

IMLI
A Small Institution with a Global Mission

Dr. Murat Sumer
The Nippon Foundation Assistant Professor in International Maritime Law

Co-funded by the European Union

The central question

How can a globally integrated shipping industry operate effectively when the laws governing it remain largely dependent on individual States?

From international rule-making → national implementation → effective compliance



Why uniformity matters?

- The applicable rules of maritime (shipping) law may vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.
- This creates a problem as ships cross political boundaries and, in a single voyage, they could be subject to many different rules depending on the ports they visit.

The Complexity of a Maritime Casualty

One incident → several concurrent legal questions

Safety	People	Environment	Commerce	Liability
Collision / navigation	Passengers / crew	Pollution / response	Cargo / charterparty	Compensation / limits

The underlying problem is also institutional

A treaty is only as effective as the capacity of States to give it life.

Understand the obligation	**Draft effective law**	**Administer and enforce**



Throughout the 1980s the IMO realized that although it was producing a comprehensive legal framework to regulate maritime affairs, the treaties being adopted under its auspices were not being ratified by States. It was identified that there were two main reasons for this, namely:

(a) Lack of expertise to understand treaty rights and obligations; and

(b) Lack of expertise in maritime legal drafting.

The Role of Capacity-Building in the Effective Implementation of International Instruments

This highlighted the Importance of International Maritime Legal Education, which, since then, has **shifted focus** from codification (which remains important) **to the incorporation and effective implementation of international rules and standards into domestic legislation**.



The Establishment of IMLI

- IMLI was established in 1988 through an international agreement between IMO and the Government of Malta.
- The Institute's Statute was originally approved by the IMO Assembly at its 16th Session and was revised by the IMO Council at its 109th session in 2012 and the IMO Council at its 134th session in 2026.







IMLI's Purpose

- The main purpose of the Institute is to provide capacity-building for maritime professionals from all over the world to be able to assist in the implementation of IMO treaties and other international legal instruments.
- To fulfill its purpose, the Institute provides suitably qualified candidates with the opportunity to undertake advanced training, study and research in international maritime law.

Academic Programmes and Professional Training

DEGREES

- LL.M. in International Maritime Law;
- M.Hum. in International Maritime Legislation;
- M.Jur. and Ph.D. research degrees.

SPECIALIZED

- Advanced Diploma in International Maritime Law; and
- Specialized short courses.

The Need for Broad Capacity-Building for the Effective Implementation of International Instruments






IMLI's programmes are unique in that they cover the whole spectrum of international maritime law, including:

- Shipping Law;
- Law of the Sea;
- Marine Environmental Law; and
- International Maritime Security Law.





Maritime Legislation Drafting

- Since its inception IMLI's programmes have offered a dedicated course on maritime legislation drafting.
- **For the last two years, this course has been enhanced twice by a full week of detailed lectures delivered by IMO Officials**.

From Classroom to National Legislation



1

STUDY

Interpret the instrument

2

COMPARE

Assess national legal systems

3

DRAFT

Prepare implementing legislation

4

APPLY

Support institutions and administration

IMLI's Contribution to the International Maritime Community



Due to the special training provided at IMLI, many IMLI graduates hold influential positions in their national administrations / international fora.











Fulfilment of IMLI's Mission in Establishing a Cadre of Experts in International Maritime Law

Since the Institute's inception, a total of **1,311 maritime professionals** from **156 countries** and territories have successfully graduated from the Institute's different programmes.

THE STARTING POINT

Outside every national system

How it was set up

By an IMO Statute and a 1988 agreement between IMO and the Government of Malta.

The accreditation gap

As an international body, IMLI falls outside the jurisdiction of Malta's Further and Higher Education Authority.

The consequence

Recognition depended on each State deciding for itself, a problem IMO had already met with WMU degrees.

TIMELINE

Eight milestones

2010

Greece's national recognition centre recognises IMLI degrees

2017

IMO Assembly (A 30) urges Member States to recognise IMLI degrees

2019

IMO Assembly (A 31) repeats the call to governments

Mar 2020

LL.M. found comparable to MQF Level 7

Jun 2020

Doctoral programme found comparable to MQF Level 8

Apr 2023

M.Hum. found comparable to MQF Level 7

Nov 2023

M.Jur. found comparable to MQF Level 7

2023

Director tells IMO Council he hopes other governments will follow Malta

PHASE 3

Malta’s comparability route

1

Voluntary submission

IMLI submits a programme, although it is outside MFHEA’s remit

2

Comparability study

Commissioned by MFHEA against MQF knowledge, skills and competences

3

MQF level assigned

Level 7 (Master’s) or Level 8 (Doctoral), with an ECTS estimate

4

Ongoing audit

The rating holds only while the programme stays subject to audit

IMLI keeps its international status and accepts an external quality check voluntarily.

RESULTS

Four programmes placed on the MQF

Programme	MQF/EQF level	ECTS	Study dated
Master of Laws (LL.M.)	Level 7	90	20 March 2020
Doctoral programme	Level 8	Not applicable	26 June 2020
Master of Humanities (M.Hum.)	Level 7	90	26 April 2023
Majister Juris (M.Jur.)	Level 7	90	17 November 2023

Each rating is maintained only while IMLI keeps the programme under programme audit.

WHAT IT ACHIEVED

A reference point for graduates

Readable in Europe

MQF levels align with the EQF, so a Level 7 or Level 8 rating has a common meaning across Europe.

Evidence for others

Recognition centres and employers elsewhere can rely on a published national finding.

The limit

The final decision still rests with each country’s own recognition authorities.

LESSONS

What the IMLI experience shows

Status

International status protects independence but leaves an institute outside national accreditation.

Method

Voluntary comparability, kept current by audit, can stand in for formal accreditation.

Mandate

IMO Assembly decisions gave governments a reason to act, and Malta acted on them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks for their support

IMLI is grateful to them, and to the Government of Malta, for their support in bringing its degrees within the MQF/EQF.

Lawrence Azzopardi

Head of Accreditation, National Commission for Further and Higher Education (now MFHEA), at the time of the LL.M. recognition

Stefan Sant

Head MQRIC, MFHEA
IMLI Graduate

James Perry Maia

Chief Executive Officer
MFHEA

Michelle Calleja Gafa`

Head Further Education, Higher Education and Validation, MFHEA


Thank You!
IMLI