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US in unilateral ballast water move

Rajesh Joshi - Tuesday 17 July 2007

A TOUGH new proposed law that is wending its way through the US Congress could effectively neutralise the likelihood of the US ratifying the IMO's ballast water treaty, according to informed sources, writes Rajesh Joshi.


Jim Oberstar, Democratic Congressman from Minnesota and the chairman of the transport and infrastructure committee of the US House of Representatives, is promoting a sweeping clause on ballast water included in the US Coast Guard Reauthorisation Act of 2007 passed by his committee at the end of June.

The Bill sets 2015 as the deadline for "no invasive species" to be discharged into US waters and requires ships to install ballast water treatment systems by 2009. Water quality standards for the treated ballast water proposed in the Bill are 10 times more stringent than the IMO standard that will go into effect that same year.

The Bill, similar in content to an earlier Bill that died with the outgoing Congress in 2006, now awaits a full House vote. A similar clause needs to be present in the Senate version and survive a conference-level reconciliation of the two versions before it can become law.

Nonetheless, experts familiar with the workings of Washington have suggested that with such a tough law at hand, more so during election year in 2008, the possibility of the US ratifying the IMO treaty is receding by the day.

"The window of opportunity is closed," a source said. "If the world really wanted the IMO treaty, it should have been easy to come up with the 30 signatory nations by now. It might be too late if anyone is still waiting for the US to take the lead."

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