

LAW
MLC is still
in force despite
Covid-19

HEALTH AND SAFETY
Insurers warn economic
impact of pandemic could
downgrade ship safety

EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Project seeks to
future-proof training for
maritime professionals

INDUSTRY
Time for employers to
stand together and say
no to port corruption

the global seafarer

Volume 4 | Number 4 | October 2020



**ENFORCING
YOUR RIGHTS**

Dr Cleopatra Dumbia-Henry – the ‘Mother of the Maritime Labour Convention’ – adds her voice to the trade unionists demanding seafarers’ legal rights in the crew change crisis

**NAUTILUS
FEDERATION**

A Federation of Maritime Professionals

the global seafarer

Volume 4 | Number 4 | October 2020

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**NAUTILUS
FEDERATION**
A Federation of Maritime Professionals

Comment

Current events are shining a light on the absurdity of the flag of convenience system, says Nautilus Federation director **Mark Dickinson**

The global crew change crisis worsens, despite a well-intended UK initiative to galvanise key governments to act. Over 300,000 seafarers are effectively being forced to work way beyond the maximum time permissible under the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC). It is of profound sadness to me that governments continue to flout their obligations to our seafarers. We will need to bring these governments to account, however long it takes.

In Lebanon, we witnessed the shocking explosion in the Port of Beirut. I hope a thorough investigation is conducted to discover the root causes. The authorities seem to have been shockingly complacent and failed to heed warnings about cargo stored in the port. It seems clear too how the ammonium nitrate got there, but how was it possible that the M/V Rhosus and its crew were abandoned and the alleged Russian owner able to walk away? Why was Moldova the flag state of a Russian-owned, Cypriot based company? These are some of the essential questions that need an answer if we are to truly understand the circumstances that led to this tragedy and learn any lessons.

In Mauritius, an emergency has been declared by the government as the stranded Panamanian-registered Japanese-owned bulk carrier Wakashio is spewing its fuel oil into the Indian Ocean, threatening the fragile marine ecosystem. It was reported that the Mauritian government has appealed to France to assist with the disaster response, which prompted a renowned expert on the Panamanian ship register to ponder on social media why the Japanese government had not been asked to help.

Not wanting to let such a huge dollop of irony go to waste, I suggested that, since the vessel's flag is Panama, and the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) makes it abundantly clear where the responsibility lies, the point is why Panama was not leaping into action? Safe to say said expert was not happy with my attempt to highlight the true culprit in this awful tragedy.

● ● ●
Your average FoC is a fat lot of good when things go wrong ... We are weaker, less resilient and our seafarers are exposed because FoCs exist



The ultimate culprits in all these unfolding tragedies are flags of convenience (FoCs) and open registers. While proponents of the system dole out sticking plasters and point the finger hither and thither, they avoid the plain truth, and the underlying issues remain untreated. This is a systemic failing that undermines any attempt at accountability or effective governance of the shipping industry.

Author Ian Urbina, in an article for the Canadian National Post, identifies the true cause of the Beirut explosion as: 'Lax rules and a maritime bureaucracy designed more to protect anonymity and secrecy of shipowners than to enable oversight and transparency of the industry.'

He observes the absurdity of the FoC system: 'The company collecting the fees for the right to fly a certain flag is also responsible for policing its customers, ensuring they abide by safety, labour and environmental rules, and conducting investigations when things go wrong. But in practice, flags of convenience create a perverse incentive for ship operators to shop around for the most lax registries.'

Shipping companies still turn to the countries where they are ultimately based when they need government assistance. Whether it be naval protection, piracy response, oil spill response, state aid, funding to survive a pandemic or consular intervention with crew changes, your average FoC is a fat lot of good when things go wrong, and no one seems to pay attention when the seafarers onboard want to go home.

Our traditional maritime nations are weaker, less resilient, and our seafarers exposed because FoCs exist. It is time for a renewed debate about their insidious impact. **i**

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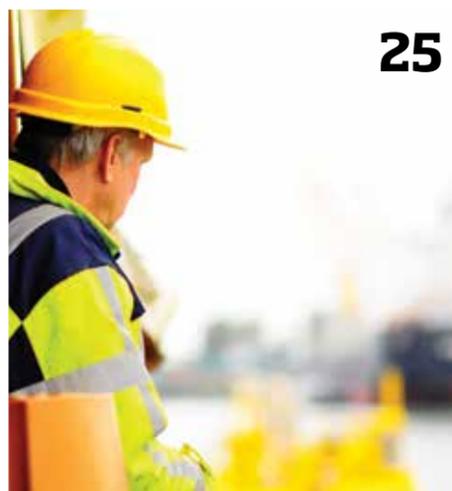
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Find your ship's safety data online

Do you want to know more about the ship you work on?
Do you want to know if your ship is covered by an ITF agreement?
Do you want details of your ship's safety record?

If so, you might want to visit www.equasis.org for free ship information.

This website provides free searchable ship information including ownership details and port state control (PSC) inspections. It also includes important ITF information including details of any ITF agreement that exists onboard, a summary of the last recorded crew list, the date and location of last ITF inspection.

You must register to access this information.

How to register

1. Go to www.equasis.org
2. Select 'Registration' from the top of the screen.
3. If you agree to the terms and conditions, select 'Accept' at the bottom of the page.
4. A registration form will appear. Enter your preferred username and password, and enter your name, address, email and any other details.
5. You will receive confirmation that registration is complete and you can begin using the Ship Search service.

How to use the service

You can search for a ship by name, call sign or International Maritime Organization number.

When you search for a ship, the main page will display:

- ship information – name, ship type, flag, build year
- management – details of ownership
- classification societies
- safety management
- P&I insurers' information



ITF steps in to repatriate seafarers after five vessels detained in UK

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) has been working to repatriate thousands of desperate crew stuck onboard five vessels detained in the UK for Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) breaches.

UK port state control boarded and detained 47 crew who went on a hunger strike after being stuck on board Astoria without pay. The mainly Portuguese-flagged Astoria on 19 June.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) also detained four other CMV ships, the Bahamas-flagged Astor, Columbus and Vasco de Gama at Tilbury, and Marco Polo at Bristol.

MCA inspectors found expired and invalid Seafarer Employment Agreements, late payment of wages and crew who had been onboard for over 12 months without respite.

Some 1,449 seafarers were on the five ships from Indonesia, India, Myanmar and Mauritius.

As of mid-July, some crew members had been repatriated and some monies had been paid. 'However, the matter is far from over,' ITF Inspectorate coordination supervisor Finlay McIntosh said.

Unions and charities stepped up efforts to help 47 crew who went on a hunger strike after being stuck on board Astoria without pay. The mainly Indian crew demanded wages owed to them and repatriation home in mid-June, after weeks of pleas to their employer proved fruitless.

The crew on Astoria had become increasingly concerned for their welfare after the cook died of a heart attack, ITF reported. Crew medication was running low and one crew member attempted suicide.

On July 20 CMV was placed in receivership after failing to secure financing. **i**

Time pressure a factor in cargo loading accident

Time pressure may have been one of the factors leading to an accident in which two seafarers were injured during cargo operations in the Scottish port of Campbeltown last year.

The two crew were struck by lifting gear used to move cargo hold hatch covers after the suspended load became snagged and a fibre sling failed during work to load a cargo of wind turbine towers onboard the 11,619gt Zea Servant.

One of the men suffered serious head injuries and had to undergo extensive specialist treatment in Glasgow, before eventually being repatriated to recover at home in China.

The UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) found that the two ABs had been standing in the hazardous fall zone beneath the suspended load, ready to guide the load clear of snagging hazards during the lift.

'The lifting gear had been stowed in the cargo hold ventilation duct space, where it was known to have snagged before,' the report notes.

'The crew could have stopped the procedure but had a collective desire to get the task done; a "can do" attitude.

'The deck preparations had been delayed by adverse winds and there was pressure to prepare the vessel for the cargo loading.' **i**



24/7 HELP FOR MEMBERS

Nautilus 24/7 helps Nautilus members in emergencies round the clock:

Skype (username [nautilus-247](https://www.skype.com/en/username/nautilus-247))



SHIPPING FORECAST

It's back! The BBC Shipping Forecast is returning to normal broadcast times and radio frequencies:

bit.ly/ShippingForecastBack



FOR COVID-19 FAQ



Free mental health support

The Seafarers Hospital Society (SHS) has renewed its contract with online mental health service Big White Wall for another year, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

SHS has been funding Big White Wall's free, anonymous seafarer service since 2016, but the support offered is particularly relevant to maritime professionals during this exceptionally challenging time.

'It's a tough job at the best of times,' said the Society's chief executive officer Sandra Welch, 'but now, with so many seafarers working well beyond the normal contract period, the strain is beginning to show.'

There have been several reported suicides and suicide attempts in recent weeks onboard ships stranded offshore or in port, and suicide is now the foremost cause of death amongst seafarers.

Seafarers are a resilient bunch, Ms Welch acknowledged, and some may think mental health support isn't for them.

'But we're living in unprecedented times, and that means we need to do things very differently. No-one needs to know – it's all entirely anonymous and confidential. We don't know who's using the service, and that's how it should be.'

Time is of the essence, she added. 'We really need to get the word out, now more than ever.'

'So, tell your colleagues, tell your crew, tell your mates. Help is available – act now, before it's too late.' **i**

Big White Wall is available online 24/7 and is free to all seafarers and their families. Users have access to trained counsellors, self-help materials, a support network and one-to-one therapy.

To access the service, go to the Seafarers Hospital Society website www.seahospital.org.uk



MSC Zoe: fundamental safety questions raised about the 'super-sizing' of containerships

Super-sized containership safety 'needs major review'

Radical action to improve boxship safety has been demanded by a joint investigation into an incident off the Dutch coast when more than 340 boxes were lost by the 19,244TEU MSC Zoe.

The Dutch, German and Panamanian report raises a series of fundamental safety questions about the 'super-sizing' of containerships, warning that operations are outpacing regulations and recommending a review of the concept of lashing containers on deck.

In January 2019, a total of 342 containers – two filled with dangerous goods – were swept off the Panama-flagged ultra-large containership (ULCS) in winds up to Force 9 and waves up to 11m high.

The lost containers had led to severe damage to the environment in the Dutch and German Wadden Sea – an area on the UN World Heritage List – and presented a hazard to other vessels.

MSC Zoe's containers had been lost in at least six separate occasions on the night of 1 January. Only one of these was witnessed by the crew – who initially estimated that only 30 had gone overboard. 'If the crew had noticed the first loss, the necessary mitigating actions could have been taken and further container losses possibly avoided,' the report adds.

The 192,237gt ship had been exposed to a range of hydrodynamic phenomena during the passage through the Terschelling-German Bight traffic separation scheme, including extreme motions

and accelerations, contact or close contact with the seabed, green water and slamming.

The main cause of the container losses was the high stability at which the ship was sailing in a beam sea in shallow water conditions. The ship's metacentric height (GM), a core criteria of stability, was typical of ULCSs, the report notes. The effects of high GM are underestimated.

'High stability is a safety risk that has not been recognised and formalised in the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Intact Stability Code and documents, as the Stability Booklet. Current limits are only set for a minimum GM.'

The length and operational GM of ULCSs like MSC Zoe exceed the valid ranges of most international technical regulations and standards for calculation of accelerations.

There is a greater risk of loss of boxes, both in terms of the probability and scale of the effects of such an incident, as the size of containerships continues to increase. The concept of lashing containers on the deck of such large and wide vessels needs to be reviewed, and international technical and operational standards should be amended or developed where necessary.

Regulations governing design limits of cargo securing equipment, approved loading and stability conditions, the consideration of shallow water effects and speed on ship motions and accelerations and forces should be revised. **i**



GIVE BACK

You can now volunteer with HM Coastguard as a Coastguard rescue officer:

www.gov.uk/guidance/volunteering-for-mca



FAIR TREATMENT APP

Download now to record emergencies. Available in either iTunes or Android Playstore

www.nautilusint.org

Elevator fatality warning signs

Australian authorities have expressed concern about accidents involving ship elevator systems, following an investigation into a fatal incident onboard a containership.

The electrotechnical officer (ETO) onboard the Singapore-flagged OOCL Kuala Lumpur died after becoming trapped between a bulkhead and the top of the ship's personnel lift cage while he was testing the system after repairs as the 68,904gt vessel was preparing to enter Port Botany, New South Wales, in June 2018.

The Australian Transport Safety Board investigation was unable to determine the exact circumstances of the accident. However, for the



The OOCL Kuala Lumpur container vessel entering Freemantle harbour in 2018
Image: Wikimedia Commons

accident to have occurred, the ETO must have moved from the safe zone, the elevator control had to have been changed from manual to auto, and the elevator called.

Key safety barriers prescribed in the electrical work permit were not put in place before the work began. There had been no warning announcement and there were no warning signs posted at elevator access doors – meaning that an elevator call could be made while work was underway.

Supervision and communications throughout the task were ineffective, which meant that opportunities to stop or alter the method of work were missed, the ATSB said.

The ETO may have been under pressure to complete the repairs before the ship took on a harbour pilot and arrived in port later that day.

ATSB said elevator accidents account for one fatality every year. **i**

Sea rescue drill: access to medical facilities for seafarers is a fundamental right



Medical care failures 'a global health emergency'

Seafarers being denied access to medical care at ports due to pandemic restrictions is putting lives at risk and is a global health emergency, Nautilus general secretary Mark Dickinson said.

'We are extremely concerned that medical assistance, especially when most of the requests are for reasons not linked to Covid-19, is being denied. Seafarers are not a health risk for the population they encounter during their sailings from port to port. They must not be forgotten as countries move towards easing their lockdowns.

'Access to medical facilities for seafarers is a fundamental right.'

Disturbing information has been received by the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) regarding desperate situations of seafarers unable to be medically assisted or evacuated, when they have been provided with a professional diagnosis by radio or tele-medical practices.

The port where the ship is to call has refused

the injured or sick seafarers or the ship has been inexplicably turned away before arriving in port.

Several international regulations provide clear and mandatory provisions on medical care, and assistance to facilitate the movement of seafarers, including the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), the Convention on Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic (FAL), Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) and The Convention on the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS).

Yet the very same countries that have ratified these conventions have breached them, leaving seafarers' lives at risk.

'Seafarers have been discriminated against by states not implementing the provisions of these conventions,' Mr Dickinson said. 'Most worrying is that these states have set a precedent that raises the question about the authority these conventions have if they can be so blatantly disregarded. **i**

Notable rise in medicals failed due to mental health

Medics have raised concerns over a marked increase in seafarers failing UK medical examinations as a result of mental health issues.

Commenting on the UK Department for Transport's annual analysis of medical examinations by approved doctors, chief medical advisor Dr Sally Bell said there has been a 'steady and significant rise' in both the major and minor mental disorders identified

during seafarer medicals in the past six years.

Last year, a total of 297 seafarers were issued with failed, temporarily unfit or restricted certificates on grounds of mental disorders following examinations, compared with 117 in 2014.

Crew issued with unrestricted certificates time-limited to less than two years for medical reasons related to mental disorders rose from 127 in 2014 to

325 last year. Crew found to have severe anxiety, depression or other symptoms likely to impair performance and leading to failed, temporarily unfit or restricted certificates increased from 35 to 97. Those holding such certificates after being found with acute psychosis rose from three in 2014 to 17 last year, while those found to have alcohol dependency remained around the same level – 24 last year and 23 in 2014. **i**



Avoidable tragedy: a Filipino deckhand died when he fell 12m on the 8,620gt Fortunagracht
Image: Onderzoeksraad

Fatal fall on Dutch cargoship highlights risks of working alone

Dutch safety officials have warned seafarers of the risks of working alone following an investigation into a fatal accident on a general cargoship.

A Filipino deckhand died when he fell 12m after opening a door into one of the holds of the 8,620gt Spliethoff vessel Fortunagracht while preparing to load the ship in Puerto de Sucre, Venezuela.

Investigators found that the seafarer had been looking for stacking cones in the hold entrance, equipped with just a small flashlight while the lights in the area were switched off. The lighting could only be switched on from the bridge, to reduce the risks of sparking with certain cargoes.

The deckhand had been carrying out ad hoc tasks which were poorly discussed in advance with the bosun and not reported to the duty officer.

Seafarers should 'call each other immediately to account if those actions are not in line with the safety agreements,' the report said.

A risk assessment would have identified that the hold was empty, unlit areas should not be entered with a torch, and it was not safe to work alone.

There were insufficient precautions to prevent someone from stepping through a door opening into a hold with no tweendeck when the deck configuration was changed to meet cargo needs.

Although the ship's safe working manual required doors leading to the holds to be fully closed and locked before pontoons were removed, the report says supervision of this was insufficient onboard Fortunagracht. **i**

Union warns of 'trial by public opinion' after Mauritius oil spill

Nautilus International has warned against the criminalisation of crew aboard the MV Wakashio, a Panamanian-registered, Japanese-owned bulk carrier that ran aground off the coast of Mauritius on Saturday 25 July.

The Union called for a full investigation into the incident and for the government of Panama to step up to its flag state responsibilities.

Nautilus general secretary Mark Dickinson said: 'We stand in solidarity with the crew of the MV Wakashio. There must not be a trial by public opinion. A full – and independent – accident investigation must be carried out by the relevant authorities.'

Mr Dickinson said Panama had been slow to respond in the early days of the accident. 'The vessel is Panama-registered, which means that under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), it would be the responsibility of Panama. So, the question is why Panama is not leaping into action?'

The MV Wakashio – owned by Okiyo Maritime Corporation and Nagashiki Shipping Co Ltd – was



MV Wakashio was carrying nearly 4,000 tonnes of fuel en route from China to Brazil when it struck a reef on Pointe d'Esny

carrying nearly 4,000 tons of fuel en route from China to Brazil when it struck a reef on Pointe d'Esny, a known sanctuary for rare wildlife.

Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth announced a state of emergency after satellite images showed a dark slick spreading in the turquoise waters near environmental areas that the government called 'very sensitive'.

On 11 August the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)/United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Joint Environment Unit joined French and Japanese efforts to control the oil spill.

The vessel broke in two on 16 August. **i**

Seafarers invited to take part in global research mapping health and wellbeing

Seafarers are invited to take part in a joint research project on their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic being carried out by UK, Swedish and Australian universities.

The 20-minute online survey – **Global seafarers during the COVID-19 pandemic** – is intended for all seafarers working on vessels with an International Maritime Organization (IMO) number.

An international team of researchers from the University of Queensland (Australia), Royal Holloway University of London (UK), Uppsala University (Sweden) and the World Maritime University (Sweden) is undertaking the research.

The aim of the study is to map seafarers' experiences during the pandemic and the challenges they are facing, potential effects on wellbeing and mental health. Other factors that might mitigate potential negative effects, such as the support they receive from organisations on shore and resilience from positive interactions on board will also be reviewed.

The study is seeking a wide range of experiences from as many seafarers as possible. The results from confidential contributions will be used to make recommendations to improve life at sea. **i**

ITF crew change survey

ITF wants to hear from seafarers awaiting repatriation, so that your story can be used to tell governments to open their borders, and tell them to open their hearts to implement the changes necessary to give seafarers a much-needed crew change: <https://itf-global.typeform.com/to/Yw7FkdWS> **i**



In brief

Maersk Covid-19 outbreak

Eleven seafarers onboard the containership Maersk Idaho tested positive for coronavirus in June. Under US Covid-19 protocols, the crew were evacuated to a quarantine facility, the vessel was cleaned and a new crew brought aboard. Ten of the positive crew on the US flagged vessel were asymptomatic.

Horns for heroes

Ship crew globally sounded their horns in ports at 12 midday local time on 8 July, during Seafarers Awareness Week. Social media supporters used the hashtags #HeroesAtSeaShoutout, #blowyourhorns and #hornsforhope to draw attention to the ongoing crew change crisis.

Crew change video

Seafarers and their families can now upload videos of themselves in a message to governments on the crew change crisis. The social media campaign is by the International Maritime Employers' Council (IMEC) and International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF). Videos should cover:

- How you are feeling? What is the impact of not seeing your family?
- How long have you been on board and where are you now?
- What message would you like to send to governments?

Videos should be sent to training@imec.org.uk via WeTransfer.

Cruise still too risky

The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has reiterated its advice to British nationals against taking cruise holidays. Danny McGowan, International organiser for Nautilus and member of the ITF's Cruise Ship Task Force, said: 'We hope that the Department for Transport and the FCO will review this advice. The cruise industry is an important source of employment for many members and needs to get back to business soon.'



Philippines government officials at the 2 July 2020 signing of the Joint Circular setting out the 'green lane' scheme for crew relief and repatriation during the Covid-19 pandemic. Image: Nilo K. Palay for Department of Foreign Affairs, Philippines

Philippines takes action on pandemic crew relief and repatriation

The Philippines has become the latest nation to introduce a 'green lane' system to allow seafarers to leave and join their vessels while pandemic travel restrictions are in force.

As the world's largest supplier of labour to the maritime workforce, the country had been under pressure to bring in measures to resolve the crew change crisis, and the green lane scheme will apply both in the Philippines itself and to Filipino seafarers working abroad.

The scheme is explained in a Joint Circular of the Philippines government, and came into force on 2 July 2020. The document sets out a range of specific

quarantine and testing requirements to enable crew members in the following categories to travel:

- Filipino seafarers joining a ship docked in the Philippines or overseas (outbound)
- Filipino seafarers leaving a ship (inbound)
- Filipino seafarers transiting in the Philippines (airport/terminal to airport/terminal)
- foreign seafarers joining a ship docked in a Philippine seaport from the airport (airport to ship)
- foreign seafarers leaving a ship docked in Philippine seaport to an airport (ship to airport)
- foreign seafarers transiting in the Philippines (airport/terminal

to airport/terminal)

Philippines foreign affairs secretary Teodoro L Locsin Jr said: 'We are aware the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting restrictions have caused thousands of seafarers to be stranded at sea and they have to extend their service after many months at sea, unable to be replaced after many long hours of duty.'

'With these guidelines we are answering the call of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the maritime industry to put in place a framework to ensure safe ship crew changes and travel during in the Covid-19 pandemic.'

Australia cracks down on excessive Covid-19 tour of duty extensions

Australia is enforcing a maximum continuous period that a seafarer can serve onboard a vessel without taking leave, which could see ships prevented from departing Australian ports if crew have spent too long at sea.

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) said that until 1 October 2020 no seafarer can work at sea beyond 13 months without a rest.

AMSA has urged all ship owners and

managers to comply with the guidelines as enforced by the Australian port state authorities.

The protocol, which seeks to apply the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 requirements on continuous maximum working periods at sea and allows for the two additional months agreed by ITF at the start of the pandemic, is good news for the thousands of seafarers stuck onboard.

GET TWEETING

Help promote your union to the international community by retweeting our content via Twitter: [@nautilusint](https://twitter.com/nautilusint)

IN THE KNOW

Members can join our lively members-only Facebook group for fast access to news and information: bit.ly/fbnautilus



FOR STATEMENT

INTERNATIONAL



Detain ships to stop humanitarian crisis at sea say Unions

An influential group of unions has called for ships to be detained in ports if seafarers have been onboard longer than international treaties allow.

Marking World Maritime Day on 24 September, the Nautilus Federation of 22 maritime unions said seafarers are being denied their human rights during the pandemic with as many as 300,000 stuck at sea beyond the agreed 11-month maximum service.

The failure of governments, industry and flag states to name seafarers as keyworkers and get them off ships and home to loved ones has led to a humanitarian crisis that can no longer be tolerated, the Federation said in a joint statement – scan QR Code to read the statement.

'This is a wholly predicted – yet avoidable – humanitarian crisis, and we call for action against governments who deny seafarers their fundamental rights,' Nautilus Federation director Mark Dickinson said.

'Maritime and shipping professionals, at sea and on inland waterways, have had enough. We will continue to push for an international solution, together as Nautilus Federation affiliates and as affiliates of the International Transport Workers Federation, so that the key workers of the world's seas and rivers are able to get to and from their vessels without delay.'

'Should that international solution cause Port States to detain growing numbers of vessels until seafarers are repatriated, the industry and governments will need to prepare for the disruption this would cause to global supply chains.'



Nautilus Federation director Mark Dickinson

The unions draw attention to the inability for some of the world's largest flags to enforce the fundamental rights of seafarers during the Covid-19 pandemic. While many of these Flags of Convenience (FOCs) quickly ratified the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 (MLC), the 'ease and speed by which many flag states subsequently ignored the rights of seafarers is a stain on the entire maritime industry,' the Federation union said.

'The major Flag States have the ability to resolve the crew change crisis by refusing to allow seafarers on their ships to be denied their fundamental human rights,' the unions said.

'We call on all Port States to assist the Flag States by enforcing the provisions of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) and detain ships that do not comply. Similar actions must also be taken for those people working onboard vessels sailing on inland waterways, many of whom are facing the same denial of human rights.'

European leaders urged to step up on crew change

Unions have again urged European leaders to resolve the crew change crisis in a series of communiqués to senior figures in the Commission and Parliament.

The EU was asked to call on all governments to:

- Designate all seafarers, regardless of nationality, as key workers and facilitate their

movement under conditions that safeguard their health and minimise the risks of infection

- Ensure that seafarers can join and leave their ships for repatriation, crew changes, shore leave and medical attention without impediment
- Create the necessary conditions for seafarer air

corridors from EU Member States and key labour supply countries.

International organiser for Nautilus, Danny McGowan, said: 'The situation is getting desperate for many seafarers. Unions are supporting vast numbers of seafarers in communicating with their employers on crew changes.'

NASA EARTH OBSERVATORY

See these pictures of pollution from ships making long, bright tracks amidst the clouds: bit.ly/shipclouds

KEEP CONNECTED

Watch this visualisation of the world's shipping routes over one 24-hour period on Vox: bit.ly/liveshiplanes

Singapore adapts crew change requirements

Singapore Maritime and Port Authority (MPA) has updated its requirements for crew changes for cargo ships transiting the Port of Singapore, to minimise the risk of spreading coronavirus.

Singapore has moved into phase two of its re-opening from Covid-19 lockdown. MPA will 'continue to work closely with the industry and unions to review the crew change procedures to ensure a "safe corridor" for crew change which minimises public health risk to both the local and shipping community.'

Shipowners, managers, and agents should apply for crew change in Singapore by filling up the online form at www.mpa.gov.sg/web/portal/home/port-of-singapore/operations/crew-change.

MPA urged applications at least 14 days before the planned crew change, especially if the application includes sign-on crew.

ITF gets crew home

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) has helped arrange repatriation for two seafarers who were stranded in Queensland, Australia, by Covid-19.

The ITF attributes this success to the establishment of port welfare boards in Queensland and urges other ports to create their own committees to support seafarers.

Crew changes in Queensland are permitted, but seafarers must follow Maritime Safety Queensland's Code of Conduct for Intrastate travel involving maritime crew changes.

'Let me make this very clear to the international maritime industry: you can repatriate in Queensland and seafarers can have shore leave. We are here to support them,' said ITF inspector Sarah Maguire, who helped to organise the repatriation of the two seafarers.



In brief

Federation refresh

The Nautilus Federation has launched a new flagship website which will give maritime professionals in unions affiliated to it access to maritime news, information and emergency help.

Nautilus Federation director Mark Dickinson welcomed the new website.

'The Federation unions are proud of their success in representing maritime and shipping professionals and protecting, promoting and furthering their members' interests and welfare needs, through our work against criminalisation, and the JASON support network,' said Mr Dickinson. 'The new cleaner web design is an important resource and will help support these goals into the future.'

Piracy on the rise

Attacks on ships increased by 20% in the first half of 2020, the ICC International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reported.

In the Gulf of Guinea, considered the most dangerous area, more attacks are taking place further out to sea with the support of motherships.

IMB reported 53 incidents of piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea in the first six months of the year with 50 percent off the coast of Nigeria and almost a third involving hijackings and/or kidnappings.

IMB's Piracy Reporting Centre recorded 98 incidents of piracy and armed robbery in the first half of 2020, up from 78 in the first half of 2019.

It said 77 seafarers had been taken hostage or kidnapped for ransom since January, with the Gulf of Guinea accounting for over 90% of maritime kidnappings worldwide.

'Attackers armed with knives and guns now target crews on every type of vessel. Everyone's vulnerable.'

The IMB says vessels were boarded a total of 81 times; there were 10 attempted attacks; six instances in which a vessel was fired upon; but only one successful hijacking. [i](#)



Unions stand in solidarity with workers and people of Beirut

Nautilus stands with the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) in condolences and support for seafarers and port workers and families impacted by the explosions at the Port of Beirut that have destroyed much of the area.

The ITF said: 'It is with shock and despair that we have received the news of the explosion at the Port of Beirut that has devastated the city, killed at least 100 people, injured thousands and rendered hundreds of thousands more homeless.'

'Tragically dockers and seafarers lost their lives, and many workers were injured.'

ITF general secretary Stephen Cotton pledged international solidarity and support. 'On behalf of the ITF and our 700 affiliates from around the world, we send our sincerest condolences and sympathies to all of those impacted by these terrible explosions. The ITF and our affiliates stand in solidarity with all of you: your

members, colleagues, families and the people of Lebanon.'

The explosion was blamed on ammonium nitrate stored in a port warehouse. It was apparently delivered on a Russian-owned ship flagged to Moldova called the Rhosus. In 2013 it was transporting tons of the volatile and odourless crystalline substance when Lebanese port authorities deemed the vessel unsafe to continue its journey, and issued fines of approximately \$100,000 to the owner. The ship and crew were subsequently abandoned and its deadly cargo eventually found its way onto land.

ITF affiliated unions in Lebanon include the General Confederation of Drivers and Transport Workers in Lebanon (GCDTW), the Union of Beirut Port Employees (UBPE), the Syndicate of Middle East Airlines and Affiliate Companies (MEA), the Lebanese Cabin Crew Association (LCCA) and the Lebanese Seaman's Syndicate (LSS). [i](#)



GET TWEETING

The ETF is calling on member states Finland and Portugal to honour their commitments on crew changes: bit.ly/RTFcrew



SHIP ABANDONMENT

Author Ian Urbina writes for the San Francisco Chronicle on the perils of abandoned ships and cargo: bit.ly/UrbinaSF



Enough is enough: no more contract extensions, says ITF

Merchant seafarers stranded at sea for months due to coronavirus-related travel restrictions could now start refusing to extend their contracts and stop working, potentially disrupting global trade, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) has said.

Insufficient action by governments to designate seafarers as key workers and to exempt them from Covid-19 travel restrictions has led to around 200,000 seafarers being caught up in an urgent crew change crisis.

The ITF and affiliate unions including Nautilus International have warned that fatigued crews working for months after they were supposed to return home pose a threat to shipping safety, the environment and trade.

'Enough is enough. We have to draw a line in the sand and make it crystal clear to governments that from 16 June, seafarers are going to start enforcing their right to stop working and to return home,' ITF president and Dockers' Section chair Paddy Crumlin said. 'No more contract extensions.'



Crumlin: end contract extensions now

15 June was the final deadline by ITF and the Joint Negotiating Group (JNG) for safe crew changes to be implemented according to protocols agreed by the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

The ITF produced guidance to seafarers on their rights to crew change. This covers shore leave, the International Safety Management (ISM) code, medical care and health and safety.

'You have the right not to perform any work if you have completed your contract, but you should be available for safety and emergencies, and DO NOT refuse to work while at sea. Wait until the ship is anchored or docked in port.'

Seafarers are reminded to contact their union, the nearest ITF inspector or the ITF using the contact information on the guidance.

Nautilus general secretary Mark Dickinson said: 'We stand ready to work with anyone seeking to get our members home or back onboard. To our members – if you feel it is necessary to take measures for the health, safety and welfare of your crew, we will support you. We have got your back. [i](#)

Health officials play crucial role in crew changes

The ministers for health of all EU member states must ensure that crew changes, medical care and shore leave for seafarers happen in ports, the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) and the European Community Shipping Associations (ECSA) has said.

In a letter to all health ministers, the ETF and ECSA called upon the ministers to co-operate with other government departments, such as transport and the interior, to implement the

International Maritime Organization (IMO) protocols and European Commission (EC) guidelines for crew changes.

'Seafarers are playing an essential role in maintaining the global flow of vital goods, fuel, medicines and medical supplies by ship. Many have been away from home for months, unable to leave their ships and return home because of travel restrictions.'

'Meanwhile, seafarers who have been rostered to replace

them are being prevented from doing so by the absence of facilities for them to obtain visas to travel to the places where they are scheduled to join their ships – including in the Schengen area.

'These problems, if not addressed immediately, are likely to have severe consequences for the safety and physical and mental health of seafarers, in addition to the safety of ship operations and the functioning of global supply chains.' [i](#)



GET TWEETING

Help promote your union to the international community by retweeting our content via Twitter: [@nautilusint](https://twitter.com/nautilusint)



IN THE KNOW

Members can join our lively members-only facebook group for fast access to news and information: bit.ly/fbnautilus

Union alarm at attempt to overturn Dockers' Clause

Nautilus has joined with the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) to express grave concerns about a threat to hard-won seafarers' rights.

Six European shortsea and feeder ship operators are attempting to use EU competition law to overturn the 'Dockers' Clause', which is part of a collective bargaining agreement between the ITF and the maritime employers' Joint Negotiating Group (JNG) that covers approximately 15,000 seagoing vessels worldwide.

The clause, which came into force this year, is officially known as the Non-Seafarers' Work Clause (NSWC). It requires operators to use specially-trained dock workers rather than seafarers for container lashing and other cargo-handling work.

As well as reducing operational dangers to crew members, the clause is designed to tackle the problem of fatigue at sea by helping seafarers stick to appropriate work and rest hours.

The operators claim the NSWC infringes EU cartel prohibition and restricts freedoms to provide services.

They do not accept that the JNG acted on their behalf in agreeing to a change in long-established working practices – arguing that their seafarers are trained in cargo-handling and are safe to do this work.

ITF said: 'This clause was negotiated in good faith, and the ITF has an expectation that those who employ seafarers will adhere to this clause in the same way in which they are expected to adhere to the rest of the agreement. The NSWC does not violate EU competition law.'

The ITF and affiliates FNV Havens, Nautilus and ver.di have filed legal proceedings to enforce the clause, saying: 'The complaint appears to be a tactical reaction and seeks to avoid compliance with the NSWC.' [i](#)

Yacht crew should be paid during quarantine, says Cayman register

New guidance from the Cayman Islands Shipping Registry (CISR) says that seafarers should be paid while in mandatory Covid-19 quarantine on joining or leaving a vessel.

This will have a particular impact on seafarers in the superyacht industry, as the majority of yachts sail under the Cayman Islands flag – which is part of the Red Ensign Group.

The principle is that seafarers should be paid while 'in the service of the ship', even if they are not onboard. There is a potential grey area as to whether this applies when a new employee is joining a vessel for the first time, but the register encourages employers to be generous:

- Any 'mandatory quarantine' not in or at the seafarer's agreed place of repatriation on joining or leaving a ship should be considered as the seafarer still being in the service of the ship and therefore paid



▲ Crew should be paid even if they are not onboard

accordingly. For newly employed seafarers (i.e. not returning from leave), whether this applies prior to joining a vessel for the first time would be down to the contract, though the CISR strongly encourages owners and managers to give due regard to the current situation.

There is also an issue as to whether seafarers should be paid when the quarantine is not mandatory, and

again the advice is to remember that self-isolation can benefit the business:

- 'Precautionary self-isolation' may not be considered as in the service of the ship and is at the discretion of the employer, though the CISR strongly encourages owners and managers to give due regard to the current situation and consider self-isolation as in the service of the ship.

Nautilus strategic organiser Rachel Lynch commented: 'Nautilus commends the register for producing clear guidance for seafarers working on Cayman Islands-flagged vessels. The guidance will be applicable to many of our members in the superyacht industry.' [i](#)

The full guidance appears in the document **Impact of Covid-19 on Operation of Cayman Islands Registered Ships** at www.cishipping.com/policy-advice/guidance-notes.

Crew welfare toolkit fundraiser motors into life

Research highlighting mental health challenges faced by superyacht crew will soon result in a dedicated online yacht help 'toolkit' being created by the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN).

A survey conducted by ISWAN in 2018 found that 82% of superyacht crew experienced low crew morale sometimes, often or always. Fifty-five per cent of female respondents found accessing mental health care to be an occasional or regular challenge.

In order to be more visible to superyacht crew in need, ISWAN has been fundraising for Yacht Crew Help – a new online toolkit to provide crew with a direct line to free, 24-hour emotional support, guidance, and useful health and welfare resources.

To support the fundraising, ISWAN has created a Just Giving fundraising page for its the

Crew Help hub which is well on the way to its £20K target.

Alongside individual fundraising efforts from Colin Squire of Yachting Matters and Captain Brendan O'Shannassy of the ISS Captain's Committee, yacht audiovisual and communications consultancy Bond TM has also contributed €10,000 to help make the new platform a reality.

ISWAN project manager Caitlin Vaughan said: 'We have been so fortunate to be supported by wonderful people and organisations within the superyacht industry who recognise the need for accessible mental health support for crew.'

'We're delighted to be partnering with Bond TM whose industry expertise will be invaluable to the development of the toolkit.'

Will Faimatea, director and founder of Bond TM, said: 'Having previously been crew for many

years, I recognise the topic of mental health is an issue like it is everywhere, but obtaining support and assistance whilst you are crew can be difficult. Crew wellbeing is an area that can easily be overlooked.'

Captain O'Shannassy said the greatest challenge at sea is creating a safe environment where crews' mental health and wellness are core values: 'The awareness of this priority across the maritime industry is not where it should be, and neither are the support and educational tools. The ISWAN initiative is a huge step in the right direction to improve crew wellness, resilience, mental health and in turn performance.'

Nautilus yacht partner wilsonhalligan is also among the businesses who provided the initial support needed for ISWAN's 2018 research for its report on **The Welfare of Superyacht Crew**. [i](#)



FOR COVID-19 FAQ



▲ Dickinson: Seafarers' stretched to breaking point

Governments can no longer hide behind Force Majeure for crew change failures

Governments can no longer hide behind a declaration of 'Force Majeure' in order to mask failures in their pandemic response.

Nautilus is calling on flag states to return to the proper implementation of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) and allow crew changes and repatriation to take place before a marine disaster occurs because of overstretched and exhausted crews.

The international shipping industry has warned of a threat to global trade and vessel safety with up to 200,000 crew stranded at sea by travel restrictions brought on by Covid-19.

In the absence of action from governments, unions and owner representatives have worked to create detailed protocols on protection, safe travel, air and port corridors, financial resources, accommodation and the secure identity of seafarers. Protocols which, having been endorsed by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), make the 'Force Majeure' arguments for contract extensions redundant.

General secretary Mark Dickinson said: 'The reaction to Covid-19 from governments worldwide saw measures introduced to prevent the disease spreading that failed to appreciate the crucial role that the shipping industry and our seafarers play in the global economy.'

'Countries closed their borders, airlines were grounded, embassies closed their consular services, ports limited their services and port and flag state control officials were unable to validate or check ships' certificates or the working and living conditions of seafarers.'

'Seafarers' mental wellbeing is being stretched to breaking point, as several recent tragic events have grimly illustrated, and they are unable to perform their duties with the necessary diligence. They have not been allowed to return home for up to 15 months in some cases.'

'Governments and representatives of seafarers and shipowners must continue to work in cooperation and partnership to make things better for seafarers and fishers and ensure a brighter future.' [i](#)

IN THE NEWS

@Mdickinson1262 speaks with the New Statesman on how the Covid-19 crisis has left seafarers in a desperate plight: bit.ly/TwitterMarkD

UK BRANCH CONFERENCE

Join the UK branch conference on Tuesday 24 November. Livestreamed on Facebook: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/UKBC_C2C

Blacklisting call for Panama flagged ships as seafarers told to stay onboard longer

Nautilus International has called for all Panama flagged ships to be targeted for inspection by Port State Control and detained for breaching the Maritime Labour Convention when entering their country in response to its 'inhumane' extension of seafarer contracts.

The Panama Ship Registry issued a notice MMN-03/2020 in June advising that Seafarers' contracts could be extended by a further three months and up to 17 months where crew change is not possible due to the outbreak of the Covid-19.

That notice was later reviewed and the 17 month stipulation removed under pressure from unions.

'PSC should immediately target all Panamanian ships and detain for breaches of the MLC! This is utterly shameful and inhumane,' Nautilus International general secretary Mark Dickinson said.

Nautilus has warned that fatigued crews working for months after they were supposed to return home pose a threat to shipping safety and protection of the environment.

'If this situation is not corrected by @AMP Panama and @MINSAPma, the risk of a major maritime accident due to exhaustion and #mentalhealth from #seafarer grows by the minute, and with it the fate of the global supply chains,' ITF Panama said.

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) has mobilised its global inspectorate to assist any seafarers who refuse further contract extensions.

15 June was the final deadline set by ITF for safe crew changes to be implemented according to protocols agreed by the industry and endorsed by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and International Labour Organization (ILO). [i](#)



TRAINING FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD

The EU-funded SkillSea project is working to identify the digital, green and soft management skills European maritime professionals will need in the years to come – and make sure these are taught at college. **Andrew Linington** reports

A blueprint that seeks to provide maritime professionals with 'future-proofed' training has been unveiled in a new report from the European Union-funded SkillSea project.

Written by experts at the Norwegian University of Science & Technology (NTNU) and Liverpool John Moores University in the UK, the report identifies ways in which maritime education and training could be improved – including greater use of simulation-based learning and new training packages to smooth the path between seagoing and shore-based employment.

The research team examined four key trends which are having an increasing influence upon the

future skills and competence needs of those working in the shipping industry: sustainable development, collaboration among clusters, digitalisation, and education.

The report draws from in-depth interviews with a dozen experts from across the maritime industry, including shipowner and seafarer union representatives, and voices from classification societies, finance, technology, equipment and IT, and education and training.

The report's findings will be used to develop further work programmes being undertaken in the four-year SkillSea project, which seeks not only to produce a sustainable skills strategy for European maritime professionals, but also to increase their numbers. Nautilus is part of the

project consortium, which has representatives from national maritime authorities, shipping companies, shipowners' associations, seafarer unions and maritime education providers from 16 European countries.

Nautilus professional and technical officer David Appleton welcomed the report, noting that the findings in relation to skills shortages for current seafarers and the potential to use new technology to enhance seafarer training were very closely aligned with the results of the Union's recent STCW survey.

'We look forward to participating in the next stage of the project to develop solutions to address the identified gaps,' he said.

▲
Crane simulator
in use at Warsash
nautical school

Sustainable development

Researchers identified the way in which sustainable development is affecting shipping and, in turn, is creating new competencies and skillsets for seafarers to master. As well as working with new 'clean' fuels and zero-emission tech, and with environment-friendly equipment such as scrubbers and ballast water management systems, seafarers are also expected to ensure high levels of vessel utilisation and advanced routing to enhance the efficiency of operations.

'The technology shifts with respect to energy systems and operational challenges are more significant than before,' the study found. 'The gap between common practice and expected competences is growing.'

Advanced skills in analytics

The report assesses the way in which technology is transforming maritime operations, with a growing number of functions being transferred from ships to shore-based control centres. This will fuel demand for advanced skills in analytics and the use of data in optimising fleet operations.

'If clean fuel is an example, then electricity and new technologies will be other vital drivers in shipping industries. Seafarers must be able to gain knowledge on the safe use and storage of carbon and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), as well as battery packages, and even retractable wind turbines, solar panels, and sails. All these are beyond current International Maritime Organization (IMO) conventions and require new thinking in maritime education and training.'

Similarly, the report cautions, the continued development of autonomous and advanced support systems onboard 'will cause increasingly challenging interactions between complex autonomous systems and the crew. Maritime professionals (both seagoing and shore-based) need in-depth understanding of the complex systems onboard to be able to serve the needed redundancy of all systems.'

Maritime clusters

The research team highlighted the importance of strong European maritime clusters within the globalised economy, and underlined the need for specialist skills and expertise to maintain the region's competitive edge.

There is 'a unique opportunity' to develop collaboration and cooperation between maritime education and training centres and surrounding industrial clusters of advanced companies, which will in turn foster the development of new competencies for the maritime industry's future workforce.

The report also points to the benefits that could flow from giving shore-based maritime personnel a better understanding of the challenges and issues that seagoing maritime professionals face. 'This will both facilitate innovation and enable better sea-land collaborations,' it adds.

Researchers said they had found a need for more transversal skills between maritime occupational profiles. 'When it comes to mobility in maritime education, this needs to become a reality.'

'The future skills of maritime professionals depend on how well we are able to help them to find their own ways to co-build maritime studies in an interdisciplinary field. This is urgent and necessary.'

Tech teaching tools

As a minimum, nautical studies must be kept up to date with a rapidly changing, technology-driven maritime world.

'Technology changes maritime education and training towards more flexible and on-demand paths. In line with the rapid technology changes, maritime education and training must seek effective training methods to meet the needs of the shipping industry. Training courses should be accessible from anywhere and at any time.

'To prepare for the future, new courses and teaching methods must be introduced, such as using simulators (including the supported tools, such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and the Internet of Things (IoT) to train high-risk operations and team performance, both ashore and at sea through e-learning platform.'

The research identified a need for a flexible and scalable training system which encourages specialisation. However, the nature of IMO decision-making 'results in a cycle of adaptation to current technology that lags behind



maritime technology development – in some cases by decades’.

Updating the curriculum

While digital skills are increasingly important for maritime professionals, finding the time to learn them during basic maritime training competes with current criteria and puts pressure on minimising STCW training, while learning them after graduation is expensive in terms of both time and money.

It calls for three core areas to be addressed:

1. Developing maritime professionals’ competence and skillsets in response to the rapid development of onboard technologies such as ICT and sustainable technologies
2. Improving seafarers’ soft skills in leadership and management with new training programmes aimed at both furthering their

onboard career and supporting the transition to an onshore career

3. Establishing bridging programmes that complement the IMO certificate-based education towards occupational profiles with a wider reach in the areas of digital, sustainable, transversal and leadership skills. The aim is to help to bridge the gaps between shore-based and seagoing profiles, and the report suggests these programmes can be established as module courses to attract future shipping industry.

The report also recommends that STCW training should be expanded, with digital and sustainable skills integrated within courses, along with maritime law, business finance, remote operation and other new technology-based skills.

Ultimately, the development of more responsive and advanced training programmes will create

▲ Officer cadets in 360 degree simulator

an opportunity for the enhanced mobility of seafarers. ‘Their experience and competence will be carried back to technology development and innovation, both at sea and ashore.

‘Such a strategy will ensure that training, shipping industries, maritime professionals and – most importantly – technology development and innovation, will progress towards new achievements in a more structured, coordinated and collaborative manner.’

The research was conducted before the coronavirus crisis and its associated lockdowns hit Europe. However, the SkillSea researchers say, this does not affect the findings of the report, and the Covid-19 situation makes its conclusions even more relevant. ⓘ

The full report **Future Skill and Competence Needs** is available to download from www.skillsea.eu



STANDING TOGETHER TO SAY NO

Port corruption in the global shipping industry is a stubborn problem that persists despite individual countries’ efforts to pass anti-corruption laws. It’s not easy to turn down demands from a local official who is blocking the progress of your ship, but it can be done if we all act as one, writes **Vivek Menon** of the Maritime Anti-Corruption Network

The nature of the maritime industry brings several unwelcome ‘traditional’ practices. One of these is the demand for ‘compensation’ by port authorities, a practice still strong in many parts of the world. In the past this was a request for a small gift, or a need to ‘grease the wheels’ to get things done; today we call it petty corruption. The acceptance that this practice is now illegal comes slowly to those accustomed to such payments and, in many cases, this leads to relentless discussions with port officials who often threaten the vessel and its crew with expensive delays if these illegal payments are not made.

As a global industry that interacts regularly with government agencies, the maritime industry is exposed to

multiple layers of integrity risk, such as frequent demands for facilitation payments including cash or in-kind benefit for a job that is already paid for, or should be part of the day-to-day operation of a port. Often these demands are made indirectly to the Master in private. This corruption gives rise to operational disruption and increased operational costs.

A captain’s log – 2002

This is a narrative of an incident during a port call when I was a junior officer.

About an hour after berthing, port health officials boarded the vessel to issue ‘free pratique’ (licence to enter a port). Two officials attended. They checked through the vessel’s sanitation documents and the crew vaccination cards. They then continued to inspect the galley and

▲ Corruption is a persistent problem in the shipping industry Image: Getty Images

bond stores. Whilst inspecting, various minor discrepancies and breaches were pointed out, all of which were questionable and led to discussions. The duration and degree of these discussions led to a growing feeling of harassment. The approach varied between the two officials, but it was mostly mild in nature. They then threatened fines to the vessel and requested the master sign papers admitting responsibility, which he very kindly refused to do. After hours, literally hours, of negotiation, we eventually got free pratique.

Shortly after, the vessel was boarded by customs, immigration, the local drug and law enforcement agency, and related boarding agent representatives. The officials from these agencies were aggressive and intimidating, with each group

checking through the arrival documents and inspections of various spaces onboard.

The inspections were extremely thorough. After about three hours, the officials returned to the master's office threatening fines and producing forms for the master to sign admitting responsibility. Heavy arguments followed, pushing the master into the position where we felt compelled to make unethical payments to resolve the spiralling situation. At no given point during the discussions were the officials careless enough to overtly ask for any gift or bribe, but it was implied such payments were required to mitigate this situation. The boarding agents became stressed in this situation and were consistently unhelpful. At the same time, cargo operations were suspended, awaiting the conclusion of the official 'inspections'. As a seafarer, you are quite aware of the fact that every moment vessels spend in port costs the owners and operators. Time is money.

In this scenario the true nature of the maritime industry reveals itself, when vessels arrive in ports, harbours, or terminals. They didn't teach us about this part of the business at maritime school! The outside world believes the primary mission of seafarers is to ensure vessels sail safely without interruption, and that ships spend the shortest amount of time in port. Few would think our job is also to pay corrupt officials to ensure they can maintain the lifestyle to which they have become accustomed.

The above example is a classic situation that seafarers face. A state of duress, where on the one hand they are vulnerable to public officials who have the power to fine, detain, and cause delays, which affect the reputation of a vessel and company. In some cases, rejecting demands endangers the safety of seafarers, the vessel, and its cargo.

On the other hand, if masters and seafarers reject these demands, they



are vulnerable to reprimand from their companies and to the possibility of criminalisation and imprisonment at the hands of port officials. Because seafarers are never trained nor educated to handle corrupt public officials, managing such situations is only learned through 'doing', thereby potentially facing compounded challenges in various ports as this becomes an accepted practice.

Resilience-building in the maritime industry

The focus on corruption has increased in the international community. The extraterritorial reach of regulations such as the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and the UK Bribery Act increases the exposure of anyone engaged in corrupt practices; so if a company engages in corrupt behaviour, this may lead to significant investigations, potential prosecution, high fines, and liability both for seafarer and senior management ashore. Companies now need to change the way they operate and be ready to both internally address these demands, and externally prepare their seafarers to refuse demands.

As a seafarer and among peers, I have heard many times that such illegal demands and behaviours are eternal: 'This is how the industry has

▲ Cash bribes are expected all too often in some ports Image: Getty Images/Andrey Bukreev

always been' and 'What can one do alone to make any change?'

But change is happening in the industry, where some shipping companies have taken a stand against such practices and have achieved successful results through clear communication and collaboration between the vessels and the stakeholders who interact with them. By making it very clear that they support their masters and crew in avoiding any payments, these shipping companies ensure the safety of the seafarers they employ and preserve the integrity of the company.

Additionally, shipping companies have come together to form a maritime industry-led initiative called the Maritime Anti-Corruption Network (MACN) to address corruption challenges faced by seafarers and industry at large in a more systematic manner. Why? Because we believe tackling corruption leads to a better and safer work environment, reduces operational costs, and avoids delays. Seafarers play a key role and can take an integral part in this initiative through some examples below.

Capability building

Given the diversity of the maritime industry and the nature of its operations, companies and seafarers may not know how to best refuse

corrupt demands. For seafarers to be able to say no to corruption, they must feel supported by strong company policies and procedures. These must be dynamic living documents, and the best way to constantly strengthen them is by creating a forum to share challenges and good practice, and collectively assess areas of improvement in internal processes and approaches. Additionally, supporting seafarers with shared methodologies, tools, training and awareness campaigns strengthens their knowledge of how to tackle corruption. At MACN we have done just this for our member companies, where seafarers can make use of these tools. Any seafarer can also report anonymously to MACN at www.maritime-acn.org/macn-upload, when faced with corrupt demands in ports, harbours or terminals.

But one problem is not the same for all, and one solution does not fit all. This is evident when one listens to seafarers' reports from port calls in various countries. Despite having company anti-corruption policies and procedures, corruption risks will continue to exist in the operating environment if the root causes are unaddressed. So how do we address this, and what role do seafarers play?

Collective action

Collective action is a combined effort – various stakeholders working together to reduce and eliminate the risk of corruption in a specific port or country. Seafarers are an integral part of collective action for several very important reasons. First, we need data and anonymous reports on what corrupt demands are made, by whom and what are the consequences for rejecting them. Collecting this data means we can clearly demonstrate there is a problem that needs addressing. It allows us to work closely with our peers and partners, including governments, port authorities, and NGOs, to undertake root cause analyses and implement measures to

tackle corruption. The simple action of reporting a corrupt incident gives us, the industry, the power to act together to fight illegal demands.

Secondly, collective action is supporting seafarers to say no to corruption in ports. This support takes on many forms. It can be sharing other vessels' experiences and issues, it can be through location-specific training and anti-corruption posters for vessels. It is useful to make use of local points of contact who are independent of the authorities, and who have been appointed to respond to incidents.

Thirdly, collective action means you are not alone. The MACN member vessel calling at the port before you said no, as will the one calling after. This consistency works, and we have numerous reports that when the master says, 'Sorry, MACN member – we can't give you anything', officials know there is no point pushing the demand.

Collaboration

The world relies on its seafarers to provide a safe, secure, and efficient international shipping industry. In order to achieve its vision, to create a level playing-field for the shipping industry, and to avoid compromising on safety, security, environmental performance and a maritime industry free of corruption, it is important to reach out to actors across the maritime industry and encourage sector-wide alignment on anti-corruption thinking.

The voice of seafarers has reached the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The IMO addressed maritime corruption by including this important issue in its work programme for the Facilitation Committee, a decision that came at a meeting of the committee last year (FAL 43 held 8-12 April 2019) in response to a submission from some member states and co-sponsored by the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

By working in partnership with

the industry, governments, and civil society, successful solutions are being developed to mitigate corruption risks through country-specific actions in various parts of the world. There are several ways we can address and fight these challenges, and the Maritime Anti-Corruption Network is one such example of an industry-led initiative which has become pre-eminent in taking tangible steps in building resilience in the maritime industry, thereby building integrity across the wider supply chain. **i**

For more on the Maritime Anti-Corruption Network, visit www.maritime-acn.org



The Nautilus Fair Treatment App provides members with instant access to Union advice and support following an incident at sea or in port.

Crucially, the App provides an incident reporting form for recording personal notes on incidents as they happen, which can be sent directly to the Union. The App report function allows members to type notes on the incident, save images and even make recordings using the phone's microphone. All data can be stored offline on the phone for personal use. Download from the My Nautilus section of the Union website www.nautilusint.org now.



Many governments have been hiding behind declarations of exceptional circumstances to avoid engaging with the crew change crisis. But maritime law experts stress that the Maritime Labour Convention is still very much in force, and some seafarers are illegally being denied their rights to relief and repatriation. **HELEN KELLY** reports

At the end of June, news that the Panama Ship Registry would allow seafarers to stay onboard for up to 17 months without a break sent shock waves through the industry and left many crew questioning their protections under international regulations.

The world's largest flag state claimed the move was necessary where crew change was not possible due to the pandemic. This was met with howls of protest from seafarer representatives who were already warning that fatigued crews – working for months after they were supposed to return home – posed a threat to shipping safety and the environment. Some even accused Panama of using the pandemic for its own gain at the expense of exhausted crew.

'If Panama can state with such authority that seafarers at the end of this latest extension "shall be repatriated", then why not enforce

that now?,' Nautilus general secretary Mark Dickinson said.

'Some seafarers have already been onboard for 15 months. This is a kick in the teeth to them and frankly inhumane. It pulls the rug from under everyone working to get crew changes done. It lets those countries who are dragging their feet off the hook.'

Mr Dickinson called for all Panama flagged ships to be targeted for inspection by Port State Control and detained for breaching the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC).

The registry has since backtracked, removing the 17 month stipulation. But it has left seafarers feeling once again abandoned by the very structures that are meant to support them.

One third officer told Nautilus: 'It seems as soon as the sh*t hits the fan, maritime regulations are just thrown out the window – which completely defeats the point of having them.'

▲ **Dr Cleopatra Doumbia-Henry: tours of duty must be limited to protect the mental health and wellbeing of seafarers**
Image: Benjiwiki2017

How did we get here?

It is a common belief that the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006 legally restricts Seafarer Employment Agreements (SEAs) to a maximum of 12 months. This is not quite correct.

The convention actually provides for unlimited employment contracts, with negotiable terms and conditions such as enhanced pay or annual leave. It is a 'living document' that is constantly reviewed by the Special Tripartite Committee (STC) – consisting of seafarer, shipowner and government representatives.

Crucially for crew changes, the MLC does provide, under Regulation 2.5 and Standard A 2.4, the right to repatriation after a maximum period of onboard service of less than 12 months, and the right to paid annual leave.

When the pandemic was first declared, national governments began closing borders and travel

restrictions were imposed. It was widely accepted that the global maritime industry would simply have to put up with this, whatever the consequences for crews, because it was a 'Force Majeure' situation – defined as acts, events or circumstances beyond control.

As it grew increasingly difficult to get seafarers off ships and fly them home, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) twice reluctantly agreed to 30-day periods of onboard service extensions under the International Bargaining Forum (IBF) Framework Agreement.

This would at least allow for seafarers to retain the right to wages and accrued paid annual leave whilst stuck onboard. The extensions permitted seafarers who had worked 11 months to stay onboard with full pay and conditions up to a maximum of 13 months. Ideally, a new one-month SEA should be agreed for each extension.

Seafarers must have genuinely consented to staying onboard and/or extending their contracts if circumstances meant that they could not be repatriated or take annual leave, and all benefits and other terms must remain the same.

When asked for a third time, the ITF refused another extension. Instead, governments were given an extra 30 days, up to 15 June 2020, to implement crew changes in line with industry protocols circulated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in mid-May.

That should have meant governments finally started to allow crew changes. But in many cases borders remained closed, and a growing number of seafarers – now thought to be as many as 200,000 – remained stuck at sea, to their increasing distress.

A captive environment

Dr Cleopatra Doumbia-Henry, the head of World Maritime University,

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'If it is possible, however hard, to repatriate, then tough! You have to do it under the MLC'

Nautilus legal director
Charles Boyle



is known as the Mother of the MLC for her work to develop this 'seafarers' bill of rights' in the early 2000s. She has warned that, despite the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic, tours of duty must be limited to protect the mental health and wellbeing of seafarers.

'We have to be careful that seafarers are not subject to forms of abuse because they are in this captive environment,' she warned. 'This has been really traumatic and a very dramatic set of circumstances in which no one should find themselves.'

Dr Doumbia-Henry urged the maritime industry to continue to fight for crew changes. 'We have to champion the cause for seafarers because they are onboard the ship. They are powerless, waiting on us to help them get back.'



▲ **Standing up for seafarers' MLC rights during the crew change crisis.**

Top: Nautilus legal director Charles Boyle;

Middle: ITF general secretary Stephen Cotton;

Bottom: Nautilus general secretary Mark Dickinson

What now?

As time has passed and the pandemic has begun to wane in many parts of the world, border restrictions are gradually easing. Tourist travel has cautiously restarted in some places, and the conditions for repatriation and transfer of seafarers have improved. It is becoming less viable to claim Force Majeure as an excuse for not making crew changes.

'It is important to make the distinction between what is difficult to do, and what is impossible to do when it comes to Force Majeure,' Nautilus director of legal Charles Boyle explains. 'If it is possible, however hard, to repatriate crew,

then tough! You have to do it under the MLC. Governments signed up to these international conventions. Industry must comply with them.'

On 9 July, the UK hosted an international video-conference where 13 governments adopted a statement pledging to urgently take forward a range of actions to 'avert the global crisis that is unfolding at sea' for the seafarers who remain trapped working on ships.

The governments pledged to designate seafarers as 'key workers', to provide visa waivers, and to exempt them from quarantine.

The event was attended by Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, United Arab Emirates and United States of America.

ITF general secretary Stephen Cotton, who attended the online event, said: 'After months of this crew change crisis getting worse, governments must do their bit. That means that port states where ships dock, flag states where ships are registered, transit hubs with airports, and the home countries of seafarers all need to make visa, quarantine and border exceptions for seafarers now – not tomorrow, not next week.'

Change is slowly starting to happen. From 1 July, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) said it would no longer allow seafarers to serve onboard beyond 13 months without a break. Vessels can be detained at Australian ports if a seafarer has continuously served onboard beyond that time.

'What we're seeing now is a tipping point in terms of facilitating crew changes,' Mr Boyle says. 'It will be harder for lone wolves to hold out. Attention will be drawn to non-compliant countries, pressure will be applied, and it will become harder and harder to rely on the excuse of Force Majeure.'

'Basically, it comes down to: will you enforce MLC at the end of the day or won't you?' **📌**



US Coast Guard and port partners responded to help save the crew after the 656-foot vehicle carrier Golden Ray capsized in St Simon's Sound near Brunswick in the US state of Georgia on 8 September 2019. Image: Public Domain

RED FLAGS RAISED OVER SHIP SAFETY

Worldwide shipping losses have declined by almost 70% over the past decade – but the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic could reverse these positive safety trends, a new study has warned. **Andrew Linington** reports

In its latest annual safety & shipping review, the insurance firm Allianz Global Corporate & Specialty (AGCS) suggests that a damaging combination of economic downturn, cost-cutting measures, fatigued crew and weakened emergency response could see a surge of accidents at sea.

Ship losses fell by more than 20% year-on-year during 2019, to a record low of just 41 vessels of 100gt and above, compared with 130 in 2010. However, as AGCS cautioned, the number of shipping casualties or incidents rose by 5%, to 2,815, with more than one-third of these related to machinery damage or failure.

Waters around the British Isles,

North Sea, English Channel and the Bay of Biscay replaced the East Mediterranean to become the main hotspot, accounting for one in five incidents during 2019.

AGCS said the coronavirus pandemic has already resulted in a sharp reduction in global seaborne trade and warned that the economic fallout could undo years of safety gains.

Top 10 problem areas

The report highlights 10 key causes of concern – including the way in which the inability to change crews is impacting their welfare and raising the risks of ‘human error’ accidents – and AGCS says the industry needs to adopt measures to reduce crew-related problems.

‘Adjustments in work and rest

hours offer effective means of fatigue management, while incentives in cash or kind will also have a positive impact on crew wellbeing,’ said senior marine risk consultant Captain Nitin Chopra. ‘Hiring from the pool of locally available seafarers may be an option in some cases that can be further facilitated by cooperation among crew management companies.’

Captain Rahul Khanna, AGCS global head of marine risk consulting, warned: ‘Shipowners will face additional cost pressures from a downturn in trade and will no doubt put efficiency measures in place. We know from past downturns that crew and maintenance budgets are among the first areas that are cut. But it is important that safety and

maintenance standards are not impacted by the downturn.’

AGCS is particularly concerned that machinery failures – already the most common cause of incidents – could increase even further as a result of the pandemic.

‘Disruption in supply of spare parts and essential consumables like lube-oil and hydraulic oils can delay scheduled maintenance or result in crews using alternative grades or brands. At the same time, travel restrictions may affect the ability of specialist engineers to access ships to make repairs.’

‘The current situation is making it difficult for vessels to obtain essential spares and consumables and carry out maintenance and repairs. This could have a detrimental effect on the safe operation of engines and machinery and potentially cause damage or breakdown, which in turn can lead to groundings or collisions.’

AGCS is alarmed at the prospect of surveys and inspections being reduced or delayed as a result of staff shortages or social distancing measures, and Capt Khanna said there are also concerns about the potentially damaging impact of coronavirus on the effectiveness of emergency rescue and support services.

Cruise on the brink

The state of the cruise industry was particularly disturbing, with 95% of the world fleet in lay-up in April.

‘The cruiseship industry will survive the coronavirus crisis. But when it does return, it will be operating in a very different world,’ said AGCS head of marine hull and liabilities Chris Turberville. ‘The problem of infectious diseases is not about to go away, and vessels will need to operate with much more stringent levels of protections for outbreaks than in the past.’

There are also concerns about the accumulation of risk created by the huge value of the large number of cruiseships and tankers



currently laid-up in typhoon and hurricane-prone waters.

The monthly cost of cruiseship lay-up can be US\$1m-\$3m, and the industry faces ‘a real test’ in maintaining vessels so that they emerge from lay-up in reasonable condition and with quality crew.

AGCS data for 2019 shows that cargo ships accounted for more than one third of vessels lost during the year, and that foundering was the main cause of total losses – no fewer than three in every four.

Contributing factors included bad weather, flooding and water ingress, engine trouble and vessels capsizing. Car carrier and ro-ro vessel safety concerns were also raised. Total losses involving ro-ros were up year-on-year in 2019, as well as smaller incidents (up by 20%) – and the trend is continuing through 2020, AGCS warns.

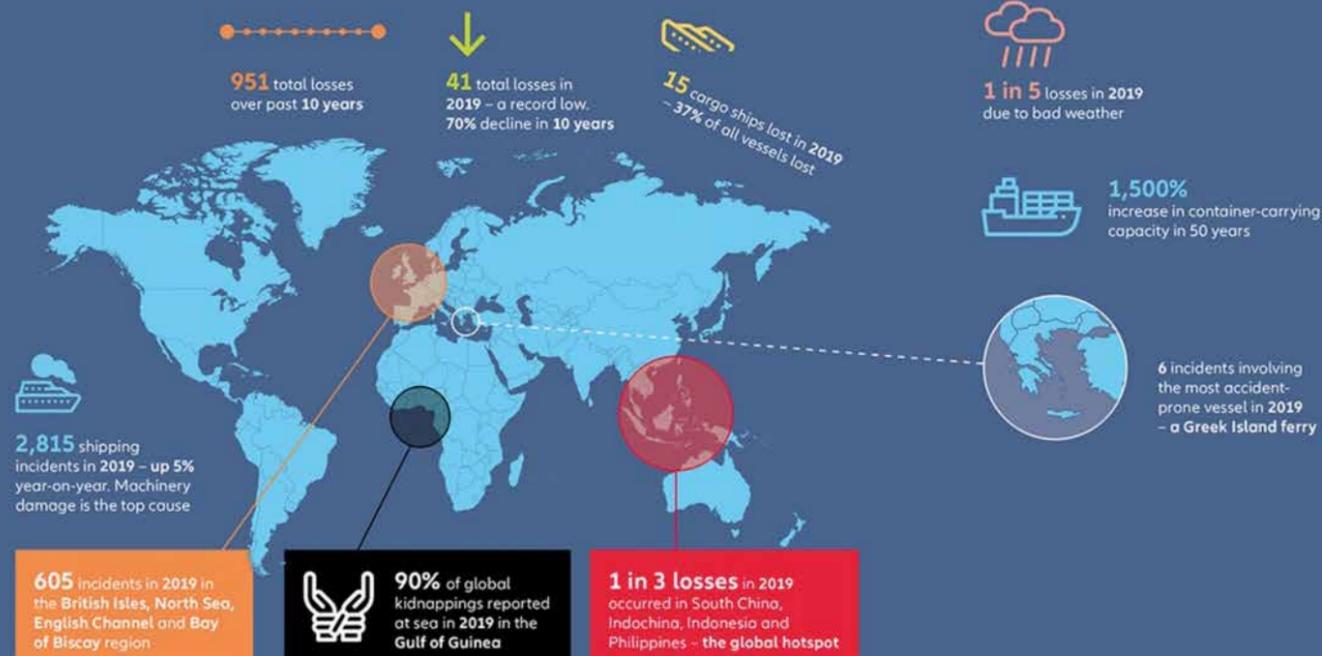
‘The rise in number and severity of claims on ro-ro vessels is concerning. Ro-ros can be more exposed to fire and stability issues than other vessels. Many have quick turnarounds in port, and a number of accident investigations have revealed that pre-sail away stability checks were either not carried out as required or were based on inaccurate cargo information. Too many times commercial

considerations have endangered vessels and crews, and it is vital that this is addressed on shore and onboard,’ Capt Khanna said.

Supersized containerships

There were almost 200 reported fires on vessels over the past year, up 13% and resulting in five total losses in 2019 alone. Misdeclared cargo is a major cause, with particular problems in the container sector – where evidence suggests that the majority of containers have issues with misdeclared or improperly stowed cargo. Chemicals and batteries are increasingly shipped in containers, and these pose a serious fire risk if they are misdeclared or wrongly stowed. Measures to reduce these risks are vital, as the threat will increase as ships continue to become bigger and the range of goods transported grows.

Regulations have failed to keep pace with the ‘super-sizing’ of containerships and the challenge of fighting larger and more dangerous fires. ‘The size of containerships has increased exponentially over the past 50 years. Vessels have almost tripled in size, while capacity has increased from around 1,500TEU in 1970 to more than 24,000TEU today. In contrast, crew numbers have decreased by around a



quarter while the average number of fire-fighting hoses has only increased from one to two.'

Regulatory modernisation is urgently needed, and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) should adopt industry proposals for amendments to the SOLAS Convention, including improvements in the detection and control of fires.

AGCS predicts that there will be more losses linked to the sulphur cap in the months ahead. It is already closely monitoring claims to assess evidence of technical and operational problems with scrubbers, and warns that there have been incidents resulting from scrubber design flaws and issues with their manufacture, testing and installation.

The report highlights particular concerns about the corrosive effects of scrubber waste causing wastewater to flood engine rooms, ballast tanks and cargo holds, and it also warns that blended low sulphur fuels often carry an increased risk of cat fines, which

can damage engines. 'Fuels from different ports and refineries currently have varying properties, which could result in damage to engines and essential equipment.'

Technology risks

AGCS also cautioned about 'significant' technology-related risks, noting reports that there has been a 400% increase in attempted cyber-attacks in the maritime sector since the pandemic began, as well as a marked rise in GPS spoofing attacks on ships, particularly in the Middle East and China.

'The way in which vessels and crew are interacting with technology has become a significant factor in collisions and groundings,' AGCS said, highlighting two UK accident investigations in which over-reliance on, and mis-interpretation of AIS and ECDIS data were key contributory factors.

Better training and utilisation of data could help improve safety. 'The industry needs to start learning from successful journeys,

▲ Safety and shipping review in numbers

Image: AGCS

not just accidents. Such insights can be used to develop new technology, inform training and improve crew and safety culture.'

Increasing the use of industrial control systems to monitor and maintain engines could also play a role in reducing machinery breakdown incidents, one of the biggest causes of marine insurance claims.

Onshore monitoring of engines, together with predictive or preventative maintenance, is likely to improve reliability, reduce machinery breakdown incidents and cut the incidence of human error, enabling a better understanding of the root cause of machinery breakdown incidents.

Shipping is increasingly exposed to risks arising from geopolitical instability, national rivalries, failed states and the continued prevalence of piracy. Shipping companies should prepare for an increase in disruption to supply chains and their operations, senior marine risk consultant Captain Andrew Kinsey warned.

'Shipping is a global commodity and can be used as a pawn in disputes due to its impact on the economy,' he said. 'If you disrupt supply chains there can be a direct impact on global markets. Shipping will increasingly be drawn into geopolitical disputes.'

A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT

Last month, we have reported on how some seafarers are illegally being denied their Maritime Labour Convention rights to crew relief and repatriation during the coronavirus pandemic. Now we turn to further violations of international treaties, highlighting Port State Control failures to enforce safety and security regulations that could lead to unsafe ships returning to our waters, both in the months to come and longer-term. **Helen Kelly** reports

Maritime safety experts are flagging up growing concerns over the failure of maritime authorities to enforce international safety and security regulations during the coronavirus pandemic, which some fear could lead to dangerously unsafe vessels plying the world's oceans and put seafarers' lives at risk.

Industry regulator, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has issued several circular letters to facilitate the continuous movement of world trade during the pandemic by ensuring smooth operations of ships with 'practical and pragmatic' approaches. But worryingly, due to

the different interpretations by stakeholders — governments, flag states, port states, classification societies, ship owners and companies — in many cases safe ship operations have been deprioritised, endangering the safety of maritime workers and the marine environment, according to the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF).

ITF maritime co-ordinator Jacqueline Smith said: 'The ITF is deeply concerned that the work that has been achieved over decades, and the international regulations that have been implemented, are being undermined out of convenience and no longer because of necessity as it was in the beginning of the

▲ Failures in enforcing regulations are putting seafarers' lives at risk
Image: Danny Cornelissen

pandemic. Such practices are setting a dangerous precedent that could continue, putting maritime workers' lives and safety in jeopardy.'

The main areas of concern flagged by the ITF are:

- safety and security of maritime workers
- safe manning
- hours of rest
- extension of ships' and seafarers' certificates
- environmental protection regulations and maritime workers' safety
- promoting the use of computer based training (CBT) for onboard safety and security training
- use of remote inspections

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'The industry needs to start learning from successful journeys, not just accidents'



The ITF will integrate these concerns into its 'Enough is Enough' campaign, launched in June 2020 to protest against the ongoing crew change crisis that now affects an estimated 300,000 seafarers stuck onboard due to pandemic travel restrictions, and another 300,000 seafarers stuck at home unable to access employment onboard.

'We have an obligation and responsibility to the seafarers to say "enough is enough" to reduced safety and security, to reduced manning, to reduced hours of rest and to added responsibilities beyond their duties – all of these factors are threatening the lives of the seafarers,' Ms Smith said.

Bigger than Covid

When the Covid-19 pandemic first hit, many countries shut their borders and travel restrictions were imposed. It was accepted that the industry faced a 'force majeure' situation and that processes and protocols would need to be reconsidered. As a result, many ports were closed, and ships denied entry.

Force majeure is defined as acts, events or circumstances beyond control, and can release parties from contractual or regulatory obligations.

Many maritime authorities chose to develop temporary guidance to Port State Control (PSC) to apply flexibly during the pandemic. Most approved delays to or extensions of ship inspections, surveys and audits for between three and six months. Routine servicing of lifesaving and firefighting apparatus, dry docking and in water surveys, testing of lifting appliances and loose gear, and ballast water and bunker fuel inspections, among very many others, were all put on hold.

In a 9 April IMO video meeting with PSC regimes, the 10 regimes all reported suspensions and or delays to ship inspections. The regimes include the United States Coast Guard, the Viña del Mar Agreement and the Abuja, Black Sea, Caribbean, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, Paris, Riyadh and Tokyo Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) on PSC.

'We now have a bigger crisis than the Covid-19 crisis to fight, and that is a crisis of regulation, because every country can

now do what they want to do in terms of safety,' says Odd Rune Malterud, assistant director & technical manager of the Norwegian Union of Marine Engineers – a member of the Nautilus Federation.

'The port state administrations keep talking about maintaining smooth operations, and they don't even mention safety. This is a big problem.'

Mr Malterud fears exemptions granted in exceptional times will become permanent without consultation with unions or seafarers.

His sentiment is echoed by Nautilus International professional and technical officer David Appleton, who has seen several proposals from the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) to make Seafarer Employment Agreement (SEA) repatriation exemptions permanent, including 60-day extensions to seafarers' contracts, and the permanent use of remote ship inspections.

'We need to create a balance between making practical allowances for the situation we're in and making sure that these don't become permanent,' he says.

'The rules are written for a reason. When it becomes inconvenient to comply with the rules, you don't change the rules.'

Remote ship inspections

During the pandemic, several maritime authorities encouraged remote ship inspections in order to safeguard crew and shore-based employees, including two key members of the IMO Council – the USA and Norway. The IMO Council is the executive arm of the United Nations body.

In a 19 June circular, the Norwegian Maritime Authority said: 'There are reasons to believe that the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions imposed will continue for quite some time.'

'The Norwegian Maritime Authority (the NMA) has therefore opted to expand the possibility of carrying out remote audits to include DOC, SMC and ISPS audits and MLC inspections in cases where it is not possible to conduct physical audits or inspections on board the vessel or at the company's office due to restrictions or the risk of infection.'

The problem is that remote ship inspections require onboard crew to assist shoreside operators to complete the

examinations – a significant increase in workload for already fatigued seafarers.

Mr Malterud, a former chief engineer and ship inspector, highlights that as a massive problem. 'It is a huge safety and security risk to eliminate Port State Control,' he says.

'If you are on a ship you don't see your own deficiencies. You need fresh eyes.'

Accident in waiting

Some now fear that a major maritime incident will need to occur before the industry wakes up to the risks of long-term regulatory erosion sparked by the pandemic.

In its latest annual Safety & Shipping Review, the insurance firm Allianz Global Corporate & Specialty (AGCS) suggests that a damaging combination of economic downturn, cost-cutting measures, fatigued crew and weakened emergency response could see a surge of accidents at sea (see pages 26-28 of this Telegraph). AGCS said the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in a sharp reduction in global seaborne trade and warned that the economic fallout could unwind years of safety gains.

The worry is that even when countries do restart PSC, many maritime administrations are moving too slowly to re-introduce effective regulatory enforcement.

The UK suspended PSC inspections in March. Maritime and Coastguard (MCA) Surveyors suspended routine survey and inspection activity for UK flagged vessels either domestically or overseas. And while the MCA resumed survey, audit and inspection activity on 20 July, 'not all activities recommenced on this date'.

The Netherlands also suspended PSC inspections in March, with a phased return to operations from early July. However, only in rare cases will inspectors now go onboard ship.

Nautilus has raised its concerns about regulatory non-compliance with several industry partners including the Merchant Navy Welfare Board and the MCA.

'We now need to restart ship inspections so that we can be sure the regulations that were put in place for a reason are being complied with,' Mr Appleton said. 

the global seafarer

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