



Caring for seafarers  
around the world

# the SEA

Issue 2, 2023



Seafarers that think  
differently can bring  
value to a crew.  
Credit: Thorne

## Celebrating brain power in all its guises

*Neurodiversity has its place at sea and on shore* By Felicity Landon

**D**oes it help to have a label? That's a question that perhaps applies more to neurodiversity than any other area within the diversity discussion. And even if you do agree on the 'label', there are also degrees along the spectrum, from mild to severe. To put it plainly, how neurodiverse can a seafarer be, while still ensuring the safety of the individual, their colleagues, the ship and the cargo?

Daniel Smith, chairperson of NeurodiversAtSea.org, says: "Unfortunately, neurodivergence is often misunderstood as something which is 'life limiting' ... something that will hold people back no matter what they do, something that takes away any value someone may have to offer. This is because everyone focuses on the support neurodivergent people sometimes need, without taking a step back to look at both the value of the person and how much support everyone else needs."

Neurodivergence, he explains, is an umbrella term that roughly translates into a "brain that is different from society's normal". It includes conditions like autism spectrum disorder (ASD), specific learning differences such as dyslexia and dyspraxia, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

But take dyslexia, for example. As he says, the vast majority of people will associate dyslexia with difficulty reading or spelling; the reality is that dyslexics may simply need a coloured overlay to help them read text without getting lost on the page.

Anglo-Eastern Ship Management looks at diversity as a whole and all it can include – gender, race, religion or neuro challenges, says Melissa Otto, group communications manager. "In shipping and generally, the tendency is for people to associate diversity with gender in particular. At Anglo-Eastern, we are obviously well aware that

diversity encompasses far more than gender, so we have a general approach to diversity. Having said that, I do feel that neurodiversity is not something that would automatically come to mind for most people when you talk about diversity."

### Value of labels?

The whole issue with 'labelling' is that it can cut both ways, she says: "It can be helpful but also unhelpful. Not everyone wants a label, or to be singled out and categorised, not even when it comes to gender diversity – for example, some women seafarers I have spoken with are very keen to advance their careers for their skills and abilities because they earned it – not because of their gender."

"In the case of neuro challenges like OCD, ADHD, autism and other challenges, these tend to lie on a spectrum. When you have a spectrum disorder, I personally don't think it



Credit: Thome

necessarily helps to have a label when a person's symptoms could be very mild. Perhaps a person is simply seen as a bit quirky or has a few unusual habits, but where do you draw the line that people need a label? It's not so black and white.

"Before ADHD was recognised as a disorder and increasingly diagnosed, we might have thought 'this person has a lot of energy and is fidgety', and we would not think too much more about it. Now everything has a label, but does it help? I am sure there are a lot of people working in companies who have degrees of these disorders, but they never needed treatment, never got diagnosed, so aren't labelled."

There are a lot of benefits in hiring a neurodiverse group of people, says Charles Watkins, CEO of Mental Health Support Solutions. "We all have varying degrees of differences in our brains. For example, some people are visual learners, some are audio learners. Some learn through exploring or listening to music."

"The diagnostic criteria are not necessarily helpful. However, when you do label things, in my profession it helps us to communicate and have a sense of where someone is, so we can help them. However, when it comes to modern labelling of people and putting them into boxes, these boxes are not comprehensive enough to fit all the

*"Putting a specific label on someone limits the person and has a negative impact. We need to educate ourselves to really look at patterns instead of boxes."*

differences in people. There might be someone who fits the ADHD criteria but other things that don't fit."

In other words, categorising helps us to discuss topics but when looking at an individual human being, there are always individual components that should not be forgotten, he says.

"There are varying degrees of ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia. It should never be automatic exclusion for these people. There should always be the consideration – does this make sense, is it safe, is it beneficial?"

### Safety first

In any area, but especially in shipping, safeguarding of the person, the vessel and others on board has to be the highest priority, Watkins says.

That's a point picked up by Henrik Jensen, CEO of Danica Crewing Specialists. "At Danica Crewing

Specialists, we do not discriminate," he says. "During the pre-employment screening process, we only look at a person's qualifications, competencies,

and social skills. However, the working environment on a vessel is risky and the crew on board is a small community. To mitigate these perils, international conventions, flag states and insurance companies require joining seafarers to pass physical and mental health condition examinations before proceeding to sea. Any candidate passing our screening process and who can pass the medical examinations is a potential candidate for employment through Danica."

Anglo-Eastern Ship Management's Otto adds: "In shipping, safety is paramount. You have to have safety of people, safety of the environment, safety of the ship and cargo. Yet you only have 20+ people on board – a small team, yet responsible for so much: ship operations, safety, regulatory compliance, etc."

"In this context, you really need a solid team, where every individual has the right skills set, attitude and ability to work independently as well as in a team. This is not something that can be compromised, so while we wholeheartedly support diversity and equal opportunities, we also need to be mindful of maintaining a meritocracy where performance matters, especially on board."



Charles Watkins



Henrik Jensen



That doesn't mean that an individual with a high-functioning neuro challenge cannot hold a job in shipping, she says. "There can be advantages to some neurodiversity. For example, people with autism who are high functioning can be incredibly intelligent with a high IQ. People with OCD are typically precision focused, have strong attention to detail, patterns, numbers, words, etc. And maybe those people have already gravitated towards those jobs that require such skills, whether ashore or at sea. Most individuals are likely working in roles that suit their character, temperament or condition – not because they have been labelled."

### Look at patterns, not boxes

There is a huge stigma attached to neurodiversity, says Watkins. "We need to educate people about this so they understand it is not necessarily a handicap but just a different expression, of a brain that works differently and might have limitations or indeed expansions. Putting a specific label on someone limits the person and has a negative impact. We need to educate ourselves to really look at patterns instead of boxes."

For example, he says, there are some people with ADHD that have severe problems concentrating; others just have problems concentrating for a very long time. "It varies greatly between individuals. You should always look at the person; what are the things that person does well, how do we communicate with them, what are the things we need to adjust? And that is very similar to working with different nationalities where words might be offensive to one person but not another, or with individuals where some you need to 'show them', others you need to 'write it down' for them to learn."

Watkins says people doing the hiring need to be trained to understand that there are "a lot of different people on the planet with brains that function differently".

However, when it comes to labelling (or not), he also acknowledges that being given a 'label' is sometimes a huge relief for a person: "It is 'now finally I know what I have got and I can figure out what can help, get information and support, etc.'."

At NeurodiversAtSea.org, Smith says it's always worth taking a step back, "because difference doesn't mean disability".

"As humans, we have evolved a broad range of neurological characteristics

within different populations; a natural variation. And for good reason – some genetic and anthropological work suggests that genes and traits we now associate with autism and ADHD could be 'adaptive', varying with time and place and being advantageous in hunter gatherer societies. Such natural variation has more recently been understood as 'neurodiversity'. And evidence suggests that this diversity can still be highly advantageous, for both individuals and the people around them."

In the modern world, this has been shown to translate to extraordinary potential at work, says Smith. "In financial services, JP Morgan Chase found neurodivergent employees to be 48% more productive. The Australian government identified 30% greater productivity in software testing.

"A better way of thinking about neurodivergence is to understand people – our colleagues at sea – as having different strengths and weaknesses, thanks to brain characteristics."

### Diversity across the spectrum

Claes Eek Thorstensen, executive vice chairman of ship manager Thome,



Claes Eek Thorstensen

points to changing requirements in the industry.

"Decarbonisation, digitisation and ESG will be the big drivers of change in the maritime industry," he says.

"At Thome we recognise that we

will need to equip our teams with the necessary up-skilling, re-skilling and cross-skilling training solutions to ensure they are ready for these changes."

Thome has intensified its efforts and is leveraging technology advances to develop new learning and development solutions, says Thorstensen. This includes inhouse training facilities, partner institutions and onboard micro and e-learning platforms.

"This provides our employees with flexible learning solutions so they can train whenever and wherever they want to. We also recognise that not everyone learns in the same way and are keen to explore training options which enable greater diversity of knowledge sharing."

He adds: "We encourage an open and transparent working environment at Thome where diversity, equality and inclusivity are welcomed, and where people are treated equally, irrespective

of creed, culture, nationality or gender. We believe that having a diverse workforce brings in new ideas and experiences where people from different backgrounds can learn from each other. It helps improve problem-solving as colleagues share different views and perspectives. Working in diverse teams also opens up dialogue, which promotes creativity and leads to greater productivity."


### In the workforce

Marine robotics company Ocean Infinity has argued that the maritime industry's movement towards remote vessel operations will not only build a more diverse workforce but the workforce itself will benefit from it.

Ocean Infinity says that its development as a fast-moving marine technology company specialising in the development and deployment of robotics for large-scale, subsea data acquisition, based on a demanding, problem-solving environment, has benefitted from the start from a neurodiverse workforce. Neurodiverse symptoms or conditions can bring advantages to an individual, providing they are fulfilling a role that is well aligned with their neurotype, says the company.

Watkins also points to automation and digitalisation as offering opportunities for neurotypes who enjoy working on monitors with the routine, structure and constant checking, or who are well suited to the detail of programming.

Anglo-Eastern has people working in its offices who have some degrees of autism or OCD, says Otto. "At the end of the day, everyone is unique and their own person, and we all work with many different types of people, including some who may be a little too gruff, a little too quick-tempered, kind of quirky, or low on people skills, etc. Do we need to officially label these variances, or only the ones that have a diagnosis? Then what about other personality 'disorders'? Personally, I think not. In fact, it is these variances in character that contribute to diversity, so provided performance is there and we can all get along, it makes life – and work – more interesting.

"In short, we strongly believe in diversity, inclusion and equal opportunity, but also meritocracy. We can't drop the ball when it comes to having the right skills and abilities on board a ship. We cannot have a team of 20+ affected by one crew member who cannot do the job, for whatever reason." 

# Making sense of mental health matters

*It can be difficult to determine who and what to trust*

By Pam Kern, Pennie Blackburn & Rachel Glynn-Williams

In maritime, we have seen an increasing appetite for approaches to mental health promotion, protection, and response mechanisms, which has led to rapid expansion and diversification of mental health advice, training, and services. However, well-intentioned guidance, strategies or interventions that are not supported by clinical research or expertise may fail to help and could make things worse.

As a network of psychological practitioners that have come together in the Maritime Mental Health Professionals Community of Practice (MMHPCoP), our personal and professional knowledge and experience on land and at sea enable us to recognise and predict potential risks and harms in approaches to mental health and recommend best practice.

We at MMHPCoP educate the industry with suggestions on what to look for, as shown in the infographic below. MMHPCoP members are qualified and accredited mental health professionals with experience in the maritime sector. Seafarers can use this infographic to find the right provider.

How can seafarers have the confidence to determine that the mental health material they access either on social media or other outlets is safe and accurate? Here is our 'Top 5 Guide' for seafarers on what to look for:

- Social media has lots of information as well as mental health apps. Check to see if the content is updated and when.
- Who is the author and what are their qualifications? Check the infographic to determine how well qualified the person providing the information is.
- Is the content sponsored by a company for profit purposes? Look at the ads.

- Check your home country mental health boards for reliable information.
- 'Share the Care' – asking someone if they are ok when you see that they might not be ok can bring immense relief to the other person because you asked them *first*. You don't need to be a therapist to ask, and you won't do harm by asking this. Helping another can start with a simple question: 'Are you ok?'. Then you can get further support, if needed. This can save a life.

If information seems too good to be true or doesn't feel right, question it to find out more. 🧐

*Pam Kern is a maritime mental health expert, former seafarer and owner of Kern and Co, LLC Consulting.*

*Dr Pennie Blackburn is a consultant clinical psychologist at PsiConsultation.*

*Dr Rachel Glynn-Williams is a consultant clinical psychologist, and clinical director at Seaways Psychology Services and at Recall Recover Limited.*

## Finding the right maritime mental health provider

### Questions to ask...



Credit: MMHPCoP

#### Qualifications

Determine what clinical areas of expertise in mental health that best suits your needs:

For example, do you need a practicing Clinical Psychologist or a Licensed Clinical Social Worker?

Evaluate what qualifications they have and determine that they are professionally adequate e.g. have their skills been professionally trained and supervised

#### 'Maritime Specific' Work Experience

Have they worked at sea or directly with seafarers and when?

Have they worked in crisis settings?

Can they provide an example of their work with seafarers?

What professional mental health organisations are they a member of?

#### Approaches

Do they use evidence based research and how?

What research methods have they used with seafarers?

What approaches have they found best working with seafarers and why?

#### Accreditation, Licence and Indemnity

Do they have a license to practice and/or an accreditation from a recognised professional body?

If yes, which ones?

Can they provide a copy of their licence(s) and/or accreditation?

What additional ongoing recent training have they done?

Are they supervised and how frequently?

Do they carry liability insurance as a company and/or as an individual provider?

#### Maintaining Quality Services

What continuing education programs do they participate in and how often?

# More training and tech acceptance needed

*DNV study finds that seafarers feel underprepared for the changes happening in the industry*

By Carly Fields

**A** pressing need for training in new fuels and technology; embracing new technology; and the use of sustainability and technology as talent recruitment and retention tools – these key strands will prepare future seafarers for tackling the challenges posed by decarbonisation and digitalisation, according to a study.

*The Future of Seafarers 2030: A Decade of Transformation*, a study undertaken by DNV and co-sponsored by the Singapore Maritime Foundation, examined the drivers transforming the maritime industry and their impact on sea-going professionals in the lead-up to 2030.

Through a combination of literature review, expert consultations, and a survey of more than 500 seafarers, the study found that both officers and ratings strongly indicated a pressing need for training in new fuels and technology.

A total of 81% of respondents indicated that they require either partial or complete training in dealing with advanced digital technologies (such as further automation of equipment/systems, advanced sensors, artificial intelligence and remote operations); only 13% agreed that they were well trained.

Two-thirds of seafaring officers said more advanced technology on board would make their job easier. However, only 40% of seafaring officers thought that shore-based remote-control centres, which can remotely operate some or all functions, would make their onboard job easier.

“Emerging fuels and new technologies could pose safety risks for assets and crews, if not handled properly. Therefore, we must focus on the human factor and adequately train seafarers who operate and maintain ship systems, including carrying out bunkering operations. As an industry, we have a responsibility to keep them safe and well prepared for all eventualities,” said Cristina Saenz de Santa Maria, regional manager South-East Asia, Pacific & India at DNV Maritime.

Addressing retention challenges, 55% of respondents indicated that new developments in fuels, automation and digitalisation on board ships could

Changes in the marine industry require a sea-change in training methods



assist in attracting new seafarers to a career at sea and retaining existing seafarers.


## Key recommendations

The study proposed several recommendations to address its findings. Firstly, key stakeholders such as regulatory bodies, shipowners/operators/managers and training academies should carefully assess and target the skill deficits in digitalisation and decarbonisation in the current decade to ensure seafarers have the necessary skills in place when they are needed in the future. Secondly, the industry should use a future seafarer training model where maritime training academies focus on delivering basic/generalised shipboard skills while ship operators focus on delivering fuel-specific and vessel-specific training.

Thirdly, shipowners/operators/managers and training academies must ensure that the best-placed seafarers based on position, experience and availability are trained at the right time to ensure continuity of operations and knowledge and skills transfer. This may result in senior officers being trained on new technologies and fuels first to enable an effective mentoring and on-the-job training environment on board.

“As industry transformation – spurred by digital innovation and fuel transition – picks up pace, we must prioritise the training and development of sea-going professionals, ensuring that they possess the technical competencies to safely operate the more advanced ships that are coming on stream. Digitalisation and decarbonisation could present opportunities to attract a younger generation of sea-going professionals, provided a pathway to sustainable career development is visible, transiting from sea-to-shore based careers,” said Tan Beng Tee, executive director of the Singapore Maritime Foundation.

The study also recommends that there is a renewed focus on the development of seafarers’ soft skills and that shipowners/operators/managers closely manage their seafarer progression opportunities from both an attraction-retention point of view and an operational capability perspective.

“Shipowners/operators/managers should harness seafarers’ unique and desirable skill sets and provide them with opportunities for complementary shore-based roles such as vessel control and monitoring facilities (shore control centres), which will likely become more prevalent later in the current decade and beyond,” concluded the report. 



# Practical health help to save lives

*Importance of providing medical advice to seafarers where and when it matters most*

By Natalie Shaw

I have been very privileged to be involved in developing a medical guide that I truly believe will help save seafarers' lives. When a medical emergency happens on a vessel, immediate medical care is critical, and for that reason, the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) has published the new *International Medical Guide for Seafarers and Fishers* in collaboration with the International Maritime Health Association and the International Transport Workers' Federation.

For nearly two years, ICS worked with a team of medical experts to gather the latest medical knowledge on all injuries, illnesses, and health issues experienced on ships and fishing vessels. All members of the guide's technical review group dedicated themselves to creating a medical guide that could improve seafarers' working conditions and make a remarkable difference in

seafarers' and fishers' lives while on board vessels.

Myriad situations arise on a ship requiring immediate medical attention including, for example, dehydration from working in a hot engine room or trips and falls from navigating passageways during seagoing conditions. Within the guide, appropriate action is explained in a practical format aiming to ensure that a seafarer receives the right advice and medical care on the vessel, so that there is a much better chance of a positive end result.

The *International Medical Guide for Seafarers and Fishers* comprises three sections:

- The 600-page medical guide containing latest medical knowledge by way of clear and practical explanations of assessments, treatments, and procedures, with chapters devoted to choking, bleeding, chest pain, seizures, strokes, back injuries, wounds, burns, and more.

- The Ship's Medicine Chest, a detailed annex listing all the different medications and equipment that should be carried on board with international comparisons of medications and the amounts required. Research at the start of the project showed that many ships' medicine chests were out of date or that medicines were not available in certain regions, so great care was taken to create a Ship's Medicine Chest that is as up to date and widely understood as possible.

- Ten removable action cards that can be carried anywhere on the ship to immediately assess an emergency medical situation.

The entire guide features an easy-to-use format for a non-medical professional to navigate and apply in a medical situation, by way of 3D visual aids, tables, charts, and assessments to help crew follow procedures correctly.

## Universally understood

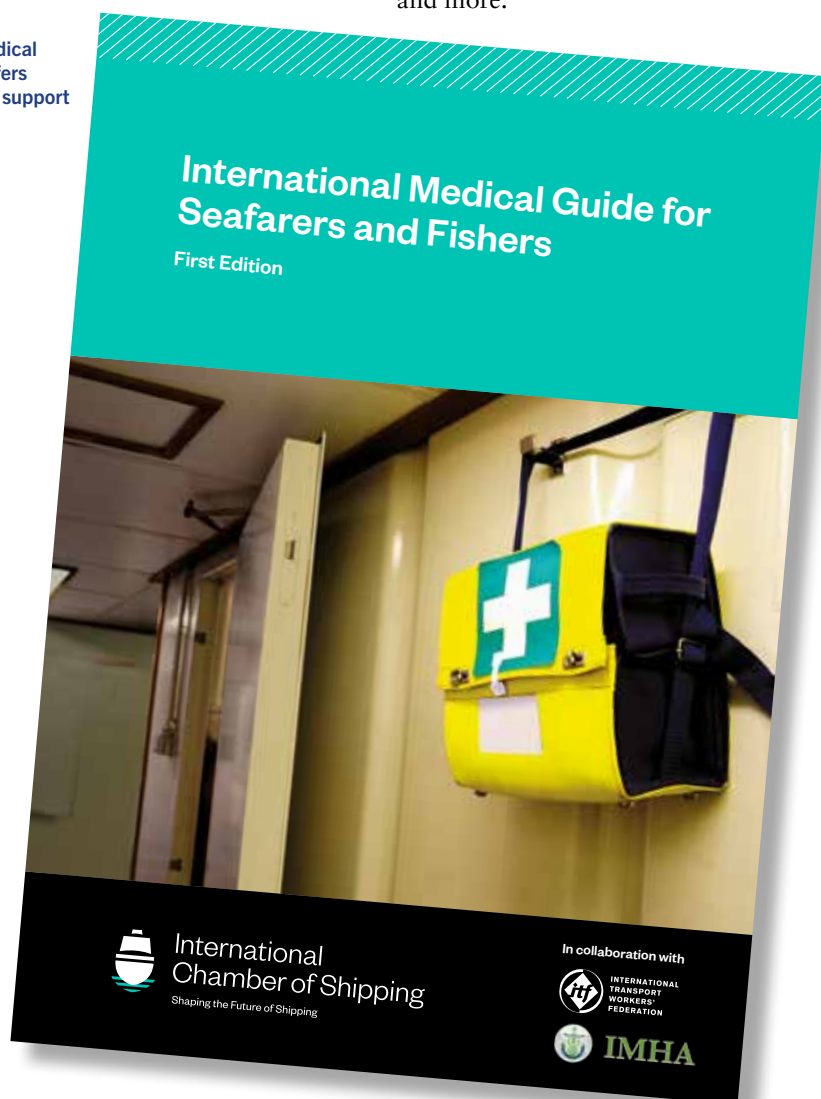
In developing this medical guide, ICS has placed emphasis on the importance of using terminology that can be understood internationally due to the many nationalities involved in modern seafaring, and including the latest medicines that can be sourced in all regions of the world.

Intended to accelerate medical care provision at the place where it is needed, the *International Medical Guide for Seafarers and Fishers* also assists ships sailing under flags without a national guide. It includes new dedicated chapters on assessing and treating mental health issues and seasickness, and how to communicate with telemedical services.

As all seafarers know, the remote nature of shipping may sometimes require practical information to be readily available to them during the first crucial moments after an on board medical emergency arises. This knowledge guided ICS and the entire team of medical experts to create this completely new, comprehensive, and practical guide designed to make a really positive difference for today's seafarers. 📞

Natalie Shaw MBE is director of employment affairs at the International Chamber of Shipping. The *International Medical Guide for Seafarers and Fishers* is available in print and digital ebook from <https://publications.ics-shipping.org>.

New medical guide offers updated support



# Capturing true life at sea

*ITF Seafarers' Trust photo competition celebrates seafarers and their careers*

**T**he ITF Seafarers' Trust invites you to submit your best photographs of Life at Sea in 2023. Share the good times, the bad times, the extraordinary and the ordinary day-to-day of life on board. Snap action shots or moments of reflection. Immortalise your crew mates and capture what it's really like living and working on board.

If you're a seafarer but haven't been able to join a ship in 2023, don't despair – we want to hear from you too. Send us meaningful shots of the life of a seafarer ashore.

From 2020, the ITF Seafarers' Trust photo competitions have provided us with a remarkable photographic archive with which to promote awareness of the essential work of seafaring.

From exhibitions at Crew Connect in Manila to the USS Constitution Museum, Boston, we've been proud to share your stories. And since we've come this far together, we plan to continue with an annual competition to make sure we're always relevant and recording the real experience of seafaring in the present day.

We are pleased to announce that in co-operation with Rotterdam Maritime Museum the winning photo will be exhibited at the Museum Harbour.

This year's judges are Paddy Rodgers, director of the Royal Museums Greenwich, UK; Anne Reitsma, photographer, Netherlands; Patrice Terraz, photographer, France; and San Ko Oo, AB and winner of *Life at Sea* 2022, Myanmar.

## What we want from you

We are looking for striking images and interesting accounts to give people ashore an insight into the lives of seafarers – photos and stories that show what Life at Sea is really like.

Include a caption or short account with your photo(s). This can be in English or in your mother tongue. Tell us about the photo and about yourself. If your picture shows someone else, please ensure you have their permission to submit their image for use in this project.

Please ensure that you provide the largest possible file size when you save and upload your photos. Select

San Ko Oo won last year's competition with his entry 'Home sick'




**Calling all seafarers: Win £1,000  
for the best photograph of Life at Sea 2023  
and have your photo exhibited at Rotterdam  
Maritime Museum!**



'Actual size' on your phone. Please note that 'selfies' taken using the front camera result in smaller file sizes so should be avoided. Likewise edited images may result in lower quality photos. Please do not forward smaller images from other platforms like Instagram or Facebook. If you have limited bandwidth or connection, you may need to choose a time to upload when fewer crew members are using

the internet, or wait until you are closer to shore. If you can only send a small image but have retained a larger file let us know in the space for text so that we can contact you.

First prize is £1,000, second prize is £750, and third prize is £500. This competition is open to all serving seafarers. 

Find out more at [www.seafarerstrust.org/competition](http://www.seafarerstrust.org/competition).

# Navigating towards fairer seas

*Survey exposes prevalence of seafarers being charged illegal recruitment fees*

By Christos Kontovas

**R**ecruitment or placement fees and charges that are borne by seafarers illegally and in violation of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) are a serious concern in the maritime industry.

Their impact on seafarers and the industry can be significant and can lead to a range of negative consequences. The stress and financial strain of paying illegal fees can take a toll on seafarers' mental health, limit their career opportunities and lead to loss of trust in the shipping industry. The latter could exacerbate existing labour shortages. These fees and charges can be a significant burden for seafarers, especially those from developing countries. In some cases, seafarers might become trapped in debt bondage and may be forced to work in exploitative and abusive conditions, which are serious violations of their human rights.

The UK's Liverpool John Moores University is currently undertaking a study which aims to address these exploitative and harmful-to-seafarers practices, by examining the extent of this problem and exploring potential solutions.

In this article, we present the results of a survey which examined the prevalence of these practices. The questionnaire survey was designed in co-operation with The Mission to Seafarers (MtS), who sponsored this study, and the Institute of Human Rights and Business (IHRB).

## Geographical spread

We gathered a total of 210 valid answers that were used in our analysis. Most of the respondents came from the Philippines (25.24%), India (21.90%) and Sri Lanka (9.52%). The following are the key results.

*Seafarers' opinion on placement and recruitment fees:* In one of our questions, we tried to elicit seafarers' opinions on illegal demands related to recruitment and placement fees/charges, as they can provide valuable insights into the issue. In their responses, most of the seafarers (almost 92%) indicated a great level of concern about these illegal practices and believed these should stop. In fact, 64.8% of

the seafarers who participated in our questionnaire acknowledged that they were aware of these corrupt demands (stating that it had either happened to them or their colleagues).

*Placement and recruitment fees – the actual picture:* Approximately 21.43% of respondents reported that they had been asked to pay recruitment or placement fees. In terms of the country where the demand for fees was made (this might indicate the place of the middleman or crewing agency), India topped the list (35.5% of cases), followed by the Philippines (13.3%) and Myanmar (11.1%). It is worth noting that 28.26% of Indian seafarers who completed our survey reported that they had paid a fee.

The results of the survey showed that 57.8% of the respondents reported that the crewing agent appointed by the shipping company requested the fees, 11.1% said that the request came from an employee of the shipping company, while 31.1% pointed to an individual

with links to the crewing agent or the shipping company.

The amount of money demanded varied from as low as \$50-100 to a maximum of around \$7,500, with an average of \$1,872. We have identified some cases (around 10%) where seafarers are still in debt because of these payments. These debts can place a significant burden on seafarers and can have a negative impact on their mental health and well-being. Further research is needed to investigate the potential for debt bondage (i.e., a form of modern slavery) and exploitation of seafarers.

## Regulation support

*Seafarers' familiarity with the MLC Convention and their rights:* We also sought to gauge respondents' familiarity with the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 and other guidelines related to seafarer workplace rights and entitlement. The majority of them (71.4%) confirmed that they are well-versed in the abovementioned





guidelines and receive regular training. While we had anticipated that most seafarers would be familiar with these guidelines, a quarter of respondents (25.7%) admitted to only having partial knowledge and limited understanding.

**Familiarity with complaint procedures:** Seafarers were also asked if they were familiar with the procedure to file a complaint against recruitment fees, corrupt demands, or unlawful retention of their documents. Surprisingly, 35.7% replied that they do not know the procedure to file a complaint. This is alarming considering that the MLC requires each Member State to ensure that ships flying its flag have on board complaint procedures in place to handle seafarer complaints regarding breaches of the convention's requirements, including seafarers' rights.

**Unlawful retention of seafarer documents:** As part of our survey, we asked seafarers whether they had experienced any retention of their documents – such as passports, Continuous Discharge Certificate/Seaman's books (CDC), or Certificate of Competency (COC) – during the recruitment/placement process by the hiring company or the recruiting agent. A startling 29% of the survey respondents indicated that they had experienced the retention of some of their documents by the hiring company or the recruiting agent during the recruitment/placement process. In almost all the cases both their Continuous Discharge Certificate/Seaman's book and passport were retained.

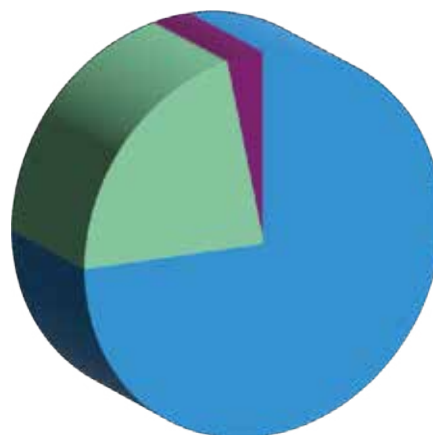
It should be noted that more than half of those who paid a fee also reported having their documents withheld. This high percentage can be attributed to coercion tactics, for example the retention of documents to ensure payment of a recruitment fee, or to guarantee employment on a particular vessel so that the agent receives a fee from the hiring company.

## Taking action

We asked seafarers to provide their opinion on four measures that we identified as having the potential to reduce these practices. The largest percentage of respondents (53.1%) suggested that increasing awareness among seafarers through leaflets, on board notices, and social media could be an effective way to combat these practices.

Including MLC awareness certification alongside other STCW certification for seafarers was supported by 32.7%

## Have you ever been asked to pay a fee/charge (even indirectly) during the recruitment/placement process



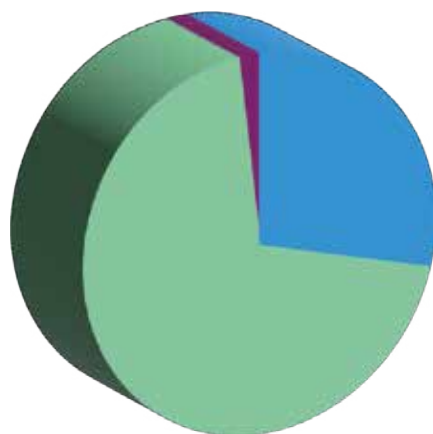
21.43% of the participating seafarers experienced demands for recruitment/placement fees

Yes 21.43%

Not willing to share 3.33%

No 75.24%

## During the recruitment/placement process, were any of your documents, for example passport, Continuous Discharge Certificate/Seaman's book (CDC), or Certificate of Competency (COC), retained by the company or the recruiting agent



29% of the participating seafarers had their documents unlawfully held

No 69%

Not willing to share 1.9%

Yes 29%

of the seafarers. This could indicate a desire among seafarers for more formal training to improve their knowledge and understanding of their rights under the MLC.

A significant proportion of respondents (31.3%) also suggested that frequent and regular education on what fees can and cannot be requested would be an effective way to reduce malpractices. We feel that there is definitely a need for a clearer understanding of seafarers' rights and entitlements.

Also, almost 30% of respondents suggested that help to obtain experience during the first years of employment could be an effective way to reduce malpractices related to recruitment fees and corrupt demands.

In addition to the survey responses, we received a significant number of comments in free text format. Most of these comments echoed the above-mentioned suggestions. Some pointed to the lack of opportunities for seafarers to secure their first placement on a ship

as a root cause of this issue. Others recommended that governments impose hefty penalties on agents who exploit seafarers or hold manning agents and shipping companies accountable. The need for stricter enforcement was also highlighted.

In summary, compelling evidence suggests that seafarers are being charged for their recruitment and placement. Several interesting observations have been made and the complete survey results will be released soon. Our study will conclude with suggestions to reduce these practices, as well as recommendations for future research. Stay tuned! 📺

*Christos Kontovas is a reader in Sustainable Maritime Transport and Logistics at Liverpool John Moores University, UK. Christos would like to acknowledge the contribution of his colleagues, Dr Robyn Pyne, Anna Kaparaki and Dr Yinan Yin, as well as former LJMU MSc students and research assistants, Rushdie Rasheed and Isuru Wijeratne, to this study.*

# Keep shipping in the public eye

*Seafarers need to be continually recognised for the critical work they do*

It took a pandemic for seafarers to become more visible to the world, but with Covid slipping from people's radars, the industry urgently needs to take action to keep seafarers front and centre. We can't wait for another crisis to improve shipping's visibility, warns Women's International Shipping and Trading Association (WISTA) president, Elpi Petraki.

Speaking to *The Sea*, Petraki highlights the introverted nature of the shipping industry before the pandemic. "We didn't show ourselves to the world, we didn't need advertising. However, Covid came and showed people who are not involved in the industry how

important shipping is for everyone – for having electricity, for having food, and for other things that are important for our everyday lives."

But this pre-pandemic introversion proved to be a problem. During the pandemic, governments not tuned into the importance of ships, their cargoes, and the seafarers that keep them moving, failed to provide the gateways needed for seafarers to travel back home or to re-join ships. With hindsight, Petraki says there is now an acceptance by industry leaders that our hidden nature means that when we need something, we are less likely to get it than other, more visible industries.

"What makes me sad is even after Covid, after we made people realise how important shipping was, I have had conversations with highly educated people with an understanding of the world, who still do not realise the importance of shipping," Petraki says. "That has really shocked me because we evidently haven't done enough."

## Awareness drive

For Petraki, maintaining visibility of the shipping industry and seafarers is all about raising awareness. The industry needs governments to continually 'see' shipping. This would help in all sorts of situations, including where seafarers have been abandoned and where there has been unfair criminalisation of seafarers.

"When people think of transport, shipping is not the first thing that comes into their mind. It's planes, it's trucks, it's other things that they see in their everyday life," Petraki said. "We need to be speaking more, and producing material to put out there and be seen by more people to make them more aware."

She goes so far as to describe it as a "regret" that the world does not realise just how essential shipping is to our everyday lives and that seafarers are still not seen as essential workers.

But it's not just about visibility; seafarers need to be heard as well as seen. The needs of seafarers have changed from 40 years ago. Then, Petraki says, people went to sea to be able to send money back home. Comfort and connectivity were not decisive factors. "Today, seafarers need to have a standard of life that was not considered before," she says. "We need to recognise those needs and work towards achieving them."

On the plus side, much has been done to improve safety and to offer psychological security and stability for seafarers. This change has been for the better, Petraki says, which will hopefully increase the attractiveness of seafaring as a career for young people in the future.

## Dearth of cadetships

However, there are still challenges to overcome. "It is still not very easy for young cadets to find cadetships," says Petraki, who is also chartering,



Elpi Petraki. Credit: Nomikou Photography

operations and business development manager at ENEA Management Inc, a Greek shipping company that operates a fleet of specialised tankers. She is also vice president of the Hellenic Shortsea Shipowners Association.

This does depend on where they learn. “In some countries they have their own cadetships, whereas in others, cadets have to look for their own cadetship. This is the new reality. They are given the freedom to enrol in marine academies, but then in some cases they don’t find work for them.”

This is disappointing, especially when there is such an obvious need for raising the number of serving seafarers, she adds.

Another issue that is deterring female cadets from sticking with shipping is a perceived injustice in career progression. “I’m hearing that, sometimes, female cadets reach a level and then they are not promoted, but a man of the same age, that maybe went to maritime school with them, is promoted. This discouragement makes them leave the industry,” she says.

Added to this, female seafarers are entering what has traditionally been a male domain, yet their needs differ. Petraki says that it is therefore important for associations such as WISTA to speak with ship owners, operators, managers and crewing agents about these needs – because those organisations may not realise the nature of the problems.

For Petraki, adapting facilities and provisions on a ship to suit female seafarers is a comparatively easy thing to do. The harder task is changing behaviours and instilling respect regardless of gender.

“I cannot try to convince people to come to sea unless I’m sure the environment is correct, and safe for them,” Petraki says. “For me, we need to change behaviours and attitudes and have respect on board for the vessel to be safe. It would certainly be good to have more women at sea – it’s a great career for any kind of person to choose. But we need to be sure that it is safe for them.”

### Good to talk

WISTA has a presence in 56 countries and its members come from all sectors of the industry, not only maritime, but also from logistics and trading. “We do really see the big picture,” Petraki says.

She praises the fact that nobody is afraid to raise these issues today, which




WISTA collaborates with other organisations, including Maritime SheEO.

*“We need to change behaviours and attitudes and have respect on board for the vessel to be safe. It would certainly be good to have more women at sea – it’s a great career for any kind of person to choose. But we need to be sure that it is safe for them.”*

wasn’t the case in the past. WISTA participates in cross-industry working groups that have open discussions about safe environments on board vessels, particularly with regards to harassment – physical or psychological – behaviour and bullying. “We join groups that are subgroups of the IMO, or other groups that talk about these things and we include our experienced members who are obviously seeing things first-hand. We encourage them to take part in the conversation so we can make a change,” she said.

“I don’t think anybody would say

that they don’t want a safe environment on board vessels. Everybody would agree with that, but it is the finer details where people have differing opinions. So, we all need to talk together and make this useful for everybody.”

Change is already happening exactly because the industry started talking about these challenges. “Of course, there are difficulties, but we are talking about it, and this is the most important change for me – five years ago few marine academies would have invited WISTA to speak about women seafarers,” Petraki says. 



# Ready to receive your rubbish

*A newly published guide could simplify requirements for marine litter reception facilities* **By Michael Grey**

**N**obody likes to see rubbish floating in the sea, and you can probably argue that seafarers are more conscious than most of the need to stop what they are floating on being used as a gigantic rubbish receptacle.

Most of us have seen pictures of the floating rubbish that has been accumulated by the winds and ocean currents in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and that horrible sight ought to give everyone pause for thought. Most, of course, is generated from the shore and deposited in the sea via rivers; seafarers are more aware and better regulated, while most merchant ships generate very little rubbish in any case.

Research from the Smithsonian Environmental Research Council in the US, which has been studying what has become known as the Pacific 'gyre' of rubbish, has suggested that much of this plastic detritus has become almost permanent, with hundreds of different species, which presumably 'emigrated' from coasts, living on the floating debris in successful small colonies.

It is plastic litter that is the most worrying and longest-lasting element in the garbage that ends up in the sea and the IMO and FAO are doing their bit to stop it with a newly published guide to marine litter reception facilities. They recognise that it would be useful to bring some order and system into the current arrangements, where practically every

port on earth has its own 'customised' arrangements for the collection and disposal of rubbish from ships.

The important element, every seafarer will suggest, is that whatever system is employed, it should be practical and easy for ships' people to use. It also needs to be affordable, because if it is too complicated and costly, the ship's operators will just instruct the master to take the garbage on to the next port, where it might be cheaper to land. That would not be much fun on a six-port rotation around the coast, forced to carry a whole lot of rancid rubbish bags smelling to high heaven on the afterdeck, waiting for a port that will take them at a reasonable cost.

## Differing rules

But the disposal of rubbish can be necessarily complicated by quarantine regulations which are put in place to prevent the introduction of foreign diseases and pathogens arriving from overseas aboard ships. It is something that, in very many countries, is increasingly regulated and policed. That invariably means that seafarers on visiting ships are having to carefully sort out the various categories of garbage before it is collected by the port.

The new guide is primarily for port authorities who have the responsibility for the collection and safe disposal of rubbish landed by the visiting ships.

They have the power to make the process easy, practical and affordable. But they can also make it excessively bureaucratic and over-regulated, with ridiculous amounts of form-filling and heavy fines levied on any ship which contravenes their complex regulations. And there are still many ports in the world which find life easier if they have a bye-law which prohibits any landing of rubbish from visiting ships, which does not exactly serve the cause of cleaner seas.

Of course, the biggest generators of wastes at sea will be the cruise ship fleet, but they have become adept at minimising what they need to land, using increasingly sophisticated on board waste-handling facilities, such as automatic sorting systems, compaction machinery and incineration. But because they are big purchasers of consumables, they are able to put pressure on their suppliers to provide packaging for goods that will not contribute to waste as much as it might. They will, for instance, require fewer liquids to be supplied in glass bottles and far less use of plastics, which might be ideas that can filter down to other shipping industry purchasers, even if the handling equipment cannot be justified on a normal commercial ship with its small crew. It would probably make a lot of sense to reduce packaging in the first place. ☺



Waste facilities vary from country to country and even from port to port

# 'We need to safeguard our seafarers'

*Lifeboat reinvention needed to stop accidents during launches*

**T**he Container Ship Safety Forum (CSSF) has called for a reinvention of lifeboats on cargo vessels after too many seafarers have been injured during the launch of lifeboats.

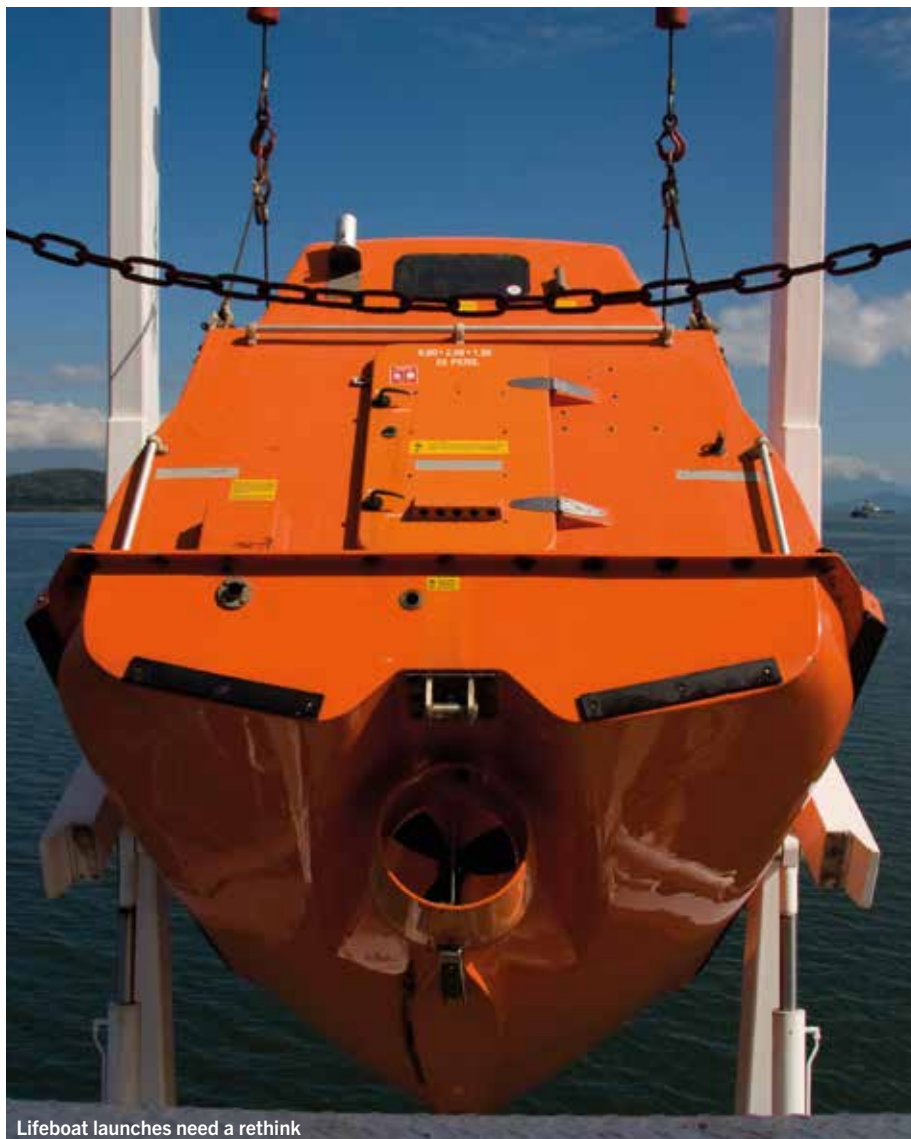
CSSF chairman, Aslak Ross, said that instead of focusing on compliance and training, the industry should shift its focus towards creating a safer environment for seafarers. "For way too long, we have seen able seafarers being injured when launching lifeboats even though crews have been trained and the lifeboat is modern and fully compliant," Ross says.

The CSSF is encouraging the industry, classification societies, flag states, and suppliers to launch innovation to replace current lifeboats with a safer technology. Ross believes that alternative designs, such as Marine Evacuation Systems (MES), are already available for offshore installations and passenger evacuation on PAX vessels and should also be made available to cargo vessels without delay. "It is long overdue to change the current environment and innovate to eliminate the risk of lifeboat accidents. We need approved systems that can be fitted to newbuildings – we need to safeguard our seafarers," Ross says.

## Too many incidents

The call for a reinvention of lifeboats comes after the UK Chamber of Shipping identified 60 fatalities during lifeboat testing over a 10-year period. In 2017, the UK Chamber issued an article urging the industry to "save lives, not lose them" and suggested that simulation training could improve safety. While Ross supports the use of simulation and new technology to reduce the risk of accidents, he believes that launching a lifeboat is too dangerous and that a safer alternative needs to be found.

"Simulation and use of new technology is one way to conduct drills in a safer environment, and we support the intent to reduce the risk of accidents; however, it does not solve the core of the problem: launching a lifeboat is too dangerous. And even though simulation has its advantages, it should only be used as a supplement to well-conducted on board abandon ship drills where crews are familiarised



Lifeboat launches need a rethink

with the ship-specific equipment," Ross says.

Accidents involving lifeboats are one of the most common causes of injuries and fatalities among seafarers in the shipping industry, according to the UK's National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT).

IMO SOLAS regulation III/19.3.3.3 requires each lifeboat to be launched at least once every three months during an abandon ship drill, and manoeuvred in the water by its assigned operating crew. However, the regulation, while requiring each lifeboat to be manoeuvred in the water by its assigned operating crew, does not actually require that crew to be on board when the lifeboat is launched.

According to insurer Gard, there are a number of causes of lifeboat accidents. Some of the more frequently occurring ones are:

- failure of the on-load release mechanism
- inadvertent or accidental operation of the on-load release mechanism
- inadequate maintenance of the lifeboat and its launching equipment. Sometimes the item to be maintained might not be readily accessible due to its location
- lack of familiarity with lifeboats and the on-load release mechanism
- unclear operating instructions for the on-load release/resetting mechanism
- faulty design.

The CSSF is calling for the industry to take action and innovate to eliminate the risk of lifeboat accidents. Seafarers' safety should be the top priority, and a safer alternative to lifeboats should be made available to cargo vessels without delay. "We need to safeguard our seafarers," Ross concludes. [S](#)



# theSea Leisure Page

There are many health benefits to spending down-time solving puzzles. Lower stress levels, better memory, uplifted mood, improved problem-solving abilities, and better work performance are just some of them.

## Sudoku

The aim of Sudoku is to fill in the empty cells so that each column, row and 3x3 region contain the numbers 1 to 9 exactly once. Find the answers to both puzzles in the next issue.

### EASY LEVEL

7			6			4		9
	1		5		8			
		4	7		2			
			8					5
5	4		1	7	9		8	3
9				3				
			3	7	8			
			4	5	6			
3	2		6					1

### TRICKY LEVEL

2			5					
	4		6			8	7	
6		9		1				
			2		7			1
	1	7				4	8	
9			4		1			
				9		3		7
	3	6			5		2	
				6				4

Credit: www.sudokuoftheday.com

### EASY LEVEL

solution (Issue 1 2023)

2	5	9	4	6	8	3	7	1
1	4	7	3	9	5	8	2	6
8	3	6	7	2	1	5	4	9
6	1	3	5	4	9	2	8	7
7	2	4	8	1	6	9	3	5
9	8	5	2	3	7	1	6	4
3	9	1	6	7	2	4	5	8
4	7	8	1	5	3	6	9	2
5	6	2	9	8	4	7	1	3

### TRICKY LEVEL

solution (Issue 1 2023)

4	7	1	5	2	9	8	6	3
3	9	2	8	6	4	1	7	5
5	8	6	1	3	7	2	4	9
6	4	5	3	8	1	9	2	7
7	2	8	9	4	5	3	1	6
1	3	9	2	7	6	5	8	4
2	1	7	4	5	3	6	9	8
8	6	3	7	9	2	4	5	1
9	5	4	6	1	8	7	3	2

## Jumble

Can you correctly unscramble these anagrams to form four words? If so, send your answers by email to [thesea@missiontoseafarers.org](mailto:thesea@missiontoseafarers.org) by June 28, 2023. All correct answers will be entered into a draw for a chance to win a Mission to Seafarers' Goodie Bag, containing a pen set, mug and handmade woolly hat. Please include your answers, name, the vessel you are working on, your nationality and finish this sentence: "I like The Mission to Seafarers because..."

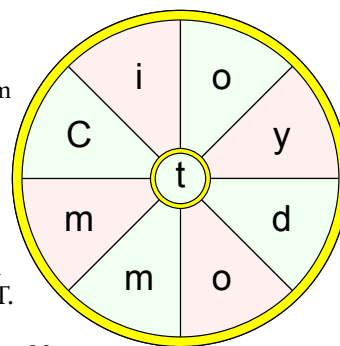
1) doglutein 2) cortpis 3) auldeti 4) qatroue

Issue 1, 2023 solutions:

1) Ropes 2) Pulley 3) Block 4) Sheets

## Word wheel

This word wheel is made from a 9-letter word. Try and find that word, then make as many words of three letters or more as you can from these letters. You can only use each letter once, and each word must include the letter T.



Answer for Issue 1, 2023 issue: 82 possible words, nine-letter word was Barometer

## Flag code

Can you tell us what words these flags are communicating? Answer in the next issue.

Answer for Issue 1, 2023: Weather Routing



See Michael Grey's feature on page 12



"I know where I would like to put this waste management plan!"



# Help for seafarers around the world

Are you one of the 1.6 million people around the world working at sea, or a loved one of someone who is?

The Mission to Seafarers is a great source of support for anyone working in the industry, and we've been helping people like you since the 19th century.

We work in over 200 ports in 50 countries and are available 365 days a year. We can provide help and support, no matter your nationality, gender or faith. Our network of chaplains, staff and volunteers can help with any problem – whether it's emotional, practical or spiritual help that you need.

## Our services include:

- **Ship visits** – we carry out approximately 35,000 ship visits a year, welcoming crews to ports, providing access to communication facilities and offering assistance and advice on mental health and wellbeing.
- **Transport** – Our teams can arrange free transportation to the local town, shopping mall, doctor, dentist or a place of worship.
- **Seafarers' Centres** – We operate over 120 Flying Angel centres around the world, offering visiting seafarers a safe space to relax between voyages, purchase supplies, seek support for any problems they might have and stay in touch with their families.
- **Emergency support** – Our teams are trained in pastoral support, mental health first aid and critical incident stress counselling. We can also provide advocacy support.
- **Family networks** – We operate these networks in the Philippines and India where seafarers' families can meet, share information and access support.

Our mission is to care for the shipping industry's most important asset: its people.

To find out where we work, visit [www.missiontoseafarers.org/our-ports](http://www.missiontoseafarers.org/our-ports). Here you can find information about all our centres, including contact details, facilities and opening times.



## CREW HELP CONTACTS

### SeafarerHelp

Free, confidential, multilingual helpline for seafarers and their families available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year, provided by ISWAN.

Direct dial: +44 20 7323 2737

Email: [help@seafarerhelp.org](mailto:help@seafarerhelp.org)

### WeCare

Our WeCare e-learning programme gives seafarers access to mental health advice and wellbeing resources on board and on shore. For more information contact your local Seafarer Centre, [www.missiontoseafarers.org/our-ports](http://www.missiontoseafarers.org/our-ports).

### CrewHelp

The Mission to Seafarers can provide help and support if you have a welfare or justice issue. Please get in touch with us at [crewhelp@mtsmail.org](mailto:crewhelp@mtsmail.org)

### Get in touch!

Have you got news or views that you'd like to share with *The Sea*? Please get in touch with the Editor, Carly Fields at [thesea@missiontoseafarers.org](mailto:thesea@missiontoseafarers.org)

The Mission to Seafarers,  
First Floor, 6 Bath Place,  
Rivington Street, London,  
EC2A 3JE, UK  
T: +44 (0)20 7248 5202  
E: [crewhelp@mtsmail.org](mailto:crewhelp@mtsmail.org)

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

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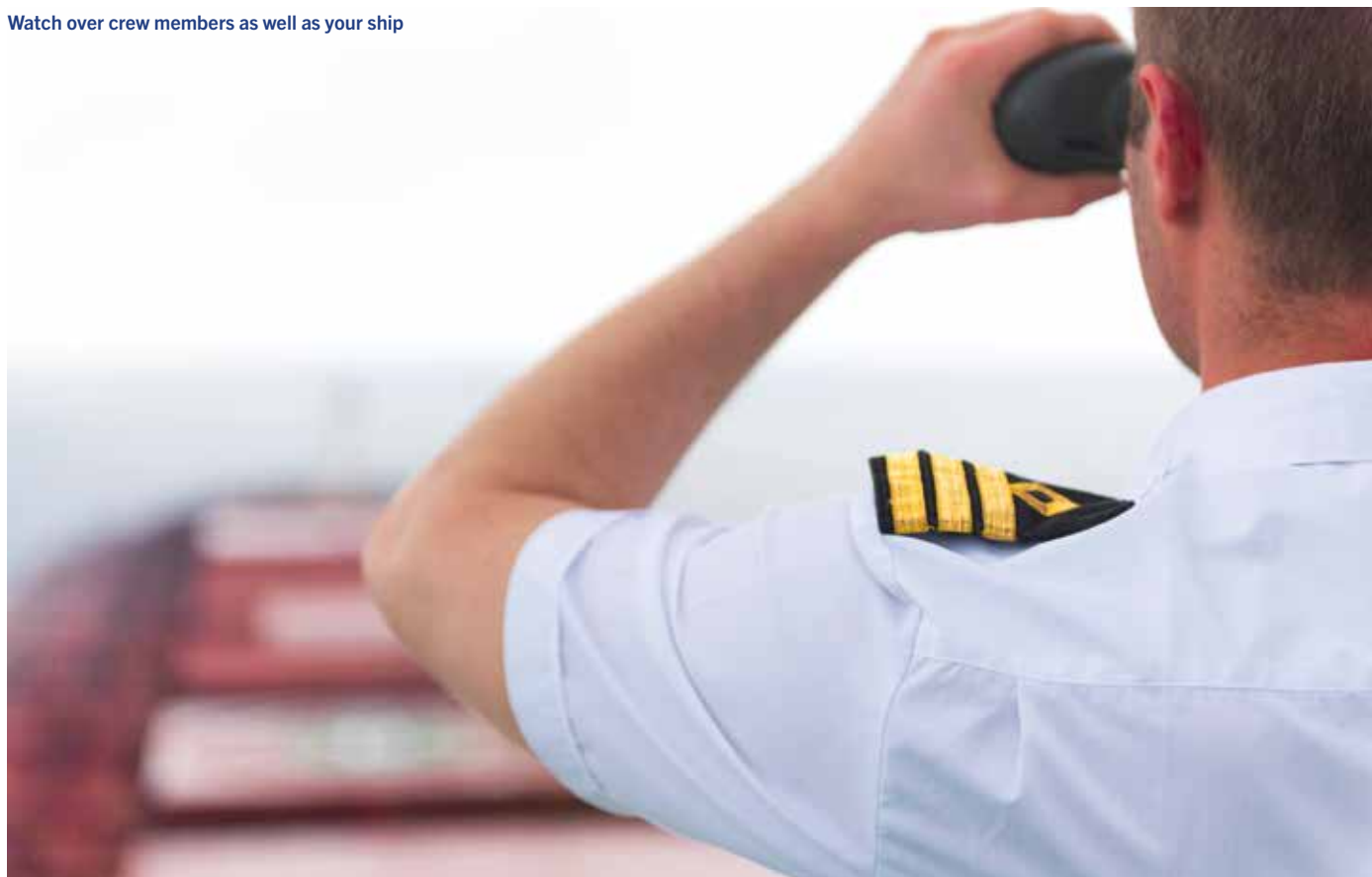
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By The Revd Canon Andrew Wright

## Being a good watchkeeper

*Are you there to watch over your colleagues at sea?*

**T**he Gospels paint a vivid picture of that last night before Jesus was arrested. The Last Supper is over. He is with his disciples among the trees of the Garden of Gethsemane. It is the quiet before the storm. Jesus' arrest is imminent, and he is troubled and distressed. "My soul is overwhelmed to the point of death."

The night is dark. The day and the evening have been long and testing, as has the whole week. They must all have been shattered. Jesus is trying to prepare himself for what lies ahead and is in prayer with his Father. "Take this cup from me", he prays, "yet not what I will but what you will."

Although he steps aside for his prayers, he does not want to be completely alone. "Stay here and keep watch," he tells his disciples. But when he turns to them again, he finds them all asleep.

One thing seafarers know is that they cannot fall asleep while on watch. Whether on land or sea, we all need people to keep watch with us. Life is often fragile and difficult, and we need people who look out for us. It is what we try to do at the Mission, for crew and their families.

We all need to be wakeful watchkeepers for those around us. We all need to recognise when people need

help and support – even if they are difficult characters. That is part of what it means to love.

When it comes to your colleagues, are you a good watchkeeper? One poet wrote of listening to the sounds of the sea at night. "And the thought comes of that other being who is awake, too, letting our prayers break on him, not like this for a few hours, but for days, years, for eternity."

God never fails in his watch of love over us. We should not fail those who need our watch over them. [!\[\]\(9c2e8d1b5bd77cb5c9f83b7a9cff79fd\_img.jpg\)](#)

*The Revd Canon Andrew Wright is secretary general of The Mission to Seafarers.*

## A prayer for seafarers

*Thank you, Lord, for watching over us in love throughout our lives.*

*Even when life is difficult and hard you walk with us, as you do with our families far away.*

*Help us to keep watch with others, with our families, with our colleagues, and even with those we find hard to like.*

*For such is the love and care to which you call us.*

*Amen*