

Application of the IMO taxonomy on casualty investigation: Analysis of 20 years of marine accidents along the North-East Passage

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Abstract

In the context of global warming and ice melting in the Arctic Ocean, maritime activities have significantly increased over recent years. However, the Arctic remains a wild and risky region where marine accidents regularly occur. Despite the difficulty in compiling relevant data on Arctic shipping casualties, we have identified 156 accidents along the North-East Passage (NEP) over the last twenty years. Following a data-driven approach, we combine multiple sources and use the standardized International Maritime Organization (IMO) taxonomy on casualty investigation. We disclose and classify the concerned cases by severity level, cause, age, and type of vessels. We draw the profile of the vessels with the highest accidentology level, ascertain the high-risk areas and the seasons with the highest accident rate. Our results stress that serious casualties represent the largest part of the accidents occurring in this area. Fishing vessels show the highest accident rate, and machinery issues are one of the most common accident types. Furthermore, the NEP accidentology during the last two decades does not seem to decline unlike the downward trend elsewhere around the globe. Finally, we call for greater reporting of marine accidents and compliance with the IMO risk classification to better understand accidentology in this growing shipping zone. A plea in favor of stricter enforcement of the Polar Code and a holistic risk-based policy combining mandatory and non-mandatory measures are notably suggested to prevent casualties in the near future.

Keywords: Arctic navigation, maritime accidents, risk analysis, IMO Casualty Investigation Code, Polar Code.

Application of the IMO taxonomy on casualty investigation: Analysis of 20 years of marine accidents along the North-East Passage

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Abstract

In the context of global warming and ice melting in the Arctic Ocean, maritime activities have significantly increased over recent years. However, the Arctic remains a wild and risky region where marine accidents regularly occur. Despite the difficulty in compiling relevant data on Arctic shipping casualties, we have identified 156 accidents along the North-East Passage (NEP) over the last twenty years. Following a data-driven approach, we combine multiple sources and use the standardized International Maritime Organization (IMO) taxonomy on casualty investigation. We disclose and classify the concerned cases by severity level, cause, age, and type of vessels. We draw the profile of the vessels with the highest accidentology level, ascertain the high-risk areas and the seasons with the highest accident rate. Our results stress that serious casualties represent the largest part of the accidents occurring in this area. Fishing vessels show the highest accident rate, and machinery issues are one of the most common accident types. Furthermore, the NEP accidentology during the last two decades does not seem to decline unlike the downward trend elsewhere around the globe. Finally, we call for greater reporting of marine accidents and compliance with the IMO risk classification to better understand accidentology in this growing shipping zone. A plea in favor of stricter enforcement of the Polar Code and a holistic risk-based policy combining mandatory and non-mandatory measures are notably suggested to prevent casualties in the near future.

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1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, the North-East Passage (NEP) has become a matter of increased scientific interest, mainly due to the capabilities and economic potentials of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) compared to the Suez Canal Route (SCR) and Panama Canal (Faury et al., 2019; Kiiski, 2017; Pruyn, 2016). The impacts of global warming do not spare the Arctic Ocean (IPCC, 2022; Melia et al., 2016) and the presence of ice-free areas is more frequent, especially during summer.

The NEP is composed of the Norwegian Sea and of the following seas in the Russian waters: Barents Sea, Kara Sea, Laptev Sea, East Siberian Sea (Vostochno-Sibirskoye), Chukchi Sea, Bering Sea and Northern-Pacific. Open since 1991 (Pruyn, 2016; Zhang et al., 2016), the NSR extends for around 3,000 miles (4,800 km) and is managed by the 'Northern Sea Route Administration' (NSRA)¹ which monitors and controls navigation. Sailing along the NSR is generally feasible from July to November (ABS, 2014) while icebreaker assistance is often necessary. Throughout 2017 and 2022, the volume traffic on the NSR tripled reaching more than 34 million tons (CHNL, 2023). This increasing traffic is mainly due to the development of oil and gas projects in the Russian Arctic (Faury et al., 2020; Faury and Cariou, 2016; Humpert, 2014; Marchenko, 2014a) attracting investments in port infrastructures (Gritsenko and Efimova, 2017), such the Yamal LNG plant in the Ob Bay (Rigot-Muller et al., 2022) and the Prirazlomnoye platform in the Pechora Sea. Consequently, maritime traffic should progressively grow in the next decade (Iudin and Petrov, 2016) not only in terms of liquid or dry bulk but also for passengers (Palma et al., 2019). Bearing this in mind, the current conflict with Ukraine is likely to slow this continued growth as underlined by the reduction in foreign investments in Russia (OECD, 2022) and by the latest figures showing a slight downward trend (CHNL, 2023).

Nevertheless, the rise of maritime traffic in the NEP is not exempt from future challenges, especially regarding maritime safety and environmental protection. In response, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) adopted the 'International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters' called 'Polar Code' (PC hereafter) (IMO, 2014). Further, whereas some studies have already highlighted the accidentology patterns in this zone (Marchenko, 2012a; 2012b; FoU, 2016; Fedi et al., 2020a; 2020b), the picture provided is often fragmented and not standardized pursuant to the IMO Casualty Investigation Code (IMO, 2008). This absence of proper classification combined with a long trend of underreporting limits the understanding of marine accidents in the Arctic and prevents insurance companies from properly assessing the related risks (Fedi et al., 2018a).

Based on a 20-year observation from 2000 to 2020, this paper aims to categorize and map marine accidents that occurred along the NEP, including the Russian and Norwegian Arctic zones. It also draws the profile of accident-prone ships and ascertains the high-risk areas and the seasons with the highest accident rate. The main contributions of the paper are to:

- provide a deeper knowledge and understanding of marine accidentology in the NEP that still appears as a "black box" while this zone is deemed to welcome more maritime traffic,
- compare the ships' age subject to accidents to the age of ice-class vessels,
- put into perspective both the accidents map and existing/forthcoming infrastructures which may harbor Search and Rescue (SAR) operations,
- and define a holistic risk-based policy to prevent serious casualties in this zone.

¹ http://www.nsra.ru/en/glavnaya/celi_funktsii.html

Following the Introduction, Section 2 reviews the existing literature on marine accidentology in the Arctic and along the NEP. The methodology is explained in Section 3 while Section 4 focuses on the accident analysis and taxonomy. An in-depth discussion is proposed in Section 5 whereas conclusions are addressed in Section 6.

2. Marine accidentology in the Arctic and along the NEP: a literature review

2.1. NEP flows, risk models, and mitigation tools

There are currently three main areas for navigation within the Arctic, the North-West Passage (NWP), the Transpolar Route (TPR), and the North-East Passage (NEP) (Bennet et al., 2022). As the ice melts, the NWP and the NEP represent two future strategic routes allowing shipowners to significantly reduce distance and therefore time between the Atlantic and Pacific basins (Theocharis et al., 2018; Schøyen & Bråthen, 2011). These routes offer potential savings in terms of bunker costs (e.g. Cheaitou et al., 2020; Cariou et al., 2019; Cariou and Faury, 2015; Liu & Kronbak, 2010) while the assessment of the related air pollutant emissions remains questionable (Zhu et al., 2018; Yumashev et al., 2017; [Lindstad](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Elizabeth-Lindstad?_sg%5B0%5D=eSbPRYNtEjlBQoLygl1OM9CNaudj1jSosNvntKMW5BRrSQpV-pbN_nmjWg74Jj-XM6ca1Ss.WZSnk8MRsiNEt46LspNVoRZSZl2E7C1NS-up2gJiiWh9daaLJYq8jn_Ru1MjY1KliCVEFe-3E7u42i4ylvpLcg&_sg%5B1%5D=vjHNbciQipIba07X68vp3t9IAG-ZzoC_nPYUL9F1UPXz6CdW-OmjnQMU-OdxPpDCxyRwlD0.Rxf5G0JqXRTG39m2j3BS6nkZiPepwYKpj4geW7ClGqZrSyQlQfwqs4Dkwe0tOXBDWfDULgQfdZbhZGwYavs6Ig) et al., 2016). Between 2013 and 2019, a 75% increase has been observed in the distance sailed by ships in the Arctic Ocean (PAME, 2020). Moreover, maritime shipping in the NEP have substantially grown since 2010 (Faury et al., 2021), and notably thanks to Russia encouraging investments along its shores (Staalesen, 2018; 2019; Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2010; Russian Government, 2020, 2022). If the maritime activities are diversified (Faury et al., 2021; Marchenko et al., 2018; AMSA 2009), bulk trade is dominant (Gunnarsson, 2021) with more heavy parcels (Rigot-Muller et al., 2022). The western and eastern parts of the NEP welcome cruise and fishing vessels (Fu et al., 2021; Halliday et al., 2018) knowing that the latter constitutes more than half of the traffic in these areas (Silber and Adams, 2019).

However, sailing in the Arctic involves numerous inherent risks. A large combination of hazards, linked to harsh climate conditions, icebergs, ice presence and thickness during most of the year, very low temperatures, shallow waters, poor visibility, lack of up-to-date charts (Pastusiak, 2015), remoteness (Fedi et al., 2020a), the scarcity of navigational aids and SAR infrastructures (Christodoulou et al., 2022; Bentz et al., 2021; Parviainen et al., 2019; SARC, 2017) represent huge challenges for ships, crew (Montewka et al., 2015) and local communities (Afenyo et al., 2022). Significant investments have been recently made in port development and icebreaker fleet renewal to improve the safety response system (Gritensko & Efimova, 2017; Moe & Brigham, 2017). Risk appraisal is also paramount for underwriters who dread a second Titanic (Fedi et al., 2018a) and for shipowners (Tseng and Cullinane, 2018) who pay particular attention to technical factors notably communication tools, hydrographic data and icebreaker assistance (Gritsenko & Kiiski, 2016). Scholars and specialized bodies have evaluated these risks both for the Arctic Circle (Baksh et al., 2018; FoU, 2016; Marchenko et al., 2015; Kum and Sahin, 2015; AMSA, 2009) and for the Russian Arctic more specifically (Fedi et al., 2020a; Vihanninjoki, 2014; ABS, 2014; Marchenko, 2012a, 2012b, 2014a). This singular context has fostered growing research on risk management (for a synthesis: Fu et al., 2021) and risk analysis models applied to Arctic shipping, especially in ice-covered waters (for a review: Xu et al., 2021).

Polar risk management has been transposed in the PC (IMO, 2014) that entered into force in 2017 through a formal "proceduralization of risk mitigation" (Fedi, 2019) imposing new requirements such as the Polar Ship Certificate (PSC), the Polar Water Operational Manual (POWM) or the "Voyage Planning." Moreover, the mandatory and risk-and-goal-based PC (Henriksen, 2014; Bai, 2015) clearly identifies the risks that ships may face during navigation and sets out procedures to assess, control, and mitigate them. To prevent risk occurrence, the PC lays down different rules mainly focused on safety and secondarily on environmental

protection that frame the ship's "polarseaworthiness", i.e., her capacity to meet the very specific hazards of polar waters (Rigot-Muller et al., 2022). As shown in Fig. 1, the PC provisions are completed by the 'Polar Operational Limit Assessment Risk Indexing System' (POLARIS) that evaluates vessel operational capacities in different ice conditions as per the ship class (IMO, 2016). As the 'Arctic Ice Regime Shipping System' (AIRSS), POLARIS has a direct impact on the ship's operational evaluation and supports the decision-makers for a safer route (Fedi et al., 2018b) while it also shows some limitations (Bergström et al., 2022; Browne et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2021).

FIG. 1 The PC and proceduralization of risk mitigation

Source: based on Rigot-Muller et al. (2022) and Fedi (2019)

2.2. Knowledge of marine accidents at international level

Marine accidents are regularly reported through public and private institutions (Goerlandt & Liu, 2023). At international level, the IMO which unifies the rules on maritime safety, security, and environmental protection (Fedi, 2021; Monios, 2020), provides a database called "Global Integrated Shipping Information System" (GISIS) with a dedicated portal to "marine casualties and incidents"² maintained by IMO members further to the 2008 Casualty Investigation Code (IMO, 2008). Entered into force in 2010, this instrument sets out that "investigation and proper analysis of marine casualties and incidents can lead to greater awareness of casualty causation and result in remedial measures, including better training, for the purpose of enhancing the safety of life at sea and protecting the marine environment". That is why states must notify casualties when they occur and submit their *final marine safety investigation report* to the IMO (Chapter 14, Part II). At the European level, the same policy is implemented pursuant to Directive 2009/18/EC, and the member states associated with Iceland and Norway also notify casualties occurring in their waters or caused by their flag ships (EP, 2009) through the "European Marine Casualty Information Platform" (EMCIP). ³ Furthermore, private bodies such as the International Union of Marine Insurance (IUMI), and insurance companies such as Lloyds or ALLIANZ, regularly publish reports on shipping accidentology. Recent studies have underlined the lowest record of losses with 38 in 2022 compared to 207 in 2000 thanks to better ship designs, technological innovations, port operations, updated charts and risk management (ALLIANZ, 2023). While one could observe fewer accidents globally over the last decade,

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<https://gisis.imo.org/Public/MCI/Default.aspx>

<http://www.emsa.europa.eu/emcip.html>

some reports have emphasized an increase of accidents in the Arctic Circle especially between 2012 and 2017 (CASA, 2021; ALLIANZ, 2021).

2.3. Knowledge of marine accidents in the Arctic and along the NEP: a 'black box'?

Statistics on marine accidents in Arctic waters are still limited nowadays. This limitation mainly lies in the fact that, compared to traditional maritime areas, shipping is not yet very developed in this zone due to risky sailing conditions (Lasserre et al., 2016; Fu et al., 2016; Haavik, 2017). The underlying risks exist even more substantially in the Russian Arctic and then along the NEP eastern part which is characterized by adverse variable weather conditions aggravated by persistent ice cover even in summer (ABS, 2014; AMSA, 2009). Ice features vary among ice massif or concentrated ice, drifting icepacks that make sailing difficult, hazardous, and unpredictable (Abbassi et al., 2017; Marchenko, 2012a, 2012b, 2014a).

Underreporting is the second key reason (Goerlandt et al., 2017; Fedi et al., 2020a) and consultation of the GISIS reveals the states' shortcomings (Fedi et al., 2020b). One assumes that states unequally comply with the IMO Casualty Investigation Code, and some events are not reported in the relevant databases. That is why we use the "black box" metaphor. It should also be noted that the Casualty Investigation Code only requires member states to notify "marine casualty" (art. 5.1) and to draft a "safety investigation" for "very serious marine casualty" (art. 6.1), meaning that investigation as regards simple "marine incident" and "serious casualties" is not mandatory.

Additionally, even though some reports have been published, they provide general data, a limited period of analysis, little or no details on the concerned vessel's characteristics and on the precise location of the accidents that hinder appropriate evaluation of Arctic accidentology (Grabowski et al., 2009; Fedi et al. 2020a). This is the case of AMSA (2009) between 1995- 2004 but without the Russian Arctic, the yearly accident figures from ALLIANZ which never disclosed the concerned areas (ALLIANZ, 2014-2021) and the FoU (2016) report (2010-2015 period) which only focused on specific zones along the NEP. In the same vein, the 'Compendium of Arctic Shipping Accidents' (CASA) launched to collect statistics on Arctic marine accidents published a first study encompassing 12 years (2005-2017) which provided a general picture (CASA, 2021). Scholars carried out complementary analyses notably Marchenko (2012b) throughout the 1990-2010 period, Kum and Sahin (2015) for 1993-2011 and Fedi et al. (2020a; 2020b) as regards the 1991-2011 and 2007-2018 timeframes. As summarized in Table 1, the different published studies dealing with marine accidentology in the Arctic Circle including the NEP illustrate that data are currently discontinued, fragmented, and not fully standardized pursuant to IMO rules.

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TABLE 1 Marine accidentology in Arctic Circle and NEP

Moreover, the scarce data has been often coupled with approximate terminology. One notices that professional reports such as ALLIANZ (from 2014 to 2022), AMSA (2009), FoU (2016), CASA (2021) are generally vague on those events by concurrently referring to the notion of "incidents" or "accidents." Obviously, this current weakness found in other reports (Ladan & Hänninen, 2012) involves some confusion on the standardization of casualties, hiding their acuity level and thus their clear understanding (Xu et al., 2021; Fedi et al., 2020a; 2020b; Goerlandt et al., 2017).

Furthermore, as explained by Fu et al. (2021), most of the previous analyses are generally based on expert interviews due to the lack of information, they emphasized specific accident scenarios rather than accident reports and provided quantitative models to prevent their occurrence. While these authors recognized the usefulness of quantitative models "as a basis for identifying risk control options and developing management strategies", they finally questioned their "evidence base" and recommended "non-linear and data-driven approaches" for future research. Our paper attempts to fill this gap using a data-driven approach and to enrich the Arctic shipping accident statistics with a focus on the NEP considering its development that may relatedly induce more accidents.

3. Methodology

First, we have created our database for the period 2000 to 2020 via different sources such as IHS Markit database, marine investigation reports from CLARKSONS, the IMO GISIS, the existing literature on maritime accidents and specialized websites. We combined data coming from different sources to include the maximum number of incidents/accidents that occurred along the NEP. In line with other studies on maritime accidents (Luo & Shin, 2019), this crosscollection search is justified by the fragmented data from existing sources and by the difficulty in accessing appropriate statistics as stressed by Xu et al. (2021). These databases mainly provided temporal data (day, month, year), spatial data (latitude, longitude, accident area), data regarding the ship (age, type, class, dead weight (DWT)), and the main causes of the related events. We have identified 28 different primary reasons that we have classified into eight accidental factors (Table 2). We have selected the events that occurred along the NEP including the Russian and Norwegian Arctics, i.e., Northern Pacific, Laptev, East Siberian, Chukchi, Bering, and Okhotsk Seas. We justify the choice of the NEP since this represents a wider zone compared to the sole NSR, and it concentrates the busiest shipping area, especially in its western part. Second, we have defined the severity level of the different cases in accordance with the proper taxonomy of the IMO Casualty Investigation Code (IMO, 2008). Third, based on Faury et al. (2021), we have highlighted the level of remoteness of accident locations compared to the existing and forthcoming infrastructures. Fourth, we have underlined the most accident-prone ships. A special attention has been given to the age of the concerned vessels compared to the current fleet of ice-class vessels. We have identified the high-risk areas and the seasons with the highest accident rate, and we finally designed the related maps. The different steps that have been followed in the proposed methodology are detailed in Fig. 2.

FIG. 2 Methodology model

TABLE 2 Accident factors and definition

Source: Investigated cases by authors and definitions from EMSA report (2018)

To ease the analysis, we have gathered the vessels into 11 categories as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3 Consolidation of fleet vessel types

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We have then categorized accidents pursuant to the proper terminology of the Casualty Investigation Code. Two categories are in force: "marine incident" (MI) or "marine casualty" (MC) depending on their severity level. As shown in Table 4, the lowest level of severity belongs to MI, the intermediate level is "serious casualty" (SC), and the highest is "very serious casualty" (VSC). This study did not evaluate the human factor and potentially unsafe practices already analyzed (Marchenko, 2009, 2014a; Kum & Sahin, 2015).

TABLE 4 Taxonomy of marine incidents and casualties

Source: based on IMO Casualty Investigation Code

Finally, we have provided a detailed list (Appendix 1) with the identification of the respective vessels, their characteristics (name, IMO number, typology, DWT, year of construction, age), the appropriate taxonomy of the case, the location and the season (winter or summer). To the best of the authors' knowledge, little or no studies on Arctic marine accidentology have disclosed this amount of information so far.

4. Accident analysis and taxonomy

We have identified 156 cases that occurred along the NEP throughout the 2000-2020 period. 147 cases (94.2%) are MC which shows an obvious level of severity while 9 cases (5.7%) are MI. Among the MC cases, there are 127 SC (81.4%) and 20 VSC (12.8%) including 16 total losses.

4.1. MI/MC causes: a general overview

As illustrated in Table 5, it appears that *machinery damage* or *failure*, such as lost rudder or fouled propeller, constitute the most recurrent accidents with 57 cases (36.5%) mostly classified as SC. *Wrecked* or *stranded ships* represent around 20% of the total. *Collision* accounts for around 10.9% and represents mainly SC. Moreover, *climate* is responsible for 16 MC including 3 VSC and equals 12.2% of the total. *Fire/explosion* is implied for more than 8% and involves SC/VSC. Finally, *contact* either with ice or port facilities forms the lowest part with 5.1%.

Causes	Share of causes	MI	SC	VSC
Machinery damage/failure	36.5%	$\overline{4}$	51	$\overline{2}$
Wreck/stranding	19.9%	Ω	26	5
Climate	12.2%	3	13	3
Collision	10.9%	Ω	16	
Fire/explosion	8.3%	Ω	10	3
Hull damage	6.4%	$\overline{2}$	3	5
Contact	5.1%	Ω	8	θ
Unknown	0.6%	Ω	Ω	
TOTAL	100%	9	128	19

TABLE 5 Overview of the total distribution of marine accidents/incidents 2000-2020

TABLE 6 Percentage share of the different levels of accident/incident depending on the cause

Table 6 stresses that *machinery damage* occurrences generate mainly SC cases (88.5%) while they rarely lead to VSC (3.5%). *Climate* represents 68.4% of SC and 15.8% of VSC. Weather conditions are directly involved in 19 cases and constitute an aggravating factor for 16 others, especially very low temperatures with heavy weather or freezing conditions which may result in injuries, death of people, and total loss (e.g., Varnek in 2010 with eight killed crew members). Moreover, *hull damage* (holed, cracks, structural failure) clearly involves MC (30 % SC and 50% VSC) as well as *fire/explosion* (76.9% SC and 23.1% VSC). In the same vein, *wrecked/stranded ship* leads to 83.9% of SC and 16.1% of VSC whereas *collision* is mostly responsible for SC (94.1%). One notes that two collisions occurred during ice convoy (M/V SCF Amur and Mary Ugland in March 2010). Finally, *contact* implies 100% of SC.

4.2. Accident-prone ships, accident-prone areas, and seasons

As shown in Fig. 4, it appears that most MI/MC along the NEP concern fishing vessels (FVs), general cargoes, and tankers representing 61.5% of the total. Furthermore, it can be observed that passenger vessels represent 12.8% of MI/MC and constitute the fourth accidentprone ship type. It can also be seen that two MC involved nuclear-powered icebreakers: one

explosion/fire for M/S Arktika in 2007 and one collision M/S Taymyr in 2011. Around 60% of events occur in winter and 40% in summer.

FIG. 4 Distribution of accidents by type of vessels

Fig. 5 reveals that 64.1% of occurrences took place in the Norwegian Sea and the Russian side of the western part of the NEP (Barents, Pechora and White Seas, Kola Bay, and Port of Murmansk) and for the majority during winter. The eastern part of the NEP (Okhotsk, Northern Pacific, and Bering Seas) represents 26.3% of events mainly in winter (75.6%). The NSR (Kara, Laptev, and East-Siberian Seas) accounts for 9.6% of cases which occurred mainly in summer (53%).

FIG. 5 Distribution of accidents by sea and season

FVs are the most frequent ship type for accident with 24.5% of cases and general cargoes are the second with 23% of the total (Fig. 6). In the Norwegian Sea, cruise ships account for 37.5%, FVs 28.1% and 55% in the Norwegian and Okhotsk Seas respectively. The Kara Sea shows the highest number of accidents along the NSR where tankers and general cargoes represent 44.4 % and 33.3 % of cases respectively.

FIG. 6 Distribution of accidents/incidents by ship type and area

Fig. 7 sheds light on the reported cases by season (winter or summer), the existing infrastructures, and their connection with the rest of the national transportation network. One observes that the number of events is much higher in the western part compared to the eastern part. Second, if the number of occurrences regarding the season is greater in winter (60) than in summer (49) for the west (from Norwegian sea to Kara Sea, included), this is not the case for the east (from Laptev Sea to Northern-Pacific) where 14 MI/MC occurred in summer and 17 MI/MC in winter.

FIG. 7 Marine incidents/accidents per sea and season along the NEP

4.3. Age of the vessels

As illustrated in Fig. 8, except for LNG ships, one notices that most commercial vessels are older than 20 years, with a median age oscillating between 20 and 41.5 years. Tankers and FPSO show a median age of 24 and 28 years respectively. Passenger ships are around 26 years, research vessels around 35 years, FVs more than 21 years and icebreakers 41.5 years.

FIG. 8 Minimum, maximum and median age of vessels involved in MI/MC

Furthermore, we compared the median age of ships involved in accidents with the current median age of the world ice-class fleet considering the MI/MC involved by *machinery issue* (Fig. 9). It can be seen that the median age of the existing global ice-class fleet is younger than the median age of the ships from the database used in this study except for reefers $(+14)$ and research vessels (+1). Consequently, it seems that old ships are more prone to *machinery failure* especially general cargo (15 cases) and FVs (11 cases).

FIG. 9 Age of vessels with machinery issues compared to the existing fleet of ice-class vessels

4.4. Focus on vessels with the highest accidentology level

Table 7 underlines that fishing, general cargo, tanker, passenger, and reefer vessels represent the top five ship categories with the highest accidentology level. The first three types (fishing, general cargo, and tanker) account for 61.5% of the total.

With 38 cases at the two extremes of the NEP, FVs are most prone to accidents, representing 24.4% of the total number of events and 58.8% of total losses. *Machinery issue/damage* constitutes the dominant accident factor followed by *fire/explosion, wreck/stranding* and *Climate*. Most of the MI/MC dealing with FVs happened in winter (71.1%). General cargoes constitute the second category with the highest occurrences (23.1%) facing 80% of SC. If we consider that *machinery issues* are correlated with the average vessel's age, these ships were 23.1 years old when the accident occurred with a median age of around 10 years above the median age of the current world fleet of winterized general cargoes. *Machinery damage*, *wreck/stranding,* and *climate* are the main root causes and account for three total losses out of 36 events.

For their part, tankers remain the third accident-prone ships. Involved in 22 cases, mostly SC, they count for 5.88% of the total with a single total loss. *Collision* represents the key accident cause with *machinery damage, climate,* and *fire/explosion*. Aged 22.1 years on average, the median age of damaged vessels is 12 years older than the median age of the current winterized tanker fleet. Further, passenger vessels are the fourth type with numerous SC. With 12.9% of the total, they experienced *machinery failure* (30%) and *wreck/stranding* (30%) while *climate* represented for 10% of casualties. However, the average age of the concerned ships (31 years) and their median age are above the current age of ice-class passenger vessels (+6.5 years). Finally, reefer vessels represent the fifth type of vessels with high accident level (8.4%), with 23.5 years in average. These vessels face mostly SC that occur in winter and a wide range of accident factors is noticed from *machinery damage* (7 cases) to *wreck* (3 cases).

TABLE 7 Accidentology per type of vessels and per season

17

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56 57

58

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63 64

5. Discussion

5.1. General patterns of the NEP accidentology: a prevalence of serious casualties

Our analysis showed an overwhelming predominance of SC (81.4%) and 12.8% of VSC. The existing reports have underestimated and not accurately described the exact nature of accidents that occurred along the NEP insofar as the appropriate IMO taxonomy has not been used notably by the reports of FoU (2016), CASA (2021), and ALLIANZ (2016-2021). This shortcoming is paradoxical since the Casualty Investigation Code aims to universally categorize marine casualties and has been mandatory since 2010. Regarding determining factors, *machinery damage* or *failure* and *shipwrecking* are the top two casualties caused by harsh operating conditions and particularly by ice which represents an aggravating factor for all ship types. In line with Marchenko (2009, 2012a, 2012b, 2014b), our analysis confirms that ice drifting, ice jet, or forced overwintering led to most SC related to machinery, hull damage, and shipwrecks. Further, if *climate* represents the third major cause, this is a second contributing factor, especially heavy weather and freezing conditions, leading to collision and hull or machinery damage. *Collision* and *fire/explosion* are the fourth and fifth most frequent factors respectively. Finally, *hull damage* is the sixth accident factor. These main identified causes are in line with those reported by previous analyses (ALLIANZ from 2016-2021; FoU, 2016).

In accordance with Xu et al. (2021), our dataset emphasizes the high median age of ships having faced casualties and especially those that foundered. While an old ship is not necessarily poorly maintained, the level of deficiencies increases (Rizzo and Lo Nigro, 2008) which reduces structural resistance against ice (Marchenko, 2014b). Further, the FVs accidentology is particularly questioning insofar as it involves the highest level of casualties. Even though numerous in the area, more than 2,500, they are "especially old and worn out" (FoU, 2016) and our analysis confirms the negative trends observed by AMSA over the 1995-2004 period (AMSA, 2009). Additionally, the accidents affecting old passenger vessels, occurring both in summer and winter, require investments for new units especially since this traffic is supposed to grow in the following years notably thanks to cruise shipping (Cajaiba-Santana et al., 2019). Even though we have identified a passenger ship that was 106 years old at the time of the accident in 2016 (S/V Noorderlicht), as the Viking Sky case showed in March 2019, a simple engine failure affecting a modern cruise ship in a remote area can turn into a severe accident.

Further, tankers and bulk carriers regularly have SC as they are dominant in this area (Faury et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020). Nevertheless, it can be noticed that the high average age of tankers (+22 years) combined with severe accidents such as hull damage, collision, fire and explosion represent possible sources of oil pollution (Konygin et al., 2015; Tikka et al., 2008) and therefore negative environmental impacts (Afenyo et al., 2022; Stevenson et al., 2019; Johannsdottir and Cook, 2019; AMSA, 2017).

5.2. PC compliance and enlargement of PC to fishing vessels

The current accidentology level along the NEP raises the question of compliance with the PC and the likely consequences of increased traffic. In 2017, the NSR rules faced some breaches (NSRA, 2017) whereas, paradoxically, the PC entered into force at the same period. Our preliminary results reveal that more accidents were reported in 2017 and 2018 compared to 2016. This observation is shared by some reports that showed an increased number of marine accidents in the aftermath of the PC implementation with a rise in 2017 (CASA, 2021; ALLIANZ, 2017). After two years of a slight decrease throughout 2018-2019, ALLIANZ observed higher accident rates in 2020 (ALLIANZ, 2021). Finally, our results confirm the

absence of tangible improvements in the Arctic area while, paradoxically, it is worth mentioning that the figures are the best ever recorded at a global scale (IUMI, 2022; ALLIANZ, 2022). Thus, considering the reported number of SC, stricter compliance with the PC provisions sounds necessary and IMO member states must set up closer monitoring notably on ship operational risk assessment and "polarseaworthiness" designed to reduce risk occurrence (Rigot-Muller et al., 2022; Fedi, 2019) and accidentology in Polar areas (Dalaklis et al., 2018; Fedi et al., 2018a). Even though some time is needed to evaluate the likely long-term positive effects of the PC, nevertheless, its compliance must be reinforced to better address and capture hazards in this zone.

The international safety standards applied to FVs have met with little or no success whereas several attempts since the 1977 Torremolinos International Convention for the Safety of Fishing Vessels (IMO, 1977). Further, in light of the 1995 International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel (STCW-F) (IMO, 1995) or the 2007 Work in Fishing Convention and Recommendation (ILO, 2007), different relevant instruments aiming to universalize fundamental safety requirements either adopted by the IMO or by the International Labor Organization (ILO) have not received large ratifications (for a synthesis: Nuňez-Sanchez et al., 2020; Havold, 2010; Perez-Labajos, 2008). At the European level, the notable effort to transpose the IMO key rules on construction or equipment of FVs 24 meters and above (EC, 1997) have been undermined by a lack of regular updates (Nuňez-Sanchez et al., 2020) and lack of tangible improvements on FVs safety as revealed by a 2011-2017 survey showing that these ships had the most losses in EU waters (EMSA, 2018). Compliance with legislation and standards was clearly pointed out as one of the three main safety issues besides training/skills and safety assessment.

Regarding Arctic navigation, pursuant to the PC, if most categories of ships must satisfy the requirements of the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention (IMO, 1974), the Marine Pollution Prevention (MARPOL) Convention (IMO, 1978a), and STCW Convention (IMO, 1978b), this is not the case for FVs having a gross tonnage below 500 tons. FVs operating in Arctic do not apply the mandatory safety provisions on manning and training (DNV-GL, 2017) while they have to comply with the PC environmental requirements (i.e., MARPOL Certificate). Obviously, this category is at risk and their advanced age combined with their modest dimensions, do not mitigate risk exposure. In 2024, the PC will celebrate its 10 years of adoption and a revision must be encouraged to include FVs within its scope of application for specific safety provisions. Considering the investigated accidental causes of FVs mainly pertaining to *machinery damage/failure*, *fire/explosion*, *wreck/stranding* and *climate*, the crew certification for ice-covered waters and a simplified PWOM should be at least imposed for all existing FVs greater or equal to 15 meters. Other requirements on machinery installations (PC, chap. 6), fire safety and protection (PC, chap. 7), and safety of navigation (PC, chap. 9) would be imposed for new constructions to enhance their polarseaworthiness although one acknowledges the undoubted reluctance of IMO members to support such new requirements.

5.3. Towards greater accident reporting

Availability of accurate and regular data on marine accidentology eases their analysis (Luo and Shin, 2019; Oltedal & Mc Arthur, 2011; Hassel et al., 2011; Psarros et al., 2010) and their readability is also an important determinant (Goerlandt & Liu, 2023). That is why the GISIS should provide proper accidentology information on all Arctic areas. Nevertheless, this is not the case since IMO members are not sanctioned in case of absence of reporting. The global database is therefore not adequately fed. The successful implementation of IMO conventions relies on states while negligence, or bad practices already observed in the last decade (Knudsen

& Hassler, 2011) are still valid today. Greater transparency is desirable to promote and to encourage states to maintain the GISIS database. Considering the current critics on transparency addressed to IMO (Fedi, 2021; Monios, 2020; InfluenceMap; 2017; Lister et al., 2015), an evolution would appear necessary in the short run. On the contrary, the European Union (EU) imposes stricter requirements since the occurrence of all types of events and all investigation reports must be notified by EU states under penalty, to be published and publicly available (EP, 2009). Accordingly, detailed reports are annually provided by the European Maritime Safety $Agency⁴$ (EMSA).

However, the situation seems to be improving through the 'Compendium of Arctic Shipping Accidents' (CASA) which collects statistics on marine accidents occurring in the Arctic Circle (PAME, 2021). The first report published provided data from six Arctic States (i.e., Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, and the United States) while Sweden and Finland did not report cases (CASA, 2021). Further, the related data content and format showed numerous "inconsistencies" such as the absence or lack of precise geographical position for numerous accidents, unharmonized data, accidents without ship categorization or absence of reporting for certain years, and non-use of the appropriate IMO taxonomy. Additionally, comparing the 2016 FoU report and the 2021 CASA, one observes contractions in the number of accidents reported for the same years, especially for Russia, Iceland, and Norway. Consequently, while the launch of CASA has been successful, the quality of data collected is questionable and the war with Ukraine will possibly lead to an absence of reporting by Russia in the coming years. If the CASA were duly and regularly maintained in accordance with the IMO taxonomy, it would allow a stronger understanding of the marine accidents. This would enable public and private stakeholders to define appropriate policies on risk management for mitigating marine casualties in this singular area. Thus, it implies greater reporting both quantitively and qualitatively.

5.4. Enhancing response capacity along the NEP

One of the main persistent characteristics of the Arctic is the uneven development of infrastructures (Hermann et al., 2022), the lack of efficient communication systems (Larsen et al., 2016; Aase and Jabour, 2015), and the appropriate level of preparedness in case of emergencies (Andreassen & Borch, 2020; Marchenko et al., 2018; SARC, 2017). Out of the 135 existing ports, 92% are small or very small ones (Pahl and Kaiser, 2017), and deep-water ports are missing (Abe and Otsuka, 2019; Buixadé Farré et al., 2014) and this hinders the NEP development (Faury et al., 2021; Gritensko & Efimova, 2017). As highlighted by Fig. 7, transport and SAR infrastructures are well-established for the western part of the NEP, particularly in the Norwegian and Barents Seas. Looking at the Russian part, the highest infrastructure density is between the Yamal and Kola peninsula. Most ports here are connected to the rest of the country by air, facilitating the evacuation of injured people and via railroad, easing the supply of cargo for the maintenance of the infrastructures, but also for the vessels able to use these ports as a refuge (Faury et al., 2021).

Regarding the Russian side of the NEP and the NSR, most dynamic ports such as Sabetta, Novy or the upcoming Port of Kharasavey, may be used as SAR centers. Facing growing volumes, especially LNG (CHNL, 2023), Sabetta was supposed to establish a SAR in 2020 (Eilertsen, 2018) nonetheless it is not yet operational. Compared to the existing SAR facilities such as in Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, Naryan-Mar or Dikson*,* larger investments are still required to provide more efficient response capacity due to the vastness of the concerned area (Benz et

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⁴ <http://www.emsa.europa.eu/accident-investigation-publications/annual-overview.html>

al., 2021; FoU, 2016). Even though this zone is the home port of eight icebreakers, the safety of the nuclear-powered ones is in question considering their involvement in accidents (CASA, 2021). Although huge investments have been made for the construction of new Russian nuclear icebreakers (Skripnuk et al., 2020), the current fleet is aging and it raises the question of their operating conditions insofar as they remain the backbone of safe navigation in Arctic (Benz et al., 2021; Moe and Brigham, 2017). This situation is particularly worrisome at a time when around 47% of ships passing through the NSR are at least 30 years old (CHNL, 2023).

On the other hand, while we reported very few accidents in the eastern part of the NEP, this zone has experienced the lowest activity until recently (Faury et al., 2021) with a lack of appropriate infrastructure and capacity response. Ports are not accessible year-round; few railways connect them to the rest of the country and flying is the main valid means of transportation. New SAR are established in Pevek and another in Anadyr (Christodoulou et al., 2022). These SAR centers are closed during winter (Dalaklis, 2021) and only two icebreakers are based here limiting response capacity and response time in case of emergency. As an example, the 2017 Chukotka + tanker got trapped in the ice close to the Sannikov Strait on October 30, 2017 and only received assistance 12 days later. With a longer ice-free season in coming years, more vessels in winter (CHNL, 2023) notably due to a potential reorientation of traffic flows towards China and India (Brigham, 2022), the reinforcement of the response capacity has obviously become a sine qua non condition. Yet, above the geopolitical issues, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict poses serious challenges for maritime safety and marine environmental protection. In March 2022, seven Arctic states of the Arctic Council decided to suspend their participation in the Council' meetings (Kopra, 2023). This situation calls into question the future SAR development and state-to-state cooperation along the NEP as it has evolved so far.

5.5. Towards a holistic risk-based policy

The frequency and severity of accidents we reported question the current approach to risk management applied to harsh Arctic conditions. A "Guideline for Arctic Marine Risk Assessment" has been recently adopted with the aim to firstly "engage Arctic stakeholders to agree on best practice methods and data sources" and secondly to "better understand, communicate and incorporate specific Arctic risk influencing factors (ARIFs) into the risk assessment process" (EPPR, 2020). Safety and the environment constitute the two pillars of the Guideline proposing a marine and environmental risk assessment. The marine risk evaluation is focused on accident factors that our investigated cases underlined notably *fire/explosion*, *ship grounding*, *contact*, or *machinery damage*, their probability of occurrence, and likely consequences for people and the environment. In the same vein, the environmental risk assessment targets potential oil spills and measures their impacts on fragile ecosystems. An open electronic platform was launched in 2020⁵ where public and private stakeholders can provide relevant navigational, meteorological, or oceanographic data for instance, and exchange best practices on risk management (EPPR, 2020). Promoting a shared framework on risk prevention and optimization, this initiative on Arctic "area wide-risk assessment" (ALLIANZ, 2020) is run on a completely voluntary basis.

Nonetheless, this Guideline ought not supersede the mandatory enforcement of the PC safety and environmental standards (Dalaklis et al., 2018) and its "proceduralization of risk mitigation" (Fedi et al., 2020a). Moreover, the enforcement of the PC combined with the use of POLARIS can reduce the potential frequency and severity of accidents (Fedi et al., 2020a; 2018b). Hence, a holistic risk-based policy combining a strict compliance with mandatory and

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⁵ https://eppr.dnvgl.com

non-mandatory requirements may prevent casualties within the Arctic. As shown in Fig. 10, this policy would rely on prophylactic measures involving the key players. Whereas shipowners have to perform their duties and implement best practices, insurers must apprehend the insured parties' risk profile, their experience in polar waters and since 2017, their documental compliance with the PC provisions (Fedi et al., 2018a). For their part, classification societies have to certify the ships pursuant to the PC and states/flag states, through Port State Controls especially, must monitor this conformity as a whole. States shall also pursue their standardization processes (Benz et al., 2021) and investments in SAR resources, infrastructures (Christodoulou et al. 2022; Dalaklis, 2021) in satellite-based Automated Identification System (AIS) (Aase & Jabour, 2015) or heavy equipment such as helicopters or aircrafts. More attention must be paid to FVs as regards the definition of fishing zones depending on the vessel's characteristics and crew competency. In addition, sustaining interstate cooperation for aeronautical and maritime SAR, oil pollution preparedness and response (Christodoulou et al., 2022) seems strategic to mitigate the aggravating consequences of marine accidents. While serious doubts exist on the Russia's collaboration in the coming years, the proposed due diligences are the prerequisites of this holistic risk-based policy.

FIG. 10 Holistic risk-based policy framework

6. Conclusion

This empirical study aimed to shed light on maritime accidents that occurred along the NEP throughout the 2000-2020 period. We have reported and analyzed 156 cases. Our evaluation has highlighted the most dangerous ships, the accident-prone causes, areas, and seasons. The used and disclosed dataset has also stressed the impact of the climate and ice presence in the level of risk faced by vessels along the NEP. These records have contributed to the data-driven approach and to the attempt to fill the gap on Arctic marine accidentology. As limitations, this research did not encompass the whole Arctic Ocean, and thus, did not develop an exhaustive database.

The preliminary results clearly show the absence of tangible improvements in marine accidents in the Arctic NEP in the aftermath of the Polar Code enforcement while paradoxically, one can observe the best statistics ever recorded in most areas. This study also highlights the prevalence of serious marine casualties compared to incidents. In line with previous analyses, this research has obviously confirmed that this zone remains a very risky area which justifies additional prevention and mitigation measures at different levels. Even though there is general agreement on improving SAR infrastructures and creating new ones in the eastern part, stricter compliance with the PC would seem necessary to prevent risk occurrence along the NEP. Its stricter enforcement and enlargement to FVs must not exclude the respect of the Casualty Investigation Code which has been neglected so far. Greater reporting is obviously needed quantitatively and qualitatively for a better understanding of Arctic marine accidentology. We finally suggest a holistic risk-based policy combining constrained and voluntary measures to prevent serious casualties. Future research agenda would include the investigation of wider Arctic zones with more cases, deepening the human factor, and ultimately, evaluating whether the PC, as it is or amended, would become a "real game changer" for marine accidentology in this area.

Finally, our analysis has revealed the perceived gaps that need to be overcome and some uncertainties linked to the war in Ukraine. As the largest Arctic state, Russia's isolation is not a "good sign" for maritime safety and the marine environment along the NEP as it may lead to less transparency, cooperation, and accountability within a zone that requires the contrary.

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