

# the global SEAFARER

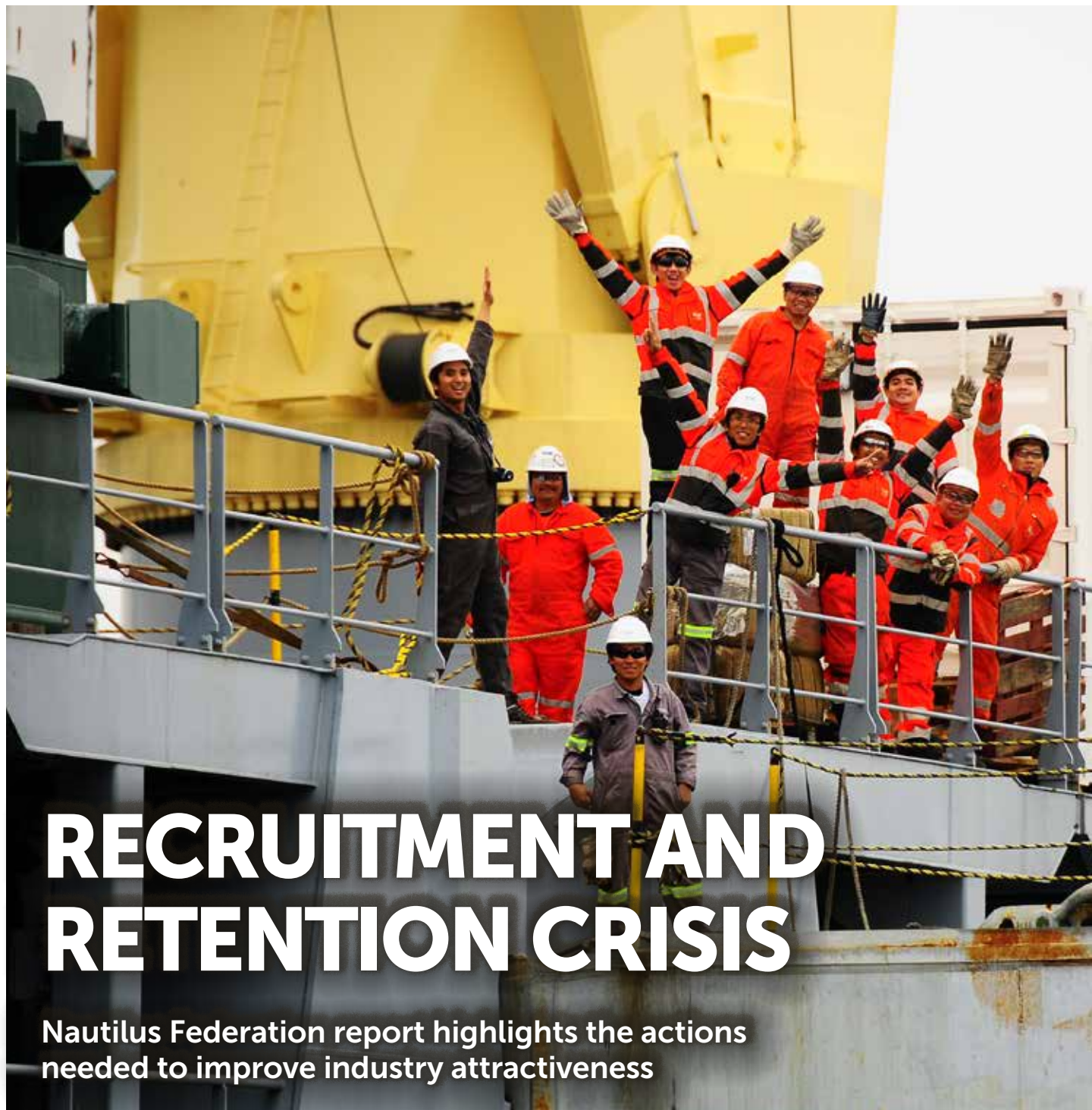
**NAUTILUS**  
FEDERATION

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Wherever you are, so are we

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## RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CRISIS

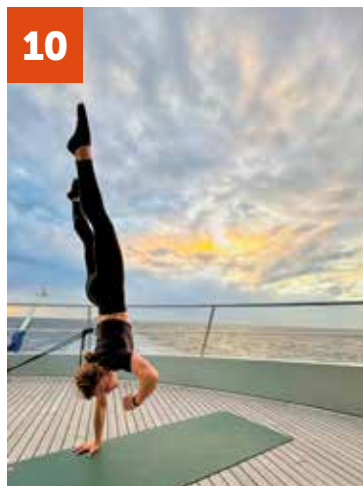
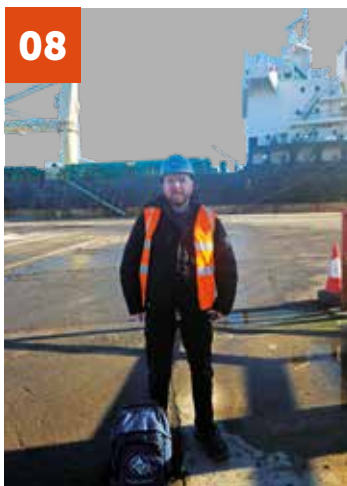
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Nautilus Federation director  
Mark Dickinson MSc (Econ)

Nautilus Federation  
coordinator  
Danny McGowan

Editor:  
Helen Kelly  
Communications manager:  
Rob Coston  
Senior journalist:  
Sarah Robinson  
Production editor:  
June Cattini-Walker  
Web editor:  
Deborah McPherson  
Communications assistant:  
Amy Field



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Front cover image & credit:  
Danny Cornelissen

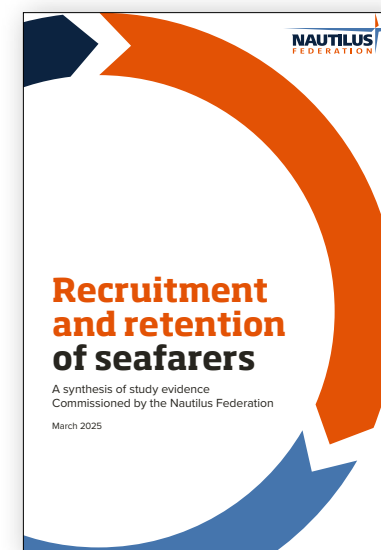
# Nautilus Federation report tackles seafarer **recruitment and retention crisis**

**T**he Nautilus Federation, a group of 21 like-minded global trade unions in shipping and inland waterways transport, has released a new report which aims to finally end the conversation on recruitment and retention of seafarers, and prompt the industry to act on the issue.

With a worsening shortfall in seafarer numbers, **Recruitment and retention of seafarers: a synthesis of study evidence** brings together the vast expanse of scholarly work already existing on recruiting and retaining vital maritime workers. It provides a definitive answer to two questions troubling the industry: which factors attract new entrants (including women and other under-represented groups) to join the industry as seafarers; and which factors make experienced seafarers stay in the industry?

The results, which are drawn from an analysis of more than 20 academic studies from leading institutions, clearly show that three main emerging themes influence the recruitment and retention of seafarers:

- the importance of job satisfaction, career progression and good working conditions
- respect, involvement and commitment shown by employers
- the provision of adequate communication facilities



In light of these findings, the report presents clear solutions to improve recruitment and retention, including:

- improving onboard living conditions
- addressing workload and stress issues by reducing hours of work, increasing rest hours, and promoting a culture of mutual respect and work-life balance
- encouraging women and people from all walks of life to pursue seafaring careers
- implementing career advancement pathways and opportunities for life-long learning and training
- supporting international

initiatives to address the seafarer shortage, with better collaboration on this issue between industry, government and trade unions

'We hope this will be the last report of its kind, as we have spent many years discussing the recruitment and retention crisis. This study shows that we have the answers: the time now is for action,' said Nautilus Federation coordinator Danny McGowan.

'We want seafarers and the industry to benefit from increased seafarer recruitment and retention. Using this report, we can take steps collaboratively across the industry. With the 21 unions of the Nautilus Federation and other international partners, such as the International Transport Workers' Federation, hopefully we'll be able to make some serious progress.

'The report is especially important in the context of the Just Transition and the move to alternative fuels. Hundreds of thousands of seafarers will need increased training and reskilling, so the issue is going to become even more stark. We need to make sure that that we can solve this recruitment and retention crisis to help us in the fair shift to green energy, and the time to solve it is now.'

● The full report is available to download from [nautilusfederation.org](http://nautilusfederation.org)



# Seafarers secure key worker status in latest MLC updates

Shipowners, governments and seafarer representatives have agreed a raft of improvements to the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 during a meeting at the International Labour Organization headquarters in Geneva from 7-11 April 2025.

The MLC, sometimes referred to as the 'Seafarers' Bill of Rights', lays out the basic entitlements for seafarers internationally. It is a living document that is regularly amended with the participation of labour, government and industry representatives through the Special Tripartite Committee on the MLC, 2006. Countries that have signed up to the MLC must create domestic legislation that puts any new requirements into practice.

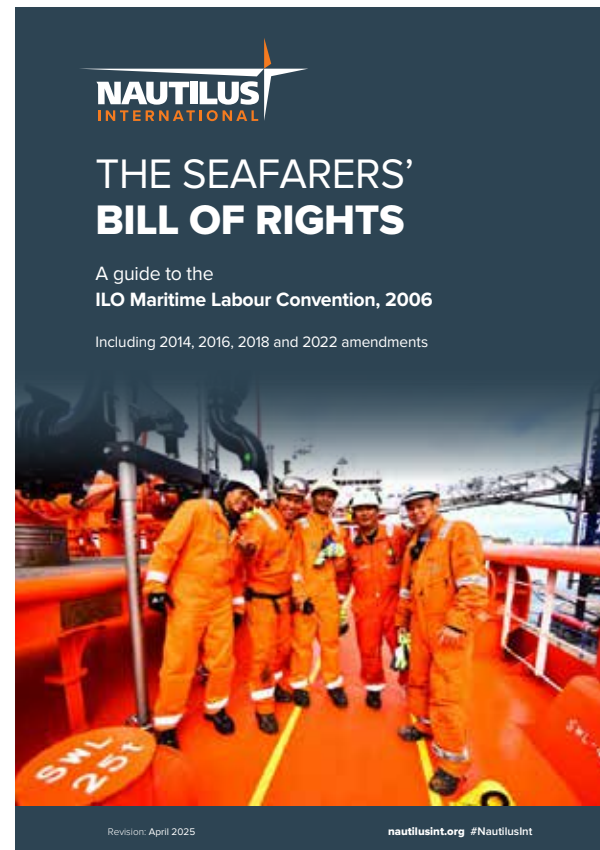
After ratification in June 2025, the latest round of amendments will enter into force from December 2027. The amendments, several of which address weaknesses in the MLC exposed by Covid-19 restrictions, include:

- recognition of seafarers as key workers
- strengthened repatriation rules
- mandatory shore leave access
- improved protection against bullying and harassment onboard
- a recommendation for ships to carry the ICS International Medical Guide for Seafarers and Fishers

At the meeting, shipowners also agreed to action on hours of work and rest, with future discussions to focus on the failure to enforce existing regulations.

Nautilus Federation director

Nautilus International, an affiliate of the Federation, produced a handy guide for members on the MLC



Mark Dickinson acted as spokesman for the seafarers' group at the meeting, in his role as International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) seafarers' section vice chair. He said: 'The latest amendments to the Maritime Labour Convention mark real progress in our fight against the unjust treatment and criminalisation of seafarers. 'During the Covid-19

pandemic, seafarers experienced completely unacceptable treatment despite their heroic efforts to deliver essential supplies and keep the world's supply chains moving. Key worker status is a milestone achievement for seafarers that will help to ensure that something like the crew change crisis does not happen again in a time of global emergency.'

# Landmark increase agreed for global minimum wage

Seafarers around the world will benefit from a significant pay rise after agreement was reached between representatives of industry and labour at a meeting held in Geneva in April 2025.

Seafarers' and shipowners' representatives met at the ILO Subcommittee on Wages of Seafarers of the Joint Maritime Commission, where they agreed to increase the current ILO minimum basic wage for an able seafarer from US\$673 per month to US\$690 as of 1 January 2026, US\$704 as of 1 January 2027, and US\$715 as of 1 January 2028.

Nautilus Federation director Mark Dickinson led the delegation representing seafarers at the meeting.

'Increases in the ILO minimum wage are very important for seafarers – not only those who benefit directly but also those who go on to receive a pay rise on the basis



The seafarers' delegation at the meeting in Geneva, including Nautilus Federation director Mark Dickinson (front, third from left)

CREDIT: Nautilus International

that "a rising tide lifts all boats", he said. 'So I'm really pleased that we've been able to reach an agreement acceptable to both groups despite all the volatility in the world right now.

'We reaffirm that free trade

must be fair trade, and it must also mean fair treatment for those who keep global trade moving.'

The Subcommittee will meet again in the first half of 2028 to discuss the next update to the minimum wage.

## Nautilus urges international action after US abandons shipping climate talks



CREDIT: Nautilus International

Nautilus International called for a worldwide commitment to worker-centred climate policies after the United States withdrew from talks at the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee in London in April 2025.

Nautilus Federation director Mark Dickinson said: 'We call on European and global IMO member states to commit to the negotiations. Further, we will continue our campaign for a Just Transition – one that

puts workers at the heart of these changes, ensures they can do their jobs safely, and allows them to benefit from the deployment of new technology.'

● More on MEPC 83 – see pages 22-23



# Nautilus Federation affiliates endorse reintroduced legislation to revitalise US maritime industry

The SHIPS for America Act, a comprehensive piece of legislation aimed at revitalising America's maritime and shipbuilding industries, has been reintroduced in the United States Congress.

This bipartisan measure, which enjoys broad support within the maritime industry, is spearheaded by Senator Mark Kelly, a US Navy veteran and the first member of Congress to have attended the US Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point.

The legislation has been endorsed by over 75 maritime organisations, including Nautilus Federation affiliates the International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots (MM&P), and the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association (MEBA).

MM&P chief mate Elizabeth Livi expressed her support for the SHIPS Act at a press conference at the US Capitol on 30 April.

'Professional mariners like myself are sailing 24/7, globally, on every ocean and waterway, performing work that is critical to our nation's security, defence, and economic needs,' she said. 'The American Merchant Marine has been essential since the birth of our nation, and through every conflict. This is why I am happy to endorse the SHIPS Act, both as a professional mariner and on behalf of my union, Masters, Mates & Pilots. This law will revitalise the US maritime industry.'

MM&P president Don Josberger endorsed the measure, saying: 'It will create and support jobs for American mariners, ensuring that our country has the maritime manpower needed to protect and enhance our nation's economic and military security.'

MEBA president Adam Vokac noted: 'A resilient maritime industry is the backbone of a strong nation. We are proud to endorse the SHIPS for America Act,



CREDIT: MEBA

which represents one of the most significant investments in the US Merchant Marine in decades and aims to address critical shortfalls in our nation's maritime and shipbuilding sectors, which have long been neglected.'

Key provisions of the SHIPS for America Act are:

- establish a new position within the White House of national maritime security advisor
- create an interagency Maritime Security Board, led by the maritime security advisor, to make strategic decisions on implementing a National Maritime Strategy
- set up a Maritime Security Trust Fund to reinvest duties and fees paid by the maritime industry into maritime security programs and infrastructure
- aim to expand the US-flag

L-R: MEBA government affairs director Erick Siahaan; MEBA president Adam Vokac; Sen. Mark Kelly and; MEBA secretary-treasurer Roland Rexha

international fleet by 250 ships within 10 years

- mandate that government-funded cargo be transported on US-flag vessels and that a portion of commercial goods imported from China be carried on US-flag vessels starting in 2029
- expand the US shipyard industrial base for both military and commercial oceangoing vessels
- make historic investments in the maritime workforce

The SHIPS for America Act was initially introduced in the previous Congress and has been reintroduced following President Trump's Executive Order 'Restoring America's Maritime Dominance'.

# Fight for union recognition continues for US deck officers despite historic mandate

In late 2024, Nautilus Federation affiliate the International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots (MM&P) celebrated the largest organising win in 50 years among deck officers in the United States, but the company is refusing to negotiate a union contract with MM&P. Captain Tom Larkin of MM&P shared the story with Rob Coston

Officers at Alaska Tanker Company (ATC) and Overseas Shipping Group (OSG), two subsidiaries of Overseas Shipholding Group, have found themselves caught in a prolonged battle for basic workplace rights. The focus of this struggle: a union agreement and representation that they already voted for

**People realize the value of being in a union and having a union contract. So, this is not going away. We'll be here for the for as long as it takes to get to a contract**

and that should guarantee them a voice at the table.

Last year, the officers, who work on 17 vessels across the two companies, voted overwhelmingly to be represented by the International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots (MM&P). But despite the clear mandate, the company has refused to honour the results and negotiate a union contract.

Captain Tom Larkin, Atlantic Ports vice president at MM&P, was deeply involved in the organising process. He says that the process was difficult from the start, with the companies always reluctant despite

the fact that union representation is nothing new for them.

'What the officers are asking for isn't anything new or radical,' he explains. 'The rest of the crew members onboard are represented by other unions. Our members are just asking for the same rights.'

## Stalling tactics

The companies have now spent months stalling, using various tactics. Meanwhile MM&P has been working hard to negotiate in a reasonable fashion, visiting the company and meeting with management.

The key tactic has been for the

companies to appeal to the US National Labor Relations Board. They have made an appeal aimed at tearing apart the bargaining group, stating that they do not believe the chief mates specifically on these ships should be able to collectively bargain and have a union contract. The companies have also said that there should be only one large bargaining unit instead of a unit at each company, as voted upon.

This has been effective in causing further delays due to US politics. President Trump has not named a third member to

the US National Labor Relations Board. Without three members the Board does not have quorum and therefore is unable to decide on the appeal. Meanwhile the companies are not negotiating.

MM&P is therefore waiting on a Supreme Court case on whether the Trump administration had the right to remove the third member from the board, but this is using up valuable time and is, in any case, merely an excuse for the company to stall.

'There's a lot of case law that says that they do have to come to the table with us right now,' Capt Larkin explains. 'Even if they appeal the decision, even if they appeal the vote itself, results are not stayed – the company still has to come to the table and bargain in good faith. And that's what we're here for. We're here to bargain in good faith too.'

## Sticking together

'I wish the circumstances were different and we could all just be adults and get to a contract. I guess part of that strategy is hoping that the officers get tired of the process, that they lose faith,' Capt Larkin says.

'We need to help people stay strong. The positive thing is that people are sticking together, especially our bargaining group members. People realize the value of being in a union and having a union contract. So, this is not going away. We'll be here for the for as long as it takes to get to a contract.'



CREDIT: Wikimedia

Can we realise the benefits of AI while mitigating or eliminating the dangers and drawbacks?



# An ITF inspector at work

**Rob Coston** interviews Nautilus/ITF inspector Matt Parsonage about how he helps seafarers in northwest England and beyond with everything from living conditions onboard to serious cases of abandonment

## RC: WHAT IS YOUR JOB AS AN ITF INSPECTOR?

**MP:** Our role is to protect and promote the rights of seafarers globally, which we do by carrying out inspections on flag of convenience vessels calling into ports in our coverage areas, and handling case work.

We're on the front line – seafarers can always approach us for help with their problems. I worked at sea for seven years as an electro-technical officer, which means I've got an affinity with the people I meet during inspections. I understand exactly what life can be like onboard.

## RC: WHAT DO YOU HELP WITH?

**MP:** I deal a lot with contractual matters – especially unpaid wages/overtime, working hours and repatriation issues.

I also do a lot of work on crew welfare – everything from cleanliness onboard and quality of accommodation, all the way up to the operation of the vessel itself. Ships are an inherently dangerous work environment, so we need to make sure that standards are kept high.

We also have broader industry issues, like the culture of adjustment around working hours, or the common issue on container ships where seafarers are routinely carrying out dangerous work that should be performed by dockers. We've got a big container terminal here in Liverpool, so I'm faced with those situations almost every

single time I go. It's a real problem which results in injuries and deaths. We also deal with abandonment cases in other parts of the world. I'm currently dealing with a case in Türkiye where 15 Ukrainian seafarers are owed £75,000 in unpaid wages.

## RC: WHAT DO YOU DO DURING AN INSPECTION?

**MP:** I check that the vessel's paperwork is in order, looking out for any discrepancies.

I then move on to inspecting conditions, for example in the accommodation, where I look through cabins, the galley, provision store, and recreation areas to make sure that seafarers have what they need. I'll also use that time to speak to the crew about life onboard.

## RC: HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT FIXING ISSUES?

**MP:** I'll liaise with the master, and explain what needs to be fixed. Further action depends on how serious the problem is – I might just stay in contact with the captain and ask for photographic evidence to make sure the work has been done, checking with the crew where possible. If it's more a systemic issue, I'll highlight it to the company or the authorities.

When dealing with an issue such as owed wages, I will try to resolve it onboard. Sometimes, though, it needs to be negotiated after the visit. On many occasions I will also liaise with other ITF inspectors who may be able to assist the seafarers at a future port of call.

CREDIT: Nautilus International



ITF inspector  
Matthew  
Parsonage



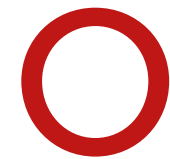
## Get in touch with your nearest ITF inspector

Visit the ITF Seafarers website [www.itfseafarers.org](http://www.itfseafarers.org), look up the details in the ITF Seafarers' Bulletin magazine; or download the ITF Seafarers app from the Google Play or Apple store.

**Union members** should get in touch with their union representative first. In an emergency, members of Nautilus Federation affiliates can contact Nautilus 24/7 online.

# Is the MLC working?

Ten years after its implementation, has the Maritime Labour Convention made a positive impact for seafarers? **Rob Coston** reports on an anniversary event



On 22 January, Nautilus director of legal services Charles Boyle represented the Union at an event organised by the Nautical Institute to mark the 10th anniversary of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) coming into force.

At the seminar – titled Maritime Labour Convention 10 Years On: Is It Working for the Seafarer? – he spoke alongside representatives of industry and maritime charities and laid out some of the key successes, challenges and potential improvements.

## SUCCESSES

In terms of success, the MLC has now been ratified by 105 ILO member states, covering over 96% of the world's gross tonnage.

'Another achievement is the unique implementation and enforcement mechanisms,' Mr Boyle said.

'Implementation can take place by way of laws, regulations, or other measures, including collective bargaining agreements which provide a way for seafarers and shipowners organisations to engage positively... As for enforcement, flag states inspect ships and the owner's implementation policies and there are port state control inspections with extensive powers. For repeated or serious non-compliances the flag state can withdraw certification and, with the port state, has the power to detain ships and issue improvement notices. Also, there is no escape for ships registered with non-ratifying states when they visit states where the Convention applies.'

'In my view, the structure of the MLC has contributed very much to



CREDIT: Zodiac Maritime

Nautilus legal  
director Charles  
Boyle (far left of  
inset image) at  
the MLC event  
in January

protecting seafarers thanks to its extensive range of updated rights, wide application, and unique compliance and enforcement regime.'

## Challenges

On the other hand, Mr Boyle said, the Covid-19 pandemic was a stress test for the MLC. It led to much non-compliance, especially regarding issues such as repatriation, with governments pleading force majeure.

'Having said that, the Convention was not drafted with such an event in mind, and efforts are continuing to address many of these issues,' he added.

Other potential failures include

continual seafarer abandonment, which calls into question the MLC's financial security system, and patchy implementation and enforcement by some signatories. These issues were exposed in recent research by Seafarers' Rights International, which estimates that the MLC is currently achieving a success rate of around 65%.

## Improvements

The MLC has a simplified and rapid amendment procedure. Mr Boyle concluded by laying out some of the proposed amendments up for discussion in April 2025. For more information on these, see page 4.





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Watch Deborah McPherson's video interview with Dr Kate Pike and Jo De Luca on NautilusTV: [youtube.com/nautilusint](https://youtube.com/nautilusint)

Testing out the data recording capabilities during a handstand onboard superyacht Savannah

# THE WEARABLE TECH MONITORING SEAFARER WELLBEING

An ongoing research project aimed at understanding the benefits of social interaction onboard and the impacts of fatigue, activity and rest among seafarers, is now using wearable technology and mobile data collection.

**Deborah McPherson** reports

**T**he Social Interaction Matters (SIM) project seeks to understand the impact of social activities and other influences on seafarers' health, and is organised by the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN). Now on its third phase, the SIM project is working with volunteer crew participants on board superyachts, commercial and cruise vessels in a first-of-its-kind research project.

The latest research collects data using wearable Fitbit watches and mobile technology to track rest and

activity, and record the impact of social interaction on overall wellbeing.

## WHY IS SOCIAL INTERACTION IMPORTANT?

'The SIM project's main aim is to improve wellbeing for all seafarers,' explains research lead Dr Kate Pike. 'The project has evolved from firstly looking at what social interaction means onboard – and the drivers and the challenges to that.'

Dr Pike adds that findings from the previous phases of the project showed that crew social interaction can provide a vital 'mental reset'.

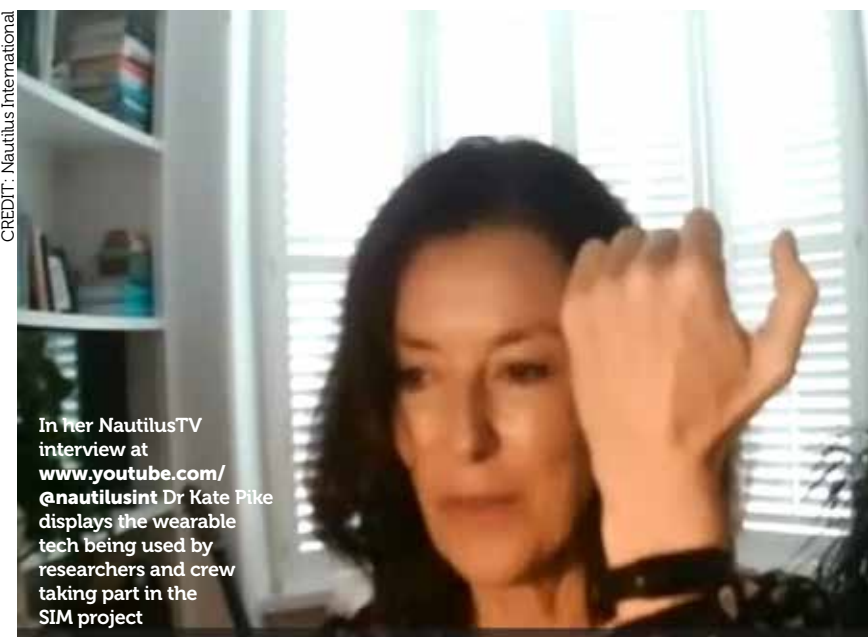
She says the findings so far show that if crew are encouraged to get to know each other better, they build stronger relationships,' which promotes a more caring environment, with better mental health, improved performance and, contributes to a better safety culture onboard.'

One of the yacht crew participating in the project, executive officer Jo De Luca on superyacht Savannah agrees: 'I see the project as having a positive effect on the marine industry as a whole. I think we have a unique opportunity with the programme to help raise the standards, not only in the yachting industry, but in all sectors in the maritime industry.'

The project, which began



CREDIT: Nautilus International



In her NautilusTV interview at [www.youtube.com/@nautilusint](https://www.youtube.com/@nautilusint) Dr Kate Pike displays the wearable tech being used by researchers and crew taking part in the SIM project



in 2019, has developed over three phases. The first involved a large-scale survey with focus groups and examined the drivers and barriers of social interaction during the Covid-related crew change crisis. The second phase involved 10 shipping companies and 21 commercial vessels where participants provided feedback on their social interaction and mental health onboard. The third phase has expanded the scope to different maritime industries, and includes 200 crew volunteers from six vessels: two superyachts, two cruiseships and two commercial ships.

#### HOW THE DATA IS RECORDED

While the initial research provided valuable anecdotal evidence about the value of social interaction for seafarers, it was also necessary to quantify the findings.

'This time, we're using technology in the form of a Fitbit wrist device that collects data on physical activity, sleep patterns and other metrics,' explains Dr Pike.

'Concurrently, seafarers answer a daily wellbeing question using mobile phone technology which delivers one of 30 questions to those taking part over a three-month cycle. Wellbeing topics range from fatigue and rest, crew cohesion, types of social interaction and how valued people are feeling, among others.'

Participating seafarers and shipping companies give signed consent and their data is anonymised.

Pivotal to the project is the use of 'social ambassadors' who volunteer to engage colleagues in various social activities and keep wellbeing logs during the research. Dr Pike says that the use of social ambassadors provides crucial context to the data – providing further understanding about the how weather, port calls, or shore leave, among others, impact crew wellbeing. She notes that some vessels which participated in earlier

phases have now implemented their own versions of the social ambassador role onboard, and this is a key recommendation of the project so far.

'Seafarers across the ranks are eager to participate and the project has generated good engagement from those participating, with some crews developing healthy

downtime together does not have to be a huge social interaction for improved mental wellbeing.

'As an example, we had a charter for three weeks and it had been terrible weather outside, and the decks were getting buffeted with 50 knot winds and torrential rain. So, the interior team and I decided to set up a pop-up hot chocolate stand for when the deck department came in. It's a very small gesture. But it gave everybody a 10-minute reprieve from the weather and reminded each other that we're a community and that we're all in it together.'

The daily wellbeing questions had also benefited the leadership team, added Ms De Luca. 'It was a really great reminder for us as leaders to take stock: "Have we provided enough rest for our crew, enough positive feedback?" These things do affect mental health, and so each day, there was a little reminder for us.'

#### RESULTS DUE

ISWAN's SIM Project is funded by the Trinity House Maritime Department for Transport Fund and the Seaspan Corporation. The third phase results are due to be released in 2025 and will provide detailed insights not just across the different maritime industries, but also on specific areas of concern like fatigue patterns and internet connectivity equality. Researchers are also aware of the damning fatigue findings in a recent report by the World Maritime University, funded by the ITF Seafarers' Trust. However, the SIM project's third phase is unlikely to be the end of the ISWAN research.

'Social interaction covers many areas, and there are multiple aspects that support the interaction and the wellbeing of seafarers,' Dr Pike reflects. 'It's very important for seafarers' mental health and safety onboard generally that we understand and support that better.'

CREDIT: Julio T. Arroyal/Seaways Excelsior



Teams from commercial vessel Seaways Excelsior

CREDIT: Mark John S. Pizon/ Seaways Excelsior



'The Smile of the Champion,' a photo of one of the onboard social activities by Mark John S. Pizon from Seaways Excelsior.

This image won second place for best photo during a steps competition run over three weeks for all participating vessels. The competition was run on a mobile phone app, with a leaderboard for stats and supportive messages



AIDA Luna cruiseship crew taking part in the SIM project

CREDIT: Ina Wettig/ AIDA Luna

competition around their Fitbit stats,' said Dr Pike.

Ms De Luca, who has also been one of the social ambassadors, agrees the project has been a positive experience. Being on a charter yacht means opportunities for social interaction are often limited for the crew, but she says ensuring crew can have



# Securing Europe's future with the Maritime Skills Forum

Nautilus Federation coordinator **Danny McGowan** details European skills updates with a global influence



Danny McGowan speaking at the MSF launch event

CREDIT: Nautilus International

Sascha Meijer and Katalin Dobranszky of ECSA



Council member Henk Eijkenaar



Danny McGowan, Sotiris Raptis, Sascha Meijer and Katalin Dobranszky at the MSF launch event

**E**arlier in 2025, I attended the European Maritime Skills Forum (MSF) launch event in Brussels, alongside Nautilus International assistant general secretary Sascha Meijer and Council member Henk Eijkenaar.

The MSF is a joint initiative of the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) and European Community Shipowners' Associations (ECSA), supported by the European Commission. It brings together maritime stakeholders from across Europe including policymakers, industry, unions, researchers, and training providers – and it has been designed to continue the work of the Skillsea Project that Nautilus also took part in, thus representing a good opportunity for the Union to influence dialogue and policy in favour of seafarers. It has three key workstreams:

- green skills
- digital transformation
- leadership, mentoring and resilience skills (including bullying and harassment strategies)

## Introductions

Ms Meijer attended as chair of the ETF Maritime Transport Section EU Committee and sectoral social dialogue spokesperson. In her opening remarks, she spelled out why this work is

so important, emphasising that this is an opportunity for people across the continent to learn from each other to build the maritime skills agenda, and that the two partner organisations were happy to continue the project to ensure well-trained seafarers and increase Europe's autonomy in an unstable world.

In his statement on behalf of the shipowners, ECSA secretary general Sotiris Raptis highlighted the Draghi report, which found that, in response to changing technology, 250,000 seafarers in Europe will need to reskill. This will help the continent to maintain a competitive edge, but it can only be done by investing in training and education.

## What is needed?

During the MSF launch, Nautilus took part in several panels. During the plenary section, with a panel that included representatives from the European Commission, ECSA, academia and nation states, Ms Meijer took the opportunity to answer questions on the attractiveness of the industry, pointing out: 'Attractiveness is not only about reputation and image. Those who choose to be a seafarer and remain a seafarer do not need to be convinced by the image of the industry but need to be treated well.' She emphasised that shoreside practices

around good careers and wellbeing should be normalised at sea, and that work/life balance is also an important consideration for the industry if it wishes to attract and retain talent.

'Former shortages of labour lead us to bring in labour from overseas,' she said. 'That necessity has then turned into a business case for normal operations and has impacted wages. Those European seafarers that we do have are then competing with worldwide seafarers on a lower wage level. When other industries have a shortage, they have to become better, but when the maritime industry has a shortage it draws on the worldwide labour force. We have to do better for seafaring to remain attractive to European citizens.'

## Automation

I took part in a panel on the Digital Transformation, in which I presented important statistics from the Nautilus Federation's **Mapping Our Maritime Future** report. Referencing the World Maritime University's reports on fatigue, I pointed out to delegates that new digital tools can be used to reduce the long working hours culture in order to attract European seafarers to the industry.

This was a chance to discuss the Just Transition, with technology used to reduce

monotonous and time consuming tasks, allowing seafarers to concentrate on critical aspects of ship operation. The statistics from our report show that seafarers generally support automation where it does not replace crew and where it can help in this way.

## Changing management style

Mr Eijkenaar took part in a panel on Leadership, Mentoring, and Resilience Skills. He said: 'In the past, young people who went onboard were used to being given orders. Newer generations are not so used to this, but those who are now in leadership positions were the ones who were used to being given orders, and some act in the same way to new trainees. I have seen many apprentices/cadets never going back to sea due to not being supported in the right way onboard, but it isn't the fault of senior officers as they've never been trained.'

In response, fellow panellist Camille Debandt of Antwerp Maritime Academy said that she had seen encouraging signs that younger officers are willing to break the cycle of 'I went through this so you should too' in favour of a more supportive leadership style at sea.



# Ensuring seafarers are at the helm

Nautilus International assistant general secretary Sascha Meijer and Nautilus Federation coordinator Danny McGowan attended the European Shipping Summit, where they shared the concerns of members with key figures in politics and the global shipping industry. **Rob Coston** reports

**N**autilus was represented at the European Shipping Summit European Shipping Summit at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels.

Danny McGowan and Sascha Meijer ensured that the voice of seafarers was heard by European and international policymakers, regulators and industry stakeholders during a range of panel events and networking sessions.

Among attendees at the event were the European commissioner for sustainable transport and tourism Apostolos Tzitzikostas; and the directors of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport (DG Move) Fotini Ioannidou and Magda Kopczynska; as well as transport ministers and deputy ministers from across Europe; and the CEOs of several European shipowners' associations.

Also in attendance were trade union partners from the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF).

## Key takeaways

Several important themes emerged during the course of the event, as articulated by representatives of governments, the European Commission and shipowners. These included:

- the need for the European shipping industry to be competitive on the global stage
- the need to ensure a resilient supply chain for Europe in the face of global instability
- the need to create a level playing field
- the need for reskilling/upskilling due to the advent of new technologies
- a desire among shipowners to claw back money from the EU Emissions Trading System to invest in new ships and training – with workers' representatives keen to ensure resources reinvested in the industry are used to ensure a Just Transition

## Navigating the future

Nautilus Federation coordinator Danny McGowan was able to articulate some of the Federation's own positions during a panel titled **People at the helm: navigating the future of shipping**.

This panel was a chance to discuss how social partners can communicate and collaborate to ensure a sustainable and attractive future for maritime careers, while also maintaining a level playing field for the European shipping sector in an increasingly competitive global market.

Mr McGowan shared some of the findings of Nautilus's **Mapping our Maritime Future** report (available at [nautilusfederation.org](https://nautilusfederation.org)). He explained the need for a real level playing field in the European maritime space, with social sustainability and without social dumping. He also called on the industry to address the recruitment and retention crisis and offer a Just Transition, and to put seafarers at the heart of green and digital developments.

## Taking on the challenge

Speaking on a panel titled **Building Industrial Capacity – the skills challenge**, ETF secretary general Livia Spera addressed the 'elephant in the room' during the summit. While many attendees had talked about the need to ensure a resilient supply chain for Europe during geopolitical instability, they had failed to deal with the contradictions of trying to ensure this without truly addressing labour conditions for European seafarers.

Ms Spera said that it is a fact that the European maritime workforce is not competitive on the global level, as non-European seafarers can be paid much lower wages while working in European waters.

A large part of the EU fleet is registered under flags of convenience and crewed with third country nationals, meaning that the only thing left in Europe is the beneficial ownership. That is not a secure supply chain, Ms Spera said.



Above: **Danny McGowan** (centre) sharing the findings of Nautilus's **Mapping Our Maritime Future** report. Below: European commissioner **Apostolos Tzitzikostas**



CREDIT: ETF

She pointed out that the industry will not be able to recruit European maritime professionals who can help to build a more secure supply chain if it expects them to work under the International Labour Organization's minimum standards. Better conditions will be essential.

## Union members' concerns heard

However, there were positive indications at the summit too, which Nautilus and its trade union partners are attempting to build upon. Speeches at the summit, which laid out the key themes listed above, also demonstrated that the concerns of Nautilus members are being echoed by policymakers at the EU level – and that industry must now respond.

During his keynote speech, Mr Tzitzikostas said the European Commission will launch a European Maritime Transport Strategy aimed at stimulating investment, support shipbuilders, ensuring ensure a global level playing field and ensuring access to skilled workers.

This last strand will require an increased emphasis on training and career development, while also making the industry more attractive with sustainable working and living conditions, added Mr Tzitzikostas. He expressed his gratitude to seafarers for their resilience so far, and for keeping the industry running.

Also of particular interest during the summit was the speech given by Magda Kopczynska. As one of the directors of DG MOVE, she plays a key role in developing and implementing European policies in the transport field.



Panelists from industry, the ETF and European institutions met to discuss the big questions facing maritime



**T.**

For a writeup of Sascha Meijer's participation in a panel on **Closing the talent gap – how to empower diversity leadership in shipping** visit [bit.ly/ESS\\_Sascha\\_panel](https://bit.ly/ESS_Sascha_panel)



During her speech, Ms Kopczynska said that people and skills are essential to achieving the key goals for the transport sector of security, competitiveness and resilience – which means ensuring working and living conditions must be properly taken care of – and highlighted the recruitment and retention crisis that Nautilus has been warning about.

To solve this, she said that attracting people would require both management of skills and a positive perception of the industry as a place to build an attractive, lifelong career. She underlined that pushing to improve the Maritime Labour Convention would form an important part of achieving this, as the current international minimum standards are not attractive enough.

'The European Shipping Summit was another key moment for Union officials to ensure our members' voices were placed at the heart of the conversation,' Mr McGowan said, summing up the event. 'In addition to reiterating the work of the Nautilus Federation in relation to the Just Transition, I was keen to remind European shipowners and political leaders that the security of the continent's supply chains is reliant on European seafarers.'

'It seems that the tide is turning politically, with a number of politicians backing our cause. Together with the Board of the Nautilus Federation, I will continue to push for our members' interests to be placed at the heart of international conversations.'



# Why nations must urgently get to grips with marine AI

Artificial intelligence in the maritime sector could expose critical vulnerabilities – threatening not just economies but also national security, argues **Graham Gosden** of the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers, a Nautilus Federation affiliate



CREDIT: Graham Gosden

**W**hether we like it or not, artificial intelligence (AI) continues to evolve. This places the maritime industry – the backbone of global trade and defence – at a critical risk, and it's a vulnerability that could be exacerbated by rapid AI adoption without proper oversight.

Protecting our industry is not just a matter of economic importance but a core aspect of safeguarding national interests, wherever we live.

## The dangers

Cybersecurity vulnerabilities: AI-driven systems in marine operations, including autonomous vessels, port logistics and communication networks, are susceptible to cyberattacks.

Malicious actors could exploit AI to disrupt shipping routes, sabotage supply chains, or compromise national defence operations. For example, hacked AI systems on autonomous vessels could redirect

military or commercial cargo, causing national and economic security threats.

AI systems could also face ransomware attacks, paralysing ports or naval fleets and disrupting operations.

**Loss of human oversight:** Over-reliance on AI systems may reduce human involvement in critical operations. In times of conflict or crisis, a lack of human oversight could lead to decisions or actions misaligned with national interests. For example, AI could misinterpret a routine naval manoeuvre as a threat, escalating tensions unnecessarily.

In high-stakes naval operations, human judgement is vital for de-escalation, and is something that AI can't replicate.

**Dependence on foreign AI technology:** Relying on AI systems developed by foreign entities can create vulnerabilities. Backdoors or intentional flaws in foreign-built systems could allow adversaries to monitor or disrupt critical

operations. For example, foreign AI systems could have backdoors, letting adversaries access sensitive data or seize control of maritime infrastructure.

**Economic warfare:** AI could enable economic sabotage, such as manipulating global shipping markets or targeting maritime infrastructure. A coordinated attack on maritime logistics using AI could cripple national economies.

AI could manipulate shipping routes or disrupt supply chains, delaying essential goods like fuel or military equipment and weakening national resilience in countries like Australia and the UK.

## The positives

On the flip side, AI can also strengthen the industry when aligned with national security priorities. For example, AI can predict engine failures, keeping naval vessels mission-ready and reducing downtime.

Another positive is that AI-

powered satellite imagery and drones can spot illegal fishing or smuggling in real time, securing our waters.

AI can improve the efficiency of naval supply chains, ensuring timely delivery of resources critical to defence operations. AI can also monitor marine ecosystems for pollution or illegal dumping, protecting fisheries vital to our economy.

## Making AI work for us

If we are to meet these challenges and opportunities, we need to develop secure, national AI systems by investing in technology developed in our own nations. These can be tailored to marine applications, reducing reliance on foreign technology. To do this, we should establish partnerships between defence, academia and industry to create secure, purpose-built AI solutions.

We must maintain human oversight in critical operations by training marine personnel to work alongside AI, ensuring human judgement drives key decisions. As part of this, we must implement stringent protocols for AI deployment in military and commercial applications.

We should enhance cybersecurity measures by building robust defences against AI-driven cyber threats targeting the marine industry. Further, we should mandate regular cybersecurity audits for marine AI systems and develop AI-specific security protocols, as well as regularly testing AI systems to identify and mitigate vulnerabilities.

We must regulate AI in maritime applications by enacting policies that limit the deployment of high-risk AI systems in sensitive operations until thoroughly vetted for national security implications. National bodies should be created to oversee AI in the sector, enforcing strict safety and security standards.

It is also important that we adopt ethical guidelines focusing on transparency and accountability in marine AI systems. And we should

incentivise the development of regenerative marine technologies, protecting natural ecosystems and aligning with long-term national interests.

## A call to action

New legislation and updated standards must mandate the inclusion of manual override capabilities, often referred to in computing as an 'air gap', to ensure systems can be physically disconnected from networks in the event of a cybersecurity threat or AI malfunction or corruption. This is essential for protecting national security.

It should be a legislative

requirement that key personnel are physically present onboard all vessels entering Australian waters. These personnel must have the authority and capability to isolate and assume full manual control of the vessel, independent of any AI systems or remote command from the vessel's originating source or 'mothership'.

the maritime industry must be approached with caution, strategic planning, and robust safeguards. While AI offers transformative benefits, it also introduces critical risks. Many other industries are similarly grappling with how to balance the opportunities and control associated with AI, including the academic sector, where even our leading universities are currently navigating how best to teach and regulate AI responsibly. A proactive, security-focused approach will ensure AI enhances, rather than compromises, the maritime industry's critical role in national defence.



CREDIT: Getty Images

To protect national control and resilience, the adoption of AI in

In summary, to safeguard national security, legislation must at the very least mandate manual override systems and onboard personnel capable of isolating vessels from AI and external control. As many industries struggle with AI's rapid advancement, a cautious, security-first approach is vital to ensure technological innovation strengthens, rather than undermines, national resilience.



# Energising your maritime career

The shipping industry's effort to decarbonise means that maritime jobs are changing – and new kinds of jobs are being created. Some seafarers are turning to specialist qualifications such as the WMU Maritime Energy Postgraduate Diploma to help them navigate the new world of work, as **Sarah Robinson** discovers

It's taken a long time for the global maritime community to agree measures for combatting climate change – and for those responsible for implementing these measures, the levels of bureaucracy involved can seem daunting.

World Maritime University (WMU) in Sweden realised that it could help by developing a new diploma. The university explains: 'Our distance learning programme in Maritime Energy equips maritime professionals with technical and socio-economic environmental knowledge relating to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) regulations on air pollution and potential mitigation measures to achieve a low carbon and energy-efficient maritime future.'

## Course content

The Maritime Energy Postgraduate Diploma is studied either across one year or in a flexible version across three years, and has five modules:

**1. Maritime Energy and Sustainable Development.** This module introduces the historical environmental discourse around the maritime industry and the development of legal frameworks on maritime energy.

### 2. Ships and Energy Efficiency.

This module starts with the basics of Chapter 4 of MARPOL Annex VI. It focuses on energy efficient operation of ships and increasing energy

efficiency of ships during design.

### 3. Future Propulsion Technologies.

This module presents alternatives to traditional ways of propelling ships. This includes renewable energy and alternative fuels such as Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), biofuel and hydrogen, as a response to Chapter 3 of MARPOL Annex VI.

**4. Energy Conservation in Ports and Shipyards.** This module focuses on knowledge of energy

management procedures and technologies in the framework of ports and shipyards. Energy management systems are discussed, including certification processes such as ISO 50001.

### 5. Best Practices and Life-Cycle Perspectives.

This module presents the trade-off between the societal economic benefit and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. It explores methodologies to



Professor Aykut Ölcer of World Maritime University

CREDIT: WMU

support decision-makers in measuring environmental impact and complying with forthcoming regulations (i.e. global sulphur cap).

Although the course is mainly studied via distance learning and assessed via coursework, participants have the option to travel to London on field study and observe a meeting of the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee.

## Seafarer participation

This diploma is specifically for seafarers, says Professor Aykut Ölcer, WMU head of maritime energy management. 'It equips them with the essential skills and competencies needed for energy efficient ship operations as well as regulatory compliance. These are all key components of a just and equitable green transition in the maritime industry.'

As it happens, there are no serving seafarers among the current intake of students taking the diploma, but many were seafarers earlier in their careers. The three-year flexible version of the course is attractive to those who want to study while at sea.

Although the diploma is taught at postgraduate level, students don't necessarily have to have graduated from a bachelor's degree to take part – seafaring qualifications also count. The entrance requirements are:

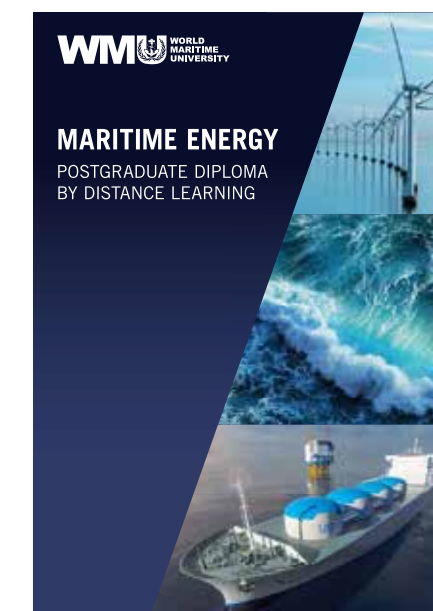
- a minimum of five years' work experience
- a bachelor's degree in a relevant discipline and/or the highest grade certificate of competency for unrestricted service as master mariner or chief engineer

Candidates must also demonstrate competence in the English language, either via the UK's English Language GCSE or through internationally-recognised certificates for speakers of English as a foreign language from TOEFL, IELTS or Cambridge English.

**'The diploma contains all the key components of a just and equitable green transition in the maritime industry.'**

Professor Aykut Ölcer

## Applying for the WMU diploma



The next date to start Module 1 of the WMU Maritime Energy Postgraduate Diploma is 15 September 2025.

More information about the course and how to apply is available at:

**[www.wmu.se/programmes/maritime-energy](http://www.wmu.se/programmes/maritime-energy)**



OPINION

# Decarbonisation negotiations hit choppy waters at the International Maritime Organization



Head of professional and technical  
**David Appleton**

**T**he 83rd session of the IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) in April this year marked a pivotal moment in our industry's journey towards decarbonisation.

Tasked with finalising the so-called mid-term measures needed for international shipping to achieve net zero emissions by or around 2050, the Committee developed draft amendments to MARPOL Annex VI. These include the introduction of a Global Fuel Standard, which will regulate the GHG [greenhouse gas] intensity of fuel used by ships, and the establishment of a Net Zero Fund to accelerate the decarbonisation of the maritime sector.

## A hard-fought compromise

The compromise agreement was reached on the final day

of the meeting after a fraught week of negotiations, during which the prospect of a deal had appeared in serious doubt.

Even then, the agreement was passed only by majority vote, in the face of opposition from fossil fuel-producing states – who condemned the proposals as unworkable – and small island developing states, who felt the targets were insufficiently ambitious.

We understand this is the first time a formal vote has been required on a proposal at the IMO since the adoption of the Energy Efficiency Design Index (EEDI) in 2011.

## Details of the framework

The new GHG reduction framework, which will enter into force in 2027, establishes a new Chapter V of MARPOL Annex VI, applicable to ships over 5,000gt engaged in



international voyages.

Under the regulations, ships will be required to report the average GHG intensity of the fuels used onboard, which will be subject to progressively stringent targets over time. A two-tier compliance system will apply: ships exceeding the thresholds must purchase remedial units, priced at \$100 and \$380 per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent for breaching the lower and higher thresholds, respectively.

Ships performing better than the most stringent threshold will receive surplus units, which can be traded, banked for future use, or cancelled. Funds raised from the sale of remedial units will be channelled through the newly established IMO Net Zero Fund, which will support the transition to low-emission vessels and encourage investment in innovation, infrastructure, and capacity-building in developing countries.



# Eliminating violence at work

Violence and harassment at work affects seafarers' ability to get and stay in jobs, and harms their physical and mental wellbeing. Women are also subject to gender-based violence and harassment.

**Helene Netland**, ITF seafarers and inland navigation section assistant, looks at how companies, unions and seafarers can bring about change

**C**onvention 190 (C190) was adopted by the International Labour Organization in June 2019 to ensure that employment is based on safe and decent work. It identifies the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment, and provides a clear framework for action by shipping companies, unions and seafarers to help end this behaviour.

C190 gives shipping companies a responsibility to ensure that policies are in place to eliminate all forms of violence and harassment onboard their ships. Likewise, unions and seafarers have a duty to help ensure that inappropriate behaviour does not take place.

It gives seafarers the right to complain directly to the master, and to external authorities where appropriate, and provides the right to be accompanied or represented when making a complaint. These are embedded in the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 grievance procedure.

#### Seafarers' unions can:

- require that C190 language is included in collective bargaining agreements
- negotiate workplace policies with companies and ensure that education to prevent and address violence and harassment is mandatory for everyone
- put pressure on their governments to ratify and integrate the ILO standards into national legislation

#### Companies and seafarers' unions can:

- arrange training programmes for seafarers that actively promote a workplace culture of equality and mutual respect
- encourage open discussions about

## FIVE CHECKS TO MAKE BEFORE YOU BOARD

Ask to see the company's health and safety policy. Does it include violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment, and provide a clear statement of zero tolerance?

Does the health and safety policy embed a seafarer's right to confidentiality?

Does the policy contain measures to protect complainants, witnesses and whistleblowers against victimisation or retaliation?

Is the vessel covered by a collective bargaining agreement?

Does the agreement have measures to prevent, address and remedy violence and harassment, in line with C190?

CREDIT: Pexels

the impact perpetrators have on the workplace and on the person they are targeting

- explain procedures for reporting and investigating incidents

#### The guidelines can help seafarers to:

- recognise the early signs of bullying and harassment in their colleagues – such as changes in behaviour, isolation, low morale or poor work performance
- get actively involved as bystanders where they witness these behaviours
- encourage people who have experienced violence and harassment to report incidents without fear of retaliation

# the global SEAFARER



Tel: +44 (0)20 8989 6677

[www.nautilusfederation.org](http://www.nautilusfederation.org)