



# THE IMO NUMBER FOR FISHING VESSELS

## APPLICATION GUIDELINES FOR COMPANIES AND FLAG STATES

A BRIEFING BY TMT & IHS MARITIME & TRADE  
IN COOPERATION WITH THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS



## 1. WHAT IS AN IMO NUMBER?

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) introduced its Ship Identification Number Scheme in 1987 to help prevent maritime fraud and enhance safety and security in the merchant vessel fleet; it has successfully served for decades and is widely recognized by users and stakeholders as the best available global identification system for ships. IHS Maritime and Trade, a UK based company, administers the scheme on behalf of the IMO. The unique seven-digit vessel number, preceded by the letters “IMO,” stays with a vessel until it is scrapped and never changes, regardless of the ship’s owner, country of registration or name. The records based on the IMO number provide an independent audit trail for each vessel. The scheme has been implemented for all merchant vessels, and was opened up to fishing vessels in 2013.

## 2. WHY DO FISHING VESSELS NEED AN IMO NUMBER?

Illegal and unreported fishing worldwide accounts for up to 26 million metric tons of fish annually, worth up to USD 23.5 billion. IMO numbers are an essential tool in the fight against illegal fishing as they help to improve monitoring, control, surveillance, and enforcement of fishing operations.

Since fishing vessels became eligible to apply for IMO numbers, nine major RFMOs have mandated that vessels above a certain size or tonnage must carry one, as well as two important Regional Fisheries Bodies, the European Union (EU) and some coastal and flag States.

It is therefore becoming increasingly important to obtain an IMO number if vessels want to fish in these areas. As more organisations and States require the IMO number, the places in which vessels can legally fish without one will decrease.

Additionally, having an IMO number is likely to make exports more attractive – the EU have discussed mandating IMO numbers for fishing vessels that import into their market, and several major retailers are looking into requiring them before purchasing fish.

### AN IMO NUMBER WILL

- Ensure that a vessel’s history is accurately recorded
- Allow flag States to consistently and accurately manage vessels under their authority.
- Provide coastal and port States with information to help them regulate the vessels operating in their waters more effectively.
- Bring clarity, consistency, and accuracy to Regional Fisheries Management Organization (RFMO) records to determine whether vessels were authorized to fish in their waters.
- Help port authorities ensure that they are accepting only legally caught fish – a requirement of the risk assessments outlined under the Food and Agriculture Organization Port State Measures Agreement.

## 3. WHICH VESSELS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR AN IMO NUMBER?

Any fishing vessel, refrigerated cargo vessel (reefer) or supply vessel over 100 gross tonnes is eligible for an IMO number.

In addition, any vessel of 12 or more metres LOA (overall length), authorised to operate outside waters of national jurisdiction, including those with a non-steel hull construction, is eligible for an IMO number.

For further information, please see the diagram overleaf.



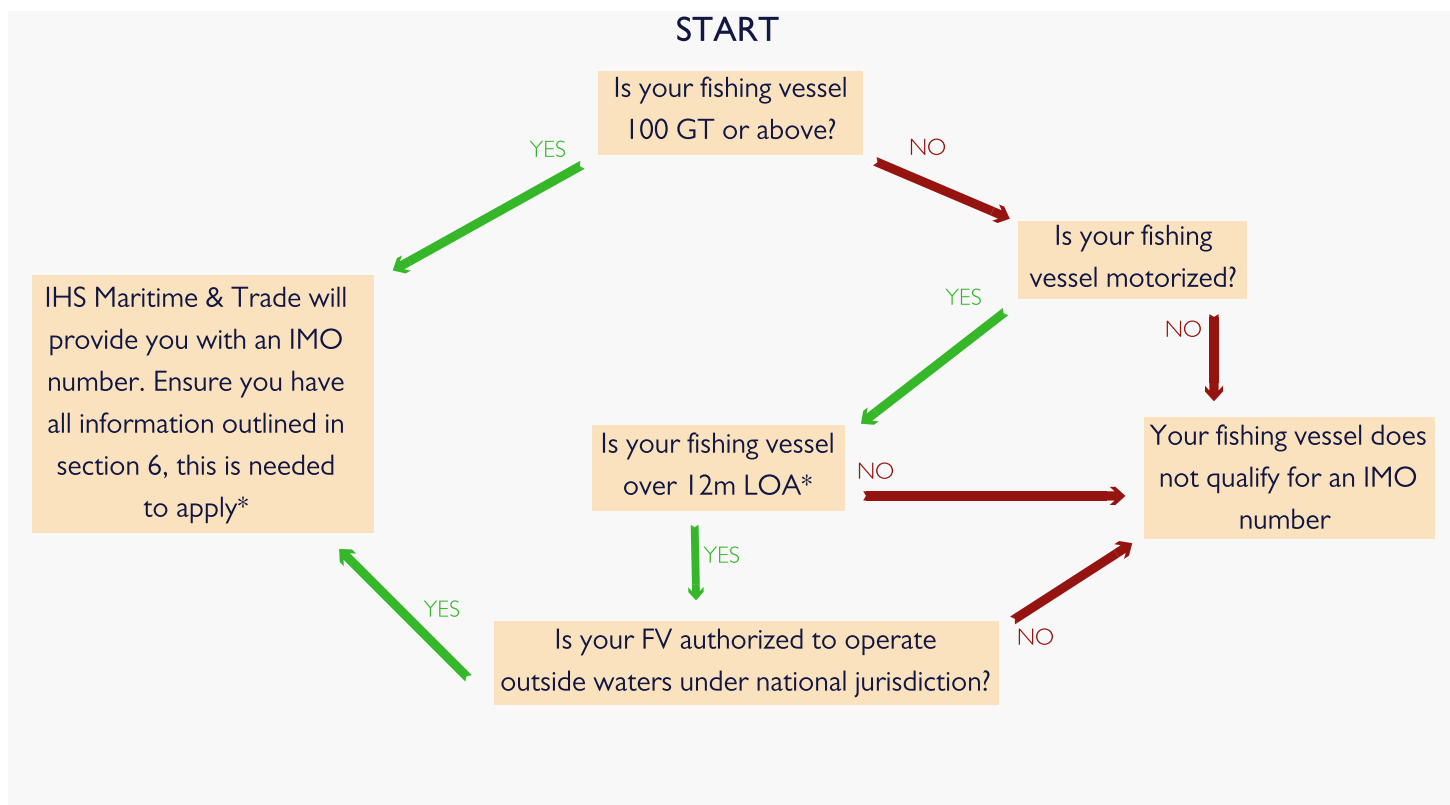
FOR MORE INFORMATION

Trygg Mat Tracking [www.tm-tracking.org](http://www.tm-tracking.org)

IHS Maritime & Trade [www.ihsmarket.com](http://www.ihsmarket.com)



# IMO NUMBER SHIP IDENTIFICATION SCHEME APPLICATION



\* Please refer to section 6 to see all information needed for an IMO number application

\* LOA = Length Overall

## 4. WHAT IS THE COST?

There is no fee. Obtaining an IMO number is FREE.

## 5. HOW CAN AN IMO NUMBER BE OBTAINED?

### 5.1 As an owner for a single vessel:

Applications can be made online at <http://imonumbers.ihs.com> using the free registration system, or you can download a form and send to IHS Maritime & Trade at the following address:

IHS Maritime & Trade  
Sentinel House  
163 Brighton Road  
Coulsdon, Surrey  
CR5 2YH  
United Kingdom

Email: [ship.imo@ihs.com](mailto:ship.imo@ihs.com) Tel: +44 (0)1334 328300



### 5.2 As a flag State for multiple vessels:

Should you require multiple IMO numbers please contact the IHS Maritime & Trade IMO Ship Numbering Department via email.

Email: [ship.imo@ihs.com](mailto:ship.imo@ihs.com) for a multiple IMO request form in spreadsheet format and cc TMT using the email address [info@tm-tracking.org](mailto:info@tm-tracking.org) to ensure that technical assistance can be provided.

## 6. WHAT INFORMATION MUST BE PROVIDED TO OBTAIN AN IMO NUMBER?

### Required Information Where to find this information

- Ship Name** • Actual name under which the vessel will navigate
- Former name(s)** • Name(s) the vessel previously known as. May be found on the vessel's flag or registry certificate
- Current flag** • Nationality of vessel. May be found on the vessel's flag or registry certificate
- Port of registry** • May be found on the vessel's registry certificate
- Former flag** • Nationality of the vessel before current flag. May be found on the vessel's flag or registry certificate
- Call sign** • May be found on the vessel's flag or registry certificate
- Official number** • May be found on the vessel's flag or registry certificate
- MMSI number** • A Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) number is only issued to vessels fitted with Digital Selective Calling (DSC) and/or (Satellite) Ship Earth Station (SES) equipment. In order to get an MMSI number a vessel will need to be in possession of a valid Ship Radio Licence
- Fishing number** • Fishing registration letters, numbers or combination of both and issued by national fishery licencing authority. May be found displayed on vessel hull or superstructure
- Gross tonnage** • May be found on the vessel's tonnage certificate and/or flag or registry certificate
- Length overall (m)** • Extreme length of vessels hull. May be found on the vessel's flag or registry certificate, more often Registered length or Length between perpendiculars will be shown
- Moulded depth (m)** • Vertical distance measured from the top of the keel to the top of the freeboard deck beam at side. May be found on the vessel's flag or registry certificate
- Extreme breadth (m)** • Width of a ship over the outside of all planking or plating at the widest frame. May be found on the vessel's flag or registry certificate
- Date of build** • Date of completion/delivered/entered service. May be found on the vessel's flag or registry certificate
- Keel laid date** • Date on which construction identifiable to the vessel commenced. May be found on the builder's certificate
- Shipbuilder** • Name of company/shipbuilder that constructed the vessel. May be found on the builder's certificate, vessel's flag or registry certificate. Will be found on builder's plate if on vessel
- Hull number** • Shipbuilder unique reference number for a vessel on order/under construction, often sequential. May be found on builder's plate if on vessel or on the builders certificate
- Country of build** • Country in which vessel was built. May be found on the vessel's flag or registry certificate or on the builder's certificate
- Number of main engines** • May be found on the vessel's flag or registry certificate
- Engine model** • Official designation of the engine given by the manufacturer, often combining model, type and displacement. Will be found on plate affixed to main engine
- Type of vessel** • E.g. purse-seiner - Specific details on fishing vessel
- Hull material** • Specific details on the material of the hull
- Registered owner** • Name of the person/company to appear in the documents as registered owners
- Owner address** • Full address of the registered owners as it shall appear in the registration documents
- Photograph of vessel** • If available

## 7. WHAT TO DO ONCE AN IMO NUMBER HAS BEEN OBTAINED

Ships' identification numbers are required to be clearly and permanently marked in a visible place either on the ship's hull or superstructure.

Fishing vessels may mark the IMO number in one of two places either on the stern or stern quarter with the name and port, taking care to avoid the part of the hull where nets are taken on board and may obscure the markings. Alternatively vessels may display the IMO number on the hull or superstructure sides, with the call sign and/or fishing number.

Ships should also be marked with their ID numbers internally. Your flag administration or class society can provide further guidance regarding display of IMO numbers.

