary-general Efthimios Mitropoulos stressed the unprecedented cooperation between member states, including China and Russia, in combating the scourge of piracy this week.

Further work is expected to be done on tackling legal issues relating to the detention and prosecution of pirates, with special tribute being paid to Kenya which has had to deal with the prosecution of many of those pirates captured so far.