The compromise negotiator

IMO regulation may seem to be fundamentally about agreeing on science but Ian Adams, former secretary-general of IBIA, tells **Girija Shettar**, negotiation on politics can be crucial

> In November 2005 Ian Adams was secretary-general of the International Bunker Industry Association (IBIA) when it obtained IMO consultancy status and an open door to participate in amendments to historic environmental convention MARPOL Annex VI.

Annex VI sets limits on sulphur and nitrogen oxide emissions from ship exhausts and contains provisions allowing for special sulphur oxide emission control areas.

Becoming a member of the IMO's Bulk Liquids and Gases (BLG) sub-committee, Adams was able to win both flexibility and certainty for the industry in this critical area.

In 2008, he helped negotiate permission for methods of compliance that offered an alternative to switching fuel. The revision went into force in 2010.

But for Adams, the biggest IMO decision that hinged on his negotiating skills was achieving clarity on sulphur emission limits in dedicated emission control areas. The resulting test precision procedure was established in 2008 and set a precedent: the EU adopted it this year, in place of the methodology from the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

In February 2008 BLG12 had reached an impasse. A few delegates with opposing views had stalled the process. Adams for IBIA, along with Denmark, opposed by Germany and Norway, wanted clarity on precisely what level of sulphur emissions would or would not be considered on or off specification. At the time, the sulphur emissions limit ships had to meet was set at 1.50%.

At stake were supplier/buyer contracts and, most crucially, trade efficiency if ships found to have off-spec fuel were prevented from sailing.

Adams explained: "It was identified that if you got a single test result of 1.43 or less you were 95% confident that that fuel was on spec, as opposed to a test result of 1.57 and above, in which case you were 95% confident it was off spec. So there was a grey area between 1.43 and 1.57. If we got a test result of 1.51, did that mean the fuel was off-spec?"

Not according to the ISO, for which 1.51 was in the range of reproducibility and repeatability for an on-spec (single) test.

Further explaining this point, Adams said: "This means that if you get a test result of 1.51 or 1.53 and re-test it you may get 1.50 or less, so the reproducibility and repeatability of the test had a percentage of error, if you like. Thus, you could argue that under ISO test precision, up to 1.56 was on spec for 1.50 for a single test."

The debate raged, with some member states wanting a test result greater than 1.43 to be considered off spec to ensure that the fuel being consumed was definitely below 1.50.

"But this would have effectively lowered the limit, as the suppliers would have had to blend to an even lower target in order to be confident of a result below 1.43," said Adams, who was looking out for both shipowners and fuel suppliers.

Adams' hard work paid off and the IMO test precision document was drawn up, detailing the procedure for checking that fuel is on spec.

The decision was not a scientific one, admitted Adams. "It was a political approach that was acceptable to all parties. That is the character of most IMO decisions," he said, while emphasising that he believed it was "a very good compromise" between the two approaches.

'If you rush things through, you often have to make changes, whereas with consensual law-making, as at the IMO, you obviate this risk'

Adams, who now runs his own training and consultancy business, IMA Marine, is a supporter of the IMO decision-making process. He disagrees with the opinion that it is too slow and cites swift enforcement of the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code after 9/11.

But rapidity, said Adams, "is not necessarily the right way to make decisions. If you rush things through, you often have to make