Since Kyoto, IMO has failed to deliver significant progress to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) from the international shipping sector. Shipping emissions have increased by approximately 70% since 1990 and represented 2.7% of global CO₂ emissions in 2012. If these emissions were reported as a country, maritime transport would rank between Japan and Germany on a table of CO₂ emitters. Under current policies, the IMO’s 2014 GHG study forecasts shipping CO₂ emissions to increase by 50% to 250% by 2050, which would then represent between 6% to 14% of total global emissions. While emissions from other sectors have started declining or are looking to peak in 2020, none of the “business as usual” scenarios for shipping foresee a decline in shipping emissions before 2050.

This week, the Republic of the Marshall Islands will present at the IMO a proposal calling for a global reduction target on shipping carbon emissions. When a developing country which is the holder of the world’s third largest shipping registry can see the existential threat posed by rising shipping emissions, isn’t it time for the IMO to step up to the plate and agree to a globally binding carbon reduction target? Particularly in the year when all countries are being asked to make reduction commitments as part of the UNFCCC process culminating at the UN climate talks in Paris this December.