



Caring for seafarers  
around the world

# the SEA

Issue 1, 2022



The pandemic has prompted many States to refuse medical assistance, against the requirements of the MLC.

Credit: Jamie Smith

## In sickness and in health

*Seafarers are entitled to the same access to medical care as workers ashore* **By Felicity Landon**

**C**ovid-19 has thrown a harsh spotlight on seafarers' rights, not least their rights to medical care. Stories have emerged of desperately ill seafarers refused permission to come ashore because of local Covid rules, left to suffer on board until their ship reaches a port that will allow them to access a doctor or hospital treatment.

But if we take the pandemic out of the picture for a moment, what should happen when a seafarer falls ill or is injured on board? The answers lie in the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 (MLC) – and, as with so much else, the reality depends on implementation.

The MLC sets out the duties of shipowners in respect of medical care for any seafarer working on board their ships, stating that they must have prompt access to medical care on board ship and ashore, at no cost to the seafarer. It states: "In principle, these measures

should ensure that seafarers have access to medical care which is, as far as practicable, comparable to that which is generally available to workers ashore."

Ships must carry a provision of medical stores and have crew on board who are trained in first aid and medical care.

Nearly 100 states have signed up to the MLC, but during the pandemic there has been a clash between the requirements of the Convention and the World Health Organization's (WHO) International Health Regulations, which are intended to "prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease", says Natalie Shaw, director of employment affairs at the International Chamber of Shipping. She describes the situation as "two opposite parallels operating at the same time".

"Health authorities in many countries are following the WHO regulations to

prevent further disease, whereas the maritime industry and IMO are saying no – these countries have signed up to the MLC and therefore seafarers should be provided with medical care," says Shaw. "It is a matter of conflicting laws and who wields the power in the government that is applying it. For example, the health ministry, the department of transport or the labour ministry." Which is the 'correct' law? "We would argue the MLC, and the right to medical care is also enshrined in SOLAS."

Besides the need for emergency dentistry and other physical medical care, there is the issue of seafarers who have Covid-19. "A lot of port States are saying 'we don't want to take you into our hospitals, we are already over capacity, you manage on board', which is clearly in breach of international responsibilities."

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## Medicare rules

Fabrizio Barcellona, seafarers' section coordinator at the ITF, says that the rules on medical care are fit for purpose; the issue is that although 99 countries have ratified the MLC, they have not all applied what they have signed up for. "That was the result especially in 2020 when in non-Covid related medical emergencies, some countries would not allow the ship to call into port, despite a seafarer having had a stroke, heart attack or cancer needing an urgent operation. We believe there were people who died because of non-compliance with existing regulations. We do look at numbers, but it doesn't matter how many – one is far too many."

As he points out, it is crucial that a person who has had a stroke is taken to hospital as fast as possible. In one case a seafarer was still on board three days later; it was fortunate that (when eventually a port allowed him ashore) his life was saved.

Dental emergencies have been a notable problem during Covid, says Shaw. She knows of many cases where seafarers have been stuck on board with excruciating toothache. What are the choices? Tie one end of a piece of string around the tooth and the other around the handle of an open door then slam the door shut, hoping it pulls the tooth out; hope the master does something; "or suffer for weeks on end, which can then cause abscesses and become much worse and require more than just a dental appointment".

*"Nearly 100 states have signed up to the MLC, but during the pandemic there has been a clash between the requirements of the Convention and the World Health Organization's (WHO) International Health Regulations"*

Pre-Covid, the situation regarding medical care and MLC implementation was much better, says Barcellona: "There will be crew on board who have some kind of basic medical training and can administer medicine. If required, they can get in touch with a telemedicine provider who can do some diagnosis remotely and recommend the master either deviate the ship or administer medicine."

The ITF has been pushing for a 'health passport' for seafarers, which would not only give details of Covid-19 vaccination status but would also (securely) incorporate the seafarer's medical history, so that medical professionals could access this information in an emergency. Because of the current crisis, the focus has been on vaccine certification, he says, "but we are trying to get the WHO to endorse or at least promote some kind of template of what they think a global health pass needs to look like."

## Fighting fit?

Do seafarers want to provide all of this information? Barcellona says: "There will always be someone somewhere who says they don't want some of their record displayed but the issue is that most contracts for seafarers include a clause that if you have some health issue before joining the ship, and something happens on the ship, you are not liable to receive any compensation. So long as the information is absolutely private to the seafarers, I would have thought that is not the problem."

As he points out, seafarers go through health checks far more regularly than most people: "They have a full check-up every two years to get a medical certificate and they have a pre-embarkation check-up as well every time before joining ship."

However, if a seafarer falls ill at sea, perhaps days from the nearest port, what happens then? "Neither the master nor the shipowner are medical professionals, so sometimes if you leave them to make the decision on whether a seafarer needs to be hospitalised, it could be a bit risky; for example, a stomach ache – is it internal bleeding or did they just eat something?"

In such a case, information in a health passport could be invaluable, he says. "Because of technology and ship-to-shore connectivity, medical providers can now make a much clearer diagnosis by looking at a small blood sample/saliva, rather than just taking second-hand information from the Chief Officer."

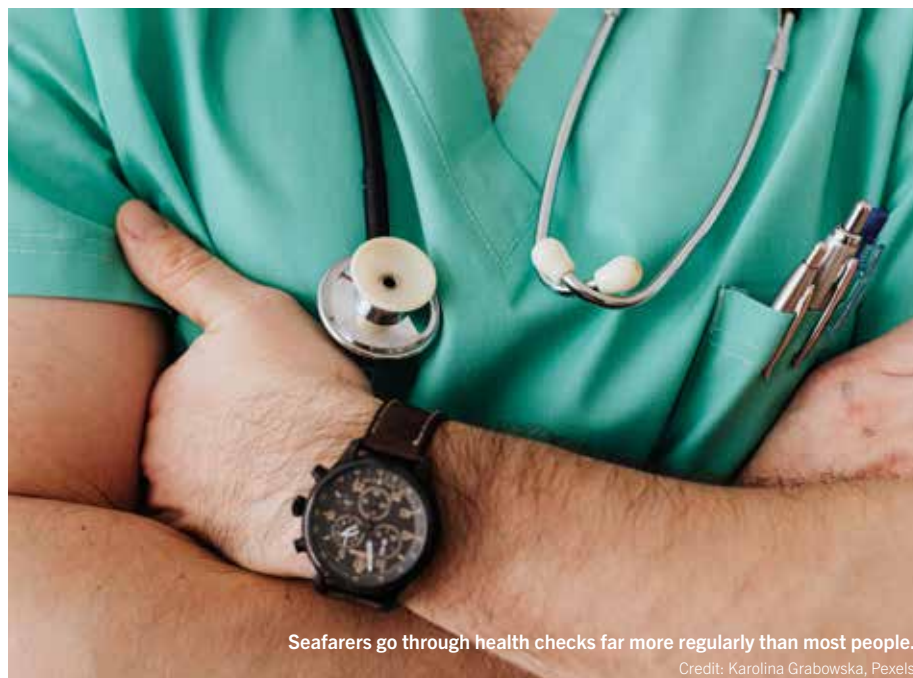
Chirag Bahri, director of regions at the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN), agrees that the MLC provides strong support for seafarers. "Everything is there in MLC about the rights of seafarers. It always needs to be updated, of course, and Covid has shown a new variety of challenges," he says.

His concern is that seafarers are not always aware of their entitlements and

**Ships must carry a provision of medical stores and have crew on board who are trained in first aid and medical care.**

Credit: Mikhail Nilov, Pexels





Seafarers go through health checks far more regularly than most people.

Credit: Karolina Grabowska, Pexels

## Telemedicine options

Barcelona sees new technology and better connectivity improving medical provision on board with medical providers increasingly able to make a better diagnosis if they can access the seafarer with a camera or other instrument. Seafarers can also talk online to a medical professional.

However, Covid has impacted on current telemedical services, says Shaw. “If you are on board, you are literally limited to what is in the ship’s medical chest and relying on (for example) the Chief Engineer with three weeks’ medical training to provide care and assistance. They are trained to act in absolute emergencies with the support of telemedical services. However, a lot of telemedical services are provided by staff working in hospitals – and they have been stretched during the pandemic, and the ability to get advice has not been as easy as it was before.”

Bahri, meanwhile, wants to see more focus on mental health. “People talk about physical illness or injury, which they can see, but what about mental health – what programmes are in place to promote that kind of environment on board? Shipowners must provide the infrastructure on board for seafarers to be able to relax, involve themselves in different activities and socialise on board.”

Despite everything, he says, one of the points most often missed is MLC paragraph 4.4, which emphasises the importance of access to shore-based welfare facilities ‘to ensure that seafarers working on board a ship have access to shore-based facilities and services to secure their health and wellbeing’.

“This is very much a part of MLC that is not strongly reinforced, that ports must have welfare facilities inside the port. It is these small facilities that give seafarers at least a chance to step down onshore and maybe make a phone call to their families. These things are important for wellbeing and mental health.”

Working and living 24/7, confined on a ship, causes fatigue, he adds. “Being at sea, your body is going to get tired even if you are not at work. We are land creatures – our body is not made for that. Let them step down from the ship; even stepping down from a ship gives a lot of energy to a person – even just a walk on the jetty.” 📍

rights concerning medical issues.

“If you have a standard contract, you can expect a decent response from your shipowner. But we have seen that seafarers’ contracts are not always properly written down and there are issues around the conditions in which these contracts are provided.”

In their anxiety to get on board, seafarers often don’t look at what their contract says. They may not know what should be there – and there could be gaps, he says.

“We regularly have seafarers come to us who have been given a contract that has no name of owner and is not signed by anyone; it is not really a contract and you couldn’t challenge it in any court of law in the world.”

He also notes that there are gaps in implementation around the world: “In different countries, it is all about the person sitting in the port, who decides how they implement what is in MLC.”

## Contract understanding

ISWAN has been trying to make seafarers more aware of the importance of signing a good contract that is properly worded, says Bahri, and he wants to see seafarers taught about MLC and their rights during their training.

“I think this all needs to be in the curriculum nowadays, so they have awareness. Whether ratings or officers, it doesn’t matter – each needs to understand about MLC and their rights and at least they will be able to see if something goes wrong. We need not hide anything from seafarers; they

should be told each and every thing. Let’s be very transparent.”

The standard response when a seafarer falls ill is generally very good, says Bahri. But problems often arise later when the seafarer is on sick leave and perhaps not fully aware of their entitlements.

“Out of 100 seafarers, only ten will have read their contracts. We have had seafarers who have been injured and are on medical leave not knowing what they are entitled to, who is going to pay their sick wages, what are the future prospects, and so on. If a person is on sick leave, the company should give them a briefing, so they have an awareness of any steps they need to take and that they will be taken care of.

“On one side, the seafarer is getting treatment and is already stressed with that. They are worrying about finances and whether, if they recover, the company will take them back. All this creates more and more stress. If they were aware of all that, it would help them with their recovery and boost their wellbeing – and their families would be at ease that everything would be taken care of. Definitely there are companies taking good care but obviously there are areas where we need to do more.”

In the face of Covid, meanwhile, “we can’t give up” on seafarers’ health, he insists. “There are definitely some companies hiding behind Covid, saying you can’t sign off or not allowing medical care onshore, saying you have to wait. But there are also companies that have gone the extra mile and got the treatment seafarers need.”

# Mapping the road ahead

*Setting the Mission's global strategy for the next five years*

By Verity Relph

The past two years have affected seafarers' lives dramatically, as they have the maritime welfare organisations who care for them. With seafarers unable to get ashore and traditional services such as centre hospitality and transport no longer viable in many ports, meeting crews at gangways and digital interaction are some of the ways in which The Mission to Seafarers has adapted to the changing environment.

It is against this backdrop that MtS has been working on its new global strategy for the next five years. So, what does strategy mean for an organisation like MtS? "Strategy guides and provides a foundation for our work through a particular period," explains the Revd Canon Andrew Wright, secretary general of MtS. "Broadly speaking, it makes sure that our global service to seafarers is as effective, relevant and transformational as we can possibly make it."

"We are acutely aware that the situation for seafarers is changing all the time," he says. "A lot of our service is based around centres, transport, ship visiting and emergency response. Crew sizes continue to get smaller, turnarounds are quick, and more and more ships are getting accessible Wi-Fi on board."

"It's not yet clear whether shore leave will ever return in the same way. The big question for us is what the outlook will be for seafarers in the next five years, how long will the impact of the pandemic last, and what does that mean for the Mission in terms of how we serve seafarers."

The overarching vision for the 2022-26 strategic period is 'to share God's love and grace with all seafarers and their families by caring for them inclusively and holistically in the often-challenging circumstances of their lives'.

Port-based ministry will continue to be the central focus of MtS' work, but the new strategy puts emphasis on other areas such as harnessing the possibilities of modern technology in seafarer support, exploring global and regional project opportunities, and building strong partnerships both locally and internationally.

"We want to make sure that we are being creative and entrepreneurial



MtS Secretary General The Revd Canon Andrew Wright is looking forward to a "creative and entrepreneurial approach" to seafarer welfare.

Credit: Jamie Smith

and adjusting our work to new circumstance," says Canon Wright. Crucially, he continues, this is about developing services in response to seafarer need: "We want to hear the voices of seafarers and listen to what they are telling us."

## Blended support

So, what does this mean for seafarers globally? "We are maximising our efforts to get out to seafarers – rather than getting them to come to us – through enhanced ship visiting provision. We also recognise the need for a more blended approach, with both face-to-face encounters but also enhanced digital services." This includes the launch of an app, which will be a one stop shop for seafarers accessing MtS services.


One area of focus will be expanding the work of MtS in some key seafaring hubs: "The Mission is always looking at where it needs to take its services further, for example we have recently opened up port ministry in Egypt and Israel. Port work is still the core of what we do and we want to continue to make those services as relevant, attractive and effective for crew as we possibly can."

In recent years, MtS has been developing wider programmes, such as the Seafarers' Happiness Index and

WeCare, and these will continue to be strengthened.

Another very important development of the last strategic period, and one which MtS is keen to take further, is family networks. These networks, which already exist in the Philippines and are developing in India and Myanmar, offer a more holistic way of working with seafarers and their families back home.

Reflecting on MtS' long history, Canon Wright explains: "We have always had to adjust the way we work as circumstances have changed but we remain absolutely committed to our fundamental Christian purposes of compassion expressed to seafarers in practical ways. The heart and soul of our work remains as it always has been, but we have to work out how we apply that in each new generation of seafarers."

He concludes: "The last two years have been a challenging time for seafarers and a challenging time for MtS, but it has also been a period of opportunity. I am excited about what we can do to continue to improve and develop our work in careful consultation with seafarers." 

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# Championing a culture of care

*The industry needs a 'radical shift' in its thinking about seafarers*

By Dr Martin Slade

Seafarers are the salt of the earth, responsible for 90% of goods that are transported throughout the world. Without them, society as we know it would not exist. Recently, during the Covid pandemic, we have had a glimpse of what it means to have, or more specifically, not have, the efficient movement of goods by sea. And it has not been a pretty sight: shortages of essential items, extended delivery times, and disruption of our daily lives. Clearly, the seafarer is an essential worker.

The life of a seafarer has changed dramatically over the past century. What was once an occupation romanticised with days spent at exotic ports of call, is now a life spent with minimal control over one's life throughout the tour of duty. The industrialisation of the maritime industry has increased dock efficiencies to such a degree that port visits are no longer measured in days but, rather, hours.

This change has meant that time seafarers could spend in a different environment allowing for decompression is no longer available to the vast majority of them. Instead, they remain on board their ship for many months, surrounded by a relatively small number of co-workers who must support all ship operations 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

As crew size has been reduced there is abundant evidence of increased stress among seafarers. They have among the highest rates of suicide of all occupations

with a recent study noting that over a two-week period, 20% of seafarers had thoughts of suicide or self-harm (Lefkowitz & Slade, 2019). They also have very high rates of injury and illness, made even more problematic since, with minimal exceptions, ships do not have medical personnel aboard and could be days out from a port.

Seafarers are exposed to various stressors, some of which are unique to their occupation. A recent study, sponsored by the Seafarers Hospital Society, showed that these stressors are generated by their work environment, organisational issues, diverse cultural backgrounds, and physical and psychosocial demands.

We know that lack of job security can also result in stress. Yet, embedded into a large proportion of the current maritime industry culture is the reliance on short term contracts for seafarers. And being unable to leave the ship at the end of the contract has become an even greater problem during the pandemic, with over 200,000 seafarers stranded at the height of the crisis.

## New thinking needed

The time has come for a radical shift in our thinking about seafarers and in the way they are treated – both by the industry and by our wider society. The maritime industry must embrace a culture of care as a core value. That means shipping companies must support their seafarers and enable seafarers themselves to support each other. Charter companies should stop imposing no crew

*“Seafarers need to look out for each other, both on and off the ship, while the industry needs to treat mental health issues as they do physical health problems”*

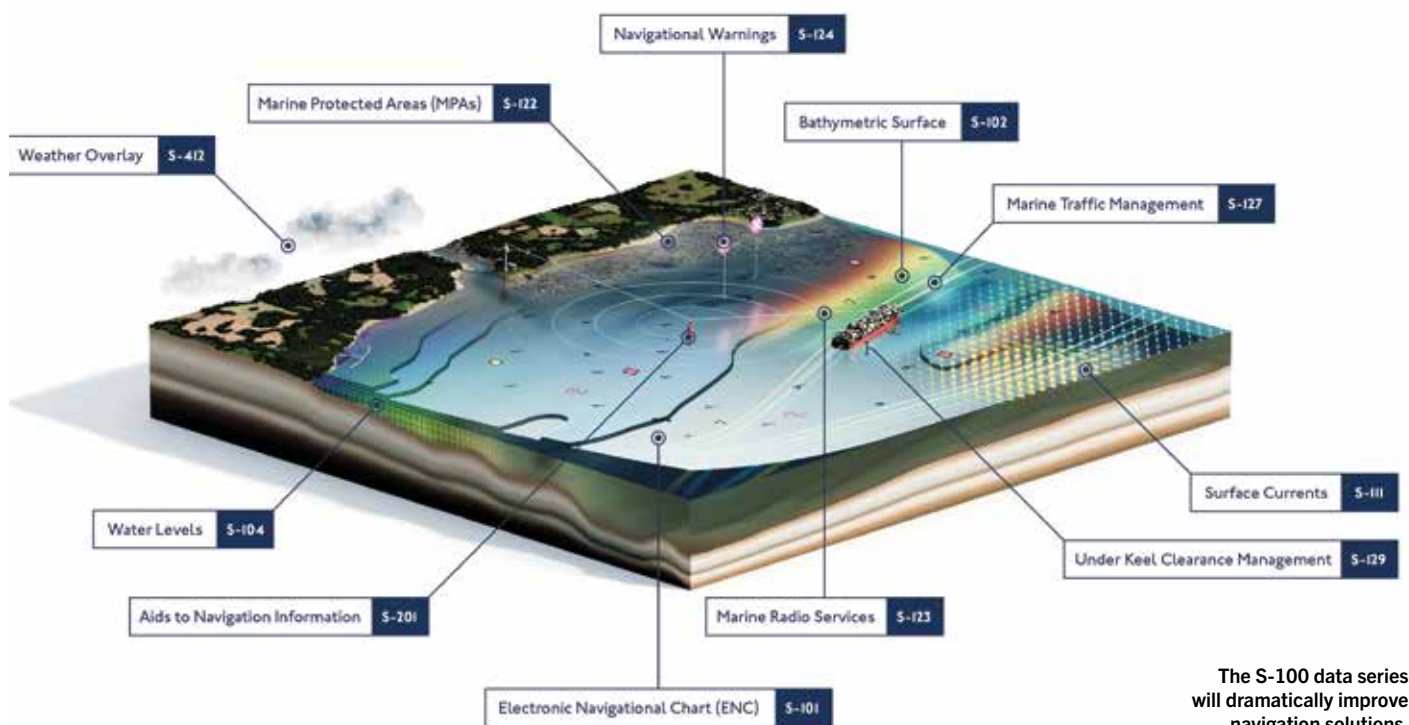
change clauses and shipping companies should not accept contracts that include them. Seafarers need to look out for each other, both on and off the ship, while the industry needs to treat mental health issues as they do physical health problems. The wellbeing of maritime workers should be routinely measured and the effects of interventions shared across the maritime sector.

Together, the maritime industry can create a culture of care that will protect all of its workers, including seafarers. Experience from land-based business tells us that this is not only good for the wellbeing of workers and their families, but also for the bottom line.

As Sandra Welch, CEO at the Seafarers Hospital Society, rightly noted recently: “It’s time for the industry to wake up to its responsibilities and do something about this.”

Adopting a culture of care is the only way forward. 

Dr Martin Slade PHD MPH is a lecturer in occupational medicine at Yale University Maritime Research Center.



The S-100 data series will dramatically improve navigation solutions.  
Credit: UKHO

## New era of navigation

*The release of new data standards will underpin an ECDIS evolution*

By Carly Fields

**C**hange is coming to the way seafarers navigate the world's waters. The UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) is moving from analogue to a more enriched digital data future which will transform the way those at sea and onshore use marine data, supporting safer and more efficient voyages.

The shift is built on new S-100 data standards. These standards are the International Hydrographic Office's framework for the standardisation of maritime data products – such as high resolution bathymetry, surface currents, and marine protected areas – and are the new standards for electronic navigational charts.

The new standards will offer the next generation of navigation solutions, enhancing situational awareness, supporting safety, enabling compliance, increasing precision, improving efficiency, ensuring protection, unlocking connectivity, and empowering users to support the future of navigation.

"It's important that seafarers have reliable data that they can trust and depend on," said Peter Sparkes, chief executive of the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO). Sparkes reflected that when he was a navigation officer,

he would sometimes wait up to four weeks for corrections to charts to arrive, if they ever did. This next generation of digital delivery will take a huge leap forward in reducing latency – and in doing so will improve safety at sea, he said.

Tom Mellor, UKHO's head of OEM technical support and digital standards, explained that the S-100 standards can be quickly extended – unlike its predecessor S-57. "In a navigational context that's going to bring benefits to safety at sea and much greater precision that will allow for just in time arrivals, for example."

It will also help connect ships and gives the potential to stream data. "Bridge teams will have access to much richer information that will help with passage planning, improve monitoring of vessels, enable ships to load more cargo, and help with voyage optimisation, among other things," Mellor said.


### First movers

The first generation of S-100 ECDIS is in development and the UKHO's goal is to see S-100 operational ECDIS in place by the end of 2027. The first set of trial data sets went live on the ADMIRALTY Marine Data Portal in Jan-

uary 2021. These cover the Solent and Approaches, including the UK ports of Southampton and Portsmouth. The Korea Hydrographic and Oceanographic Agency has also produced a free S-100 Viewer.

In parallel, the IMO *Guidelines for the Standardization of User Interface Design for Navigation Equipment* are being promoted to improve the user interface of ECDIS, standardising icons across different systems. "That will go a long way to helping the familiarisation issue," said Mellor. The new S-100 derived products also have a new security scheme to manage co-ordinated and more sophisticated cyber-attacks.

Seafarers will be all too aware of the risk of 'alarm fatigue' when it comes to bridge equipment and while the UKHO is bound by IMO regulations when it comes to alarms, there are plans to address this too in the new roll-out. Sparkes said that the UKHO will work with vendors to ensure that displays are alarming for the right things. "I think S-100 will give us a more fused single point of reference and situational awareness will be considerably enhanced for the mariner and for those onshore as well." Another area that the new data standards support is that of ship autonomy.

Sparkes described this as an "important time for the shipping industry... A time of real transformation and innovation for our sector." 

*"It's important that seafarers have reliable data that they can trust and depend on"*

# Putting seafarer comfort first

*Ship designs need to put more emphasis on how the environment can best support the crew*

By Yahaya Sanusi and Rangel Vassilev

The pandemic and resulting crew change crisis thrust seafarers into the spotlight in 2020 and has led to increased public awareness of the harsh conditions seafarers may face. At the same time, we see growing demand from customers, investors, and others for transparent and sustainable supply chains that address human rights concerns throughout – including transportation and logistics.

To move cargo takes a team; without one, cargo will remain idle, supply chains will fail, and the world will all but stop spinning. Therefore, the comfort, security, and wellbeing of seafarers is essential and, arguably, more important than the carrying capacity of a vessel. This is what AAL has focused on with the development, design, and construction of its newest vessels.

The new AAL vessels have crew living quarters at the front of the vessel, not placed towards the stern as is traditional. There are a multitude of reasons for this – design choice, including improved visibility and cargo carrying capacity, for example – but the comfort it can bring seafarers has been key in cementing this decision.

AAL, in co-operation with DNV, is optimising the shape of the hull for these newbuilds with the target of reducing vessel motion in seaways. The team at DNV are currently analysing hundreds of calculations and simulations covering a diverse range of scenarios and possible load cases to help design the hull in a way that achieves their goal. As the deckhouse is located further forward

than traditional vessels, these calculations and simulations are of pivotal importance to make sure the engineers have the information needed to design a hull that reduces motion. The wellbeing of the crew is of the highest importance, which is why AAL and DNV are undertaking so many calculations and hypothetical cargo possibilities to analyse the vessel across its lifetime.

## Bridge forward

As a multipurpose vessel, the nature of the cargo being transported over the lifetime of the vessel will be diverse, large and unique, and there is a possibility of reduced visibility with an aft-placed bridge. The decision to move the bridge forward means that reduced visibility because of cargo dimensions is less of a consideration. The major benefit of this is that crew safety and vessel safety are prioritised. Visibility is also one of the biggest issues when manoeuvring vessels of this size with heavy cargo, particularly in technical areas of water such as ports. AAL has undertaken studies on other vessels with CCTV capabilities to help ease this problem with some success but designing a vessel with the bridge further forward is the best way to avoid reduced visibility.

With the main superstructure towards the bow of the vessel, it was decided to place the engines towards the rear of the vessel to reduce noise and vibrations. It has been reported on other vessels that engines can cause discomfort in crew quarters, so AAL has taken steps to avoid this as much as possible. However, the disadvantage is that crews



Yahaya Sanusi, AAL Shipping

will need to travel further from their accommodations to the engine rooms. Therefore, these newbuilds will have an engine office located on the main deck below crew accommodation where officers will be able to monitor and control the engine and tanks.

The newbuilds will also include covers in the areas surrounding the winches, located across the length of the ship. This will protect crewmembers against the elements, particularly rain or green water when they are working. For the forward areas, a roof will be installed; the aft working areas are located below the enlarged cargo deck. Between these two areas there will be a covered walkway portside, adding further protection for individuals moving across the length of the vessel during their shifts.

Crew living quarters will include recreational areas, a gym, and highspeed internet access for unlimited communication to crew on board. Furthermore, kitchens and galleys are designed to follow guidelines and feedback from catering specialists and crew to provide efficiency and comfort for the preparation of diverse nutritional meals.

The design choices made by AAL for these newbuilds, as well as the data gathered by DNV, will help create a vessel that is not only safer for the industry, but will improve working conditions for seafarers and ensure that they receive the highest levels of comfort. 📍

Yahaya Sanusi is deputy head of transport engineering at AAL Shipping and Rangel Vassilev is project manager at Columbia Shipmanagement.



Rangel Vassilev, AAL Shipping

*“The wellbeing of the crew is of the highest importance, which is why AAL and DNV are undertaking so many calculations and hypothetical cargo possibilities to analyse the vessel across its lifetime”*

# Taking control of recruitment

*New platform aims to modernise maritime employment*

By Fraser Matthew

The recruitment process for maritime professionals is traditional, slow and laborious for both the seafarer and recruiter. As the industry faces a shortfall of 26,240 skilled mariners, according to the Seafarer Workforce Report 2021, there is a desperate need for a modern, streamlined process.

Going further, it is evident that seafarers are missing a professional platform that understands the industry and their needs. PROPEL has been built for seafarers by seafarers, placing them at the helm of their own recruitment and aims to bring the maritime community together.

Historically, the maritime industry has been slow to embrace change and technology. It took the ratification of the Maritime Labour Convention to end the practise of signing-on with a ships master and having a legal employment contract. PROPEL's team aim to go further – it is time to address the GDPR risk of CVs and make finding the next contract safer, easier and quicker for all involved.

Using AI technology, a standardised recruitment process and digitisation of seafarers' certification and training records, PROPEL is providing the tools for seafarers to take charge of their careers. After building a digital CV users can apply for roles

in one click while staying fit to sail is encouraged by reminders sent to your phone. PROPEL also allows you to securely share your digital certificates and documents.

In addition to modernising maritime recruitment, PROPEL's mission is to provide the international community of seafarers with a digital home.

Through Main Deck, seafarers can keep track of the latest shipping news, engage with other seafarers and learn about the work of the many maritime organisations and charities, including The Mission to Seafarers. [S](#)

Fraser Matthew is a serving master mariner and a co-founder of PROPEL. Seafarers can join PROPEL for free at [www.propelme.io](http://www.propelme.io).

# Making powerful blue connections

*seaV promises an all-encompassing social community for seafarers*

By Will Ellison

SeaV is more than a community platform and social network; it's the only fully automated digital logbook for seafarers.

The free app uses live and historical AIS data records to create a complete digital log of a seafarer's professional experience. Sea-time is an important metric which is usually calculated manually. seaV automatically calculates all sea-time which has raised some interesting applications.

seaV has a simple interface. Seafarers only need to input basic voyage details from their discharge book and seaV will automatically add much more detail using historical ship tracking data records.

This means the app can automatically log sea time according to rank, ship type and regions traded.

Having established a solid user base and taken on their feedback, seaV will shortly be introducing My seaV, which allows seafarers to view and export a highly detailed experience record to help with future job applications. Ship profiles are also being introduced to add more detail to a record, and to make it easier to connect with crew mates.

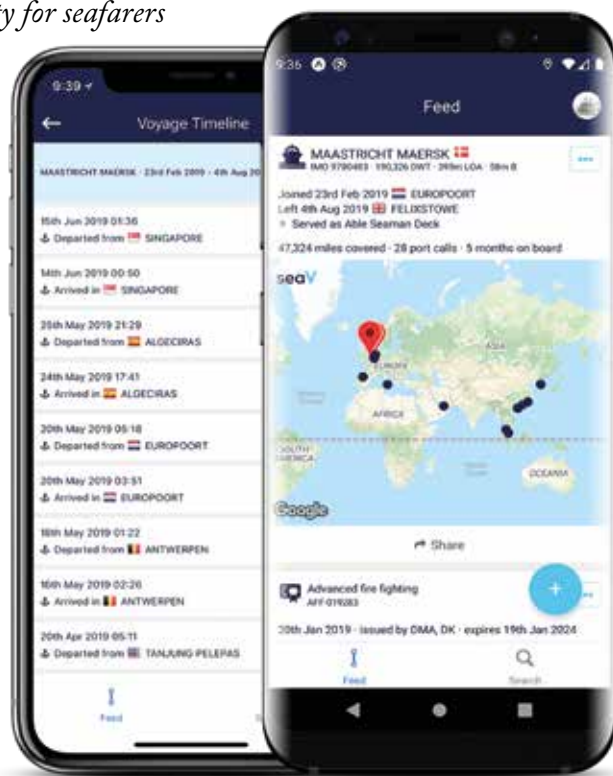
Mentoring plays a significant role in training. seaV is the ideal tool for

mentors and training instructors to follow the progress and stay in touch with their mentees.

seaV invites seafarers to share their knowledge and expertise with their peers and those who follow them to help build a stronger and more supported global maritime community. Shore-based colleagues and the wider community can use seaV to connect with friends and family working at sea

and the ships they sail on. Above all, seaV is the barometer of international seafaring – through the platform users can document in words and pictures what is happening, where they have been, how far they have sailed and, importantly, how the pandemic has affected them. [S](#)

Will Ellison is a naval architect and co-founder of seaV. Seafarers can join seaV for free at <https://seav.io>.



# Urgent need for port-based welfare

*Restrictions on shore leave mean seafarers are confined to their ships*

By Helen Sampson and Iris Acejo

Anyone who has been to sea for more than a few weeks will have experienced the relief and joy of getting ashore and stretching their legs in the hubbub of normal life. As such, they will understand the significance of shore leave to seafarers and their mental health and wellbeing.

In their daily life and work, seafarers cope with a confined, moving, noisy, institutionalised and hierarchical environment. There is no escape. Seafarers live and work with their superiors and they experience an overall loss of autonomy that stretches beyond time spent on the job – they cannot choose who to be with, what to eat, where to go. They are also separated from the normal social and physical landscapes that are associated with being human. There are no trees or plants, no animals, and on cargo vessels their companions are invariably men of working age.

In this context, it is easy to understand the need for shore leave. Regrettably, in the modern shipping industry, faster vessel turnaround, the rise of 24/7 port working, and a desire to limit the time that ships spend on a berth, have all led to greatly reduced opportunities for shore leave. In 2020, the situation became considerably worse. In the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, crews and passengers had their lives turned upside down by travel and shore leave restrictions. The consequences for health, safety and welfare have been documented elsewhere and as a result of a concerted effort by stakeholders some issues have been partially, if not fully, resolved.

However, in relation to shore leave, as the pandemic has progressed the situation appears to have become worse rather than better. In August 2021, we undertook an analysis of information which was already in the public domain about shore leave worldwide. The material that we examined was made publicly available by Wilhelmsen. We collated information on 122 countries on August 11, 2021 and we repeated the exercise again on December 27, 2021. We found that in August just 27 countries permitted shore leave for seafarers. This fell to 26 in December. In August there were 14 countries for



Port-based welfare facilities are important to seafarers on extended rotations

which there was no information on shore leave and by December this had dropped to nine. Eighty-one countries explicitly denied shore leave in August 2021, rising to 87 in December 2021. Given that ashore, many countries eased pandemic-related travel restrictions prior to the rise of Omicron, this worsening picture comes as a surprise, and it has potentially serious ramifications for seafarers' wellbeing.

## Importance of facilities

In the context of denied opportunities for shore leave, the existence of port-based welfare facilities for seafarers gains significance. Where such facilities are available within port limits, and where local authorities permit it, seafarers have the opportunity to get away from the vessel for a few hours respite, stock up on sundry goods and wi-fi vouchers and buy food and drink.

Unfortunately, such welcome facilities are seldom available to seafarers. A global directory of seafarers' centres collated by SeafarerHelp lists 398 seafarers' centres worldwide. They are most frequently found in the UK and US, but even there they are not always established within port limits. In the UK we identified seafarer centre provision within 25% of commercial ports. In the whole of South America just 12 seafarers' centres are listed and the majority of these are in Brazil with

several concentrated together in the same significant port area.

This situation leaves seafarers with limited access to port welfare facilities across the globe. In the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, when shore leave has been banned (by both countries and also some companies) and when seafarers are sometimes too afraid to go ashore, even when shore leave is permitted, the absence of port welfare provision has been keenly felt. As we recover from the pandemic, it is important that we remind ports and governments of their responsibilities to provide port-based welfare services for seafarers. In doing so, consideration has to be given to both the funding of services and the needs of seafarers.

Port-based welfare facilities can provide seafarers with a brief sense of 'normality' even when their time, and their vessels' time, is limited due to work schedules and even when the world is turned upside down by unforeseen and sometimes unforeseeable events. They are a key requirement for a key workforce, and it is high time that they were offered to hard-pressed seafarers working day in and day out across the globe. ☺

*Professor Helen Sampson and Dr Iris Acejo are based at the Seafarers International Research Centre, Cardiff University, UK. Please see [www.sirc.cf.ac.uk](http://www.sirc.cf.ac.uk) for more information.*

# Safety first and last

*Seafarers encouraged to confidentially report near misses as well as actual incidents*

**A**dam Parnell took over as director of maritime at the Confidential Human Factors Incident Reporting Programme (CHIRP) Charitable Trust at a pivotal time. Taking over the reins of the seminal reporting system in August last year, Parnell has experienced first-hand the impact of the pandemic on maritime safety.

The CHIRP Charitable Trust has provided a totally independent and confidential safety reporting system to seafarers worldwide since 2003, complementing the reporting system that it has offered to the UK aviation industry since 1982. By publishing analysis of received incident and near-miss reports CHIRP raises awareness of safety issues and contributes to improved safety outcomes throughout every sector of the maritime industry. The programme complements existing statutory, company and other organisational incident reporting systems by providing a voice to those mariners who feel that they cannot otherwise speak out about safety, or who feel that their concerns have not been heard. CHIRP, says Parnell, speaking with *The Sea*, is “the voice of the mariner”, concerned only with the enhancement of safety for everyone employed by or associated with the global maritime industry.



*“Between 80%-94% of incidents are the result of systemic or organisational shortcomings”*  
**Adam Parnell**



CHIRP is the ‘voice of the seafarer’ when it comes to safety reporting

Parnell explains that while the level of recreational vessel activities – and the associated reports – has reduced during the pandemic, this has been more than compensated by the increased number of reports from commercial vessels, who have continued to operate throughout the pandemic. “In many ways they are the unsung heroes who have ensured the continuity of global medical supply chains that the more visible front-line health workers rely on,” he says. Of note is the increase in the number of reports relating to safety issues arising from seafarers unable to get home, effect timely crew changes, or who are suffering mental and physical health issues because of the Covid-19 restrictions.

## Confidentiality critical

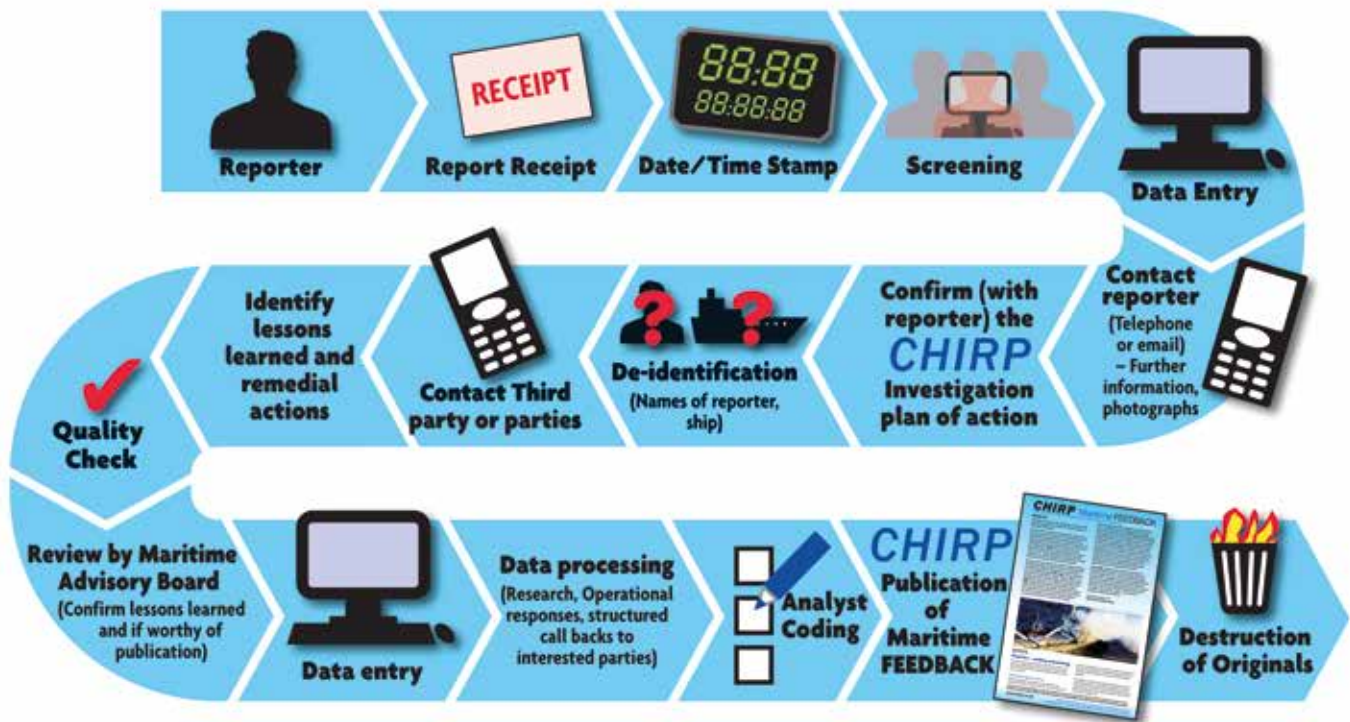
One of the key aspects of CHIRP’s Maritime Programme is that reporters’ identities are kept confidential, rather than offering anonymity. This allows CHIRP to confirm the legitimacy of the reports. The reporter’s contact details are initially taken so that CHIRP can correspond with them to obtain more information if needed. “But as soon as we have the information that we need we disidentify the reports by redacting any names or contact details that we have prior to uploading the report to our secure database,” says Parnell. “If we ever need to approach third parties to obtain a different perspective of the incident, we always obtain the original reporter’s consent to do so first – and if that is not

forthcoming then we do not pursue the third party.” Furthermore, when the incident is presented to CHIRP’s Maritime Advisory Board for analysis of the incident, any identifying information (dates, vessel names, locations etc) is removed. “To the best of our knowledge, none of our reporters have ever been identifiable – or identified – after reporting their concerns to us,” he says.

There is another advantage to publishing disidentified reports: when CHIRP publishes a report about ‘a vessel’ rather than a named vessel or even a vessel type, the findings become useful and relatable to a wider audience. “For instance, if we mentioned issues regarding pilot ladders on tankers, that report might not be of immediate interest to, say, someone in the cruise industry, even though pilot ladder issues are pretty much universal. So, by our genericising the vessel type, we hope that our reports are more widely read.”

## Fault lines

In terms of making safety progress, apportioning individual blame for incidents often proves to be a blinkered view of what has happened. Too often, says Parnell, blame is directed at those involved in the accident, or their immediate supervisors. “But depending on which accident analyst you speak to, between 80%-94% of incidents are the result of systemic or organisational shortcomings.” Viewing incidents from the broader



human factors perspective allows the industry to look at these wider issues and seek solutions, rather than ascribing blame to individuals. “That could be the foundation upon which the maritime industry adopts the ‘just’ safety culture’ ethos from their aviation counterparts,” he suggests.

Looking to the future, safety-related risks are increasing through new fuels, autonomy and remote operations. But the speed and the span of technological change throughout the industry presents immense opportunities as well as challenges to Parnell. “One of those opportunities is to embed safety at the heart of these changes right at the very start of their introduction and evolution. I don’t doubt though that the novel technologies that are being discussed will require significant safety oversight, management and training overheads.”

Specifically in relation to the introduction of new fuels, he recalls a quote from his explosives instructor in the Navy: ‘This stuff is safe until you forget that it’s dangerous.’

Autonomy and remote operations, meanwhile, are a paradigm shift akin to the move from sail to steam, he says, requiring seafarers to evolve. But irrespective of the technologies being introduced, the need for safety of the crew, the cargo and the vessel won’t change. Rather the way the industry applies the processes to control the

age-old risks of collisions, groundings and so on will. Safety, he notes, is “timeless”.

### Safety horizon

Digital megatrends, such as big data and Artificial Intelligence, need to be founded on a culture of reporting, Parnell adds, particularly safety reporting. Near misses are still too often not reported because it’s a human response to not want to report something that didn’t happen. “We first need to remove the stigma of reporting near misses and instead celebrate the act of reporting as much as, if not more than, the content of the report itself.” Big data relies on data transparency to avoid false lessons being learned.

As a former mariner, Parnell is acutely aware of the challenges that seafarers face. To reduce accidents and improve safety, he urges the industry to remember the human seafarers at the heart of the industry. Ensure that they are adequately trained, rested and the time pressures on them are better managed. “These are the same issues that face the aviation industry and we can learn a lot from them in terms of crew resource management, closed-loop communication techniques, and the primacy of a robust reporting and ‘just’ safety culture,” he says.

As for CHIRP’s future, Parnell is keen to maintain the momentum that

his predecessor generated in many areas, not least of which is the need to raise awareness of the programme among the global seafarer community. He also plans to make the programme more accessible to seafarers. “That means improving our website, social media channels and overall ‘digital footprint’, and making much more of our material available online.” He would like to expand the number of languages that CHIRP is published in: “Since I’ve joined, we’ve published our quarterly journal in Spanish and Indonesian to complement the four existing languages (English, Chinese, Portuguese and Filipino) and I hope to introduce yet more languages so that we engage directly with as many seafarers as possible in their first language.”

Finally, in parallel, Parnell aims to expand the number of partnerships that CHIRP has with other maritime organisations, to increase its insight into topical maritime safety issues and to widen the audience of its safety messages for the good of the entire industry. 📧

To read the latest issue of *Maritime Feedback*, CHIRP’s safety publication in six languages, go to: [www.chirpmaritime.org/newsletters/](http://www.chirpmaritime.org/newsletters/).

**CHIRP**  
Confidential Human-Factors Incident Reporting Programme

*"The cook who dishes up delicious meals three times a day, for month after month, needs to be shown appreciation and respect"*



Chief cooks have a large impact on crew wellbeing.  
Credit: Jamie Smith

## Compliments to the chef

*Good chief cooks are worth their weight in gold*

By Michael Grey

If an army, as was allegedly said by Napoleon, 'marches on its stomach', what effect might the quality of the food have on the productivity and efficiency of a ship? This is not a hypothetical question that could be argued about around the messroom table, but is a serious point developed from the obvious statement that a 'happy crew makes a happy ship' and that there is a direct connection between this desirable state of mind and the performance of the cook.

This important link was recently made by Christian Ioannou of the international catering management and training provider MCTC, who was emphasising his belief that highly motivated chief cooks aboard ship are worth their weight in gold. He points out the plainly obvious: good, well-prepared and presented food makes mealtimes enjoyable, but also, he suggests, the work of these hard-working people should not be taken for granted. Like any other human being, the cook who dishes up delicious meals three times a day, for month after month, needs to be shown appreciation and respect.

I recall a very grand shipowner, who, when visiting his big cruise ships for some ceremonial occasion, such as the naming of a new vessel, never failed at

the conclusion of the dinner to vanish into the galley to thank the cooks and stewards for their contribution. It wasn't just an empty gesture, but something he believed mattered more than being on hand to bid farewell to the distinguished guests. He took his time to meet and thank people individually. Maybe they might have preferred, given the choice, a 10% pay rise, but there was no doubt that his presence, and expressions of appreciation, made a positive difference to their work. And Ioannou makes clear that everyone, from the company who employs them to the crew who eat the food the cook prepares, should try and understand something of the unique challenges of catering at sea. People, says Ioannou, should focus on how to support and motivate them and show appreciation for their contribution to the success of the voyage.

### Financial benefits

It is also suggested that beside toiling over hot galley ranges for up to 15 hours a day turning out meals for the ship's complement, the cook aboard a well-run merchant ship actually contributes to the financial success of the voyage. That's not far-fetched either, if you consider that a competent cook takes care of the provisions that are supplied and, with good management of the stores, eliminates waste. Go a bit further down the chain of consequences

that flow from a well-fed ship and there will be better productivity aboard, people will be healthier and will want to return to that ship after their time on leave, reducing crew retention and replacement problems. That's worth something, too and it is even suggested that healthier crews will lead to lower P&I claims if sick people are not having to be repatriated. So, there is quite a lot of 'self-interest' in any policy that aims to keep a crew happy and healthy.

What is also inferred here is the need for those who manage ships and appoint their crews to be attuned to the well-being of their crews, not least after a couple of years when, as those who study crew 'happiness indices' have emphasised, life for seafarers has been quite dreadful. But it ought to be possible, albeit mindful of the difficulties of finding stores in locked-down ports, to make a real effort to ensure that crews are properly fed. The company that shows it cares about the quality of food it provides with its appointment of well-trained cooks is making a statement that will differentiate itself from those who do not think about these matters. It is a shipping company that cares and what's more, demonstrates that fact. In my days at sea, we used to talk about a ship being a 'good feeder'. Perhaps that's a message that ought to be shared more widely today. ☺

# Hopes dashed by Omicron

*Period of hope gives way to confusion and frustration for seafarers*

In closing out 2021, we unfortunately saw a drop in the overall average figure for the Seafarers' Happiness Index. The drop from 6.59/10 to 6.41/10 for Quarter 4 was not particularly surprising given the year ending with a surge of Omicron Covid-19 cases. The knock-on effects for seafarers were as predictable as they were depressing. There was some positivity in areas such connectivity, training and food but the overall trend was far less positive, highlighting the challenges of dealing with uncertainty.

Seafarers are robust, resilient and they cope so well with all the various trials and tribulations which are thrown at them. But the uncertainty of Covid-19 has really exerted a heavy toll on crew mental health and wellbeing. In the Q4 2021 Seafarers' Happiness Index report, the peaks and troughs of pressure have been described as 'yo-yo' in nature. One month things look good; there is a drop in infections and the world's borders are set to reopen. The next month, there's a spike and lockdowns return with seafarers unsure of which way to turn. This leaves them lacking clarity, consistency and a clear idea of whether they will get home as expected, or whether their contract of employment will be rolled over and extended, sometimes against their will or without their agreement.

Such ambiguity and a lack of certainty is draining to deal with

and has a hugely detrimental effect, creating doubt, stress and frustration. Seafarers want to know how long they will be away, and when they are likely to go home. It is the same basic need that people at sea have always had. Even seafarers like to plan.

So, the yo-yo takes its toll. At the start of the reporting period for Q4 we noted a rapid rise in sentiment. Seafarers were looking ahead to the holidays, and those who were due home were increasingly hopeful they may finally get back. Then the latest variant hit and hopes and dreams were thrown into disarray. The impact on happiness was hard and deep. Levels dropped off, as uncertainty rose.

## Profit share

While the issue of crew change and seafarer movement were a primary focus in 2021, there was another trend seen over the year: 2021 saw a real hardening of sentiment from seafarers about the business of shipping and their role in it. There was a far more militant tone in responses we received, particularly when discussing the risks and rewards of their career, as seen by seafarers. Wage levels have become more of an issue, and there was a criticism from many respondents that shipping's financial gains are not being adequately shared among seafarers. This perception is further damaging and eroding goodwill.

Another issue is that of key/

essential worker status. Seafarers are increasingly dismayed and disappointed by the inability of those in power to universally designate them as such. They know how important they are; they know that without them world trade would stall and people would go hungry and be without power. They want to know that the sacrifices they make are at least reflected in status and recognition.

In yet another year of uncertainty there are some things which have come very much into focus and will need to be addressed in 2022. To put it plainly, seafarers want to know when they will be going home, they want the rewards they receive to mirror the huge profits being generated in shipping, and they want to be seen and formally recognised for the amazing job they do to keep ships and cargoes moving. 📧

*Steven Jones is the founder of the Seafarers' Happiness Index, in association with the Wallem Group and the Standard Club in 2021. The Index is designed to monitor and benchmark seafarer satisfaction levels by asking 10 key questions and serves as an important barometer of seafarer satisfaction with life at sea. Questions focus on a range of issues, from mental health and wellbeing, to working life and family contact. If you would like more information, to see the data or read more in-depth reports, visit [www.happyatsea.org](http://www.happyatsea.org) for access to the latest results and to have your say.*



Seafarers have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19

# theSea Leisure Page

There are many health benefits to spending down-time solving puzzles. Lower stress levels, better memory, improved 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

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

### TRICKY LEVEL

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

Credit: www.sudokuoftheday.com

### EASY LEVEL

solution (Issue 4 2021)

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

### TRICKY LEVEL

solution (Issue 4 2021)

1	8	4	9	5	2	6	3	7
9	2	7	1	6	3	4	8	5
5	3	6	7	4	8	2	9	1
4	7	1	8	3	5	9	2	6
8	6	2	4	9	1	7	5	3
3	9	5	6	2	7	1	4	8
2	1	8	5	7	9	3	6	4
6	5	3	2	1	4	8	7	9
7	4	9	3	8	6	5	1	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 May 31, 2022. 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..."

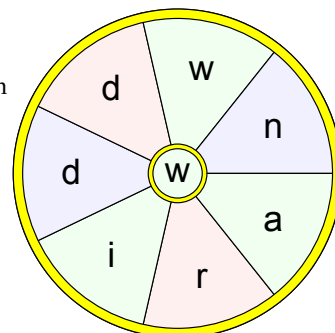
1) Elylag 2) Irvpoisson 3) Msse 4) Lames

Issue 4, 2021 solutions:

1) Deckhand 2) Cadet 3) Navigator 4) Bosun

## Word wheel

This word wheel is made from a 8-letter word. Try and find that word, then make as many words of any length as you can from these letters. You can only use each letter once, and each word must include the letter W.



Answer for Issue 4, 2021 issue:

100 possible words, eight letter word was Engineer

## Flag code

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

Answer for Issue 4, 2021: Horizon



See Michael Grey's feature on page 12



Well done Cook, you've won Masterchef!

# Help for seafarers around the world

Are you one of the 1.5 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 70,000 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)

### Chat to a Chaplain

You can now connect instantly with a chaplain via our new 24hr chat service. Whatever you want to talk about, simply go to our website and click 'Chat' in the bottom right corner of the screen:

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

### 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).

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## Finding the right path

*The maze of life can be better navigated with God's support*

**M**azes are a collection of paths leading to a goal. They are not simple. Finding the right path can be difficult. Very often you might find yourself at a dead end. Sometimes they are called labyrinths and they go back deep into history.

Some medieval cathedrals, particularly in northern France (most famously Chartres), have such labyrinths. Their purpose was not absolutely clear. There is evidence that clergy would sometimes dance on them at Easter. They may have been seen as a symbolic way of going on pilgrimage, with the centre representing Jerusalem, the Holy City. However, it is highly likely that mazes echoed life. Life is, after all, a journey.

*"Sometimes it can feel that large impenetrable hedges are all around us"*

Christians, and indeed others, believe life has a purpose and a goal. And yet it is also the experience of most of us that life is full of uncertainty, fragility and wrong turns. Finding the right path can often be confusing. Never has this been truer than during the pandemic when those at sea and their families, along with many others, have faced acute uncertainty and anxiety about what might lie ahead. Currently that situation continues. Sometimes it can feel that large impenetrable hedges are all around us.

In one famous maze in England, it is the custom every now and again for someone to climb a ladder and give




Mazes can echo life

guidance to those who are really stuck and cannot find their way in or out. Perhaps there is a symbolism in this as well. As we approach Lent, Holy Week and Easter we are reminded of the God who does not leave us without help.

While there are never easy answers to life's confusions, we can still often hear his guiding voice as we pray and reflect.

Mazes also remind us that even when

we reach dead ends there is always hope. We can retrace our steps and try again. The prayer below is one I found recently when visiting a house with a maze. It is composed by Robert Runcie, a former Archbishop of Canterbury. May God help and guide us all.  The Revd Canon Andrew Wright is secretary general of The Mission to Seafarers.

## A prayer for seafarers

*Lord God, we thank thee for all thou hast fashioned here to remind us of the beauty of your creation, the mystery of time and eternity and the signs you have given us of your love for all mankind.*

*Help us to find our way through the path of life with simplicity, courage and truth.*

*Lift from our hearts all anxiety and fear.*

*So evermore lead us in thy way and keep us in thy peace through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*