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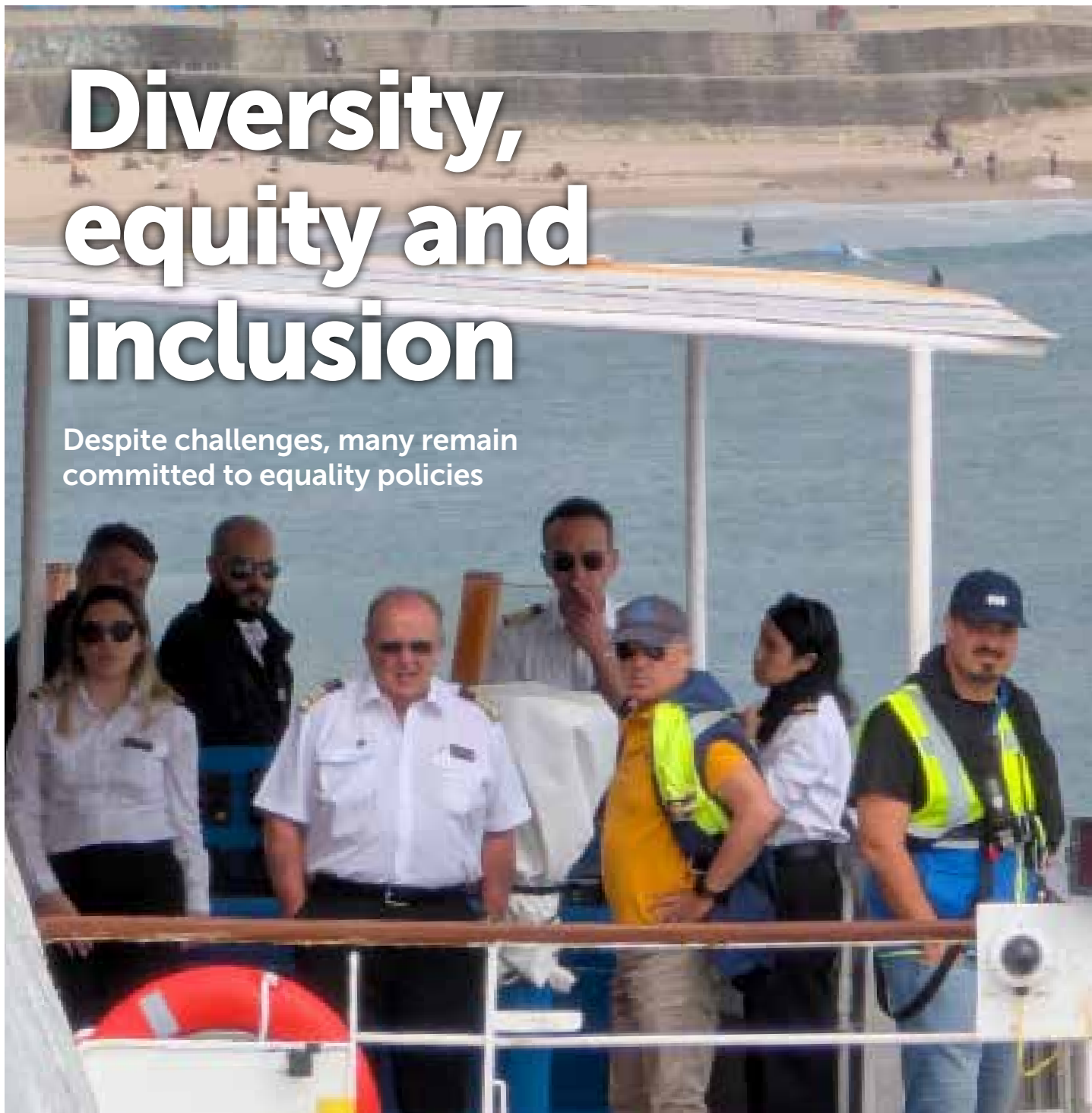
# SEAFARER

Wherever you are, so are we

Volume 10 | Issue 2

## Diversity, equity and inclusion

Despite challenges, many remain  
committed to equality policies



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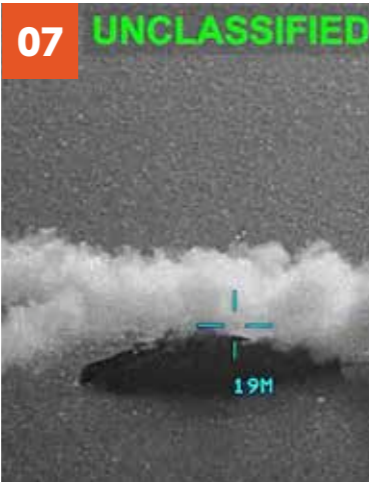
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# Time to fix flags of convenience

Nautilus Federation coordinator **Danny McGowan** says that governments must enforce and review UN conventions to control flags of convenience and therefore combat the global 'shadow fleet'



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ITF added Dominica, Gambia, and Niue to the FOC list bringing the total to 48 FOCs

Front cover credit:  
Danny McGowan/Nautilus International

**T**wo Nautilus Federation affiliates recently published a report looking at the capabilities of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members' merchant fleets and national seafarers.

Since its publication, it has been shared with multiple external agencies, including with the maritime representations of all NATO member states' embassies in London. Its content has also been discussed at European Commission meetings.

Whilst the geographical area covered by NATO is limited, the principles maintained in the report are relevant around the world, with the report quoted as an important consideration in the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) report on domestic maritime policies, which focuses on national security.

The entire report is growing in relevance in the context of a changing world order and the need for secure civilian and military supply chains. Our recommendations for the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the UN Convention on Conditions for Registration of

Ships 1986 have become even more urgent with the rapid rise of the so-called shadow fleet. UNCLOS Article 91, which requires a genuine link between a vessel and its flag state, urgently needs to be reaffirmed and enforced. Likewise, a common-sense definition of what a 'genuine link' actually means must be established, as there is no official interpretation of this.

Article 94 of the same convention, relating to the duties of a flag state, also needs to be reaffirmed and enforced in an attempt to make

months, with the interdiction of the vessel *Marinera* (ex-*Balla 1*), and the seizure of the vessel *Smyrtos*, both in waters surrounding the United Kingdom.

Merchant seafarers working onboard such vessels must receive fair treatment in all cases, but isolated actions against shadow fleet vessels will not change a system that urgently needs to be changed for the benefit of all. National governments need to act to review these UN conventions, and Nautilus is ready to support them.

## Read the report at [bit.ly/FOC\\_report](https://bit.ly/FOC_report)

shadow fleet operations more difficult.

Surprisingly – or perhaps unsurprisingly, given the prevalence of flags of convenience – the UN Convention on Conditions for Registration of Ships has not been widely ratified. A review of this convention could aid wider ratification in efforts against shadow fleet operations.

We have seen increased action against individual vessels in recent



## THE FULL-THROTTLE UNION BUILDER

Council members, colleagues and friends gathered at northwest England's Oulton Park in April to bid farewell to Mark Dickinson, who has stepped down as Nautilus International general secretary after nearly 17 years in the role. The motor racing venue was a fitting choice – Mr Dickinson raced in his earlier years and spent many more sponsoring his son Kai's career.

Mark Dickinson was one of the architects of modern Nautilus International – the only truly international trade union, operating across three countries and a leading affiliate of the International Transport Workers' Federation and European Transport Workers' Federation. He drove the creation of the Nautilus Federation (where he remains the Director), took bold decisions including a major investment in the new building programme at Mariners' Park, and has left both the Union and its welfare organisation in strong shape. After 26 years at Nautilus, his legacy has been built to last.



Mark Dickinson  
speaking at Oulton Park

# 6,180

**Number of days**  
Mark Dickinson  
served as general  
secretary  
(16 years, 11 months  
and one day)

# 2

**Deputy general  
secretaries**  
appointed by  
Mr Dickinson

# 9

**Trustee directors**  
appointed by  
Mr Dickinson

# CRISIS IN THE PERSIAN GULF

## Helping to repatriate stranded seafarers

As part of our support for members in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman, we are helping seafarers find their way home safely. **Rob Coston** reports on a whole host of measures for members in the war-torn region

**N**autilus has identified safer travel options to ensure members are not left stranded in the Persian Gulf as the security situation evolves.

'Repatriation routes have been established through Oman towards Muscat, and through Saudi Arabia, which have greater geographical distance from directly impacted areas,' Nautilus director of organising Martin Gray said.

A key area of support has been helping members understand their right to refuse to enter a war zone and to get them home safely.

### YOUR MLC RIGHTS

Under the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) seafarers have:

- an unqualified right to repatriation if a vessel is bound for a war zone without their consent (shipowners cannot request advance payment for repatriation from seafarers. If a shipowner does not make repatriation arrangements, seafarers on UK ships can be repatriated

by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency)

- protection from dismissal or penalty for refusing to sail into warlike conditions (these rights do not disappear once a vessel has entered such a designated warlike area)
- extra compensation if they agree to sail into a warlike area and are on a vessel sailing under International Bargaining Forum agreements
- a legal right to a safe working environment, including protection from extreme security risks through fatigue management, enhanced watchkeeping, mental health welfare support, regular communication with families and access to free medical care onboard or ashore
- complaint and enforcement mechanisms if those rights are breached.

We have also intervened where necessary to ensure employers meet their obligations

'We've been able to support members by having some fairly robust discussions with companies to remind them of the rights of the seafarer,' Mr Gray said.

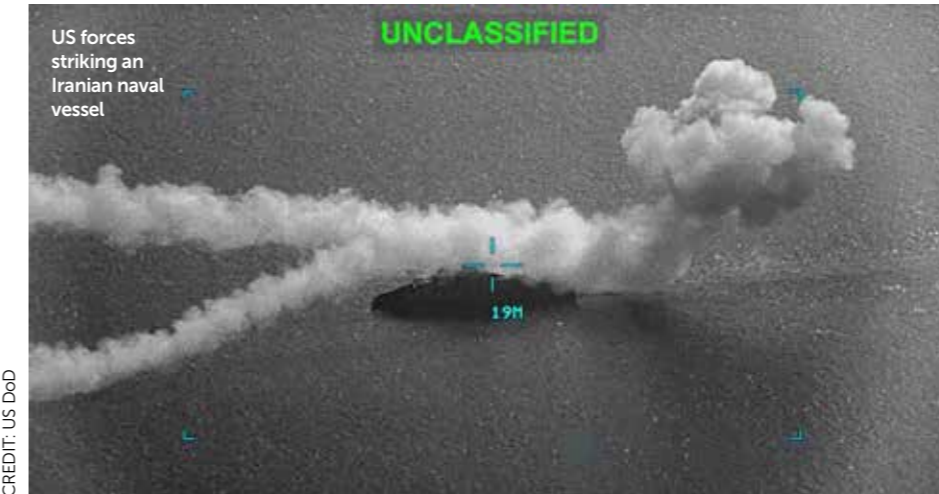
For example, flights and accommodation



**Director of organising Martyn Gray**



Vessels in the Strait of Hormuz



CREDIT: US DoD

being 'too expensive' is not a valid reason to delay or defer repatriation.'

Informed consent is critical when crews are asked to remain in high-risk areas.

'Shipowners should be proactive in seeking that defined, informed consent about people's willingness to remain,' Mr Gray continued. 'Or whether they would prefer the repatriation which they're entitled to.'

A significant number of Nautilus members are directly impacted and operating in the Gulf, some of whom have observed military operations taking place.

While estimates from international bodies suggest around 20,000 seafarers are directly affected, Mr Gray warned the true figure could be far higher.

'It is possible that somewhere in the region of 30,000 maritime professionals across a variety of different sectors which are not being counted are directly being impacted,' he said. 'And we are supporting them as best as we are able.'

'Primarily, what we've seen is a lot of concern for safety. We took very immediate steps to understand the security risks and have been exchanging information with members on a regular basis as that picture changes.'

'There has been a lot of contractual enquiries. Members are looking at agreements and asking why protections aren't being applied to them.'

### SUPERYACHT CREW

Members from a wide range of sectors have been affected by the crisis. However, there

have been different challenges for those in the superyacht sector, where protections can be inconsistent.

'We've got a number of members starting to highlight challenges around supplies of food and water, and fuel, and not being kept informed of the security risks,' Mr Gray said. 'There are very expensive yachts in the region being crewed by very scared seafarers who are not getting the level of information that they would expect.'

Mr Gray also pointed to gaps in oversight and regulation affecting these workers.

'Private yachts are largely unregulated,' he said. 'That means that crew are at the whim of the owner and operators in being able to get home or secure additional compensation relevant to the risk.'

### THE IMPACT OF UNCERTAINTY

Even seafarers far from the conflict zone are feeling the effects, particularly through disruption to global air travel. Airspace restrictions and rerouted flights have created delays, increased costs, and logistical complications for crews travelling to and from vessels.

'Aircraft are being forced further south, with longer durations and different routes that don't normally operate at that volume,' Mr Gray explained. 'Seafarers are having to take quite circuitous routes via South Africa or North America to get home.'

**T.**

If you are affected by the situation in the Strait of Hormuz, please contact your trade union for advice and assistance.

In an emergency, get in touch immediately via [nautilusint.org/nautilus247](http://nautilusint.org/nautilus247)

This has led to growing uncertainty among members about future voyages, with some concerned that renewed air travel via the region could leave them trapped there if the war becomes even more intense.

'There's a lot of concern about whether a temporary lull in hostilities is a move towards resolution, or whether there will be a renewed escalation,' Mr Gray said. 'That uncertainty is not something maritime professionals enjoy having to deal with.'

Nautilus continues to monitor the situation closely and provide direct support to members.

'The key piece of advice is: know your rights and how they apply to you,' Mr Gray stressed. He also noted that seafarers should be aware of how the conflict could affect the chances of a payout on life insurance.

'If you are not covered appropriately, there are seafarers who could be facing devastating consequences for their families if the worst was to happen,' he added.

'The most important thing, though, is to understand your contract, and if you don't understand it, contact us so that we can help explain it and enforce your rights.'

'Don't feel pressured to go into the conflict zone. Don't feel pressured to remain onboard longer than you need to, and don't feel pressured to accept worsening terms and conditions.'

CREDIT: Wikimedia Commons

# BLACK SEA ATTACK CONDEMNED

**N**autilus joined the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) in denouncing a November 2025 attack on merchant shipping in the Black Sea by the Ukrainian armed forces – warning that civilian seafarers must never be treated as targets and that their safety and rights must be protected at all times.

Reports suggest that a tanker transiting Ukraine's exclusive economic zone on a voyage to Novorossiysk was struck and disabled by Ukrainian sea drones. At least two other vessels identified as part of Russia's so-called shadow fleet were attacked by Ukraine in the weeks leading up to the incident.

Nautilus Federation director Mark Dickinson is also vice chair of the ITF Seafarers' Section. In a statement issued by the ITF, he said: 'Seafarers are not a weapon of war. They are civilians simply doing their jobs, often in extremely difficult and precarious conditions.'

'Under the Flag of Convenience system – where shipowners register vessels in countries without a genuine link and therefore weak oversight – many seafarers are recruited from nations where decent job opportunities are scarce. That leaves them with little real power to refuse dangerous voyages, and

often without clear information about where a ship is bound or the risks involved.

'Regardless of the flag a vessel flies, the cargo it carries, or the politics surrounding a conflict, targeting seafarers or placing them in harm's way is completely unacceptable.'

Since the start of the Russia–Ukraine war, the Black Sea has become an increasingly dangerous operating environment, with merchant seafarers facing persistent threats from mines, drones and missile strikes.

The ITF reiterated calls for all parties to uphold international humanitarian and maritime law, de-escalate tensions and take all necessary steps to safeguard civilian seafarers. It continues to monitor the situation closely and stands ready to support any seafarers affected.

'Many of these seafarers are already working at the sharp end of an industry that too often fails them,' Mr Dickinson added. 'Seafarers keep global trade moving, even during times of war and crisis. They must not be treated as expendable or as collateral damage. Nautilus and the ITF condemn any attack that harms or endangers seafarers anywhere in the world, and we will continue to speak out until their safety is fully respected.'

Ukraine has used sea drones in a number of attacks on Russian naval vessels, as well as the bridge over the Kerch Strait





CREDIT: Nautilus International

## Taking your voices to the heart of Europe's skills debate

**W**hen Europe's maritime industry gathered in Brussels

to thrash out the future of seafaring, Nautilus International made sure it was your concerns leading the conversation.

Unions, shipowners, training bodies and European Commission officials came together on 31 March for the European Maritime Skills Forum (EMSF) — and Nautilus general secretary Sascha Meijer was right at the centre of it. Representing the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF), she opened the forum and closed the plenary session, with one message running throughout.

She said: 'Getting through this transition means working together, being honest, and sharing the load. It's about people, not just technology.'

With the industry changing fast — new fuels, new tech, new ways of working — the question remains of how to prepare the maritime workforce without leaving seafarers behind.

Futureproofing maritime skills isn't just about green innovation or digital tools. It's about the people doing the job, Ms Meijer said. 'We can only futureproof maritime skills through genuine cooperation across our industry,' she told delegates — stressing that attracting new talent, keeping Europe's fleet independent, and maintaining

**Nautilus general secretary Sascha Meijer with Council deputy vice chair Captain Henk Eijkenaar, centre, and Nautilus Federation coordinator Danny McGowan in Brussels**

safety all depend on the industry pulling in the same direction.

She also made the case for why trade unions matter in all of this, pointing out that the union movement remains the strongest channel for bringing seafarers' real, day-to-day experiences into the policy rooms where decisions get made.

The EMSF — launched in early 2025 by the ETF and the European Community Shipowners' Association — focuses on three areas: green skills, digital transformation, and leadership and workplace culture. Nautilus is actively involved in two of them, with head of international relations Danny McGowan contributing to the digital workstream and Council member Henk Eijkenaar supporting the leadership and culture work.

Ms Meijer welcomed the work done so far but didn't shy away from the challenges still ahead. Green and digital training gaps are already creating real operational safety risks, and a shortage of qualified trainers is slowing the decarbonisation transition. She called on the sector to get better at sharing best practice and to rethink what good employment looks like in 2026.

She made the case for rethinking how seafarers work altogether — with more flexible labour models that support a better work-life balance and open the door to a more diverse workforce. 'Think lifecycle contracts where time aboard, ashore, short sea and deep sea can flex across a career,' she said. 'Better for retention, better for recruitment, and better for the long-term health of Europe's fleet.'

'The momentum is there — now it's time to turn it into action.'

## Swiss flag revival must focus on seafarers' rights

**A** new pilot project in Switzerland is underway, aimed at revitalising the Swiss flag, marking a rare moment of optimism for Switzerland's deep sea shipping sector and the seafarers who keep it moving.

After the Swiss parliament rejected the introduction of a tonnage tax in 2024 — dealing a blow to hopes of reversing the decline of the Swiss fleet — attention has shifted to practical reforms that could make the flag more competitive from 2025 onwards. Momentum has been driven by the Department of Economic Affairs under its new head, Helene Budliger Artieda, a strong supporter of the maritime industry.

At the same time, the Swiss Maritime Navigation Office (SMNO),

which administers the Swiss flag, has undergone reorganisation. Registration processes and related services are being modernised and digitised, with the aim of matching the efficiency offered by leading international registries.

Outdated maritime legislation is also being revised. Longstanding restrictions on ownership structures, capital requirements, foreign financing and bareboat chartering are being relaxed to reflect global industry norms.

By the end of 2026, a pilot project will see three to four new vessels added to the current 11 registered under the Swiss flag, creating a template for future growth. Three

Swiss shipping companies, previously operating under flags of convenience, have already committed to the project and to joining the Swiss Maritime Cluster — a collaborative forum coordinated and moderated by the SMNO that brings together key stakeholders involved in Swiss maritime activity.

Working through SMNO and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs — the Swiss federal government's centre of expertise on economic policy — Nautilus is advising the Cluster on social security and employment conditions, ensuring that seafarers' rights sit at the heart of Switzerland's renewed maritime ambition.

## Hormuz exit for US-flagged vessel

A vessel crewed by deck officers from Nautilus Federation-affiliated union the International Organization of Masters, Mates and Pilots (MM&P) and engineer officers from affiliate the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association (MEBA) has become one of the two first US-flagged vessels to exit the Persian Gulf since the start of the conflict there.

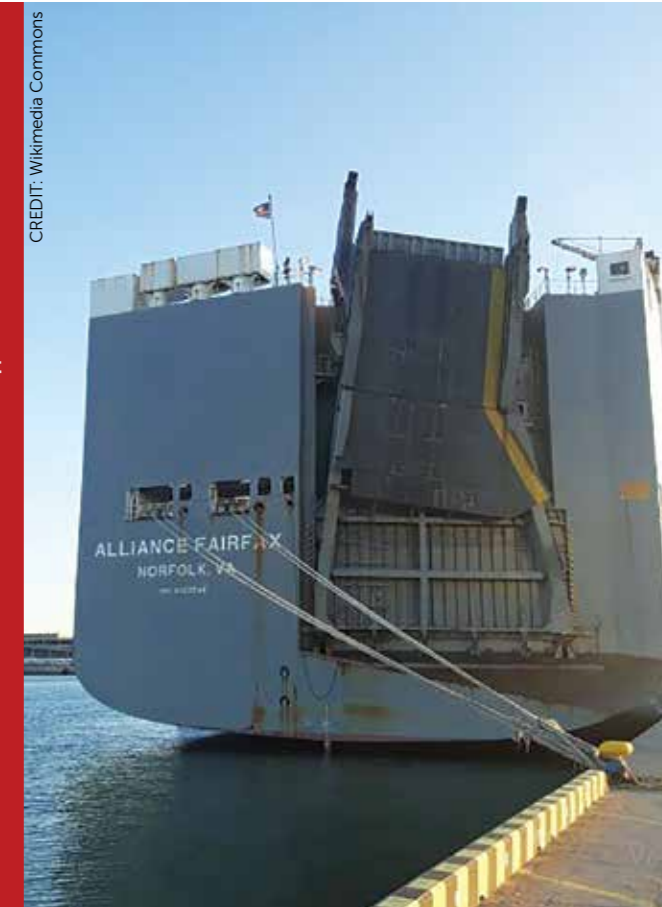
The officers form part of the crew of the vehicle carrier Alliance Fairfax, which transited the Strait of Hormuz accompanied by US military assets on 5 May. The transit was completed safely and without incident. In the wheelhouse were Captain Brian Mercurio, chief mate Ernie Caponegro, second mate Omalika Lipp and third mate Steven Humbert.

'I'm extremely proud of

our members,' said MM&P president Don Josberger. 'Once again, MM&P members have demonstrated exemplary levels of leadership, bravery and professionalism in the finest tradition of the American Merchant Marine.'

In a statement, Maersk Line congratulated the crew and thanked the US military for planning and executing the operation.

About a fifth of the world's trade in oil, natural gas and fertilizer passed through the strait before it was effectively closed by Iran, which is demanding tolls in exchange for passage. The US, meanwhile, has enforced a naval blockade on Iranian ports, ordering some ships away and warning shipping companies that they could face sanctions if they pay Iran for passage.



CREDIT: Wikimedia Commons

# Why DEI isn't a dirty word in maritime

Despite the backlash against diversity, equity and inclusion in some parts of the world, many maritime employers remain committed to DEI policies. It's all about improving life onboard and creating a strong safety culture where people aren't afraid to speak up, as **Sarah Robinson** discovers

**D**SG is a maritime consultancy that helps employers develop diversity and inclusion policies for their employees. Business is apparently brisk, and clients are strongly encouraged to use their policies to make a genuine difference to their employees' lives.

To find out how that's going, the consultancy runs an annual survey of shorebased and seagoing staff in its member companies, which is published in a report called **The DEI**

## in Maritime Review.

This time, the seagoing part of the survey attracted responses from an impressive 6,000 seafarers from all ranks and roles, and from several different countries. They had some powerful points to make about their experiences of discrimination at work, and also came up with ideas about what they wanted their employers to do.

We spoke to Richard Young and Heidi Heseltine of DSG about the latest survey, and we also have a

summary of the research findings overleaf.

**Sarah Robinson (SR):** Richard, what struck you the most about what the seafarers had to say this year, and was there anything different from previous years?

**Richard Young (RY):** It's important to stress that overall, this is a relatively positive view of life at sea. I think a lot of people do feel that they have a sense of belonging onboard. There is a genuine sense that where policies are in place, they're trusted, and they have a positive effect on seafarers while they're at work.

In a way, we'd expect to hear that, because DSG member companies have already made a commitment to diversity and inclusion policies.

And yet, about one in five of our respondents from these companies still say they've experienced some kind of psychological harassment, and that could be bullying or lack of a supportive environment. So there is still work to do.

Sexual harassment is also an interesting issue. If you look at the change in our data year on year, what we're seeing is more female seafarers saying that they feel safer and can speak up. That's positive, but at the same time, 23% of the female respondents did say that they've experienced some form of sexual harassment.

About 64% of the people who have experienced some kind of sexual harassment are male, though, and it's really important that we don't lose sight of that. This is one of the big lessons that we've

drawn out of this year's survey: diversity and inclusion is really about everybody feeling safe. It's not just about picking individual characteristics and saying we need to cater to these people better.

**SR:** Your survey comes at a time when DEI has become almost a dirty word in certain parts of the world. Heidi, are you still seeing the same kind of commitment to DEI policies in maritime as you did a few years ago?

**Heidi Heseltine (HH):** We're actually seeing an even greater commitment, I think. You can't ignore the fact that there has been pushback around the world when it comes to DEI, but it's been very localised.

The Trump administration has had a massive impact within America, and particularly on those who are serving the federal government, so companies that have an American footprint are having to adapt. But for example, when we're in Asia, the feedback is 'we know what's going on, but it's not changing what we're doing'.

The trend now is to lead with inclusion, so it's around ensuring we have an inclusive working culture onboard and encouraging best practice.



CREDIT: Danny Cornelissen

**SR:** It's certainly noticeable from the strong response to the survey that many seafarers hope DEI policies will improve their working lives. Richard, how do the survey participants want their companies to tackle issues like sexual harassment or prejudice against particular nationalities?

**RY:** At the most basic level, crew members want to be sure that their

company's policies are properly enforced, so reporting someone for harassment or discrimination will be treated seriously.

They also want DEI training and awareness in their company. Interestingly, our analysis showed that you're much more likely to say you're comfortable speaking up onboard about safety issues if you've had DEI training than if you haven't, and I think that's one of the indications that this stuff can be really effective.

Seafarers also want to see changes to the kind of onboard culture where people are seen through a lens of nationality, ethnicity or even language. We get a lot of comments from people saying they feel excluded from life onboard and even from critical decision-making processes because they have a different language or because they come from a different nationality. It's something to think about for all crew members, particularly for those who are higher up in the onboard hierarchy.



Watch Sarah Robinson's video interview with Heidi Heseltine and Richard Young on NautilusTV at [www.youtube.com/@nautilusint](http://www.youtube.com/@nautilusint)



CREDIT: Danny Cornelissen



CREDIT: Getty Images

► **SR: So Heidi, what would DSG recommend? What works in successful companies to improve life for everyone onboard?**

**HH:** Your starting point is around creating fairness for everyone, but also a culture where everyone can speak up and where everyone feels included. What you're doing there is you're setting the baseline of what it means to work in this organisation.

You're setting expectations and you need to be very clear about expected behaviours, what's acceptable and what's not – what does good look like?

And I think being very strategic and joined up with it is hugely important. Ad hoc initiatives and one-offs simply don't work, and people want training in person, not just computer-based, because, again, it doesn't have that long-lasting impact.

You also need to have accountability and measure the impact of initiatives – and don't forget to acknowledge where things are working well.

**T.**

To request a free copy of the DEI in Maritime Review 2025, go to [www.diversitystudygroup.com/publications](http://www.diversitystudygroup.com/publications)



CREDIT: Damny Cornelissen

## Giving seafarers a voice on DEI

It's time to take a closer look at the findings of the latest diversity, equity and inclusion research. **Deborah McPherson** delves into the details

The sixth edition of the **DEI in Maritime Review** is its most comprehensive yet, with almost double the previous year's seafarer responses and two-thirds of participants providing detailed feedback. This level of engagement is rare for any industry survey, especially among multinational crews working long hours in safety-critical environments. It signals something important: seafarers want their voices heard.

This year's sample was again dominated by seafarers from India, the Philippines and Malaysia, with Ukrainians rising to over 5% of the total. These perspectives underline that maritime DEI is a global challenge, not just a Western corporate priority.

### Encouraging signals

Despite political hostility toward DEI in some regions, participation rose sharply both ashore and at sea, showing people remain invested in improving working cultures. Among seafarers, the results are encouraging:

- **93%** feel able to 'be myself at work'
- **88%** believe it is safe to speak up

Both scores improved slightly from the previous year and cut across age, rank and nationality. While disparities persist – especially for women and LGBT+ seafarers – the overall picture is of a workforce valuing inclusion as essential to safe, functioning ships.

### Discrimination: still an uncomfortable truth

Beneath these positives lies a harsh reality: discrimination and harassment remain embedded on some vessels:

- **38% of women** report psychological harassment
- **almost one in four women** report sexual harassment
- **33% of LGBT+ seafarers** report harassment
- **17% of men** report bullying

Nationality-based discrimination is most common. Across nearly 4,000 narrative responses, recurring themes include:

- exclusion from friendship groups or information flows
- 'in-group' preference in work allocation
- inconsistent discipline across nationalities
- use of shared native language to exclude others
- frustration over 'same job, different pay'

Women remain a tiny minority onboard (2.7%) yet face disproportionate negative experiences. LGBT+ seafarers – fewer than 2% of respondents – are also more likely to report feeling unsafe and unable to speak up when something goes wrong.

Bullying and intimidation often intersect with rank. Typical comments describe favouritism in training or promotion, withheld overtime or shore leave, threats to employment and abusive 'tiger-type leadership'. In a closed shipboard environment, this can escalate quickly with serious consequences.

### What seafarers want employers to do

The report's most striking contribution comes from almost 4,000 free-text comments. Seafarers ask companies for:

*'Effective action regardless of the status/rank/seniority of the person being complained about'*

*'A clear and transparent system that ensures equal opportunities for shore leave and rest would support fairness and wellbeing'*



CREDIT: IMO Flickr

*'Regular sessions on how to treat each other respectfully from different countries; not just e-learning'*

The report distils these responses into five practical demands:

1. Real, scenario-based DEI training
2. Zero tolerance for harassment
3. Fairer systems for pay, promotion and work allocation
4. Better reporting systems – confidential, safe and enforced
5. Improved communication and language support

### Staying the course

The large response base offers insights across fleets. Older seafarers report the highest levels of confidence and belonging. For the first time, the experiences of Black seafarers are also highlighted; their sentiment largely matches the wider population, though with slightly lower confidence in speaking up. Encouragingly, however, while the proportion of female seafarers remains low, female cadets now make up 12.4% of all cadets, signalling promising change.

Many seafarers link inclusive culture directly to safety: crews that trust each other communicate better and operate more effectively.

At a time when parts of the world question DEI's value, the message from those at sea is unequivocal. Inclusion isn't political; it's practical. And it works.

# Maritime education: working for members behind the scenes

Did you know your Nautilus membership gives you a say in what seafarers learn at college – and even in how training is funded?

In our special report this issue, we're going to give an update on the review of global training standards at the International Maritime Organization, where your Union representatives have been making sure members' views are in the mix

We're also going to look at how Nautilus influences who pays for maritime training in the UK and Netherlands, and whether reforms could lead to improved recruitment and retention of seafarers



The IMO sub-committee on Human Element, Training and Watchkeeping in February 2026, where we took members' concerns to the review of STCW training standards

# TALES FROM THE INTERNATIONAL TRAINING REVIEW

Yes, it can be dry, and yes, it can be bureaucratic, but it matters. We are closely involved in the latest overhaul of STCW seafarer training standards, and there's a lot that members should be aware of, writes **Sarah Robinson**

**A**s new technology is introduced and societal attitudes change, seafarer training can't stand still. But, as with so many things in the global shipping industry, it's a massive project to agree international standards for maritime education – one

that takes years of discussion at the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

The good news for members is that we can take their views straight to the decision-makers at the IMO, which is the only United Nations agency based in London. Whenever training standards are reviewed, there are delegations to the IMO from flag states such as the UK and Netherlands, but also representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

That's where we come in: we speak as part of the International Federation of Shipmasters' Associations (IFSMA) or the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF). Nautilus head of professional and technical David Appleton was the voice of the Union at the IMO meetings in February and March, and he has now reported back on the issues members most wanted to hear about.

## HOW DOES THE REVIEW OF TRAINING STANDARDS WORK?

All seafarers around the world must hold certain certificates to work at sea, and that means passing qualifications that adhere to the IMO Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) Convention

and Code. Adopted by the IMO in 1978, STCW has been periodically reviewed and amended, and at present there is a major review underway which is expected to conclude in 2029 or 2030.

'The review falls under the IMO Human Element, Training and Watchkeeping Subcommittee (HTW),' Mr Appleton explains. 'Interested parties submit amendments, which are then discussed, accepted, or rejected. But this isn't a typical amendment cycle – it's a full-scale review of the entire convention.'

Before formal proposals were considered, the process began

introduce new safety challenges.

For us, this is about fighting for seafarers' rights to a 'Just Transition' – the principle that no one should be put in harm's way or find themselves out of a job as the industry moves away from traditional fossil fuels.

The secretary-general was right to highlight the need for new training standards, says Mr Appleton, but unfortunately those were never going to emerge from this session of HTW. 'You can't define training standards until you fully understand the risks, and the IMO is still in the process of conducting a comprehensive safety analysis of these

## 'The STCW change to simulator use shouldn't be about cutting sea time – it should be about increasing competence'

Nautilus head of professional and technical **David Appleton**

with identifying gaps. Stakeholders assessed where the current STCW framework falls short, whether due to outdated provisions or emerging industry needs. That gap analysis now underpins the current phase, where specific proposals aim to close those gaps and modernise the STCW Convention and Code.

## KEEPING SEAFARERS EMPLOYED AND SAFE AS NEW FUELS ARRIVE

In his opening remarks at February's HTW meetings, IMO secretary-general Arsenio Dominguez emphasised the need to prepare seafarers for working with new maritime fuels such as hydrogen and ammonia. These developments are central to decarbonisation efforts, but they also

fuels. The findings will inform guidelines on risk mitigation, which will in turn shape future training requirements.'

In the meantime, interim guidance is in place to bridge the gap, and the development of long-term, standardised training for alternative fuels will come later in the review process. 'Nothing is agreed until everything's agreed,' Mr Appleton notes, 'so everything that comes out of this year's discussions will feed into the ongoing STCW review that will culminate in one major set of changes in 2029 or 2030.'

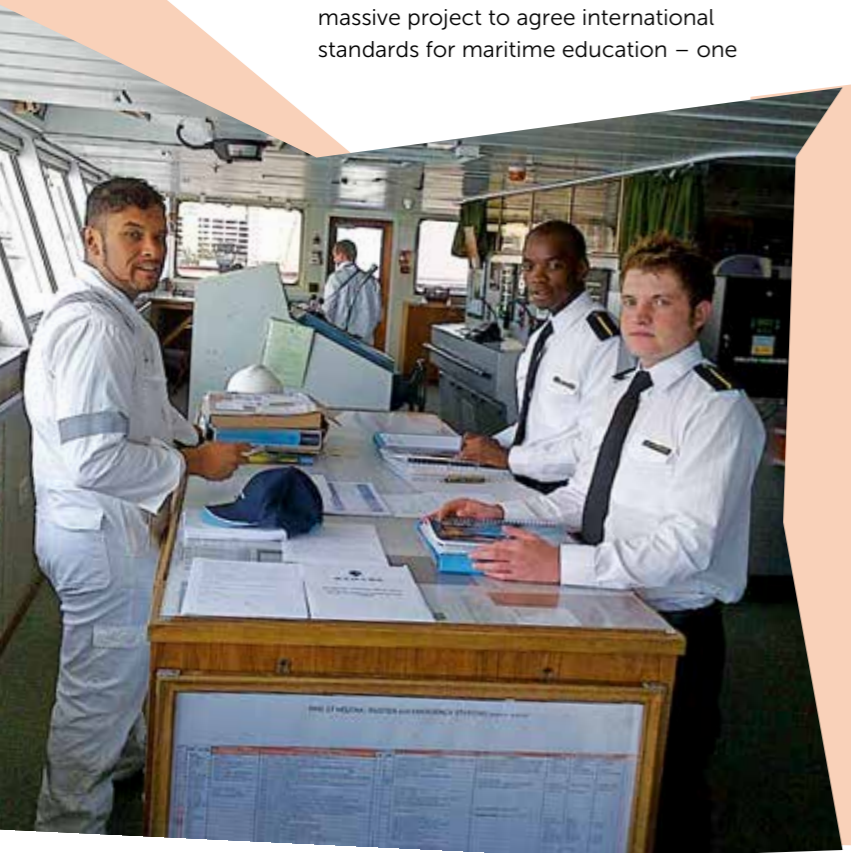
## SHOULD SIMULATORS BE USED INSTEAD OF SEA TIME?

This is a highly contentious topic that has often been raised by Union members at the Nautilus Professional

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Pictured throughout: Our behind-the-scenes work on standard-setting and educational funding benefits cadets in the Netherlands, the UK and all around the world



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Watch Sarah Robinson's video interview with David Appleton about the STCW review on NautilusTV at [www.youtube.com/@nautilusint](https://www.youtube.com/@nautilusint)

Pictured throughout: Our behind-the-scenes work on standard-setting and educational funding benefits cadets in the Netherlands, the UK and all around the world



and Technical Forum. Advances in simulation technology have opened up new possibilities for learning, prompting debate over whether simulator time can partially replace mandatory sea service for trainees.

Mr Appleton is clear about the principle that should guide this discussion. 'It shouldn't be about cutting sea time – it should be about increasing competence,' he argues. In other words, simulators could provide an experience that trainees may not get in a routine sea phase, such as exposure to handling a vessel in extreme weather conditions. But

the technology should not be used as 'sea time' simply because it can be hard to find training berths for cadets onboard ships.

The focus must first be on defining what high-quality simulator training looks like. Only then can regulators assess whether it justifies any reduction in time spent at sea.

The UK national delegation put forward a proposal to the STCW review that reflects this approach. It includes strict requirements for standardised training courses, consistent competency benchmarks, and high-specification 'full mission' simulators. It also suggests limits on

how much simulator time can count toward sea service.

Frustratingly, though, these points were not fully debated at HTW. 'There was swift agreement on the principle that sea time could be cut, and then the debate focused on the amount that should be cut,' Mr Appleton says. 'We felt that was putting the cart before the horse.'

However, with no final decisions to be taken until at least 2029, there is still time to influence the process.

### TACKLING SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT SEA

In an unexpectedly decisive move, delegates at this HTW session agreed in principle that seafarers should receive training on preventing and responding to sexual harassment and sexual assault. 'This is going to be in the text of the STCW Convention and Code itself, not just in an amendment,' Mr Appleton points out.

Now the work needs to be done on deciding what seafarers should be taught on this matter, and when. It's one thing to add competencies for new entrants to the profession, but quite another to make sure experienced seafarers are also covered.

### SENIOR ETO ENDORSEMENT

Despite our best efforts, there was one significant disappointment, reports Mr Appleton. 'There was a proposal for an international Senior ETO endorsement, which is something Nautilus has argued for strongly over the years. We've

supported proposals in the UK to have a UK-only Senior ETO endorsement, but unfortunately, there wasn't any support for that internationally. So that's essentially dead in the water; it will not be moving forward.'

### NEXT STEPS FOR STCW

The current phase of the review has focused on Chapters 2 and 3 of the STCW Convention, covering deck and engine departments. These sections alone have generated more than 160 proposals from flag states and NGOs – far more than could be fully addressed in a single session.

As a result, discussions will continue at future meetings, before moving on to other chapters of the convention. The process is necessarily slow and meticulous, reflecting both the technical complexity of the subject matter and the need for global consensus.

'It's a very long-winded process,' Mr Appleton acknowledges. 'But as participants become more familiar with it, we expect things to speed up.'

For seafarers and other maritime professionals, the stakes are high. The outcome of the STCW review will shape training standards for decades to come, influencing not only individual careers but also the safety, efficiency, and sustainability of the global shipping industry. That's why Nautilus will continue to engage closely with the review and make sure our members' expert opinions are listened to and acted upon.



UK-based  
Nautilus/ITF  
inspectors  
Matthew  
Parsonage  
and Helen  
Meldrum



CREDIT: Nautilus International

## How the ITF's FOC campaign supports seafarers

The long-running ITF's Flag of Convenience campaign exposes and seeks to regulate ships registered under lax foreign flags to protect seafarers' rights, ensure safety, and promote fair, properly regulated maritime work

**T**he International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) has long campaigned against the use of so-called flags of convenience (FOCs) – a practice in which shipowners register vessels in foreign countries with lax regulations, low taxes, and minimal labour standards. The ITF's Flag of Convenience Campaign is a global effort to protect seafarers from exploitation and ensure that maritime work remains safe, fair, and properly regulated.

FOC vessels are often registered in countries with weak labour laws, allowing shipowners to cut costs by paying lower wages, skirting safety regulations, and employing crews on insecure or short-term contracts. While

this may reduce operating expenses, it creates serious risks for seafarers, including unsafe working conditions, lack of proper insurance, and limited recourse if rights are violated.

### How the ITF helps

Through its campaign, the ITF works to identify FOC ships and secure justice for workers aboard them through the work of its dedicated ITF inspectors – several of whom are co-employed by Nautilus International in the UK.

Inspectors in ports worldwide check vessels for compliance with international labour standards, including the Maritime Labour Convention, and support crews facing harassment, unsafe conditions, or contractual violations. The ITF also pushes

governments and international bodies to strengthen maritime regulations and enforce responsible shipping practices.

### Get in touch with an ITF inspector

If you are working onboard an FOC vessel you can find your closest inspector by visiting the ITF Seafarers website at [itfseafarers.org](http://itfseafarers.org), looking up their details in the ITF Seafarers' Bulletin magazine, or downloading the ITF Seafarers app from the Google Play or Apple store.

Members of Nautilus Federation affiliates should get in touch with their own union first. Outside of office hours or in an emergency, contact Nautilus 24/7 online.



UK-based  
Nautilus/ITF  
inspector  
Elinor Cheason

CREDIT: Nautilus International

## Three new countries added to FOC list

In November 2025, the ITF added Dominica, Gambia, and Niue to the FOC list, bringing it to a total of 48 FOC flags.

**Gambia** went from having zero tankers in 2023 to more than 35 by early 2025. The registry is strongly associated with the 'dark fleet'. Research showed that 99% of its tankers were under sanctions or believed to be carrying sanctioned commodities, although Gambia now claims to be vetting the registry.

**Niue's** registry opened in 2012, but as of 2025 ITF data shows that where ownership of its 59 vessels can be confirmed it is spread across Asian states including Singapore (16), Malaysia (2), Japan (2), Indonesia (7), India (1), Hong Kong (1) and Thailand (1), in addition to the Netherlands (1).

**Dominica:** of the registry's 43 ships, 30 have ownership in the UAE (7), India (7), Kazakhstan (3), Saudi Arabia (2), USA (2), Barbados (2) and Norway (2), in addition to Australia (1), Cyprus (1), Finland (1), Great Britain (1) and Guinea-Conakry (1).



Watch recent interviews with ITF inspectors Matt Parsonage, Elinor Cheason and Helen Meldrum on NautilusTV at [youtube.com/nautilusint](https://youtube.com/nautilusint)

## Nautilus/ITF inspectors recover over a million dollars for seafarers

Over the past year, inspectors seconded from Nautilus to the ITF have helped recover almost US\$1.2 million in unpaid wages and overtime for seafarers. This comes from their everyday work visiting ships in ports across their patches in northwest England, north Wales, south Wales and southwest England, as well as clawbacks they have achieved by stepping in to support abandoned crews in ports around the world where no ITF inspector is currently based.

the global  
**SEAFARER**



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