

## The Dangers of Putting the Polar Code on Ice

REGULATORS NEED TO ISSUE A STRONGER CALL FOR RAPID AND ROBUST PROGRESS IN RELATION TO THE POLAR REGIONS. ISSUES OF BLACK CARBON AND HFO NEED TO BE CONSIDERED NOW, WHILE TRAFFIC LEVELS REMAIN MANAGEABLE, SAYS ANTOINE KEDZIERSKI, POLICY OFFICER FOR CLEAN SHIPPING AT TRANSPORT & ENVIRONMENT.

BY ANTOINE KEDZIERSKI

**IT HAS BEEN** three years since the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) began its work on an international code regulating the safety and the environmental aspects of shipping in polar waters, known as the Polar Code. So far, only timid progress has been made. Yet the alarming reports on the effects of climate change in the Arctic and the Antarctic underpin how vital it is to ensure that the growth in shipping activities in these areas does not worsen the situation. Time is of the essence in developing the Code. Despite this challenge, too many regulators have lost their nerve in the face of determined industry and geo-political pressures.

### THE ARCTIC IS MELTING AT AN UNPRECEDENTED RATE

It is now May, and the Arctic sea ice has already passed its annual maximum extent and is beginning its seasonal decline through spring and summer. Over the past decade, the Arctic has warmed twice as rapidly as the rest of the globe and in September 2012, for the first year since satellite measurements began, the Arctic sea ice cover dropped below four million square kilometers - slightly more than half of the average extent between 1979 and

2010. Not only is the sea-ice extent dramatically declining, but the cover is now dominated by younger, thinner ice, which is more likely to melt in the following summer season. Multiyear ice used to cover up to 60% of the Arctic Ocean's surface in winter, whereas it now covers only 30%.

The prospect of an ice-free Arctic ocean in the near future draws closer. Scientists from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration recently suggested that the possibility of ice-free summers in the Arctic could become a reality before 2050, and possibly within the next decade or two. This is much earlier than what the previous conventional climate models estimated and as a result, many companies and governments are now scrambling to exploit the resources of the region, develop tourism and open new sea routes. Unsurprisingly, the record low sea-ice cover from September 2012 also resulted in a record high number of shipping activities along the Northern Sea Route (NSR), growing at double-digit figures. In 2012, around 1.26 million tonnes of cargo were transported on the NSR, a 53% increase over 2011.

*continued >*