



A Nautilus Federation message to our maritime professionals

We all know how the shipping industry has been affected by the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, but seafarers have been the most immediately and urgently impacted through the lack of crew changes. Seafarers feel let down and abandoned by their governments.

Trade unions, such as those affiliates of the Nautilus Federation, in support of the work of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), have been highlighting the plight of seafarers and working with employers and governments nationally to achieve a number of successes such as securing key worker status.

We all know, however, that there are many more seafarers still onboard vessels around the world, waiting to hear about their return home. There are others at home, eager to return to work in order to feed their families. Despite some joint industry successes – such as the publication of IMO protocols for crew changes - there is a lot left to be done.

In some cases, seafarers have felt the need to take part in hunger strikes¹ to draw attention to their plight. In other cases, seafarers have sadly taken their own lives² due to the pressures they have faced during this time. We extend our sympathies and support to them and their loved ones. This is a crisis and it has the potential to impact heavily on the safety of life at sea and protection of the marine environment.

Many senior officers onboard vessels, including shipmasters, share the responsibility of their employers for the safety and welfare of the maritime professionals onboard their vessels and for the protection of the marine environment.

To those senior officers – our members - we say your union has your back. If you feel it is necessary to take measures for the health, safety and welfare of your crew, we will support you in exercising your professional judgement in compliance with the widely ratified international standards.

Governments and Shipowners worldwide need to know that we will do whatever it takes to ensure that our members are afforded protections against fatigue, caused by long working hours and extended tours of duty, as enshrined in the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping 1978 and the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (as amended).

¹ <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/business/tourism-cruises/article242638061.html>

² <https://www.cruiselawnews.com/2020/05/articles/disease/crew-member-dies-on-virgin-voyages-lady-scarlet/>



Furthermore, our unions will extend support to their members who, in exercising any decision which, in their professional judgement, is necessary for safety of life at sea and protection of the marine environment, as set out in the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, 1974 in compliance with Regulation 34-1 as follows:-

“The owner, the charterer, the company operating the ship as defined in regulation IX/1, or any other person shall not prevent or restrict the master of the ship from taking or executing any decision which, in the master’s professional judgement, is necessary for the safety of life at sea and the protection of the marine environment”

Furthermore, the International Safety Management (ISM) code states that the Company should ensure that the Safety Management System (SMS) operating on board the ship contains a clear statement emphasising the master's authority. The Company should establish in the SMS that the master has the overriding authority and the responsibility to make decisions with respect to safety and pollution prevention and to request the Company's assistance as may be necessary.

We are therefore concerned that there may be the potential for unwarranted criminalisation of seafarers if an incident takes place in which the tiredness and mental health of their crew are subsequently found to have undermined the safe operation of their vessel.

We welcome the fact that many countries are now starting to ease lockdowns. The industry protocols for safe crew changes supported by the IMO are starting to make a difference. But crew changes are not happening quickly enough. Governments need to understand that the time is now – they must be focussed on actions to ensure that our maritime professionals at sea and ashore are able to get home and those stuck at home can get back to work.

The undersigned unions demand that governments, shipowners and employers implement crew changes now. Doing nothing is not an option.

The undersigned trade unions, affiliates of the Nautilus Federation and all proud affiliates of (or recognised by) the ITF, stand ready to work with anyone seeking to get our members home or back to work.

27 May 2020

NAUTILUS FEDERATION

A Federation of Maritime Professionals

Supported by:-

