

Alternative marine fuels are coming – are we ready?

The OPRC-HNS Protocol was adopted in 2000 and entered into force seven years later, setting out the international framework for preparedness, response and cooperation to spills/releases of Hazardous and Noxious Substances (HNS). During this period there was significant focus by countries on establishing national contingency plans, considering options for developing response capacity and identifying the best way forward in the face of a vast array of products of widely differing behaviours and hazards. Whilst a wealth of information existed on the properties and behaviours of these products, there was considerably less information on how they behaved when released into the marine environment, and that gap remains significant up to present day. Now, almost 25 years since the OPRC-HNS Protocol was adopted, new industry-changing regulations establishing new marine fuel standards are expected to be adopted in 2025 that will push the topic preparedness and response to HNS incidents to the forefront once again, with the looming question being “Are we ready?”. This document will review the provisions of the OPRC-HNS Protocol, outline the provisions of the new regulations and the alternative fuels that are being considered in order to meet this new fuel standard, all of which fall firmly within the definition of an HNS. It will also explore some of the existing resources and future work that will inform the spill response community in order to strengthen existing HNS response capacity.