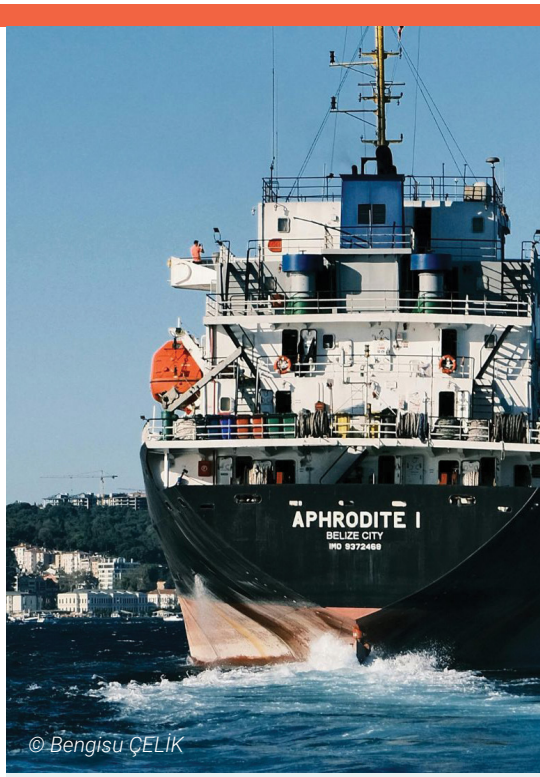
Global Fishing Watch

Fact sheet
June 2026

IMO Numbers: A Guide for Governments



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Definition and purpose

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) number is a permanent, unique seven-digit identifier assigned to a vessel for its entire lifespan. For government and regulatory bodies, this system is a critical mechanism for enhancing maritime safety, mitigating fraud and combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

IMO numbers are required for all motorized fishing vessels and commercial maritime craft that meet the following criteria:

- **100 GT and above:** All vessels of 100 gross tonnage (GT) or more, regardless of area of operation.
- **Sub -100 GT and > 12 meters:** All vessels below 100 GT, down to 12 meters in length overall, when operating outside of their flag State's territorial waters.

S&P Global Market Intelligence manages the issuance and identification system on behalf of the IMO. The assignment of a number is recorded within a comprehensive, centralized database that serves as a single source of truth for international maritime authorities. This database captures and maintains essential, lifelong vessel data, including construction information, registration, ownership and status.

Issuance process

As a general regulatory standard, all vessels built after Jan. 1, 1998, that meet the qualifying size threshold must be assigned an IMO number. Securing these identifiers is free of charge for all governments and flag States.

Administrations have two primary mechanisms for obtaining IMO numbers for their fleets:

- **Block allocation (recommended):** This is the most efficient and streamlined approach for government registries. Administrations can submit their complete national registry data in a spreadsheet to S&P Global. The data is reviewed, and missing IMO numbers are assigned in bulk, ensuring comprehensive fleet compliance.
- **Individual application**: Vessel owners or registry officials can apply online at imonumbers.ihs.com or submit a physical application form directly to S&P Global offices.

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Submission requirements

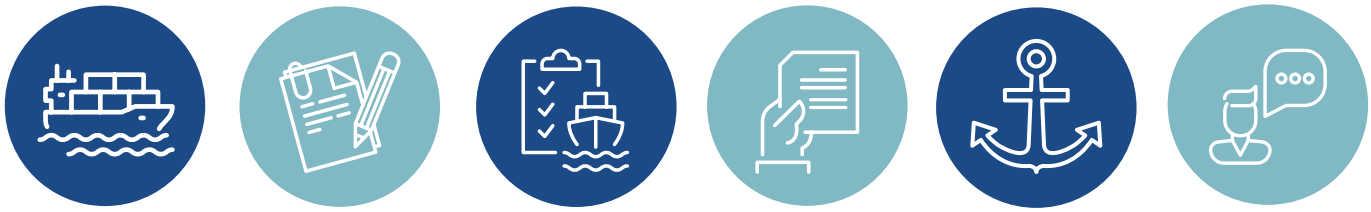
To maintain the integrity of the global database and prevent duplicate registrations, all applications must include accurate and comprehensive vessel data. Providing complete information upfront minimizes administrative delays and reinforces the reliability of the national maritime registry.

Required data includes:

- **Vessel specifications:** Precise dimensions, gross tonnage and propulsion details.
- **Construction data:** The designated shipbuilder and port of construction.
- **Ownership details:** Information regarding the current registered owner, including contact details.

Once an application is approved, the IMO number is automatically generated. The number issued is integrated into the vessel's certificates, documentation and databases, including official registries, ship databases and certificates such as the International Tonnage Certificate and other IMO platforms.

How to obtain an IMO number



1

DETERMINE ELIGIBILITY

Check if the vessel meets the size and jurisdiction criteria

2

CHOOSE APPLICATION METHOD

Online or physical application for a single vessel owner

Contact S&P Global to submit a flag State's request for multiple vessels

3

PREPARE THE DATA

Collect the necessary information on the vessel(s)

4

SUBMIT APPLICATION

Send, bring or contact S&P Global with the completed application

5

RECEIVE IMO NUMBER

Owners of a single vessel will receive an IMO number assigned by S&P Global

6

FOR FLAG STATES: INFORM VESSEL OWNER

Notify the ship owner of the assigned IMO number

Contact

info@globalfishingwatch.org

globalfishingwatch.org

@globalfishingwatch.org

@globalfishwatch

/globalfishingwatch

/globalfishingwatch

Global Fishing Watch is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing ocean governance through increased transparency of human activity at sea. By creating and publicly sharing map visualizations, data and analysis tools, we aim to enable scientific research and transform the way our ocean is managed. We believe human activity at sea should be public knowledge in order to safeguard the global ocean for the common good of all.

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