

# Shaping the Legislation for Autonomous Vessels in the UK

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**PRACTICES** Shipping, Autonomous Transportation, Offshore Oil and Gas

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The UK government has released a new [consultation](#) on remotely operated and autonomous vessels. This provides an excellent opportunity for any interested parties to be involved in the shaping of the UK's autonomous shipping regulation and help steer the future of this developing industry.

The review highlights that existing maritime regulation is a barrier to innovation and not written with new technology or business models in mind. It proposes three alternative responses to address autonomous vessels:

1. Amend the current legal framework and provide primary legislation to regulate all Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships (**MASS**) regardless of size. This option is advocated in the consultation as it will allow the UK to become a market leader in the MASS sector and take an active role in shaping new international law;
2. Wait for the IMO to produce new regulations for MASS, something that is not expected before 2028; or
3. Rely on the Maritime Coastguard Agency to continue to use the exemption available in The Merchant Shipping (Load Line) Regulations 1998 to allow MASS to operate in UK waters and under the UK flag.

The consultation invites comment on key definitions such as 'Master', 'Remote Operations' and 'Remote Operator', as well as wider questions concerning the vessels to be covered by the legislation, and looking at port and harbour authorities' powers, autonomous submersible apparatus, marine equipment and marine security.

It is to be hoped that there will be substantial participation in the consultation (and positive amendments to the legal framework for MASS in the UK as a result).

The consultation will run until 22 November 2021.