

the global

SEAFARER

Wherever you are, so are we

Volume 6 | Issue 4



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BUSINESS
OF STAYING
SAFE
AT SEA**

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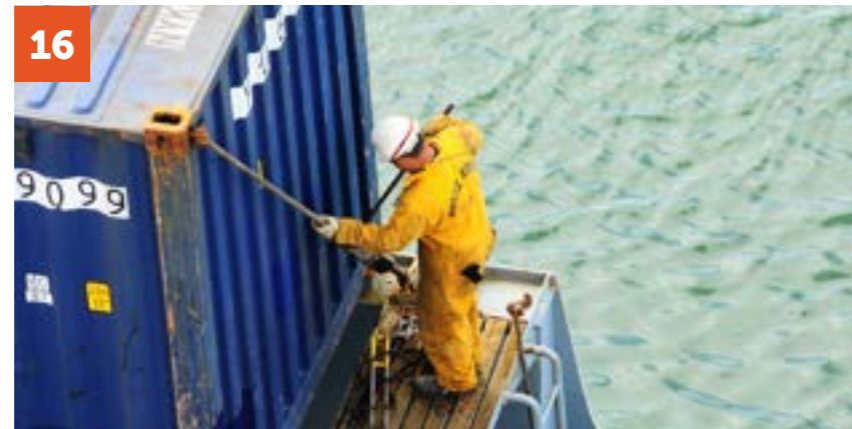
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New EU crewing regulation, the ETF wants to ensure zero accidents and a safe workplace for all inland waterways crew

Cover image: Pilot ladder on a tanker
Credit: Robert Weber / Getty Images

Organising efforts pay off with Mexican tug workers linked to Nautilus Federation affiliate

After years of organising followed by a government-mandated election, a battle to represent tug workers in seven ports in Mexico has finally been won by an affiliate of the International Organization of Masters, Mates and Pilots (MM&P).

An overwhelming majority has voted – for the second time – to be represented by the MM&P affiliate Orden Mexicana de Profesionales Marítimos y Portuarios, Similares y Conexos (Orden Marítima).

MM&P is one of two unions affiliated to the Nautilus Federation in the US.

Workers at Boluda first chose Orden Marítima to represent them in July 2021. But the company challenged the results, and the government ordered that a second election be held.

In the second election, 82% of the tug workers in seven ports voted in favour of Orden Marítima.

They ratified their first contract earlier this year.

Members of Orden Marítima now crew the tugs top to bottom: they work as captains, ordinary seamen, oilers and in other capacities. There are 260 people in the bargaining unit.

'Relations with management are now good,' says MM&P



Captain Francisco Montes, Orden Marítima, addressing the 89th convention of the International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots.

United Inland Group representative Eduardo Iglesias, who visited members of the union in July 2022 in the ports of Altamira and Tampico.

On the heels of this success, Orden Marítima is expanding its organising efforts throughout Mexico to other tug companies, fishing companies and ferries.

It already represents about 70 workers at SAAM Towage, which is based in Chile and operates in Mexico's ports alongside Boluda.

Nautilus rejects attempts by Swiss government to deregulate its flag

Nautilus has rejected attempts by the Swiss government to introduce legislation for commercial ships that would harm protections for workers by abandoning flag requirements common across European Union (EU) states.

A new 'Federal Act on the Tonnage Tax on Seagoing Ships' was introduced by the Swiss government on 5 April 2022 and now must pass parliament. It proposes a maritime taxation system that does not tax profit, but rather the ship's own freight volume, thus removing the flag requirement. Nautilus Switzerland national organiser Holger Schatz said the Union believes this will invalidate the 'strict conditions attached to the granting of the tonnage tax, for example in the EU, which enables regulation in terms of

worker protections, ecological concerns and safety issues.'

Mr Schatz said keeping the flag requirement in the bill – and all its associated conditions to protect workers – would mean that 'a company wishing to benefit from tonnage taxation would not only have to be domiciled in Switzerland but would also have to place a large part of its fleet under the flag of Switzerland or an EU state. The EU uses this type of legislation to try to stop flagging out to so-called "flags of convenience.'

The Swiss government says that the bill stipulates ships must be subject to a flag state that has ratified the various existing international maritime regulations.

'There is a great discrepancy between the formal recognition of international regulations such as the Maritime Labour Convention and their implementation, argued Mr Schatz. 'Our many years of experience, and recent incidents all show how effectively seafarers under the Swiss flag are protected in a crisis.'

With flags of convenience, however, 'there are usually no strong trade unions, no critical civil society, and it is questionable whether the competent flag-state authorities exercise their critical control authority or are ultimately only instruments of increased social dumping.

Switzerland needs a 'real, sustainable maritime strategy, not quick fixes.'

Back off Svitzer: Australian unions hold national 'stopwork meeting'

Members of the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers (AIMPE) and the Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU), both affiliates of the Nautilus Federation, held a joint 'stopwork meeting' of Svitzer tug employees, alongside members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA/CFMMEU) on 5 August.

'Stopwork' meetings are held in company time to consider the progress of an industrial dispute, with this one organised for members to provide feedback about the long running dispute with Svitzer over the company application to terminate the current Enterprise Agreement and attempts to drive members' conditions down to the legal minimum.

The current national Enterprise Agreement commenced in early 2016 and the unions have been negotiating with Svitzer since late 2019 to secure a replacement Agreement. So far this has proved impossible. In early 2020 Svitzer used the cover of the Covid-19 pandemic to stall the process and then served up a list of 30 claims to reduce pay and conditions for their employees.

The company claims would force tug crews to work longer hours and accept shorter breaks all of which will lead to greater fatigue in the 24/7 sector. The company also wants part time and casual employees to work for drastically reduced rates of pay. When the company put a similar proposal out to its employees to vote in 2021 it was rejected by 92% of the workers.

Subsequently, in early 2022 Svitzer applied to terminate the Enterprise Agreement which has generated another battle away from the bargaining table and instead at the Fair Work Commission with lawyers arguing the toss in Australia's tribunal service. The three unions are vigorously opposing the termination application.



ACTU secretary
Sally McManus

CREDIT: Martin Byrne, AIMPE

During this protracted and frustrating exercise, rates of pay for the tug crews have been frozen. The covid pandemic impacted towage operations for three months in 2020 but ever since tugs have been assisting a strong and growing level of shipping around almost all ports.

Like parent company Maersk, Svitzer Australia is reaping strong revenues and generating solid profits but it seems clear to the unions that there has been a corporate decision to exploit the pandemic to drive down tug workers' pay and conditions.

The national stopwork meeting was conducted by videoconference and was attended by over 200 members in various locations including from tugboats, in union rooms and from members' homes. The meeting was addressed by ACTU Secretary Sally McManus who reported on the recent Workers Delegation to Parliament which took the message to MPs that the Fair Work Act needs to change because it is not fair on workers as it is being used now.

Officials of the three unions reported updates to the members at the meeting,

and several Svitzer employees moved and seconded three resolutions calling for Svitzer to back off, for the Federal Government to act and for the Svitzer global CEO to get involved and resolve the negotiations which have now been running for three years.

Key resolutions

Resolution 1:

This combined meeting of Svitzer tugboat employees calls on Svitzer Australia to withdraw its application to terminate the Svitzer Australia Pty Limited National Towage Enterprise Agreement 2016. Members of AIMPE, AMOU and MUA support the call of the three unions for Svitzer to use its time, resources and what's left of its good name to resume enterprise bargaining with its workforce under the Fair Work Act.

Resolution 2:

This combined meeting of Svitzer tugboat employees calls on the Federal Government to take immediate steps to amend the Fair Work Act to make enterprise bargaining fairer for workers – as proposed by the ACTU. Most importantly, members of AIMPE, AMOU and MUA call for amendments to prohibit employers from seeking to terminate Enterprise Agreements in the sole pursuit of lessening workers' pay and conditions.

Resolution 3:

The combined meeting of Svitzer tugboat employees calls on Svitzer Global CEO Kasper Nils to join, in person, with the Svitzer Australia management team and take immediate steps to resume EBA negotiations to achieve a fair and mutually agreeable outcome, giving tugboat workers certainty in their employment with dignified wages and conditions.



Roland Rexha
(middle) with
Staten Island
Ferry workers.

CREDIT: Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association

Nautilus Federation affiliate secures big win for US ferry engineers

In a victory for members of the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association (MEBA) – an affiliate of the Nautilus Federation – an administrative law judge in New York City has ruled that engine work aboard the vessels is comparable to such jobs in the US-flagged Maersk fleet and should be paid comparatively.

Staten Island Ferry (SIF) seafarers have not had a pay raise in almost 12 years after the collective bargaining agreement expired in 2010, and in that time underpaid workers in the fleet have sought opportunities elsewhere. New York City's inability to attract and retain qualified mariners has created service disruptions that occasionally boils over into frustration for commuters who rely on the ferry service to move between Staten Island and Manhattan.

MEBA has pointed out that the City's failure to adequately compensate its Staten Island Ferry mariners 'has left our crews with enormous financial hardship and gruelling work hours to keep up with today's soaring inflation and cost of living.' MEBA's push to secure fair compensation for the seafarers it represents in the ferry system was tested by the city's central,

independent administrative law court that adjudicates city matters.

Law judge Faye Lewis from the NYC Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings (OATH) agreed with the Union in a ruling issued this week that states that: 'Marine engineers and chief marine engineers [onboard the Staten Island Ferries] should be paid the rates of prevailing wages and benefits commensurate with those paid to chief engineers and first assistant engineers on US-flag Maersk cargo vessels.'

The City is currently reviewing the decision and can choose to appeal. The ruling was handed down days before the Union goes back to the bargaining table with the City looking to finally nail down a long overdue contract covering seafarers who carry out high-stress jobs 'without adequate support from the City.' An impartial mediator will join the parties to assist talks.

MEBA secretary-treasurer Roland 'Rex' Rexha, a former shop steward at the Staten Island Ferry, hailed the ruling: 'Judge Lewis's decision is a triumph for our crews and upholds our long-time concerns that SIF engineers and other officers are paid well-below other professional mariners although their work obligations and skills are equal.'

Australian minister slams Svitzer tactics on tug crews

A campaign by Australian maritime unions against efforts by Svitzer to terminate long standing enterprise agreements covering tug crews in the country has gained additional momentum, following a key intervention by the Australian minister for workplace relations Tony Burke.

The unions campaigning include Nautilus Federation affiliates the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers (AIMPE) and the Australian Maritime Officers' Union (AMOU).



AIMPE federal councillors Evan James (L) and Peter de Szoeke (R) with ACTU secretary Sally McManus in the Australian Parliament lobbying for industrial relations' changes.

CREDIT: AIMPE

On 8 August Mr Burke told a major employer group meeting that he regarded Svitzer's termination tactic as 'more than [taking advantage of] a loophole it's a rort' [scam] and that he was 'disgusted' by the company's approach.

Mr Burke singled out Svitzer and their application to terminate the collective agreement covering Svitzer tug crews in Australia, while outlining the government's priorities in the area of industrial relations.

AIMPE officials and delegates have been lobbying Australian parliamentarians in a campaign organised by the country's national trade union council, ACTU, to raise the need for action by the Federal Government.

Most of the world's tonnage is now covered by the Maritime Labour Convention, which guarantees basic entitlements and offers mechanisms for seafarers to obtain justice if their rights are disregarded



MLC: YOUR NEW RIGHTS EXPLAINED

Trade unions converged in Geneva this May to negotiate for better worker protections in the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006.

Global Seafarer asked Charles Boyle, Nautilus's director of legal services and a recognised expert on the MLC, to explain the benefits to members

Global Seafarer (GS): Can you give us a brief overview of the MLC and why it is important for members?

Charles Boyle (CB): The MLC consolidates many provisions over many decades formulated by the International Labour Organization (ILO) for the benefit of seafarers.

In the past, flag states had signed up to a number of conventions but not all of them – they had effectively cherry picked the ones they liked. But with the MLC, most of the major flag states have signed up, which means they must implement the whole suite of rights within it. Most of the world's tonnage is now covered by the Convention.

GS: What are some of the rights that are guaranteed by the MLC?

CB: The MLC guarantees, for example, the right to obtain a Seafarers Employment Agreement (SEA), the right to repatriation, the right to certain protections relating to wages, rights relating to medical care, sanitary conditions onboard in respect of accommodation, health and safety rules, and also – most importantly, I think – proper implementation and enforcement by flag state control and port state control.

GS: I understand that the MLC is also open to amendments that further improve rights for seafarers?

CB: That's right, the MLC is a 'living instrument', amended through meetings of the ILO Special Tripartite Committee (STC) of seafarer representatives, governments and shipowners. It contains express provisions for the continuous improvement of seafarers' living and working conditions.

The proof of this has been that we have now been through four STC meetings at the ILO, and all of these meetings between representatives of seafarers, shipowners and governments have led to amendments to bring the MLC up to date with the needs of seafarers and address specific problems.

GS: Going into the negotiations, what was the seafarers' group hoping to achieve and were you optimistic?

CB: The seafarers' group was very effectively led by Nautilus general secretary Mark Dickinson on this occasion. We had put forward a suite of proposals, some of them jointly with shipowners and some on our own. Many of them related to amendments addressing certain problems that arose during Covid, some related to other matters.

I felt optimistic we would get at least some of what we were looking for, and I think that we did quite well. I think

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Nautilus International Twitter presents a quick summary of why the MLC is so important for seafarers: bit.ly/MLC_Twitter

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Nautilus general secretary Mark Dickinson shares his view on the outcome of the negotiations at bit.ly/Mark_MLC



➤ there's a general feeling that shipowners don't like amendments to the MLC unless it entirely suits them! They have stated before that, just because the MLC can be amended, that doesn't mean it should be.

GS: What was the negotiation process like? Was it particularly contentious this time or was there more agreement, post Covid?

CB: Some aspects of these negotiations were particularly tense. There were two amendments we had to 'park' because the shipowners simply wouldn't agree to them. The major one was that the shipowners would not agree to inserting a statement in the MLC that the maximum period of time onboard a ship before a seafarer had a right to be repatriated is 11 months. It currently states 12 months, but it's commonly understood that 12 months minus a month of MLC leave equals 11.

We wanted the document to explicitly state this, but the shipowners refused because they perhaps want scope for more flexible contracts. However, this endangers seafarers and the marine environment through increasing fatigue.

Those two issues have not been abandoned. Further work will be done through other means to address these particular problems.

GS: We did win some really important rights though, which will enter into force by December 2024. Are there any that really stand out for you?

CB: Wages arrears was a particular problem during the pandemic. I think one of the most important amendments we got is one that will protect wages and hopefully give seafarers more chance of recovering wages in future.

This is a requirement for seafarer recruitment and placement services to provide seafarers with information

about the system of protection that these services are required to hold in case shipowners default on their obligations towards seafarers. So we hope there's more transparency there and as a result more seafarers will be able to go after recruitment agents if wages are outstanding.

There is now also a requirement that states ensure prompt access to shore-based medical treatment for seafarers. They also cannot refuse this access due to public health reasons – meaning that they won't be able to prevent treatment of seafarers due to a pandemic situation, as has happened with Covid.

Another very important amendment was the insertion of a new paragraph into the repatriation provisions of the MLC, requiring members to facilitate the prompt repatriation of seafarers, even when they have been abandoned in port. We wanted this because some port states have been slow to repatriate because they do not want an empty ship left there. We have now made clear that we expect prompt action and that before port states can just replace those seafarers on the abandoned ships, they need to establish cooperation with other involved states to ensure that the seafarers replacing them are still accorded their MLC rights.

GS: What should members do if they find that their old, or new, MLC rights are being violated?

CB: Of course, they should report what has happened to their union, but there are also a number of avenues they can go down in terms of self-help, including the MLC onboard and onshore complaints procedures, and reporting infringements to the port state and flag state.

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Listen to the full interview at soundcloud.com/nautilusinternational

Eight amendments

- Seafarers are now entitled to appropriately-sized personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Seafarers must receive good-quality drinking water, free of charge
- Seafarers must have access to nutritious, well-balanced meals
- Seafarers must be provided with appropriate social connectivity by shipowners, without charge. Internet access should also be provided by shipowners and ports, with charges, if any, being reasonable in amount
- Recruitment and placement services must provide seafarers with details of their system of protection, which is to compensate them for monetary losses suffered as a result of the shipowners failing to meet its obligations to them
- States must further facilitate the prompt repatriation of abandoned seafarers
- States must provide medical care for seafarers in need of immediate assistance and facilitate the repatriation of the remains of seafarers who have died onboard
- All deaths of seafarers are to be recorded and reported annually to the ILO, which will publish the relevant data

ENFORCING YOUR RIGHTS

See page 50-51 for details of who you should approach for assistance when your rights – or those of your shipmates – are not respected



'There is still this problem of the so-called Libyan coastguard acting like they act, and there are still many seafarers out there having to decide whether to hand people over to them'

Migrant rescue work in the Mediterranean

CREDIT: Georgios Giannopoulos / Wikimedia Commons

BEATING BLACKLISTING

After two years, a Dutch court has ruled in favour of a seafarer who was turned away by a crewing agency due to his work rescuing migrants in the Mediterranean. **Rob Coston** reports

The Dutch Human Rights Committee has decided that a seafarer was the victim of employment discrimination, after crewing agency Total Crew BV refused to put him forward for contracts due to his charity work onboard a migrant rescue vessel in the Mediterranean.

The Telegraph first reported on the case of Captain Kai Kaltegartner in November 2020. Capt Kaltegartner volunteered with an NGO and spent two years as captain of a migrant rescue vessel, and later applied for a short-term contract with the Dutch crewing agency in 2019.

He was upfront with Total Crew regarding his NGO work, believing that it was good evidence of his skill as a seafarer and his ability to work under extreme

pressure. Staff at the agency did not make any negative comments, even though the contract involved serving as first mate on a ship in the Mediterranean, and he completed the contract successfully with no complaints about either his behaviour or the fulfilment of his duties.

However, when he approached the agency for work again in 2020 during a break in his studies, staff sent him an email saying that they were no longer interested in hiring him, and attached an article about migrant rescue operations that quoted him and mentioned his NGO work.

'I received an email saying that they couldn't hire me any more due to that article in an Italian newspaper discussing my work on a search and rescue ship in Venice, to whom I gave a quote about the so-called "Libyan coast guard"', Capt Kaltegartner says.

'I called the crewing agency, and they said a client refused to hire me because of these activities and quotes, and they would also not propose my CV to other clients so as to not have other problems at all.'

Capt Kaltegartner was advised to explore his legal options. On his behalf, lawyers from the firm Prakken d'Oliveira wrote to Total Crew BV asking the company to explain why it had refused to put the officer forward for other work and asking if it wanted to settle out of court, as its actions could constitute an act of employment discrimination. This offer was rejected outright by the company.

The next step was to file a complaint with the Dutch Human Rights Committee (College voor de Rechten van de Mens). Capt Kaltegartner's insurance did not cover bringing a case before that specific court, and so the Sea-Watch Legal Aid fund helped cover the legal costs. The fund supports people in protecting and enforcing their rights in the field of sea rescue and in seeking asylum. Recently it has helped cover the legal costs of skippers from boats sailing from Libya or Turkey. Some of those inside the boats which made it to Italy and Greece have been accused of people-smuggling, and they can receive a separate charge of up to 10 years in prison for each person who came ashore.

At a court hearing this year, with Capt Kaltegartner participating online and his lawyers there in person, the Dutch Human

Rights Committee ruled on 27 June 2022 that employment discrimination had taken place. Total Crew management argued that they did not want to hire him because of poor performance on the previous contract, but the court decided that Capt Kaltegartner's lawyers had provided enough evidence to assume discrimination had taken place, and that Total Crew had failed to provide enough evidence to prove it had not done so.

The legal process put a strain on Capt Kaltegartner. However, he is not discouraged. 'If I hadn't done this search and rescue work, the outcome would have been unimaginable,' he says.

He also stands by his original quotes regarding the Libyan coastguard in the Italian newspaper article, which was forwarded to him by the crewing company as a reason behind the decision not to offer him further employment.

'There is still this problem of the so-called Libyan coastguard acting like they act, and there are still many seafarers out there having to decide whether to hand people over to them. I think it is a breach of international law to hand people seeking asylum over to them. Many people are still dying in the Mediterranean and they are not safe in Libya.'

In March 2022, the German government said that its military will no longer will provide training to Libya's coastguard because of, for example, concerns about its treatment of refugees, migrants, and NGOs.



Read the full court decision at bit.ly/Kai_decision

Data showed that fishing vessels were among the ship types that suffered the most incidents

Report shows increase in safety incidents during pandemic

Fewer vessels lost, but a significant increase in distress calls shows the impact of extreme fatigue on seafarers

A new report by Inmarsat has revealed a rise in reported safety incidents during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Drawing on Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) data from 2018 to 2021, **The Future of Maritime Safety Report 2022** highlights a trend towards increased distress calls.

There were 597 distress calls in 2018, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. This rose by a substantial amount to 749 in 2021. Inmarsat believes that 'issues with crew change, rapid turnaround in ports and fatigue onboard' were most likely the root cause of the sudden rise.

Between 2020 and 2021 the number of calls dropped by 85 to 664. The company believes that this decrease shows a 'stabilisation' as crews adjust to life in the 'new normal'.

There is, however, a downward trend in vessels lost from 2020 into 2021, which may have been

contributed to by an increased focus on safety regulation and improved ship design.

54 vessels were lost in 2021, a decrease of 11 from the figure of 65 in 2020. This follows the decade-long trend of improved safety, with a 57% decrease across the past 10 years.

There was also a divide in terms of which types of ships had incidents. Tankers, fishing vessels and bulk carriers suffered the most incidents. Passenger ships had the least incidents, although this figure may be affected by the lower number of passenger ships in operation during the pandemic.

'Better understanding these patterns can help us to take proactive steps to prevent such incidents going forward and help guide us to a safer future,' said Peter Broadhurst, senior vice-president of safety and security at Inmarsat.

'This data should help us focus our attention and tackle known safety issues in these sectors.'

Experts call for improved oil leak detection after fire on President Eisenhower containership

US safety experts have called for improved systems to be fitted to ships to enable rapid detection of oil leaks to prevent fires in machinery spaces.

The call comes after an investigation into an engine room blaze onboard the 82,794gt containership President Eisenhower in April last year. Although no one was injured, the ship lost propulsion and drifted for several hours before being towed.

An investigation by the US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) found that ultra-low sulphur diesel fuel

had begun spraying around the main engine's no. 5 cylinder about 30 minutes before the fire started and spread to cardboard and wooden boxes.

The engine room was unattended at the time (01:54), and the leaking fuel was not noticed until an AB saw smoke coming from an open hatch.

The NTSB report praises the 'textbook perfect' response of the crew of the US-flagged ship to the fire.

'The crew of the President Eisenhower effectively contained the spread of a main engine room fire by removing fuel and oxygen sources, cooling boundaries, and communicating effectively,' it points out.

However, the report also notes that the fire could have been avoided if the ship had been fitted with rapid oil leak-detection equipment.

'Video analytic technology is designed to detect fuel mist and spray in real time and alert the crew before any ignition and fire,' it points out. 'Had this technology been in use aboard the President Eisenhower, the spraying fuel oil may have been detected well before the fire developed.'

Damage to the ship was estimated at US\$8.22m and the NTSB said the blaze had been the result of the second engineer insufficiently tightening a compression fitting ferrule while repairing fuel oil return tubing. When the tubing came apart, the leaking fuel oil ignited on the exposed surface of an unshielded and uninsulated exposed flange for the exhaust valve compensator.

The second engineer told investigators he had not previously carried out such work and said he had difficulties while completing the installation.

CREDIT: Natalie Fobes/Getty Images



CREDIT: Courtesy of Anne Prees



Collision Avoidance

The damaged bulk carrier Western Moscow, following a collision in the Singapore Straits in 2019. Maritime lawyers have called for prompt action to avoid further collisions after this landmark incident.

• Read more at bit.ly/singapore_collision



MAIB highlights poor training and inadequate PPE in fumigant poisoning incident

A UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) report on a fumigant poisoning accident that left one person injured has found that officers and inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE) contributed to the incident.

The incident in Liverpool in July 2021 on the Thorco Angela cargo ship involved cans and pouches of aluminium phosphide that had been placed between bags of cargo. After handling the fumigant, a Peel Ports Liverpool stevedore suffered 'sickness and disorientation'.

The MAIB found that the crew unloading the material were inadequately trained for such a task, and their PPE was insufficient. Further to this, the Thorco Angela's officers underestimated the risk involved with using the fumigant and did not adhere to their company's safety management system.

Because of the investigation, the MAIB has advised Auerbach MARINE GmbH & Co. KG regarding the errors and the failure to stick to the safety management system.

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Investigators have stressed the importance of having sufficient crew to undertake mooring operations following an incident in which a seafarer suffered serious injuries. Read more at bit.ly/mooring_safety

INLAND SECTOR UNITES ON SAFETY



With the new EU crewing regulation, the ETF wants to ensure zero accidents and a safe workplace for all inland waterways crew. **Myriam Chaffart** reports

Myriam Chaffart is the ETF senior policy officer for inland waterways and European works councils

The ETF is working closely with our inland waterways transport (IWT) affiliates to prioritise safety in a new Europe-wide crewing standard for IWT.

The aim is to replace all existing crewing standards developed by the respective River Commissions. IWT will never be the same again, as this new regulation, for the first time ever, will organise the sector on the entire European continent.

The new crewing regulation is being developed by the European Commission and the inland waterways standard-setting body CESNI (Comité Européen pour l'Élaboration de Standards dans le Domaine de Navigation Intérieure).

The legislation will enter into force in 2028, after being approved by the European Parliament and the EU member states.

And for the first time ever, the new regulation will simultaneously be implemented by EU member states and non-EU member states – depending of course on the non-EU member states' voluntary will to co-regulate the sector.

At the ETF, our responsibility is to be at the heart of the discussions and negotiations planned along the way and to make sure no stone remains unturned when protecting workers on the inland waterways.

At our request, CESNI has set up additional consultations, as we want to ensure all our affiliates with members



CREDIT: Partonez/Wikimedia Commons

Barges such as this one on the River Rhine in Germany will in future have their crewing regulated by Europe-wide legislation

working in IWT are actively involved in adjusting the draft proposal according to their specific needs. Input is also being given from our social partners at the European Barge Union and the European Skippers Organization.

We encourage everyone to take a keen interest, as positions are constantly finetuned and revised. And every word counts! CESNI is expected to come up with a final draft proposal for the new crewing regulation by this time next year. Once the final advice is handed in to the European Commission (EC); the EC will initiate the formal procedure for the new piece of EU legislation.

SAFETY ONBOARD: A MEETING OF MARITIME MINDS

Nautilus International played a prominent part in UK Maritime Safety Week 2022. Taking place from 4-8 July with support from the UK Department for Transport, the focus this year was on safety best practice. **Jon Parkin** and **Rob Coston** report

Nautilus recently won a court victory against companies who protested at being forced to use trained stevedores rather than seafarers to perform lashing operations

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An MCA Maritime Safety Week podcast informed the public on technology that could save your life at sea: apple.co/3e1tihy

A 2021 study of seafarers published in the British Medical Journal found that, over a four-year period, 6.31 out of every 1,000 seafarers were affected by occupational injuries and diseases. The study's conclusion – that 'workers at sea have high mortality, injuries and illnesses and work in a hazardous environment compared to ashore workers' – will come as no surprise to anyone who has ever found themselves in a maritime workplace.

This year's Maritime Safety Week aimed to do something about the grim statistics by bringing together a range of organisations to share knowledge and learn from each other, from government bodies to maritime employers, charities and membership bodies – including Nautilus of course,

Nautilus speaks at safety week

Port Skills and Safety, the UK's professional ports health and safety membership organisation, scheduled its annual conference to be part of Maritime Safety Week on 5 July – with panels and speeches from members of the maritime community. Representatives from the Department for Transport and the British Ports Association were present, and UK maritime minister Robert Courts MP said that safety should be at the core of the country's maritime strategy alongside education/upskilling and the government's objectives as laid out in the Maritime 2050 strategy.

Nautilus was represented by general secretary Mark Dickinson, who took the opportunity to stress the importance of

'Only through constructive dialogue between stakeholders can we ensure our ports are safer workplaces for our people'

proper training and investment into the maritime workforce in order to ensure safe practices.

In his speech he also talked about the need for communication between unions and employers, so that maritime workers have a secure channel of communication to share safety issues they have identified. This point was echoed during the week by UK Chamber of Shipping CEO Sarah Treseder, who agreed that good safety practice can only be achieved if shipowners, the MCA and unions work together and share information openly,

'Our industry, while strategically vital, remains hazardous,' Mr Dickinson told attendees. 'Workplace injuries are all too common and sometimes, tragically, lives are lost. We must commend Port Skills & Safety for its work in bringing together unions, employers and safety experts to tackle these issues. Only through constructive dialogue between stakeholders can we ensure our ports are safer workplaces for our people'.

'Our maritime professionals must be given the opportunity to train and learn new skills, so they can be active participants in the future of the maritime industry, an industry they already know, and many will have worked in for their entire lives. Investing in our workforce so more seafarers can transition from sea to shore and vice versa, that allows for all workers to upskill and reskill, is in all our interests.'

The dangers of fatigue

During his speech, Mr Dickinson also flagged up an issue of note: who should be allowed to carry out lashing on containerships?

'Lashing by seafarers creates another safety issue. Nautilus believes that this should be carried out by trained stevedores, not overworked and fatigued seafarers. Cargo work, lashing and unlashings, is dockers' work.'

Shortly after the speech, a Dutch court ruled in favour of unions including Nautilus International over a collective bargaining agreement clause around the lashing

of vessels (see the previous issue of the Telegraph, or bit.ly/lashing_case). The clause, which applies in all ports worldwide and came into force on 1 January 2020, stipulates that lashing must be done by qualified dock workers. If dock workers are not available, then seafarers may only lash on a voluntary basis and in return for additional pay. Nautilus's Netherlands branch and other trade unions had brought the case after employers, shipowners and charterers refused to comply, but the court has now ordered them to comply in the port of Rotterdam and elsewhere or face hefty fines.

This is an important victory in the greater struggle against seafarer fatigue – which is dangerous as it increases the risk of

'Lashing should be carried out by trained stevedores, not overworked and fatigued seafarers'

accidents, as well as being detrimental to mental health.

However, this is a multi-front war. There are, of course, the traditional causes of fatigue – for example, the ever-increasing crew workload which was identified as a serious risk in the latest Seafarers Happiness Index report from the Mission to Seafarers. There are also new issues such as the proliferation of 'safety' paperwork, which some commentators believe can get in the way of actually improving the situation by creating extra work and a tick-box culture.

Fixing work and rest

Nautilus has long identified overwork and low-cost crewing models as unsustainable and a threat to safety, and can present credible research to back up its case.

The Telegraph has previously covered the **Culture of Adjustment** report from World Maritime University (WMU), released in 2020, which found widespread malpractices in the recording of work and rest hours with a culture of adjustment – both on and off ship – normalising fatigue among seafarers that could lead to serious casualties, loss of life



CREDIT: Danny Cornelissen

and environmental damage

Following on from this, WMU is expanding the scope by launching a new survey of seafarers covering crewing levels plus work and rest hours, developed in cooperation with IFSMA, the Nautical Institute, IMarEST and ISWAN and tying in with conversations at the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

Any Nautilus International members that have worked on a commercial ship after 1 February 1997 are encouraged to take part by visiting bit.ly/WMU_survey. The survey should take around 20 minutes to complete and all responses are confidential. The quantitative data that will be collected about seafarers' practices regarding work and rest will be used to strengthen ongoing research, with the ultimate aim of enhancing provisions on seafarers' work and rest hours.

Mental health still a key concern

Maritime Safety Week was focused on the practical aspects of safety onboard, but outside of the event itself, charities, employers, unions and governments are continuing to work on the issue of seafarer mental health.

Earlier this year, the UK government collaborated with the Merchant Navy Welfare Board (MNWB) in launching a £2.4 million investment in seafarer training, wellbeing and support – something that maritime minister Robert Courts tied to the government's post-Covid-19 Maritime Recovery Route Map, since the pandemic put a significant strain on seafarers and drew public attention to the fact that even in 'normal' times crew are often expected to endure mental strain.

Maritime charities are now able to apply for a share of this funding to create projects that benefit seafarer wellbeing. MNWB chief executive officer Stuart Rivers applauded the move: 'This significant investment in the maritime charity sector is both timely and extremely welcome. The maritime charities sector has been supporting seafarers through multiple crises over the past two years, despite the difficult fundraising conditions. The Department for Transport's funding will provide a real boost

MLC amendments affecting safety to come into force

During the pandemic-related crew change crisis – the effects of which are still being felt – many seafarers faced dangerous levels of fatigue because their fundamental rights under the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 (MLC) were not respected.

The UK Maritime & Coastguard Agency has updated three M-notices regarding MLC rights that have now been amended at a tripartite level, due to

deficiencies exposed in the Covid-19 pandemic.

These M-notices cover, among other areas, the requirement for seafarers to serve no more than 11 months onboard and what companies must do if this limit is exceeded; the detailed mandatory requirements regarding hours of work; and the entitlement to shore leave and medical care.

For more information see pages 56-57.

to seafarers' welfare and enable improvements in skills and diversity for the wider sector.'

MAIB involvement

As the UK body which is responsible for investigating maritime incidents, the UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) was keen to communicate key messages during Maritime Safety Week.

'Maritime Safety Week 2022 is an important moment when the marine industry comes together to focus on how we can collectively continue to improve safety across the sector,' said MAIB chief inspector Andrew Moll. For that reason, the MAIB took the week as an opportunity to write about current key safety topics: the dangers of work onboard fishing vessels; mooring deck safety; pilot ladders; and CO2 fire extinguishing system blockages that could prevent seafarers from extinguishing an engine room blaze.

The blogs also highlighted the findings of MAIB's annual report for the year 2021, released in June.

During the year, the Branch raised 1,530 reports of marine accidents and commenced 22 investigations, 14 of which involved loss of life. This represented a significant increase on previous years – with 1,217 reports in 2020 and 1,090 in 2019, for example – which the MAIB attributes to a rise in leisure craft and small commercial craft notifications and its industry request to report sub-standard pilot ladders.

The pandemic drew public attention to the fact that even in 'normal' times crew are often expected to endure mental strain

MAIB inspector of marine accidents Bill Evans said that the 200 reports received by MAIB regarding pilot ladders show that even though serious accidents have been rare, 'the potential for injury and even loss of life clearly exists'.

Mr Evans added: 'Marine pilots play a critical role in the safe operation of any harbour, where they guide almost every vessel in and out of the port. However, while the size and technological complexity of ships has increased, marine pilots still embark and disembark moving vessels by using a rope pilot ladder. The pilot transfer is a hazardous operation, so it is absolutely essential that these ladders are correctly rigged and their use properly supervised by the crew.'

During Maritime Safety Week, the MAIB also highlighted incidents where seafarers have been struck by mooring lines, sometimes resulting in serious injury or death. Sadly, such incidents continue to occur. Crew should therefore make sure the right equipment is used and kept in good condition.

Planning – including risk assessments, control measures and ensuring there are neither too few nor too many crew to conduct the operation – is important when trying to conduct mooring deck operations safely. Areas where mooring deck operations take place



CREDIT: Benaiah / Maritime Safety Week

need to be kept tidy, and mooring lines should be closely monitored on all berths.

As with all dangerous operations, crew communication is of the utmost importance when working on mooring decks, because it has the potential to be extremely hazardous if people are not able to interact clearly.

A more positive outlook?

Seafarers may be relieved to hear, however, that there are some signs that a greater emphasis on safety in recent years has improved matters and undoubtably saved lives.

According to insurance company Allianz's Shipping and Safety Review, the global fleet was losing 200+ vessels a year in the early 1990s but now this has dropped to between 50 and 75 per year, despite a significant growth in the number of vessels. Annual shipping losses have declined by 57% since 2012, while 2021 represents a significant improvement on the rolling 10-year loss average – something that Allianz attributes

to 'the increased focus on safety measures over time, such as regulation, improved ship design and technology and risk management advances'.

This is good news for seafarers as well as shipping companies. When the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) released its Annual Overview of Marine Casualties and Incidents 2021, it found a reduction of 18% in the total number of casualties compared with 2019 plus a reduction in the number of lives lost by 48% and the number of injured persons by 36% – an incredibly positive finding given the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the shipping industry. This continued an ongoing positive trend since 2014.

As with the MAIB's advice, EMSA's report highlights for seafarers the most common causes of injury and death. Fishing vessels remain the most dangerous. The main causes of death were vessel collisions and slipping/falls (nearly 10% of which involved someone going

Fishing boat crew wins Seafarers' Charity safety competition

As part of Maritime Safety Week, The Seafarers' Charity launched a competition open to everyone who works at sea, with participants asked to practise and improve their crew muster safety drill. Crews onboard all vessel types from chemical tankers to the UK Border Force submitted photographs and videos of their safety drills. The competition judges included Robert Greenwood, director of The Safety Folder, and Captain Jeff Parfitt, head of safety and environment at The Nautical Institute.

The winner was the crew of the fishing vessel Karima, with close runners up the crew on another fishing vessel: the Benaiah IV (pictured left). The Karima's crew even managed to halve their drill time to 2 minutes and 27 seconds after repeated practices. This was heartening to see, since European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) data shows that the number of accidents involving fishing vessels increased between 2014 and 2020, and these vessels remained the type of ship with the most accidents.

The top four vessels were awarded Safety Champion 2022 plaques and gear from Guy Cotton Clothing and XtraTuf.

overboard). It also shows when to be most vigilant: from 2014 to 2020, the departure phase was the safest segment of a voyage and the en route portion the most unsafe, but 41% of casualties occurred in port areas.

However, while many of the threats to life and limb onboard are traditional ones, seafarers will need to remain vigilant. In the 2022 Emsafe report, also from EMSA, researchers identified a number of growing issues that will require different solutions, including fire safety on ferries plus the carriage of battery-powered vehicles on ships (see pages 48 and 49), the increased use of potentially hazardous alternative bunker fuels and the novel risks of automation.



Download EMSA's latest report on maritime safety: bit.ly/Emsafe



Find safety guidance from the UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch at bit.ly/MAIB_reports

Using pilot ladders

Bill Evans of the MAIB has three pieces of advice for anyone using a pilot ladder:

- inspect the ladder before and after use
- ensure it is well lit and rigged correctly
- supervise its use with a suitably qualified officer at the embarkation point who is in direct communication with the bridge and has lifesaving appliances close at hand, ready to respond if something goes wrong

ADDRESSING FIRES AT SEA

Seafarer safety is in question after a number of serious fires caused by lithium batteries – including a 13-day blaze onboard the *Felicity Ace*, which was lost off the Azores in March with 4,000 vehicles onboard. **Andrew Draper** reports on a project aimed at reducing the risk posed to ferries by the electric cars they are transporting

The Danish Institute of Fire and Security Technology (DBI) launched a project last year on how best to deal with electric vehicle (EV) fires onboard ships. Final conclusions are not yet in, but DBI says EV fires on ferries can be dealt with using the correct technology, education of crews and well-coordinated cooperation with emergency services on land.

Its project, **Electric Vehicle Fires at Sea: New Technologies and Methods For Suppression, Containment, and Extinguishing of Battery Car Fires On Board Ships (ELBAS)**, showed:

- lithium batteries give off toxic smoke
- lithium battery fires can be difficult to put out
- in some cases, EV fires spread very rapidly from car to car

The project is providing methods and materials. It is working with local first responders to adapt and transfer existing knowledge of

EV-specific firefighting ashore to the maritime sector.

The overall goal, it says, is to present new, holistic firefighting strategies for EV battery fires at sea.

The project will also work to increase awareness of the complexity of EV battery fires and the need for short- and long-term solutions. DBI is leading and coordinating the project, run in close collaboration with Danish shipowning companies DFDS, Scandlines, Molslinjen, and with the Danish Emergency Management Agency.

Drills essential

The special characteristics of EV fires mean that novel methods are needed to contain and extinguish them.

Carsten Møller, business development specialist maritime and power-to-X at DBI,

highlights training as essential. 'In general we would recommend that on the basis of the project, crew members should do realistic tests – or realistic drills – to actually try the difference between a conventional car fire and EV fire.'

Theoretical drills are of limited value, he says, adding that tests should be as realistic as possible to reveal any issues in how equipment is used.

New methods

Fires at sea must be successfully contained and extinguished, so there is a pressing need to update and develop current standards and methods, according to DBI. Covering burning cars with fire blankets may be one method – or covering cars not on fire to protect them may be another.

DBI says water mist from sprinklers is highly effective, not at putting the fires out, but at stopping them from spreading, giving crews time to access fires and put them out in a traditional way.

Testing has been carried out in three 40-foot containers, designed to simulate a car ferry deck. The Danish Emergency Management Agency found last year that there is less risk of fire with hybrid cars or EVs than conventional vehicles. But when it happens, lithium battery fires can be more difficult to put out and may repeatedly flare up after being extinguished.

Battery packs are typically placed in the bottom of cars. There was a fear the heat of a burning EV could melt aluminium decks. But the tests showed the heat from the bottom of a car is not initially as intense as anticipated and decks were left with barely a mark after an hour-long EV fire.

Prepare for the unexpected

DBI says it can be problematic if an EV bursts into flames on the street. But it can be more problematic if it happens in a multi-storey car park surrounded by other vehicles, and very problematic if it happens on a ferry at sea among other vehicles with passengers onboard, and where a ship crew has the task of putting a fire out, far from land support.

Alexander Kleiman, maritime R&D project manager at DBI Advanced Fire Engineering and manager of the ELBAS project, said: 'We found that how fires develop was very different, even though we had the same set-up from test to test. For example, in our fourth test, fires had spread to the other cars after two minutes. But that's also reality – no two fires are ever the same.'

Final conclusions will not be ready until later this year, but early indications are that modern battery packs are much more fire-safe than older ones. And the team believes that EV fires on ferries are 'not to be feared' – as long as your vessel and crew are properly prepared.

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WATCH: DBI sets cars ablaze as part of its project to establish the dangers posed by EVs onboard ferries bit.ly/DBI_video

WORKING IN A WAR ZONE



With some shipping now on the move again out of Ukraine, the northern Black Sea has been designated a Warlike Operations Area for merchant vessels. **Sarah Robinson** looks at what this means for seafarer safety and how trade unions are involved in providing protection for their members

The northern Black Sea has been declared a Warlike Operations Area by the International Bargaining Forum and national agreements in the UK and Netherlands



CREDIT: From March 2002 IBF Warlike Operations Area agreement document

When people embark on a career in the Merchant Navy, they're probably not expecting to see military action, but this is in fact a persistent safety problem for civilian seafarers around the world.

We might think of the cargoships in the Second World War supply convoys, or the ferries and cruiseships requisitioned as troop carriers (with their usual crews) for the Falklands conflict.

But many Merchant Navy seafarers who find themselves in danger from conflict aren't engaged in official 'war work', but find themselves in a dangerous situation as they go about their usual activities. For example, in the Telegraph we have told the stories of Nautilus International members whose civilian tankers came under fire in the Persian/Arabian Gulf during the Iran-Iraq war, and others whose vessels became marooned in the Great Bitter Lake off the Suez Canal as a result of the Six-Day War.

Ukraine: the latest maritime war zone

This year, Merchant Navy seafarers from all over the world have been asked to go through a war zone on an urgent humanitarian mission to bring crops out of Ukraine and on to the countries who rely on this food, which includes wheat, other cereals, and sunflower seeds for cooking oil.

Famously known as 'the breadbasket of Europe', Ukraine under normal circumstances is one of the top three grain exporters in the world, but since the Russian invasion in February 2022

has struggled to get its harvests out of mined and blockaded Black Sea ports.

Hopes were not high that this problem would be overcome, but after many false dawns, the involvement of Turkey eventually brought both Ukraine and Russia to the table in Istanbul to sign a United Nations agreement on 27 July – establishing the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

Aiming to keep seafarers safe

The Black Sea Grain Initiative specifically allows for significant volumes of commercial food exports from three key Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea: Odesa, Chornomorsk and Yuzhny. Ukrainian vessels guide the cargoships into the international waters of the Black Sea, avoiding mined areas. The vessels then proceed towards the Bosphorus Strait along an agreed corridor. Both the Russian and Ukrainian sides have agreed to withhold attacks on any of the commercial vessels or ports engaged in the initiative to transport vital grain.

For the merchant seafarers on the cargoships, their safety is in the hands of a new UN Joint Coordination Centre, which monitors implementation of the 27 July agreement. It is hosted in Istanbul and includes representatives from Ukraine, Russia and Turkey.

Ships heading to and from the Ukrainian ports are being inspected by teams organised by the Joint Coordination Centre to ensure they are only carrying the agreed food and cargoes and not soldiers, weapons or ammunition.

Who are the Merchant Navy seafarers on the grain ships?

Initial reports suggested that maritime employers were struggling to find crew members willing to take part in the Black Sea Grain Initiative, and until recently Ukrainian nationals were not usually allowed to leave the country because of military conscription. However, permission has now been given for Ukrainian seafarers to travel for work, and recruitment from other nations seems to have improved, judging by the



Initial reports suggested maritime employers were struggling to find crew willing to take part in the Black Sea Grain Initiative



Increased security levels from nations across the Gulf of Guinea have been part of the attempts to reduce piracy levels

CREDIT: US Africa Command/Flickr

SEAFARER SAFETY FLASHPOINTS: GULF OF GUINEA AND STRAITS OF SINGAPORE

Warlike area and high risk area agreements don't just apply to war zones; they can be declared because of a significant danger of piracy – writes Jon Parkin. Over the last decade the IBF High Risk Area and Extended Risk Zone agreements covering the Gulf of Guinea have been particularly important to seafarers, as the region overtook Somalia as the world's worst piracy hotspot.

In 2021, the Nigerian government announced a defence scheme called Deep Blue, aiming to reduce the level of piracy around the Gulf of Guinea. The defence effort was in response to figures from 2020, when the region accounted for 40% of global piracy attacks and 95% of the 135 crew kidnapped from ships worldwide.

The scheme was met at first with a degree of scepticism; however, something appears to have gone right. Whether down to Deep Blue or other circumstances, piracy has now reduced in the region. Of the 58 total incidents reported to the International Maritime Bureau Piracy Reporting Centre (IMB PRC) in the first half of 2022, only 12 were reported in the Gulf of Guinea. This decline in attacks follows the global trend, with reported piracy incidents falling to their lowest level for the first half of a year since 1994.

To keep up the momentum, a new coalition has been formed between the Nigerian navy and shipowner associations such as the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and Intercargo. This group, the Nigerian Industries Working Group, will be looking to identify approaches that are working well in the battle against piracy, and areas that require further inspection.

Look east, on the other hand, and the picture isn't quite as bright. Asia has seen a rise in attacks, with ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre (ISC) stating there were a total of 42 incidents of armed robbery in Asian waters in the first half of 2022. This is an 11% increase over the 38 incidents in the same period last year.

The ISC described the Singapore Straits in particular as an 'area of concern'. However, officials are keen to stress that while numbers have risen, they are still only a very small portion of the thousands of ships that pass through daily, and there is not currently an IBF Warlike Operations Area or High Risk Area agreed for the region.

- Nautilus members with any concerns about operating in a warlike or high risk area should contact the Union for advice on their rights.

Inspectors from the UN Joint Coordination Centre checking the bulk carrier *Razoni* in August 2022 as part of the Black Sea Grain Initiative



CREDIT: OCHA/Levent Kulu

daily shipping movements being reported by the UN Joint Coordination Centre.

Inevitably for the shipping industry, some of these vessels will be crewed by seafarers from developing countries who are not in a financial position to turn down work and are not supported by a trade union.

However, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) – of which Nautilus is an affiliate – has ensured that some 9,500 vessels and 170,000 seafarers worldwide are covered by Warlike Operations Area agreements instigated by unions. These are either national agreements (of which more below) or international agreements negotiated between the ITF and shipowners at the International Bargaining Forum (IBF).

'While specific terms of each agreement differ depending on the nature of the risk involved, in general they allow for seafarers to disembark before a vessel enters the affected

area,' says Nautilus head of professional and technical David Appleton. 'They may also place obligations on companies to underwrite any insurance policies that may be rendered invalid by entering into the area and, in certain instances, agree additional payments for seafarers whilst they are in the area.'

Nautilus general secretary Mark Dickinson is regularly involved with negotiations at the IBF, where Warlike Operations Area agreements for the Northern Black Sea Region, the Sea of Azov and All Ports in Ukraine were added in March 2022 (see map, pages 24-25).

He stresses how important it is that seafarers around the world join a union, particularly one affiliated with the ITF: 'This is a powerful example of how unions work together internationally to secure protection for their members and help seafarers globally, and we will continue to be part of the movement to uplift everyone in the industry to decent and safe work onboard.'

- Read more about the Black Sea Grain Initiative and download the full text of the UN agreement at: bit.ly/UN_grain. This website also has a regularly-updated section on the vessel movements of ships taking part in the initiative.

'This is a powerful example of how unions work together internationally to secure protection for their members'

Seafarer safety flashpoints: Yemen



FSO Safer in 1988, the year it was moored off the Yemeni coast

CREDIT: FSO Safer

The Black Sea is just one of many maritime regions designated warlike or high risk areas in agreements negotiated between unions and shipowners – writes Rob Coston. Another notable example of a region where such agreements apply is the waters around war-torn Yemen.

Five miles off the coast of Yemen, a crumbling oil tanker poses a critical safety threat to one of the world's busiest shipping lanes – but there is now hope that it can be removed before disaster strikes.

Ironically named FSO Safer, the dangerous vessel has been used as a floating storage and offloading facility for the country's oil since the 1980s.

It contains more than a million barrels of oil. Structural integrity is failing, and the fire-extinguishing system and systems to prevent explosions have ceased operating. Due to the civil war in Yemen, no maintenance work has been done since 2015, and only a skeleton crew remains onboard to try and prevent disaster.

If the vessel does break apart, it threatens to cause the world's largest oil spill and devastate both the ecology and economy of the Red Sea. Depending on conditions, it could also shut the port of Hodeida, clog the Bab el Mandeb strait

and, as happened last year when the *Ever Given* blocked the Suez Canal, shipping would need to be diverted for an extended period, disrupting the lives and livelihoods of seafarers.

The country's Houthi rebels were initially unwilling to allow the oil to be offloaded without some of their other demands being met. In March 2022 they finally agreed to a United Nations rescue plan, which would involve a Dutch company stabilising the vessel, removing the oil and salvaging the ship, and then replacing it with a new, equivalent facility.

The UN launched a global crowdfunding initiative to raise the US\$144 million the plan requires, including the US\$80 million for the emergency operation. The target has not yet been reached, but the UK government has become one of the largest donors – pledging £6 million.

However, the Houthis withdrew permission for a previous rescue operation in 2019, even though the UN had already chartered a recovery vessel. It remains to be seen whether the operation will go ahead and disaster can be averted in time.

- Nautilus members with any concerns about operating in a warlike or high risk area should contact the Union for advice on their rights.

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