

the global

SEAFARER

Wherever you are, so are we

Volume 9 | Issue 1



THE MASTER OF COMMUNICATION

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Published by
Nautilus International
on behalf of



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nautilusfederation.org

Incorporating the Merchant
Navy Journal and Ships'
Telegraph.
ISSN 0040 2575

Nautilus International also
administers the Nautilus Welfare
Fund and the J W Slater Fund,
which are registered charities.

Published by
Nautilus International

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Front cover image & credit:
Captain Mark Maguire

OPINION

A key moment for our international work



Nautilus Federation coordinator
Danny McGowan
dmcgowan@nautilusint.org

We often hear about 'COP,' but what does it actually mean? COP stands for the Conference

of the Parties and often refers to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Late in 2024, COP 29 took place in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Those of you who followed the outcomes will have seen that a new climate finance goal was agreed, through which developing countries will see their financing increased from US\$100 billion annually to US\$300 billion annually by 2035, in the form of grants and low-interest loans. The new goal also secured efforts to scale up financing from public and private sources to US\$1.3 trillion per year.

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) was present at the most recent COP summit, supported by affiliates including Brazilian maritime affiliate CONTTMAF – Brazil is the host of COP30, which will take place in 2025.

The involvement of maritime unions – including Nautilus – in environmental matters is essential. Our industry is leading the global charge to reduce our impact on the environment, and through the Nautilus Federation's **Mapping Our Maritime Future** report, we are highlighting the necessity for the transition to net zero



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To read **Mapping Our Maritime Future**, go to the Resources section of the Nautilus Federation website www.nautilusfederation.org

shipping to be fair – in other words, a Just Transition.

I recently presented this report to representatives of the European Community Shipowners' Associations and the European Commission, ensuring that both organisations are aware of the Federation's work in this area. At present there is no other international research that enables us to authoritatively insert the seafarer's voice into this work.

Under the Paris Agreement, achieved at COP 21 in 2015, the parties to the agreement are required to submit Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to tackle climate change. Of the submitted NDCs, two-thirds do not reference a Just Transition, and while 20% refer to transport workers, maritime is generally overlooked.

It is essential, therefore, that Nautilus continues to use the outcomes of the **Mapping Our Maritime Future** report to ensure that no-one is left behind in the Just Transition in maritime, and that we continue to work with the ITF to develop this work for maritime professionals.

Nautilus Federation supports Seafarers' Union of Croatia over ferry crew criminalisation

The Nautilus Federation is supporting its affiliate, the Seafarers' Union of Croatia (SUC), as it tackles a serious incident of criminalisation after a fatal accident onboard the ferry Lastovo.

On 11 August 2024, seafarers were checking problems with the Lastovo's bow ramp seal when the bow unexpectedly fell, instantly killing three seafarers and seriously injuring a fourth. Separate investigations found the company's safety procedures to be deficient, and laid the responsibility at the door of the company involved, Jadrolinija Rijeka. Jadrolinija Rijeka experienced 16 serious issues during 2024 alone, including four other incidents of ramp failure and ramp collapse.

Despite this, six months after the accident the State Attorney's Office initiated a criminal investigation against the master, first officer and



Neven Melvan,
general secretary
of Seafarers'
Union of Croatia

CREDIT: Seafarers' Union of Croatia

bosun – who now face up to 15 years' imprisonment. The company has not been held accountable.

In a letter to the Nautilus Federation, SUC general secretary Neven Melvan said: 'Due to what we see as the political intimidation of the seafarers and attempted rescue of

the company's board, we are looking forward to your support by making clear we have the international seafarers' community on our side.' Mark Dickinson, in his role as director of the Federation, replied to offer solidarity and support across borders to achieve fair treatment for seafarers.

Nautilus warns of criminalisation threat following North Sea allision

Nautilus International has expressed profound concern following the allision between the Madiera-flagged Solong containership and US-flagged Stena Immaculate in the North Sea on 10 March 2025.

General secretary Mark Dickinson said: 'Our thoughts are with all seafarers involved in this tragic incident, particularly with the family, friends and colleagues of the missing crew member.'

The Union urged the public and media to refrain from

speculation and to allow the official investigation to run its proper course before drawing conclusions.

'This incident serves as a stark reminder of the dangers faced daily by maritime professionals, and also underscores the critical importance of having highly skilled seafarers working aboard tugs and emergency response vessels, as well as the maritime professionals at HM Coastguard and the RNLI, whose expertise is essential during such

circumstances,' Mr Dickinson added. 'It also demonstrates the camaraderie and support of those who work at sea, with crews from nearby vessels selflessly supporting the rescue and recovery of those forced to abandon both vessels.'

The Nautilus Federation also reminded seafarers of the value of union membership, which includes legal support, following several cases in which maritime professionals have been blamed following incidents at sea.



Nautilus Federation
director Mark
Dickinson (seated,
second from left)
with other delegates
during the meeting
in Geneva

CREDIT: Ailoune Ndiaye / ILO

New guidelines to protect seafarers from criminalisation

Seafarers' unions, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) adopted new guidelines for the prevention of unfair treatment and criminalisation of seafarers at a meeting held in Geneva in December 2024.

The meeting on new guidelines followed several high-profile cases in which seafarers have been mistreated following accusations around maritime accidents, pollution or smuggling. The guidelines adopted at the meeting

will now be presented to the IMO Legal Committee and the ILO Governing Body in March 2025 for endorsement, after which they will be disseminated for implementation by IMO and ILO member states.

Nautilus Federation director Mark Dickinson led the delegation of seafarers' unions at the meeting, in his capacity as elected spokesperson for the ILO Seafarers' Group. He said: 'These IMO and ILO guidelines are intended to ensure that seafarers detained on

suspicion of committing a crime are treated fairly during any investigation or detention by public authorities, and to ensure that detention is for no longer than necessary.

'They acknowledge the unique role of seafarers, as key workers, and that, due to the global operations of the shipping industry and the many different jurisdictions that impact on seafarers, "special protection" must be afforded to them when it comes to contact with public authorities.'

An ITF inspector at work

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

RC: WHAT IS YOUR JOB AS AN ITF INSPECTOR?

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

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

RC: WHAT DO YOU HELP WITH?

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

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

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

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

RC: WHAT DO YOU DO DURING AN INSPECTION?

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

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

RC: HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT FIXING ISSUES?

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

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



CREDIT: Nautilus International

ITF inspector
Matthew
Parsonage



Get in touch with your nearest ITF inspector

Visit the ITF Seafarers website www.itfseafarers.org, look up the details in the ITF Seafarers' Bulletin magazine; or download the ITF Seafarers app from the Google Play or Apple store.

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

Fighting the job scams

Lucy Chapman spoke to Steve Trowsdale of the International Transport Workers' Federation about the organisation's work protecting seafarers from rogue crewing agents



ITF inspectorate
coordinator
Steve Trowsdale

CREDIT: Nautilus International

What is your role at the ITF?

As the ITF inspectorate coordinator, I have operational responsibility for the 135 inspectors and contacts around the world and a team of nine people in London, most of whom work full time dealing with seafarers' requests for assistance.

What are rogue crewing agents and has there been a rise in this kind of activity?

Rogue crewing agents – most people would know them as scammers – tend to be individuals who push themselves forward on social media as crewing agents to advertise fake jobs. Seafarers respond because these scammers prey on the desperation of some people for work. They then start charging them using fake visa requests and things like that.

It is on the increase, because so many people are using social media to search for jobs, particularly Facebook and LinkedIn.

Can you give an example of how the scammers operate?

I'm actually tracking one at the moment – an individual who I believe is based in Nigeria and has so far set up about six or seven companies. They're setting up fake visa/immigration companies too.

The one behind this particular scam is looking for shipping firms on Companies House in the UK, then they're taking the company number and making these false stamps with the name of the company and the company number.

Many seafarers, when they see this, look up the firm on Companies House and can see that there is a real registered company. Then they believe that they're dealing with the real thing. The scam can be very difficult to spot.

Is there any immediate support the ITF can offer to seafarers who have been scammed?

In some cases, a seafarers has received a job offer and actually gone to a ship only to find it isn't even there – or they've even been trafficked onto ships that have been abandoned. We have to use what legislation we can, talk to the flag and port states, and try to resolve things. On occasion, we have stepped in to repatriate the seafarer.

What strategies is the ITF employing to tackle the problem?

When we find a website operated by a scammer, we get it shut down. It's tricky, though, because

it's very easy for the scammers to register a domain and put up a website. As fast as we can get them deregistered, they pop up again. It's a bit like playing whack-a-mole, but hopefully we can keep the number of seafarers that are being scammed to the minimum.

We've also set up a dedicated email address for seafarers to come to us if they want to check the legitimacy of a job offer. To date, this has stopped thousands of seafarers being scammed. We have a dedicated website that guides seafarers through the whole of the recruitment process and actually outlines a lot of the scams that we've identified (see page 20).

We're also very proactive on social media, periodically pushing out messages to be aware of scams and every time we find a large-scale scam with a company, the ITF and our inspectors share the news. We're members of about 100 seafarer groups with a reach of about 2 million people, so we post on all of those as well.



Watch Lucy Chapman's video interview with Steve Trowsdale on Nautilus TV: www.youtube.com/@nautilusint

UNIONS DEMAND STRONGER ACTION ON THE SHADOW FLEET

The European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) is calling for flag states and international maritime authorities to step up the fight against unregulated shipping.

The rise of the 'shadow fleet' is putting seafarers' safety at risk, says the union federation – with marine pollution likely to increase as well.

The ships in the shadow fleet tend to operate under flags of convenience, registered in nations with minimal regulatory oversight, enabling frequent renaming and reflagging to avoid detection.

Many of these vessels bypass essential protocols, operating without proper insurance, adequate maintenance or safety checks, which puts seafarers and marine environments at heightened risk.

The ETF is urging the European Union and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to launch a coordinated European and international response – keeping track of suspicious vessels and implementing more stringent controls to ensure these ships comply with safety, labour, and environmental standards.

'Seafarers should not be unwittingly involved in illegal activities, nor should they be subjected to dangerous work conditions that put their lives at risk,' ETF general secretary Livia Spera said. 'Without a coordinated response from flag states, port authorities, and regulatory bodies, these shadow operations will continue to threaten the safety of our waters and our workers,' she added.

The ETF – whose affiliates include a number of Nautilus Federation unions – wants to see the following measures put in place internationally:



Ship-to-ship cargo transfers are often used by shadow fleet vessels seeking to evade sanctions

CREDIT: Anusha Narayanan/Wikimedia Commons

- enhanced tracking and transparency requirements, holding flag states accountable for the vessels they register
- stronger port state control inspections to ensure vessels in European waters have valid insurance, adhere to safety regulations and maintain worker protections

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For any queries about this article or other ETF matters, please contact Nautilus Federation coordinator Danny McGowan at dmcgowan@nautilusint.org

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Could AI help with tracking the shadow fleet? See pages 16-17

Crewing crisis at Military Sealift Command

Nautilus members at the Royal Fleet Auxiliary are under pressure due to a recruitment and retention crisis – but they are not alone. Seafarers at the United States Military Sealift Command, which fulfils a similar role to the RFA, face many of the same problems.

Rob Coston spoke to Sal Mercogliano – former MSC merchant mariner, maritime historian and host of popular YouTube channel What's Going On With Shipping? – to find out what's happening across the pond

Rob Coston (RC): How does Military Sealift Command (MSC) compare to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA)?

Sal Mercogliano (SM): Very similar, I would argue. The MSC runs the auxiliary vessels for the US Navy. All the underway replenishment vessels are operated by these civilian merchant mariners, who are direct employees of the US government. Basically, they operate one fifth of the US fleet, a very similar proportion to the RFA and the Royal Navy, including a range of different replenishment vessels.

If there's a major difference between the two organisations, it's that the MSC is not commanded by a mariner or a chief engineer like the RFA commodore. It's typically commanded by a US Navy admiral, which has been part of the problem, as the connection between the merchant mariners and the US Navy has weakened over time.

RC: The crewing crisis at the RFA has largely been caused by declining pay. I understand that there's a similar recruitment and retention problem at the MSC, but it has quite different origins?

SM: If you look at the salaries being offered by MSC, RFA personnel would love that kind of money – it looks great! We're talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars for starting jobs.

CREDIT: Nautilus International



The US Navy has literally been throwing money at the problem.

The issue has really been the leave policy. As civilians, MSC mariners operate under the same leave system as other federal employees – you're at sea but you basically have the same policy as someone working in Washington DC.

People who sail with the RFA will understand that a job at sea is not a job on land. You don't go home every night, it's not nine to five Monday through Friday with holidays and days off that you can schedule, so that you can make a life of it.

This has been a persistent problem. A new mariner onboard, whether a deck officer, a mate, or an engineer, would have to work onboard almost 10 months

of the year to get their full leave in. So they would have to be onboard for quite a long period of time.

The policy for getting on and off ship has also been a problem. MSC guarantees you a four-month sea tour; you're supposed to be onboard four months, and then with a guaranteed two months off. The problem is those guarantees don't work. No one's getting off in four months. And the two months you have off, a lot of that is unpaid because you haven't accrued enough leave to cover it. And then even when you do get off, you're kind of harassed to get back onto a ship or else you may lose your spot.

That's because they need the people – MSC has a workforce of about 6,000 mariners to fill 5000 spots. There's 1.2 people for every spot, and it's just an unsustainable number to cover the whole fleet. You would need, in my opinion, about 10,000 MSC mariners for adequate cover.

Now they're trying to reform this system and get more leave, but it's just been ridiculously slow. In fact, one of the reasons I left MSC back in the 1990s was the leave policy – I was on my first ship for 11 months until I got relieved.

RC: A ratio like that of personnel to berths onboard must be having a really serious effect on seafarers?

SM: It is. Let me just say, MSC is a great job. I did it for a long time and I think it's one of the most interesting jobs you can do as a seafarer. But with the leave problems, one of the things we're seeing is high turnover. Especially in the lower ranks, at the unlicensed and junior officer level, they're churning through a lot of people. This creates a big problem because if you can't retain people at that junior level, you're not able to train them



USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76); Pacific Ocean; USNS Rappahannock (T-AO 204); replenishment at sea

CREDIT: U.S. Navy / Public Domain



The Military Sealift Command fleet replenishment oiler USNS Rappahannock (T-AO 204) falls back after conducting a replenishment at sea with the amphibious dock landing ship USS Ashland (LSD 48)

CREDIT: U.S. Navy / Public Domain

up to the middle and upper level. That has created a problem. MSC has had to bring a lot of people in at a much higher level, which means they have to be educated. As RFA personnel will tell you, a job like this is not the same as running a tanker from point A to point

People who sail with the RFA will understand that a job at sea is not a job on land. You don't go home every night, it's not nine to five Monday through Friday with holidays and days off that you can schedule, so that you can make a life of it



Sailors aboard the Nimitz-class nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75) receive stores from the Military Sealift Command fleet replenishment oiler USNS Big Horn (T-AO 198) during a replenishment at sea

CREDIT: U.S. Navy / Public Domain

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Watch the complete interview with Sal on Nautilus TV at: www.youtube.com/@nautilusint

Sal Mercogliano's popular YouTube Channel, What's Going On With Shipping, is at: www.youtube.com/@wgowshipping

SM: Right now, we're seeing MSC trying to repair things. There's a lot of work going on behind the scenes to get that leave policy fixed.

We're also seeing everything from Starlink being put on ships to attempts at improving the shore leave policy. That will go a long way, much like getting the RFA the pay rise which has been denied to them for 14 years – something I still can't believe.

I also think it's a big problem that there is no mechanism to put mariners ashore, at least on a short-term basis. And while there's some mariners who do transition to shore after their careers, I think it'd be really interesting to have more of them on planning staffs because there's a lot of issues that the Navy doesn't understand about the logistics behind the vessels.

One of the reasons that the US Navy has transitioned completely to all civilian auxiliary vessels was because of cost, so they could reduce the crew onboard. Plus you don't have the operational requirements that you worry about with the US Navy. We keep hearing about carriers being deployed way past six months; well, the Navy doesn't care about that for an MSC ship, you can keep it deployed 365 days of the year because it's crewed by civilians. That kind of different treatment creates a kind of opposition between MSC and the Navy. It really undercuts camaraderie, and I think, you know, at times it goes to the pay issue you're talking about – there's the sense that mariners want to be treated better, and that means addressing either pay or leave.

B. It's very dynamic and requires an understanding of the situations like sailing right alongside a vessel at 150 feet at 12 or 13 knots while pumping very volatile diesel and jet fuel over to them.

RC: For our members at the RFA, we think that the solution to recruitment and retention really does begin with pay – which isn't just about money but is also an indication of the respect the government has for the organisation. What would you say the solution might be for MSC?

CREDIT: U.S. Navy / Public Domain



The Greek-owned bulk carrier Elpida GR

HEAT DEATH WARNING

Extreme heat caused the death of a seafarer during an incident in Qatar last year. As heatwaves become more common, seafarers should arm themselves with information on how to treat those seriously affected by high temperatures, writes **Andrew Linington**

A new report has warned that climate change is posing a growing health and safety risk to seafarers working in extreme heat.

The alert follows an investigation into an incident in which one seafarer died, two collapsed and one other suffered the effects of heat exhaustion while working in temperatures between 40C and 45C in the port of Mesaieed, Qatar, last year.

Malta's Marine Safety Investigation Unit says the increased frequency, duration and intensity of heatwaves linked to climate change means there is likely to be an growing number of similar cases in which crew members suffer from heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

It also warns that many seafarers do not get the necessary time to properly acclimatise to extreme temperatures and humidity during a voyage.

The report notes that International Maritime Organization (IMO) elementary first aid and medical care model courses do not cover training to help victims of heat stroke. It recommends that Malta seeks new IMO requirements for 'emphasised seafarer training on

the on-site treatment of heat stroke/hyperthermia casualties onboard, taking into consideration the predicted effects of climate change'.

The accident occurred during mooring operations as the 52,579dwt bulk carrier Elpida GR entered the port on 27 July 2023. The bosun and two ratings collapsed as lines were being passed ashore and the chief officer then complained of feeling unwell. All four were taken to a hospital ashore, but the bosun was confirmed to be dead, as a result of heat stroke, and the others were suffering from heat exhaustion.

Investigators found that some crew members had worked up to 89 hours in the five days preceding the accident, cleaning the cargo holds after discharging rice in the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr ahead of loading a bulk cargo of urea in Qatar.

The report concludes that the effects of extreme heat may have been exacerbated by fatigue and sleep deprivation. The crew members had already experienced a month of high temperatures and humidity during cargo operations in Iraq, as well as

poor quality sleep caused by the 'uncomfortable warm conditions' in the accommodation areas.

Although the ship's owners denied that any bonus had been promised for the cargo hold cleaning work, the report notes that some crew members believed they would get one. Investigators said they could not exclude the possibility that such payments would have served as an incentive for the seafarers to work such long hours.

The report notes that crew members took most of the recommended action to treat the bosun after he collapsed, including moving him to shade, stripping off clothing, and fanning him.

However, it adds, they were unaware of **The International Medical Guide for Ships** advice to cool his body with water and apply cold packs or immerse him in a bath of cold water.

Following the accident, the ship's Greek owners revised their safety management system manual to include a section on 'working in hot environments', together with a related checklist and precautionary measures to be taken.

Degassing ban for inland waterways

The Netherlands and five other countries are signatories to a treaty to end degassing from inland tankers, with phase two coming into force this July. What does it entail?

CREDIT: Nautilus International

Scan the QR code for technical information on the ban:



Degassing refers to ventilating enclosed spaces to remove harmful gases. In inland navigation, it is specifically about removing liquid residual cargo from the cargo tanks of tankers.

After a cargo is unloaded, a residual cargo is often left behind, and ships degas this residue on the way to reload by evaporating it with fans and blowing it out of the tanks and pipes. The tanks must then be cleaned.

THE CDNI CONVENTION

The Netherlands is one of six countries that have now laid down in a treaty what must be done with waste materials, including residual cargo. This treaty is known by its French abbreviation, CDNI: Convention relative à la collecte, au dépôt et à la réception des déchets survenant en navigation rhénane et intérieure. In the Netherlands, this convention is incorporated in the Shipping Waste Decree. This convention covers:

- waste containing oil and grease
 - cargo waste
 - other ship-generated waste, such as household waste and small hazardous waste
- Among other things, the CDNI Convention regulates a gradual ban on degassing. Vapours will no longer be released into the air, but at special facilities.

A GRADUAL BAN

The ban on degassing while underway will take effect six months after the last country concerned incorporates the ban into its national legislation. It will occur in three stages:

- Phase 1:** ban on degassing petrol, benzene, petroleum distillates and mixtures containing more than 10% ethanol
- Phase 2** (two years later): ban on degassing crude oil, flammable liquids and hydrocarbons with more than 10% benzene
- Phase 3** (four years after phase 1): ban on degassing of acetone, ethanol and methanol and other substances.

SHORTAGE OF FACILITIES

A problem with the ban is the shortage of release points. Currently, only two facilities are available in the Netherlands, which is insufficient, especially given the extensive operational area of tankers. Without sufficient drop-off points, vessels risk being immobilised.

THE UNION'S POSITION

Nautilus supports the ban partly because it will reduce the exposure to harmful substances of those living near to where the ships pass, but especially because it will protect crew onboard.

However, Nautilus is also calling for a solution for when ships are unable to comply with the ban. When problems arise, the Union doesn't want fingers to be pointed at the captain because of a situation they cannot resolve. Nautilus always stands up against unjust criminalisation of maritime professionals, including in this situation.

Shocking levels of harassment

A study has revealed an 'alarming' degree of physical and verbal aggression and sexual harassment of crew, especially female seafarers. **Andrew Linington** reports

A new study published in the latest edition of the International Maritime Health journal has found that aggression and harassment in the workplace – including sexual harassment – remains at a much higher level for seafarers than workers ashore, and warns that it increases the risks of anxiety, depression and burnout amongst maritime professionals.

The research was conducted by leading French universities and was based on feedback from almost 800 seafarers undergoing their annual medical certificate examinations.

Women seafarers reported experiencing twice as much physical, verbal and sexual harassment as their male colleagues, with more than two thirds of women seafarers and just over 38% of male seafarers saying that they had been sexually harassed at work at some point in their careers.

Almost 25% of all seafarers said they had been the victim of verbal or physical aggression in the previous 12 months. Some 41% of women seafarers and 21% of male seafarers said that in the past year they had been verbally abused by work colleagues. Some 5.8% of women and 2.6% of men said they had been the victim of physical aggression.

Shockingly, five women seafarers and one male seafarer said they had been the victim of rape at one point in their career. Almost 6% of women seafarers said they had experienced sexual assault in the previous 12 months. Other frequently reported problems included sexist jokes, unwanted sexual advances and touching or groping.

Around two thirds of the

harassment was reported to have come from higher-ranking seafarers.

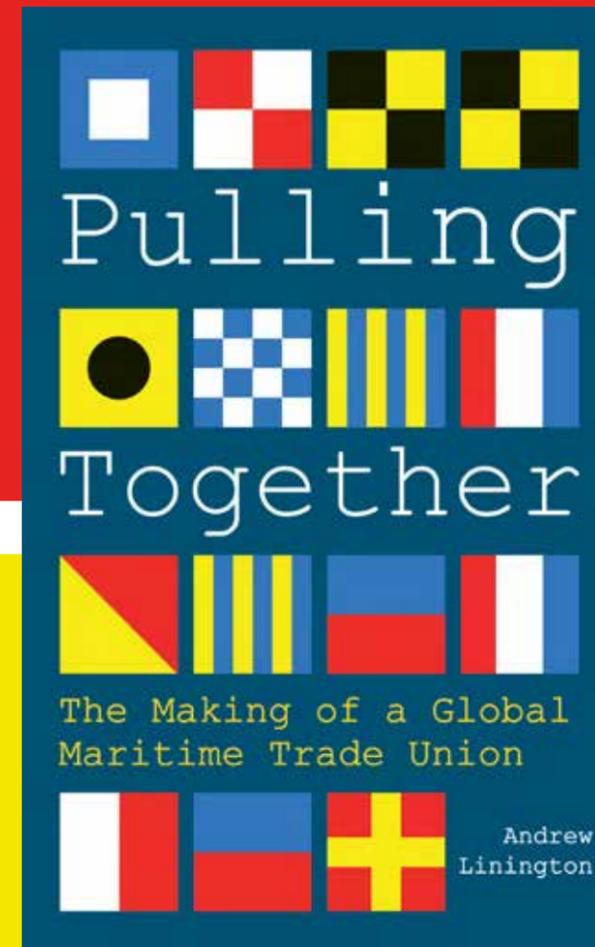
Almost 40% of seafarers said they had experienced or witnessed a traumatic event in the past 12 months – including death, accidents and serious injuries onboard. However, only 2.5% of the seafarers had sought professional help following cases of harassment or traumatic incidents at sea. Of these, half had reported problems to their union and a third had gone to the shipping company or a workplace inspectorate.

The report says more effort must be made by the industry and authorities to address the low levels of awareness among seafarers on the procedures to follow if they are suffering harassment. It recommends a programme to ensure that seafarers can recognise the risks posed by workplace bullying and assault. 'To effectively combat sexual harassment and gender-based harassment, all employees must be able to identify the situations that characterise them, of which they may be the victim, witness or perpetrator.'



CREDIT: Wikimedia Commons

NAUTILUS INTERNATIONAL PRESENTS...



'The list of what our Union has achieved is just incredible. It makes you think how different the industry would be if Nautilus hadn't been there.'

Andrew Linington
Author



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The intelligent solution to vessel tracking

With ever more merchant ships trying to hide their movements from the authorities, a new way of monitoring this shadow fleet is needed. AI-enabled 'persistent tracking' technology could be the answer, writes **Steve Bomgardner**

► **T**he simplicity of automatic identification system (AIS) tracking has transformed the accessibility of vessel tracking over the past few decades. But in today's overcrowded and high-risk seas, that simplicity is now a liability.

Disabling, jamming, or spoofing AIS signals is too easy, leading to inconsistencies in vessel tracking data. This allows bad actors to operate unchecked, while also compromising the safety of legitimate vessels. In addition, signal blockages caused by the congestion of transmitted positions are leading to significant gaps in global tracking systems, creating an unacceptable level of risk.

AIS AND THE SHADOW FLEET

This problem is being compounded by the expansion of the 'shadow fleet' – also known as the 'dark fleet' or 'grey fleet' – which consists of vessels seeking to avoid the usual international regulation and monitoring systems.

There is a longstanding dark shipping problem which aims to hide illegal activity (people, arms, drugs, contraband and fish smuggling). Recently,

new conflict zones in the Red Sea, Black Sea and South China Sea have greatly increased the number of vessels wishing to conceal their movements – for example, those undertaking illegal ship-to-ship transfers of sanctioned Russian oil and liquefied natural gas.

Even shipmasters on legitimate vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden are switching off AIS tracking in a bid to avoid being targeted by the Houthi rebels attacking merchant shipping. While this may remove immediate vulnerability to this threat, ships operating without AIS significantly raise the risk of collision, with associated potential loss of life and environmental damage, as well as creating supply chain uncertainty.

The lack of transparency in shipping is now of global concern to those governments and stakeholders who wish to operate in compliance. This creates a divide between good actors and bad actors. The shift of Russian oil tankers from large open registries to smaller, less diligent flags in response to heightened sanctions from the USA, EU, UK and others highlights the growing challenges. These developments are complicating efforts by the International Maritime Organization and national regulatory bodies attempting to reinstate order.

PERSISTENT TRACKING: A HI-TECH ALTERNATIVE

While the need to improve shipping transparency is a given, solving it is far from straightforward. The industry urgently needs a stronger solution. This solution should combine multiple tracking data sources supplemented at times with affordable Earth-observation (EO) data. The goal is to deliver persistent tracking of every vessel without compromise.

Persistent tracking overlays multiple vessel tracking services and data sources. This includes AIS and secure point-to-point satellite tracking systems

CREDIT: kees torn/Wikimedia Commons



The Russian tanker Olympiysky Prospect, pictured in 2021. In September 2024, the UK government described the vessel as part of 'Putin's shadow fleet', and imposed sanctions on it

(Inmarsat-C, Iridium, etc.), voyage plans when available, EO data when relevant, and real-time analytics to transform the accuracy and reliability of vessel location data.

Developing a persistent tracking system is typically beyond the capability of a single organisation. It would require data selection, aggregation, management, storage, and processing using artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. With this overall technical complexity and cost, it is best to align with an established specialist application service provider.

INTELLIGENCE-LED OPERATIONS

With multiple, layered data sources and robust cross-referencing and analysis, the persistent tracking model allows stakeholders to have increased confidence in a vessel's true position. Guessing is eliminated and errors associated with false positives are minimised, allowing stakeholders to ensure any anomaly or vessel deviation is immediately identified and notified, and open to investigation.

Multiple, diverse vessel detection technologies feed into live dashboards, providing stakeholders with the essential visibility and control required to confidently locate and manage vessels. By adding the power of predictive analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning, stakeholders can gain far more insight into the extent of dark activity and ensure secure, safe, clean, and compliant operations.

With the rise of compromised security, safety, and environmental compliance, the lack of visibility across seas globally must be urgently addressed. Proposing additional sanctions and greater risk assessment is a necessary start. Yet, without a persistent tracking solution that can layer multiple tracking data streams to overcome the current information gaps, the maritime industry will continue to incur unacceptable risk.

Explainer: AIS vs AI

► **AIS** stands for **automatic identification system** – radio-based technology that allows ships to broadcast their position and other information to neighbouring ships and shore stations. AIS is used to monitor and track ships in real time, and is an important safety feature that helps to avoid collisions.

► **AI**, on the other hand, stands for **artificial intelligence**. AI works by simulating human intelligence through the use of algorithms, data, and computational power. The goal is to enable machines or software to perform tasks such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception and language understanding. AI is particularly useful for aggregating and repurposing very large amounts of data.

Captain Steve Bomgardner



► **C**apt Steve Bomgardner is a master mariner who now serves as the vice president of shipping and offshore at maritime tech corporation Pole Star Global.

He has a particular focus on driving new technology initiatives related to environmental, social and corporate governance, and corporate social responsibility.

OPINION

AI in maritime: hype vs reality



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In recent years, the narrative surrounding artificial intelligence (AI) has dominated headlines, with many predicting it will revolutionise the world of work. A report by the Institute for Public Policy Research estimates that up to eight million UK jobs could be at risk as AI increasingly handles routine cognitive tasks.

The maritime industry is no exception to this trend, with the AI market expected to exceed \$3 billion by 2028. Companies are touting AI-driven applications in areas such as weather routing, safety monitoring, hazard detection, and decision support systems. Amidst this hype, it seems to be taken as a given that these AI systems will perform tasks at least as effectively as the seafarers who currently manage them, potentially sidelining or even replacing human workers.

However, before we accept these projections as inevitable, it's worth remembering that we've been here before. The Yara Birkeland, heralded as the world's first fully autonomous vessel by 2020, still operates with a crew onboard. Similarly, ambitious predictions made by Rolls-Royce, MOL, and others during the peak of the autonomous ship hype now seem unlikely to materialise within the given timeframes.

Recently, senior business figures have started voicing concerns that AI might be overhyped. They've also criticised the practice of 'AI washing', where companies exaggerate the capabilities of their supposedly AI-powered products. So what is the real impact of AI on maritime, particularly for seafarers?

While AI undoubtedly holds promise for practical applications and could reduce seafarers' workloads, the industry's primary focus seems to be on reducing crew numbers. This is evident from recent efforts to relax the requirement for a second watchkeeper at night to facilitate trials of AI watchkeeping systems. In our view, this approach is premature. Regulations should be grounded in solid evidence rather than driven by hype and speculative predictions, which too often turn out to be nothing more than hot air.

If technology can genuinely enhance safety and improve working conditions, it should be embraced. However, before we consider relaxing any regulatory standards, manufacturers must provide solid, verifiable evidence that their AI systems deliver on their promises. The maritime industry cannot afford to gamble on unproven technologies at the expense of skilled seafarers. It is imperative that we prioritise rigorous testing and uphold the highest safety standards, ensuring that AI complements rather than compromises the efforts of our maritime professionals.

Safeguarding your rights in the new digital workplace

If you are a Nautilus member working for a European shipowner, then your company will recently have signed up to an initiative to ensure you have the right training and support for shipping's digital future.

The European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) has been working with its social partner, the European Community Shipowners' Associations (ECSA), on **Seafarers Go Digital**, which was launched in July at a special event in Brussels.

WHAT IS SEAFARERS GO DIGITAL?

Seafarers Go Digital is a mutual commitment of the social partners to identify and address the challenges of digitalisation for shipping and seafarers.

It acknowledges the importance of protecting seafarers' employment rights and wellbeing, while promoting a fair and inclusive digital transition for everyone. Through this initiative, ETF and ECSA commit to working together to benefit the most from the digital transition while mitigating its risks and contributing to a sustainable and attractive future for seafarers.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM MY EMPLOYER AND UNION?

The initiative raises awareness on key areas such as onboard digitalisation, cybersecurity, internet access onboard, e-certification, digital skills and attractiveness of the maritime profession. It puts forward

CREDIT: ETF



ETF and ECSA representatives with speakers from the European Commission and the European Maritime Safety Agency at the July 2024 launch event of Seafarers Go Digital

policy recommendations for further cooperation between the industry and the unions, the policymakers, and relevant stakeholders.

Developed as part of the social partners' work programme for 2024-2027, **Seafarers Go Digital** draws on existing initiatives such as SkillSea and the ETF's Crew Statement on Maritime Cyber Risk Management.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

A guide to **Seafarers Go Digital** is now available in the Resources section of the ETF website www.etf-europe.org. Please download the free guide, and if you have any questions or ideas about the initiative, contact Nautilus head of international Danny McGowan at dmcgowan@nautilusint.org

ITF ShipBeSure: stay safe from scams

Find out more about how the ITF can help you protect yourself and your colleagues onboard

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) strongly believes that no seafarer should be charged a placement fee to find a job. Unfortunately, this kind of scam persists, especially in major labour supply nations like India.

However, seafarers from any country can come under attack from a professional scammer, and the ITF receives hundreds of reports of scams each year. The people behind the scams pose as recruitment agents or HR managers and are using more and more sophisticated ways to make the jobs they advertise look real. They create email addresses and fake websites that look and feel like the real thing and are increasingly using direct contact methods like WhatsApp, Viber and LinkedIn.

What can I do?

Before you even start looking for a job, take a look at the ITF's ShipBeSure website at www.itfshipbesure.org.

It will guide you right through the recruitment process and it may even protect you from being scammed. ShipBeSure was set up by the ITF to identify rogue crewing agents and 'red list' them – so that seafarers do not fall victim to them. It is packed with important information and advice. It helps you to:

- identify the signs of a scam – the Scam Alerts page provides a way to check for scams, fake companies and websites
- look up a ship, inspector or union – find out more about a ship you may be considering joining, or identify the nearest ITF inspector or affiliated union who may be able to support you

To report a scam contact the ITF at jobscam@itf.org.uk



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Read an interview with ITF inspectorate coordinator Steve Trowsdale about how the organisation is tackling the scourge of completely fake crewing agents on [page 7](#), or watch it online at www.youtube.com/@nautilusint

CREDIT: ITF

CLAMPING DOWN ON ROGUE AGENTS

Once the ITF is tipped off about a rogue agent, it can act to protect seafarers. ITF inspector Arvin Peralta from Manila recently dealt with the case of a Philippines-based recruitment agency that unlawfully charged seafarers placement fees, and helped to get the company's licence suspended after its illegal practices were highlighted.

Global Marine and Offshore Resources Inc was initially 'red listed' on the itfshipbesure.org directory of crewing agents – a warning to seafarers that they should avoid seeking employment through that

agency. The ITF had provided incontrovertible evidence to the Filipino Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), which regulates the country's crewing agency system, that four seafarers were illegally charged placement fees and placed with different employers on different ships to those described in their contracts. Some were owed more than two months' pay.

The DMW suspended Global Marine's licence. The ITF hopes that its evidence will lead to a permanent ban on the agency.

the global
SEAFARER



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