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SEAFARER

NAUTILUS
FEDERATION

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Wherever you are, so are we

Volume 9 | Issue 3

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in their Merchant Navies



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Front cover image & credit:

Don Marcus and Mark Dickinson
at NATO headquarters in Brussels
Nautilus International

Fighting a fake union

Nautilus Federation coordinator **Danny McGowan** explains a new, international campaign from the ITF to crack down on a 'sham union' that it says is undermining the rights of seafarers

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) has launched a new website, **isu.exposed**, to highlight a 'trade union' with very dubious credentials operating to undermine the ITF's activities.

The International Seafarers' Union (ISU) is registered as a trade union in Slovenia, but ITF investigations show that the agreements signed by ISU are substandard, giving companies that wish to avoid genuine trade union relationships a chance to legitimise their operations.

In addition to this, the ITF's report also shows that the people who are behind ISU also run a private company, Lanibra. Lanibra acts as an agent for shipowners, openly offering its services 'to sideline genuine trade unions'.

The ITF is asking any seafarers who work onboard a vessel with an ISU-Lanibra agreement to contact them, providing information and guidance to help the ITF deal with the issues caused by ISU-Lanibra.

The ITF is also reminding companies that ships sailing under ISU-Lanibra agreements face fierce opposition worldwide, and that partnering with ISU exposes them to serious legal, reputational and financial risks. Partnering with ISU means complicity in



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If you are working onboard a vessel with an ISU-Lanibra agreement or are aware of such a situation, please contact Danny McGowan via dmcgowan@nautilusint.org

undermining seafarers' fundamental rights.

Nautilus members who become aware of ISU-Lanibra agreements are free to contact me to report what they know. It is only with the eyes and ears of genuine trade union members that the ITF and its affiliates will be able to tackle this 'sham union' and ensure that we can maintain continuous improvement of global standards.

The ITF's report shows that the people behind ISU also run a private company, Lanibra. Lanibra acts as an agent for shipowners, openly offering its services 'to sideline genuine trade unions'

Dutch MP targets 'fake' unions in maritime sector

A Dutch member of parliament joined Nautilus International's Council meeting in June to discuss strategies for combating 'fake' unions that undermine workers' rights.

Mariëtte Patijn, a labour parliamentarian with extensive union experience, shared her concerns about 'yellow unions' like the International Seafarers' Union (ISU), which she described as commercial operations designed to favour employers over workers.

The MP is exploring potential legislation to restrict these unions, focusing on ensuring genuine membership, independence from employers, and protecting workers' rights. She specifically sought input from members of the Nautilus Council on how to define and regulate these organisations.

Key challenges highlighted



CREDIT: Nautilus International

Dutch member of parliament Mariëtte Patijn, second from left, with Nautilus International assistant general secretary Sascha Meijer, Nautilus Federation director Mark Dickinson and chair of Nautilus International Council Wilco van Hoboken

in the discussion included migrant worker exploitation, and the difficulty of organising workers in increasingly fragmented employment markets, noting that only 55% of Dutch workers have permanent employment contracts. Members

of the Nautilus Council also raised specific concerns about fake unions in the maritime sector arranging employment contracts that fail to comply with Dutch regulations, which the MP acknowledged as a critical area for potential intervention.

Seafarer rights strengthened with adoption of MLC amendments

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has adopted a new set of amendments to the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC), marking a significant step forward in safeguarding the rights and welfare of seafarers.

The changes were approved by a strong majority in June 2025 and will come into force in December 2027. Nautilus welcomed the agreement as

a major step forward in ending unfair treatment.

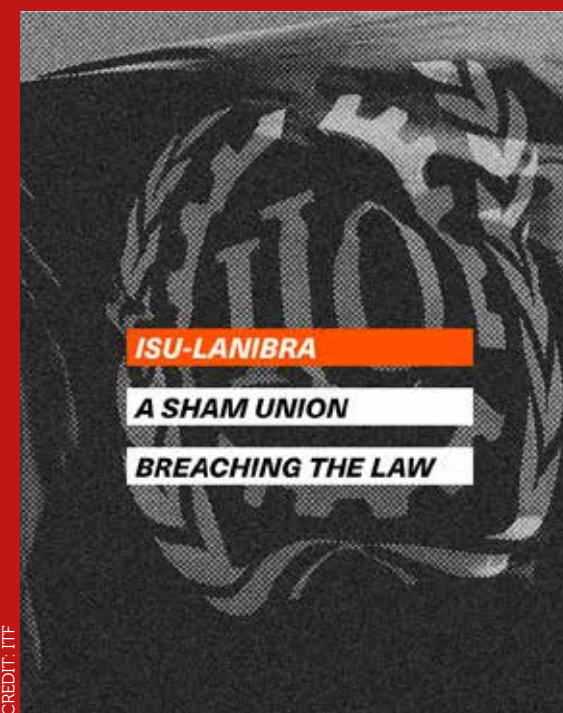
Key changes include reinforced shore leave rights, a firm commitment to repatriation (with specific costs covered by shipowners), and the designation of seafarers as key workers. Further provisions aim to ensure fair treatment of seafarers involved in marine casualties or legal proceedings, and measures to address violence and harassment.

IBF AGREES 2026-2027 SEAFARER PAY RISE

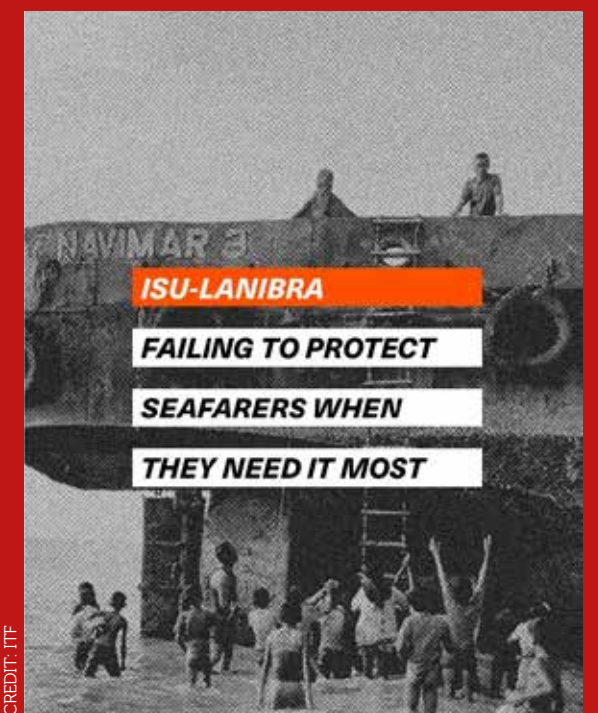
The International Bargaining Forum, which is made up of trade union and shipowner representatives, has agreed a pay increase for more than 250,000 seafarers globally who work on flag of convenience vessels covered by an ITF-IBF collective bargaining agreement.



CREDIT: Nautilus International



CREDIT: ITF



CREDIT: ITF

OSG and ATC: demanding a union contract

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



This article is based on Rob Coston's video interview with Tom Larkin. Watch the video now on NautilusTV at youtube.com/@nautilusint

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 is a union agreement and representation that they already voted for 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

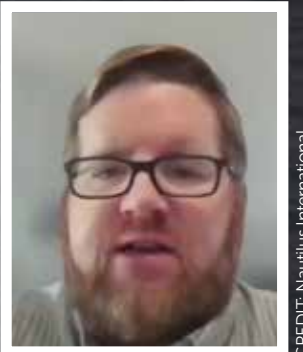
'I wish the circumstances were different and we could all just be adults and get to a contract. I guess part of that strategy is hoping that the officers get tired of the process, that they lose faith,' Capt Larkin says.

'We need to help people stay strong. The positive thing is that people are sticking together, especially our bargaining group members. People realise 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.'



The ATC vessel
Alaskan Explorer

Captain Tom Larkin in his NautilusTV video interview with Rob Coston



CREDIT: Nautilus International

CREDIT: Wikimedia Commons

VOS Paradise
navigates past
the Scroby
Sands wind farm
in the North Sea

WINDFARM WARNING

The Dutch maritime authorities have raised safety concerns around vessels operating near North Sea wind turbines – and their research could prompt a rethink of navigational procedures in crowded seaways. **Andrew Linington** reports

Seafarers are facing a growing challenge to navigate safely in the North Sea as ships are forced to compete for space with an increasing number of windfarms, oil platforms and other ‘industrial’ developments.

That is the conclusion of research carried out by the Dutch Safety Board in response to several collisions and allisions between ships and structures such as wind turbines. The Board argues that officials have set ‘unrealistic’ safety buffer zones around windfarms based on inadequate understanding of actual risks – leaving large vessels with insufficient room to manoeuvre in an emergency.

‘Up to now, the consequences have been limited to material damage, but more serious human

and environmental consequences are a realistic possibility,’ the study warns.

With significant new developments planned in the North Sea, the Board calls for a rethink of risk management and suggests that seafarers may need to change the way in which they navigate in the area.

Increasing pressures

The Dutch Safety Board report – titled **Compromise on Room to Manoeuvre** – points out that the North Sea is already one of the busiest waterways in the world, with some 240,000 shipping movements a year in the Dutch section alone.

Climate change means ships are facing growing risks of extreme conditions in the North Sea, and consequential pressures to change course or to

remain at sea rather than entering port may lead to increased vessel traffic density in key areas, the report notes.

But free space for shipping is coming under increasing pressure, it warns. The Dutch section of the North Sea already has six windfarms, 700 wind turbines, 7,000km of subsea piping, 4,000km of cables and 160 oil and gas production platforms, as well as naval exercise areas and nature reserves. A further 1,000 wind turbines are due to be added by 2031, and there are also plans for storing CO2 and generating solar power, hydrogen and ammonia in the North Sea.

Inadequate risk management

Risk management in the area is failing to keep up with the pace of developments, with many measures being outdated or based on inadequate or over-generalised criteria.

Existing policies display ‘insufficient understanding of the risks to shipping safety when positioning wind farms’, and there are significant ‘knowledge gaps’

A structural vision
map for the North
Sea 2022-2027
showing current and
planned windfarms

in such subjects as the effects of collisions, the effectiveness of measures to prevent collisions, and the behaviour of vessels in certain circumstances.

Most current and planned windfarms are adjacent to traffic separation schemes, the report points out. The ‘buffer zone’ that seeks to reduce the risk of collisions and allisions sets a distance of 1.87nm on the starboard side and 1.57nm on the port side of a shipping lane, with a formula based on a notional six ship lengths to complete a 360-degree turn.

However, simulations undertaken for the Safety Board showed that the 1.87nm buffer zone is not sufficient for wind-sensitive and heavy vessels such as ultra-large containerships in conditions commonly encountered in the North Sea. ‘This is understandable because the design criterion takes no account of the influence of hydrological, hydrodynamic, and meteorological conditions on vessels’ manoeuvring characteristics,’ the report stresses.

Problematic monitoring proposals

The Safety Board also challenges proposals to introduce a system of vessel traffic monitoring (VTM) – as opposed to vessel traffic services (VTS) – to cover shipping operating around windfarms. VTM is reliant upon a single operator monitoring several different windfarms, and would fail to address the risk of ship-to-ship collisions, the report says. The proposed system could also cause confusion among ship crews because it deviates from international standards and will not appear on nautical charts nor come with reporting requirements.

The report says the Dutch government sees emergency towing vessels (ETVs) as an important control measure. However, it cautions, their effectiveness is constrained by factors such as positioning, availability, reliability, bollard pull and the challenges of establishing a towing connection in poor conditions.

International safety review required

The Safety Board says a radical revision of safety management in the North Sea is required to reflect developments in shipping and the growing pressures for space. It argues for a comprehensive assessment of the use of the North Sea and the impact upon



shipping, with modelling applied to new and existing installations and used to produce more realistic safety goals.

It also urges the Dutch government to work with other North Sea nations to secure modified global standards that reflect a better understanding of shipping safety risks, and to submit proposals for new International Maritime Organization rules.

'An internationally shared view on how shipping can navigate safely around fixed objects is crucial,' the report stresses.

Actions for seafarers

The Safety Board says ships need to change the way they operate in the increasingly crowded North Sea, and in a new **Shipping Occurrences** report it calls for seafarers to consider ways they can 'prepare for confronting the impact' of an 'increasingly dynamic and complex' vessel traffic scene in the area.

'For shipping, this means that vessels will operate closer to windfarms and closer to one another,' the Board notes. 'As a result, the North Sea increasingly

resembles a narrow waterway or the approach area to a port. Less and less space is available to cope with problems such as a blackout or to ride out a storm. Certain course changes – for example to keep the vessel's head on to the waves – are becoming more difficult to execute.'

All this means that crews need to properly plan before entering the area, with an assessment of location-specific conditions and associated risks, it says.

When in shipping lanes passing windfarms, ship masters should consider operating their vessel as if it was approaching a port, the Board suggests. 'That includes having a different personnel setting on the bridge, keeping the engine room manned, and making sure that propulsion and multiple steering gear options are immediately available.'

Captains, shipping companies and cargo planners should also cut ship speeds in congested areas, enabling more time and space to be given to anticipate potentially dangerous situations and take timely action, the Board concludes.

CASE STUDY: Julietta D

One of the incidents which led to the Dutch Safety Board report involved the Maltese-flagged bulk carrier Julietta D, which began to drift off the Dutch coast when its anchor failed to hold in stormy conditions in January 2022.

The ship's engine room was holed when it hit another vessel before drifting into a windfarm under construction and striking a turbine and other structures. It was abandoned and was eventually towed into the port of Rotterdam by the Dutch-owned tug Sovereign.

An investigation highlighted the problems associated with the choice of a safe anchorage and the challenges faced by the tug in securing a towing connection, as two crew members suffered serious injuries when a wave swept over the main deck as they were returning to their accommodation.

Dropping the ship's other anchor would have posed a threat to the crew in the prevailing conditions and would have also run the risk of damaging submarine cables and pipelines in the area, investigators said.

The report's recommendations

included a call for windfarm developers to explore and study the possibilities to install innovative physical barrier systems to prevent allisions with critical windfarm structures, noting that there had been some 'promising' early research into such technology.



The Maltese bulk carrier Julietta D drifted into a windfarm under construction

CREDIT: KNRM



CREDIT: MAIB

TWO SEAFARERS KILLED IN TUG CAPSIZE

Amy Field reports on a fatal accident off the coast of Scotland

The UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) has released its report into the deaths of two seafarers onboard the tug Biter in February 2023.

The tug girted and capsized while attached to the stern of the passenger vessel Hebridean Princess while off the coast of Greenock, Scotland.

At the time of the incident, the passenger vessel was traveling well above the recommended speed of 2-3 knots. The investigation reveals that this led to the force exerted on Biter via its towlines being up to five times higher than if recommended speed levels were adhered to.

Although the reason for the failure of Biter's gob rope – a safety measure implemented to prevent girting – is unclear, the report argues that the passenger vessel's speed 'almost certainly' contributed to the rope's failure.

Additionally, the report reveals serious communication failures between the pilot onboard the Hebridean Princess and the master of the Biter, revealing that there was

a lack of shared understanding as to the planned manoeuvre. While the master of the Biter had extensive experience operating conventional tugs, the pilot of the passenger vessel lacked both training and experience, having only worked with more modern ASD tugs in the past.

The MAIB report flags the use of a conventional tug to tow the Hebridean Princess as inappropriate, and has called on Clydeport Marine Services, which assigned the tug, to review its tug allocation procedures.

Following the incident, the MAIB has also made several recommendations directed towards wider industry bodies.

These include issuing further guidance around pilot/tug and master/pilot exchanges, to be included within relevant publications such as the Port Marine Safety Code's Guide to Good Practice; in conjunction with guidance around matching appropriate tugs to tasks.

MAIB is also calling for extended industry-wide guidance to be issued on the testing of gob ropes and towlines during harbour towage.

Raising the Bayesian sparks safety concerns

Rob Coston writes about the case of the superyacht *Bayesian* and the early findings of the MAIB safety investigation into the sinking, which could reshape design and safety precautions

When the UK-flagged sailing yacht *Bayesian* sank off the coast of Sicily in August 2024, Nautilus International called for restraint – asking the media and public to allow investigations by the British and Italian maritime accident investigators to proceed without external pressure or pre-judgment.

A year on, these investigations are still being carried out. The criminal investigation, initiated by Italian prosecutors, has officially put Captain

The *Bayesian* in Milazzo harbour, Sicily, in 2024

James Cutfield, chief engineer Timothy Parker Eaton and deckhand Matthew Griffiths under investigation, although this does not imply guilt or mean that charges will necessarily be brought.

These proceedings are running alongside a British inquest into the deaths of the yacht's owner Mike Lynch, his daughter, and two other UK nationals.

With the release of a preliminary report by the UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB), however, some answers are beginning to emerge about the causes of the accident, in which a total of seven people died, including a crew member.

MAIB FINDINGS

Published on 15 May 2025, the MAIB's interim report lays out the nature of the accident.

The eventual full report promises to offer comprehensive guidance and safety action plans to prevent similar catastrophes at sea.

The interim report points to extreme winds and instability: convective storm squalls hit the vessel with gusts exceeding 63–73 knots (73–84 mph). These winds, striking the hull beam-on, overwhelmed the yacht, tipping it

CREDIT: Wikimedia Commons

90° in under 15 seconds.

There were also unrecognised vulnerabilities: with sails furled and the centreboard raised for motoring, the yacht's angle of vanishing stability dropped to just 70.6°, rendering it capsize-prone under such gusts. Crucially, the Stability Information Book (SIB) aboard made no mention of this – neither owners nor crew were aware of it.

Another issue was rapid flooding and loss of power: witnesses and survivors reported water rushing over the starboard rail, entering stairwells, and knocking out power, leaving no time to respond before the yacht sank.

WIDER IMPLICATIONS

Already, the early MAIB findings expose vulnerabilities in large sailing yachts, including an absence of real-world motoring stability figures in onboard manuals. Yachts like *Bayesian*, with tall rigs and high freeboard, are susceptible to sudden wind surges, yet safety system documentation may not cover all risks. There may be a need in future for:

- complete stability assessments across all operational configurations
- technological enhancements such as real-time stability monitoring and early weather detection systems. Architects might need to re-examine profiles of tall-masted yachts to avoid similar capsize from short-lived storm dynamics
- improved crew training, focusing on rapid storm response

RAISING THE VESSEL

New details of the vessel's sinking are likely to emerge, now that the vessel is being lifted for analysis onshore – an operation delayed by the tragic death of a salvage diver in May. Investigators will inspect the yacht, and prosecutors and lawyers representing victims and crew members will also be given access in order to build their cases.

Raising the *Bayesian* will allow investigators to verify critical elements flagged in the interim MAIB report, such as the position of the centreboard, any open hatches, and signs of structural damage, as well as retrieve onboard data for analysis.

The MAIB's final report – awaited in

the coming months – will integrate these findings with existing weather and stability data, aiming to produce actionable safety recommendations for yachts and crews.

WAITING FOR ANSWERS

The raising of the *Bayesian* will begin a new chapter in the investigation, awaited by safety inspectors and prosecutors alike. While the MAIB's interim findings have already illuminated key weaknesses, the raised vessel promises to fill in gaps and propel regulatory change.

However, it is likely that the final MAIB report will take at least a year for completion, as tests must be conducted and interested parties notified and consulted with on the findings. In the long term, however, the case could reshape design and safety precautions for similar luxury craft.

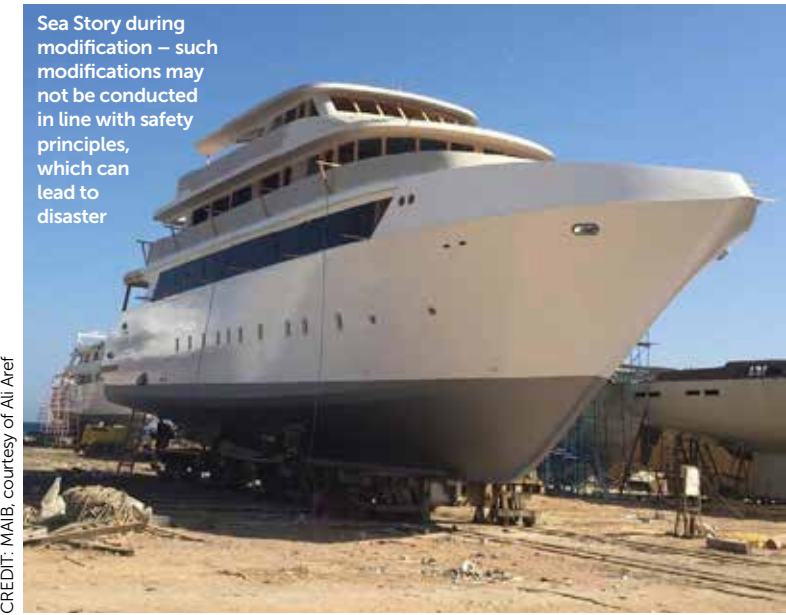
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Read the MAIB interim report into the sinking of the *Bayesian* at bit.ly/Bayesian_interim_MAIB

The yacht's owner, British businessman Mike Lynch, died during the sinking



CREDIT: Wikimedia Commons



CREDIT: MAIB, courtesy of Ali Aref



CREDIT: MAIB, courtesy of Toby Meadows/Alexander Derhaag

Carlton Queen following capsizes



CREDIT: MAIB, courtesy of Mohammed Kaddah

Hurricane on fire

Safety warning after dive boat fatalities

In recent years, several UK nationals have died in accidents involving live-aboard dive boats, prompting the MAIB to issue an official warning about working or taking a trip on these vessels. **Rob Coston** reports

The UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) has warned the public about the risks of living or working onboard live-aboard dive vessels operating in the Red Sea, following several deaths and injuries among UK nationals.

Over the past five years, 16 accidents have occurred involving such vessels in the area. Three dive boats have been lost in the last two years, resulting in numerous deaths including some UK nationals.

These included a 2023 incident involving the Carlton Queen, which capsized and foundered with 33 people onboard. All passengers and crew were

rescued though several were injured, including UK nationals. Another incident, on 11 June 2023, involved a fire onboard the dive boat and the disappearance of three UK passengers who are believed to have died. A third incident, on 25 November 2024, saw the dive boat Sea Story capsize and founder with 45 people onboard. Four bodies have been recovered and seven people, including two UK passengers, remain missing and are believed to have died.

In line with the principles of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Casualty Investigation Code, the UK has now been registered as a substantially interested state in the Egyptian safety investigations into dive boat accidents.

Common safety issues

The UK MAIB has identified several safety issues with dive boats operating in the Red Sea:

- the dive boats involved were poorly constructed and often substantially modified/extended, which resulted in some vessels exhibiting inadequate stability
- essential lifesaving equipment was defective, out-of-date for service and, in some cases, missing
- the rapid spread of fire is indicative of poor structural fire protection, and items of essential safety equipment, such as fire detection systems and fire extinguishers, were either missing or defective
- emergency escape routes were via lockable doors, had no emergency lighting, and were unmarked
- safety briefings to passengers were of a poor standard or not conducted at all
- crews appeared poorly trained and were unfamiliar with their vessels

Chief inspector of marine accidents Andrew Moll OBE said: 'While MAIB does not have the jurisdiction to investigate accidents involving non-UK flagged vessels operating within the territorial waters of another coastal state, we have made the appropriate authorities aware of our national interest and offered every assistance with any safety investigation they conduct.

'Our safety bulletin provides important guidance to those intending to stay on liveaboard vessels. It is important to remember that such vessels are unlikely to be built, maintained, equipped, and operated to the standard of similar vessels in the UK and we urge the exercise of extreme caution when choosing a boat.'

Counterfeit pilot ladders trigger US maritime safety alert

The United States Coast Guard has issued a Maritime Safety Alert after inspectors found counterfeit pilot ladders being used at the Port of Baltimore during a Port State Control Examination.

Nautilus Federation union the International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots (MM&P) has been made aware that the ladders contained several faults, including incorrectly referencing the SOLAS certification standard as ISO 799-1 instead of the correct ISO 779-1. The counterfeit ladders were also found to have step counts and lengths that did not align with their certification.

The ladders' certificates and plates listed a company called Qingdao Good Brother Marine Life Saving Appliance Co. LTD as the manufacturer. The same name was found in March 2019 when the Australian Maritime Safety Authority also reported counterfeit ladders being used.

Pilot ladders are a common cause of injury within the maritime sector and are one of the leading causes of death or injury amongst maritime professionals, as reported by the UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch.

- If you observe the use of counterfeit ladders, please report it to competent authorities.

Fresh findings on ferry fatigue

Following on from other seafarer fatigue studies, the UK government last year commissioned Loughborough University to investigate the situation in the ferry sector.

Dr Wendy Jones explains how the research was conducted – and what she and her colleagues found out

Previous research has identified fatigue to be a challenge in seafaring. For example, Project Horizon was a laboratory-based study which found high levels of sleepiness in seafarers. Particularly, it identified that split shifts adversely affected performance – and that being disturbed when off-watch increased sleepiness.

Project Martha was a long-term study of deep sea seafarers. It found risks to be particularly high for captains and night watch keepers, and that port work was more demanding than being at sea. However, relatively little research has been carried out in ferry operations.

Sleep is a biological need, and it is to be expected that every person will become sleepy every day. Risk occurs if people are fatigued while undertaking a safety-critical task. The longer it has been since a person last slept, the more pressure

their brain will be under to sleep, and the ability to maintain wakefulness fluctuates across the day with the circadian rhythm. Shift work is most challenging if people are working at times when the circadian rhythm is not prompting wakefulness, and if it is difficult to get good quality sleep.

FOCUSING ON FERRIES

Those working in the ferry industry may be at particular risk of fatigue because shift work is unavoidable. A wide variety of working patterns are used to meet the practical and commercial demands of operations. With 37,000 crossings each year into or out of UK ports, this is a potentially high-risk part of the sector. For example, in 2022, 41 people were injured, some seriously, when the roll on/roll off ferry Alfred ran aground in Scotland after the master fell asleep while navigating close to shore.

The UK Department for Transport (DfT)

commissioned research to improve understanding of the risk that fatigue creates for seafarer wellbeing and vessel safety in ferry operations and explore how the impact could be reduced.

The research was led by Professor Ashleigh Filtiness, an expert in sleepiness and fatigue who is part of the Transport Safety Research Centre at Loughborough University. The TSRC has a 40-year history of conducting research into all aspects of safety in transport. For this study, Loughborough University partnered with The Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute (VTI), an independent and internationally prominent research institute in the transport sector with particular expertise in measuring sleep and alertness.

DESIGNING THE RESEARCH

The priority when designing this research was to hear the voices of seafarers, making sure that a wide range

of people in many roles and from many operators had an opportunity to contribute. As a result, a wide range of methods were used, including subjective approaches (people's opinions and experiences) and objective measurement (how much sleep people get; how alert they are at work). The five research strands were:

workshop: a discussion with representatives from ferry operators to explore how rosters and shift patterns are designed, and how mathematical models could be used to compare different working arrangements

survey: open to anyone working in any role in participating ferry operators; 446 seafarers took part

focus groups: discussions with small groups of customer-facing staff; 45 people took part.

Participants were mostly OBS, and also some ABs

interviews: with 11 masters and bosuns

Losing concentration:
59% of the ferry sector
seafarers surveyed
reported fighting
sleepiness at work at
least once a month



CREDIT: Pein Sude Gültigin / Pexels

➤ **field trial:** 63 seafarers wore FitBit watches for four weeks, assessed how sleepy they felt at work, and tested their reaction times to assess alertness

Our main conclusion from this research was that fatigue in the ferry sector is a significant issue which does cause accidents. Below are some notable findings that we are keen to publicise throughout the industry.

FATIGUE IS WIDESPREAD ON FERRIES

Fatigue was an issue in all job roles and shift patterns. It affected crews living onboard ferries and those who went home to sleep between their shifts.

In total, 18% of survey respondents had fallen asleep at work at least once in the last 12 months, and 59% said that at least once a month they had to fight sleepiness at work. When alertness was monitored in the field trial, around one quarter of measurements showed respondents to be sleepy at work (scoring seven or higher on the Karolinska Sleepiness scale – see Figure 1).

One impact of this fatigue is accidents – 31% of survey respondents reported having had one or more fatigue-related incidents in the last 10 years. The majority (85%) did not think that their employer would know that fatigue was a factor.

FATIGUE IS A MULTI-FACETED PROBLEM

The comments from survey respondents and workshop participants revealed that seafarers are fighting fatigue on ferries for several different reasons:

Long hours and shift variability: Long working hours, varying shift start times and moving between day and night shifts were reported as causing particular problems. Some seafarers had working hours which were much longer in the summer than winter. Some reported that they frequently worked

beyond their scheduled shift time (e.g. if sailings were delayed) or that their working patterns or rosters were often changed and that this increased fatigue. Evidence from the field study showed many participants’ working hours that were different from the original roster.

‘A straight shift comprises of 13-hour day with two half hour meal breaks and split shift comprises of six hours on six hours off with no meal breaks for a two week on two week off rota’

Interrupted sleep: Senior staff on live-onboard vessels could be disturbed when off duty, particularly where they were the only person on the vessel working in that role. For all crew types, training drills could conflict with crew rest time, although attempts were generally made to minimise this.

‘I work permanent nights, 8pm to 8:30am; I have a break between 2:30 and 4:30am. Drills take place at 18:30 hours once a week and impact on my sleep time’

Rest does not equal sleep: Poor sleep quality and lack of sleep were major challenges. Only 21% of survey participants reported their sleep in the last three months as being good or quite good.

For live-onboard crew, sleep quality was adversely affected by noise (other crew, passenger announcements), heat, cold, vibration and weather.

‘If you’ve got really crap weather for two weeks and a ship’s bouncing around, your cabin’s rearranging itself, you do not sleep very well. And that has an accumulative effect’

For those who went home between shifts, the time spent travelling plus the demands of home life had an impact on the time available for sleep, as well as introducing a risk of falling asleep during the commute. The commute time was also a factor for those live-onboard crew who had a

	Rating	Verbal descriptions
Alert	1	Extremely alert
	2	Very alert
	3	Alert
	4	Fairly alert
	5	Neither alert nor sleepy
	6	Some signs of sleepiness
Sleepy	7	Sleepy, but no effort to keep alert
	8	Sleepy, some effort to keep alert
	9	Very sleepy, great effort to keep alert, fighting sleep

Figure 1
The Karolinska sleepiness scale – around one quarter of measurements showed seafarers to be sleepy at work



CREDIT: ITToolSomePhotos/Wikimedia Commons

long commute before starting their first shift.

'A major factor is arriving to the ship after being up early morn, travelling and then straight into your working shift'

'So even though we've got our 12 hours, we don't because we're travelling at least a good hour and a half sometimes'

'I would drive home after an early shift ... One instance saw me "fall asleep" at the wheel nearing home, fortunately for me I woke up at the corner with a lorry approaching from the other direction'

Task-related fatigue: In addition to the impact of lost sleep, task-related fatigue also occurs due to the physical demands of the job, including looking after passengers, frequent running up and down stairs (often in safety shoes/clothing) and securing lorries on the vehicle decks.

'Just imagine, if you can, that three persons in bad weather need to apply for 70 units, four chains and four turnbuckles, altogether 280 of each, carrying an impact wrench all the time. And six hours later to take them off. And to do that two times a day, crouching under the trailers during wind, rain, cold and hot weather, with weight of personal equipment of 25 kg'

'Another thing that I'd say is, a lot of stress and tiredness is angry ... abusive passengers because we get a lot of that as well'

SEAFARING CULTURE CAN CONTRIBUTE TO FATIGUE

Many research participants considered that fatigue was integral to the industry. Challenging this culture

could be difficult, as to report fatigue or request help when tired would, they felt, be perceived as a sign of weakness amongst peers.

'I think it's always been just an accepted thing in the industry, that people are just tired on ships. ... because it is a 24-hour industry, you're awake when the ship needs you'

'I feel like you'd be laughed at'

However, there was also evidence of senior crew recognising and managing fatigue. For example, several masters had taken a decision to delay or cancel sailings when they felt the crew were too tired to sail. Also, some participants in focus groups talked about feeling like part of a family and were confident that they could rely on their colleagues to help them out if they were struggling. Nevertheless, they still considered that fatigue was an inevitable part of the job.

'It had been such a rough night and we were doing four knots ... just not going anywhere. And by the time we got back, we were all knackered. And he [the master] said, "We're not going anywhere"'

'We're like a second family on here ... everybody would come ... to help out with whatever situation you were in'

Very few interviewees and focus group participants had received any training about fatigue management and only 8% of survey respondents reported having had such training. As a result, they had limited knowledge of good fatigue management practices. For example, there was widespread use of caffeine as a fatigue control measure (which is effective in the short term, but not a substitute for good fatigue

management), and many survey respondents also reported using measures such as going out on deck or listening to music. There is no good evidence that these are effective ways of controlling fatigue, particularly when it is related to inadequate sleep or circadian rhythm effects.

'The shift runs on coffee'

There appears to be a lack of information at an industry and company level to support good decision making about fatigue. Only 35% of survey respondents felt they were always able to record their rest/work hours accurately.

SOME THINGS THAT WERE NOT FOUND, AND WHY

One of the aims of this research was to identify whether seafarers in particular roles or working particular shift patterns were at higher risk of fatigue. The survey showed that service crew were more at risk of fatigue than those in other roles. They were the most likely to have tiredness every day and reported the worst sleep.

However, we found no major differences between job roles regarding sleepiness whilst on duty or from other research activities. Also, we did not find significant differences in fatigue between different rosters or schedules. This may be because there was such a wide range of different roster/shift patterns reported; also that many other factors were affecting fatigue. It is not evidence that these differences do not exist.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BETTER FATIGUE MANAGEMENT

Although fatigue management in ferry operations is not easy, fatigue is influenced by many contributing factors and is not inevitable. The following are important steps which all operators should consider:

Develop fatigue risk management programmes. This would increase focus on fatigue, highlight that it is a serious issue and promote discussion.

Provide education for all on fatigue management. Specific training should also be provided consistently across the ferry sector for those with responsibilities for managing fatigue in others.

Maximise the available time for sleep for all crew. Avoid variability in shifts, changes to planned shifts, and disturbing crew during rest hours. Design shift patterns to minimise impact on circadian rhythm.

Gather accurate information. Ensure the hours actually worked are recorded, and identify all occasions when fatigue contributes to incidents or near misses.

Develop a fatigue-aware culture. Encourage crew at all levels to recognise fatigue, to report it, and to be supportive when others report it.

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Read the IMO's most up-to-date guidelines on fatigue onboard at bit.ly/IMO_fatigue_pdf

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Watch our exclusive interview with fatigue research leader Professor Ashleigh Filttness on NautilusTV: www.youtube.com/@nautilusint



CREDIT: RNLI/Andy Fellows

As noted in the Loughborough University research, the UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch found that the ferry Alfred had grounded in 2022 because the master had fallen asleep. Some passengers had to be evacuated by lifeboat crews

The WMU found that:

37.5%
of seafarers indicating **sleeping six hours or less** per night

93.4%
agreed that fatigue is the **most common safety-related challenge** onboard

An inconvenient truth

Another piece of fatigue research, the 2024 World Maritime University report **Quantifying an Inconvenient Truth**, found that revealed how much shipping companies depend upon seafarers working excessive hours, enduring fatigue and falsifying their hours of work and rest.

It proved beyond doubt the industry conspires to adjust records in order to comply with hours of work and hours

of rest – this pressures seafarers to go along with it at the expense of their safety and health.

To solve this widespread problem, the study called for international action: a re-examination of the thresholds set out in the Maritime Labour Convention, and the STCW code, and of the two-watch system.

Read the WMU report at commons.wmu.se/lib_reports/80

Read the ferry report

The Loughborough University fatigue paper is based on research carried out by Wendy Jones, Ashleigh Filttness, Anna Sjors Dahlman, Sally Maynard, Adam Asmal, Andrew Pooley, Christer Ahlstrom and Anna Anund.



Download the report free of charge by searching for the title **Understanding seafarer fatigue in ferry operations** at www.gov.uk

Home truths about international defence

Working with the US Masters, Mates & Pilots union, Nautilus International has gained the ear of the NATO defence alliance – and the two unions have some powerful points to make about the risks of neglecting national Merchant Navies. **Sarah Robinson** reports



Maritime union representatives Don Marcus and Mark Dickinson at NATO headquarters in Brussels for their November 2024 presentation to the NATO Transport Group on the defence contribution of the mercantile marine

Last year saw the 75th anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – an alliance in which an attack on one member state is treated as an attack on all, so members must go to each other's defence.

The occasion prompted Nautilus Federation affiliate unions based in NATO member states (see panel page 40) to issue a press release drawing attention to the importance of the Merchant Navy in times of conflict.

This led to an invitation to address the NATO Transport Group in Brussels in November 2024, and the speakers were Nautilus International general secretary Mark Dickinson and Don Marcus, president emeritus of the Masters, Mates & Pilots (MM&P) union.

'It struck us that in this time of heightened global tensions, with all sorts of wars and arenas of conflict breaking out, this was bringing the NATO alliance into sharp relief,' Mr Dickinson said. 'We wanted to highlight that NATO's commitment to Article Five of its founding treaty – an injury to one is an injury to all – was undermined by declining mercantile marine capability.'

Following their presentation, Mr Dickinson and Mr Marcus pledged to commission a detailed study showing the current state of the Merchant Navy in several NATO member states and the way this affects defence capabilities.

The findings of this study have now been published in a report titled **NATO Member States' National Merchant Fleet and Seafarers**, and the report is summarised below.

The strategic importance of merchant fleets

Merchant fleets are the lifeblood of global trade, with approximately 90% of goods transported

by sea. Beyond their economic significance, these fleets play a pivotal role in national security. During wartime or emergencies, civilian merchant vessels are indispensable for military logistics, troop transport, and humanitarian missions. Their versatility allows them to be repurposed as hospital ships, munitions carriers, or even aircraft transporters.

However, NATO's merchant fleet is shrinking. As of 2023, NATO member states collectively owned 16,916 propelled seagoing merchant vessels of 100 gross tonnes and above, representing a mere fraction of the global fleet. This decline is compounded by the widespread use of flags of convenience (FOCs), which enable shipowners to register vessels in countries offering lax regulations, tax benefits, and cheaper labour. While economically attractive, this practice erodes the strength of national registers, weakens flag-state responsibilities, and increases reliance on foreign crews.

Flags of convenience: a threat to maritime sovereignty

FOCs pose significant risks to NATO's maritime security. By allowing shipowners to obscure vessel ownership and accountability, FOCs facilitate illegal activities such as smuggling, human trafficking, and environmental violations. They also dilute regulatory authority, making it difficult for flag states to enforce safety, labour, and environmental standards.

The case of the Eagle S, a vessel linked to Russia's 'dark fleet' and accused of severing undersea cables between Finland and Estonia, highlights the vulnerabilities inherent in FOC practices. The ship's opaque ownership and frequent reflagging allowed it to evade scrutiny, underscoring the systemic risks posed by FOCs. Such incidents demonstrate how FOCs can be exploited for hybrid warfare, threatening NATO's infrastructure and collective security.

The decline of national seafarers

The shortage of qualified seafarers is another pressing concern. NATO member states collectively account for only 22.24% of the world's seafarers, with many nations experiencing a steady decline in their

THE BIG ISSUE



maritime workforce. For instance, the United Kingdom saw its pool of British seafarers employed on UK-registered ships plummet from 108,723 in 1975 to just 15,666 by 2000. Similarly, Norway and Greece have witnessed significant reductions in their maritime workforce, with foreign crews increasingly filling the gap.

This reliance on international labour poses challenges during crises. In wartime, ships with crew members from adversarial nations may face restrictions or be denied access to NATO ports. The logistical complexities of replacing foreign crews, especially during airspace closures, further exacerbate the problem. Without a robust pool of national seafarers, NATO's ability to crew its

merchant fleet and sustain operations during emergencies is severely compromised.

Economic incentives and policy failures

Despite the critical role of merchant fleets, existing policies and subsidies have largely failed to reverse their decline. Maritime incentives such as tonnage tax schemes have had limited success in retaining national flags and boosting seafarer employment. In the UK, the tonnage tax introduced in the year 2000 initially increased the number of UK-registered ships but failed to deliver long-term growth or significantly improve employment prospects for British seafarers.

Similarly, Greece's pioneering tonnage tax system, designed to reduce flagging out, has struggled to compete with the fiscal

advantages offered by rival shipping centres. As a result, over 87% of Greece's fleet capacity is registered under foreign flags, primarily FOCs. Norway's creation of the Norwegian International Ship Register (NIS) in 1987 helped retain its shipping industry but also led to a reliance on foreign labour, with most positions on NIS-registered ships now held by non-Norwegians.

These examples highlight the need for a strategic overhaul of maritime policies. State aid must be directly linked to national policy objectives such as growing the national fleet and ensuring a minimum share of national seafarers on subsidised ships. Without such reforms, subsidies risk perpetuating the status quo rather than fostering resilience and competitiveness.

Recommendations for NATO member states

To address these challenges and strengthen NATO's maritime backbone, the report proposes several recommendations:

Policy reforms and coordinated governance

NATO member states should enhance targeted state aid to incentivise shipowners to support national policy objectives. This includes linking subsidies to training and employment outcomes, restricting eligibility to vessels under national registries, and developing a coordinated governance framework to ensure sustainable maritime employment and competitiveness.

Strengthening the 'genuine link'

The principle of a genuine link between ships and their flag states must be reaffirmed and enforced, aligning with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Efforts should be made to combat fraudulent ship registrations and close gaps exploited by FOCs.

Investment in maritime capabilities

Member states must increase investment in their merchant fleets and maritime professionals. This includes boosting the number of qualified national seafarers, enhancing maritime education and training, and developing strategies to retain and attract talent in the sector.

NATO member states and Nautilus Federation unions

The following countries are members of the NATO defence alliance. Countries are given with the year each one joined the alliance. Those highlighted in **red** have at least one maritime trade union which is an affiliate of the Nautilus Federation.

Albania 2009	Finland 2023	Lithuania 2004	Romania 2004
Belgium 1949	France 1949	Luxembourg 1949	Slovakia 2004
Bulgaria 2004	Germany 1955	Montenegro 2017	Slovenia 2004
Canada 1949	Greece 1952	Netherlands 1949	Spain 1982
Croatia 2009	Hungary 1999	North Macedonia 2020	Sweden 2024
Czechia 1999	Iceland 1949	Norway 1949	Türkiye 1952
Denmark 1949	Italy 1949	Poland 1999	United Kingdom 1949
Estonia 2004	Latvia 2004	Portugal 1949	United States 1949

Sources: www.nato.int and www.nautilusfederation.org



Nautilus Federation coordinator Danny McGowan raised the Union's NATO report at the EU Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Maritime Transport in May 2025, which he was attending as part of the European Transport Workers' Federation delegation



The British-flagged ferry Norland, pictured in Hull in 1986. In 1982, the Norland was requisitioned by the UK government as a STUFT (ship taken up from trade) to serve as a troop ship in the Falklands war. The country had many more merchant vessels available for defence purposes than it does now

» **Enhancing data collection and analysis**

Improved data collection methods are essential to address fragmentation in ship ownership and registration. Comprehensive data will enable informed policy decisions and strategies for the maritime sector.

Strengthening NATO's maritime resilience

Contingency plans should be developed to overcome reliance on foreign-flagged ships and FOCs for military logistics and supply chains. Enhanced cooperation among member states can pool maritime resources and capabilities, ensuring readiness during crises.

A call to action

The shrinking NATO merchant fleet and declining pool of national seafarers represent a significant threat to the alliance's operational readiness and maritime security. By investing in their merchant fleets, curbing the use of FOCs, and implementing the recommendations outlined in this report, NATO member states can reverse these trends and build a secure, resilient maritime sector.

Nautilus is working to ensure this call to action is heard as widely as possible by placing the report before decision-makers at national and international levels.

For example, the findings have been reported to the European Commission, as 23 of the 27 EU countries are in the NATO alliance. The EU Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Maritime Transport was alerted to the study at its meeting in May this year, and Nautilus is working to ensure this is a full agenda item at the group's next session in October.

Copies of the report have been shared with the NATO Shipping Centre and Allied Maritime Command, based in London. NSC is the primary point of contact for the exchange of merchant shipping information between NATO's military authorities and the international shipping community.

In addition, Nautilus Federation affiliate unions based in NATO member states are sharing the report with their national administrations and contact networks. As part of this effort, Nautilus International is working to ensure the British and Dutch governments see and act on the report, as well as sharing the document with industry bodies such as the UK Chamber of Shipping and Maritime UK.

● The Nautilus/MM&P report **NATO Member States' National Merchant Fleet and Seafarers** is available for download free of charge at www.nautilusint.org/resources



Watch Helen Kelly's thought-provoking video interview with Mark Dickinson and Don Marcus on the vital contribution of the Merchant Navy to national and international defence.

You won't find a more well-informed and passionate argument anywhere for the abolition of flags of convenience!

Find the broadcast on NautilusTV at www.youtube.com/@nautilusint



OPINION

Results achieved for seafarer safety at IMO committee



Head of professional and technical
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Nutilus recently attended the 110th session of the International Maritime Organization's Maritime Safety Committee (MSC), held in London this June. It was a packed agenda – but a productive one – with developments that will be of importance to members of Nautilus Federation affiliates.

Once again, our main focus was the ongoing work on the non-mandatory code for maritime autonomous surface ships (MASS). Nautilus has taken a key role in discussions throughout, insisting that seafarer safety and the integrity of the regulatory regime for existing ships remain central as autonomy develops.

Following a marathon session of the MASS working group, the end is now in sight. The majority of the code is finalised, with adoption now expected in May 2026.

A firm decision was made that whenever there are persons onboard a MASS, the master must also be onboard – a point that Nautilus has argued strongly for throughout.

Discussions on proposals to allow a master to be in charge of multiple MASS were deferred until after adoption of the code

in May 2026 and a subsequent experience-building phase.

Attention now shifts to the next MSC meeting this autumn, where the MASS code's 'human element' chapter will be finalised. Nautilus will of course be participating fully in this final phase to ensure that the interests of seafarers are properly considered in the finished code.

Another critical development was the revised timeline for updating the STCW Convention. The initial proposal to complete the work by 2031/32 caused understandable concern. Following direct intervention from IMO secretary-general Arsenio Dominguez and the allocation of additional resources, the schedule has been brought forward to 2029/30 – a welcome step for ensuring that maritime training keeps pace with modern demands.

Equally encouraging was the Committee's agreement to prioritise work on fatigue and crewing levels. With hours of rest already flagged in the STCW review, we are hopeful that some long-overdue progress on fatigue may finally be achieved.



Abandonment: how you can help

The ITF is calling on international regulators, port states, and the International Maritime Organization to take urgent action after a surge in abandonment cases this year – and maritime professionals can help tackle the problem too

New figures released in June 2025 by the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) reveal yet another disturbing increase in the abandonment of seafarers worldwide.

Over 2,280 seafarers have been abandoned aboard 222 vessels in the first half of the year – with US\$13.1 million in unpaid wages and a 30% year-on-year increase in cases.

They have been left stranded, often without pay, food, or medical support. By comparison, at this point in 2024, already the worst year on record for seafarer abandonment, there had been 172 cases involving 1,838 seafarers and US\$11.5 million in unpaid wages.

A staggering 37% of all abandonment cases in 2025 have occurred in the Middle East and North Africa – the highest proportion of any region

globally. Thirty-four percent have taken place in Europe (the majority in Turkey, yet to ratify the Maritime Labour Convention). Nearly 75% of abandoned vessels in 2025 so far are registered under flags of convenience.

'We are seeing a pattern of abuse that cannot be ignored and that must be confronted,' said ITF inspectorate coordinator Steve Trowsdale. 'In recent years, the Gulf region, and the UAE in particular, has seen a huge increase in seafarer abandonment cases. Both there and in Europe, much more must be done to crack down on the rogue shipowners who need to know there'll be consequences.'

'Every single case of abandonment is a disgrace. It's an intentional abuse of human rights, and the failure to end abandonment exposes a systemic problem in the maritime industry.'

What is meant by abandonment?

According to IMO/ILO guidelines, abandonment is characterised by the severing of ties between shipowner and seafarer.

This occurs when the shipowner fails to fulfil fundamental obligations to the seafarer regarding timely repatriation, payment of outstanding wages, and provision of the basic necessities of life (e.g. food, accommodation, and medical care). Abandonment is considered to have taken place when the master has been left without the financial means to operate the vessel.

If you think your vessel might have been abandoned, visit itfseafarers.org/en/resources/abandoned-seafarers

What else can I do?

Keeping abandonment databases up to date is vital to tackling this growing problem.

If you suspect a ship has been abandoned, you should contact abandonment@itf.org.uk

The ITF will then log the incident in its database and report it to the International Maritime Organization.

THE MARITIME CHARITY COLUMN



Simon Grainge
Chief executive
ISWAN

Building a culture of psychological safety onboard

Safety is paramount in the maritime sector – everyone has a duty to protect those working on board from harm. If there is a threat to physical safety onboard, this is treated as a priority and an immediate response is required, but what about psychological safety? Why don't we treat this with equal importance?

Seafarers have the right to feel safe at work – not just from physical injury, but to voice their concerns, report incidents, ask for help or suggest improvements without fear of negative repercussions. In a psychologically safe environment, there is a culture of trust. Open, honest communication is encouraged and people feel safe to speak up and know they will be heard without judgement or negative consequences. There

are benefits for the overall safety culture and productivity on board, but psychological safety also affects crew wellbeing.

If a seafarer feels psychologically unsafe and unable to speak up, they can feel isolated and powerless, and their health and wellbeing might start to suffer. We regularly hear from seafarers contacting our helplines – SeafarerHelp and YachtCrewHelp – who have experienced abuse, bullying, harassment, discrimination or violence onboard or witnessed it happening to others. If seafarers feel secure, supported and respected in their workplace, not only are they more likely to report incidents of this nature, but these harmful behaviours are less likely to happen in the first place. Psychological safety



GET HELP

Nautilus 24/7
Emergency helpline for Nautilus Federation affiliates, wherever they are.
www.nautilusint.org/nautilus247

builds a culture where people feel accepted and have a sense of belonging. This helps to prevent toxic and harmful behaviours building, and any conflict can be resolved constructively before it escalates.

As we are highlighting with our **Safe at sea...it takes all of us!** campaign (bit.ly/safeatsea), everyone has a part to play in making life at sea a safer place by listening to others, challenging inappropriate behaviour and supporting each other. Further guidance can be found in our Resources section at www.iswan.org



THE MARITIME CHARITY COLUMN is a regular feature in the Nautilus Telegraph. Submissions are invited from a range of organisations by the Telegraph editor.

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