



Caring for seafarers  
around the world

# the SEA

Issue 1, 2024



US Customs and Border Protection and Homeland Security investigations led a multi-agency inspection of the *MSC Gayane*, seizing a record 35,000 pounds of cocaine in shipping containers

Credit: Steve Sapp, CBP Office of Public Affairs

## Scourge of drug smuggling by ship

*Crews need to take steps to protect themselves from illegal cargoes* **By Felicity Landon**

**W**elded on to the hull or an onboard crane; hidden in containers; loaded into the hold of bulk carriers via the hopper – the methods are various, but the use of ships for drug smuggling is increasing. The implications for seafarers, so easily arrested and imprisoned without charge, are frightening.

‘Miscarriage of justice’ doesn’t quite cover it. We live in a world where a Master who has served an exemplary half a century at sea can be locked up in a Mexican jail, without trial, for two years after reporting to authorities finding 240 kg of cocaine in the hold while in the port of Altamira. Despite co-operating fully with the investigation, Capt Andrzej Lasota was taken off the ship by armed military forces and police – and locked up. He was not provided with a translator. His

experience in prison was traumatic. Eventually, he was released without charge.

More than 300 tonnes of cocaine were seized from ships in 2023, according to a Houston conference held by BIMCO, Interpol, InterManager, the World Shipping Council and the Northeast Maritime Institute. Held in January, the ‘Fostering law enforcement/trade cooperation’ conference was organised to discuss the rise in drug smuggling using ships and the abuse of seafarers. Speakers noted that crime networks are becoming more organised and violent and discussed the need for governments to share information about smugglers’ tactics and high-risk areas; they highlighted the unfair treatment of seafarers who discover drugs on board their ships, and the need to update the existing IMO guidance.

### ‘Bigger challenge than piracy’

Dealing with the threat of drug trafficking is now a bigger challenge to seafarers than piracy, according to INTER-CARGO’s special adviser, Captain Jay K Pillai. “Criminalisation and unfair treatment of seafarers is a worldwide problem, and both seafarer unions and shipping companies wish to see action taken. In too many cases, seafarers are treated as suspects and have their rights to proper legal proceedings denied.”

Pillai was a seafarer for 21 years before coming ashore in 1996, ultimately becoming head of ship management at Pacific Basin Shipping until retiring three years ago. “When I was at sea, we faced petty theft and petty crimes on board; people in port might come and steal items from the store, for example. Later it advanced to targeting the money in the captain’s safe; but these were the biggest

>>

problems we had in the 80s and 90s,” he says.

“When I was sailing to South American ports, there used to be drugs attached to the hull on occasions. We used to arrange for a diver inspection and dog search and that gave us peace of mind.”

Today, however, the sophistication of criminal gangs and networks involved in drug trafficking is extraordinary. How can a small and busy crew ever hope to be one step ahead?

“A seafarer has been trained to run ships from A to B and take care of the ship and its cargo. He/she is trained in taking care of safety of lives at sea, to navigate the ship safely without causing damage to the marine environment, to maintain the ship’s machinery and equipment, and to deliver the cargo in the same condition as received on the ship. A seafarer is not a security-trained professional to deal with the criminals – if he was, he would be earning a lot more elsewhere,” says Pillai. “Even with all my experience at sea, I wouldn’t be able to outsmart a criminal gang that wants to put 15 kilos of cocaine on my ship. Ship managers put in cameras, watchmen, dog searches, diver searches – and despite all of this, it is happening.”

A relatively new approach by the gangs is the ‘drop off’ before the vessel reaches port. The criminals know through their networks exactly where the drugs are on board; maybe 20 kms from port, a speedboat approaches, the gang manages to get on board and the drugs are removed.

## Law and order inefficiencies

Pillai says much of the current threat to seafarers from all this is down to the various governments’ inefficiencies in dealing with law and order and “complete lack of ability to track, curtail and stop these criminal gangs”.

“The Port State says – we have done our job and introduced the ISPS Code. But if the ISPS Code is introduced properly, and port security is working, seafarers would be able to do their job with no risk of drugs, stowaways, petty theft, etc., and no possibility of unauthorised people coming on to the ship. Seafarers would love to call at a port like that. But if the ISPS Code is not applied properly, drugs can get on board – then seafarers get the blame. But don’t entangle seafarers and ship owners with it. As long as they co-operate with any inquiry and investigation, don’t lock them up for an indefinite period.”

As he says, whether they use planes or ships, criminal gangs will find a way to move the drugs, because this is such a lucrative trade. It’s possible that a stevedore, a local police officer or someone conducting dog searches or underwater hull inspections is in the pay of the criminals.

Pillai emphasises that he is not saying ships or seafarers should escape any investigation when drugs are discovered. “Of course, it’s possible that a seafarer is involved in some way in some incidents, though there was no evidence to suggest that most of the cases reported directly involved any seafarers,” he says.

It’s possible that some seafarers may have to be detained for questioning. “But there has to be a timeframe for this and then they are let go – take a bond, whatever.”

He wants the IMO to introduce a regulation capping that timeframe, with a point at which the seafarer must be released and allowed home to his family – even if that involves payment of a bond and the possibility of being called back to court later. He also wants rules on compensation for seafarers who are unreasonably held. “But it is not just about making a resolution – it is about implementing it and seeing that seafarers are not criminalised.

“Seafarers have been locked up with hardcore criminals, which has been completely traumatic. If you arrest someone and keep them under arrest for two years, you are ruining their career and family life. Then you tell them – you are free now, you can go. But think about the damage done. Do the seafarers get \$10m to walk away with for being locked up for nothing? No, they do not. No compensation, no apologies, nothing.”

Unless seafarers see a dramatic turnaround in this criminalisation, “the IMO and its member states and the shipping industry will face attrition of existing trained seafarers and young men and women being deterred from taking up this noble profession”, says Pillai.

## Burden of proof?

Sometimes there is an assumption of guilt and a ‘reversal of the burden of proof’, with seafarers trying to prove they are innocent, says Leyla Pearson, senior manager (legal) at the International Chamber of Shipping. She highlights the case of Captain Yu Yihai, kept in prison in Honduras for two years after port authorities in Puerto Cortes discovered bags of cocaine in the vent shaft of a cargo hold during discharge operations,

in 2021. “He was held in shackles and with serious criminals. He was detained purely because he was the Master. Eventually he was released, but this was after being detained for two years, away from his family, and subject to physical sickness as well as mental stress.”

As the Chamber pointed out at the time, Captain Yu’s ordeal was contrary to the principles in the IMO/ILO guidelines on the Fair Treatment of Seafarers, the Maritime Labour Convention, and Human Rights law, for trials to be conducted as expeditiously as possible or for the detained person to be released, and for non-custodial alternatives to pre-trial detention to be considered.

“Work is now ongoing in the IMO’s legal committee to develop some guidelines for the fair treatment of seafarers when they are detained on suspicion of committing a maritime crime,” says Pearson. “It is not about saying ‘you should not investigate’. We respect a country’s national laws, etc. But it is about shining a light on the issue, pointing out that seafarers are in a unique category, that they go to these jurisdictions because the owners/charterers send them there, that they are vulnerable when there and may not speak the language. It is about setting some guidelines to ensure that due process is adhered to – that you have translators, consular access and so on, that if a bond is being offered, the authorities have to consider bail.”

But would these guidelines lead to a change in behaviour? Pearson says: “You hope that if they [states] sign up to the guidelines and endorse them, they would then implement them.”

## Guidelines can help

Drugs are a scourge on society, she says, “and we also need to focus on how we investigate these crimes. The guidelines will be useful for that – setting out stages, what you should do, due process. It is a reference point. There has been good engagement, and you would hope they will be followed.”

Prevention is key, she says. “Once drugs are on board the vessel, the ship is obviously going to be investigated. The ship has responsibility too. But drug traffickers are very innovative and very tenacious. Shut down one route and they will find another. Prevention on the port side is critical. There are links in the chain and drug trafficking can only happen if there are people on either side.”

The Chamber recently published a drug



Ports need to do more to stop drugs reaching ships in their waters

trafficking and abuse guide to be used for seafarer training. Companies must train and keep seafarers updated on what to look for, says Pearson. Recommendations include having people on watch, good lighting, and CCTV or someone videoing loading cargo operations. “You might spot something when it is coming on. But at least if you don’t, you can show the precautions you have been taking. Keep track of who comes on board, keep a visitor log, check ID. But also, there are things that the port should be doing. The ship doesn’t have access to hoppers and loading cranes.”

She highlights the role to be played by P&I clubs, thanks to their networks of contacts and correspondents around the world who can provide information about ports where there are concerns.

Even with all the correct procedures and security protocols in place, this is a daunting issue, says Pearson. “The Master is often in a uniquely vulnerable position because he is responsible for the ship. Sometimes he is taken because he represents the ship. However, I know of one case where a large number of crew of a bulker were detained after something was found in the hopper at discharge. They were released eventually, but not before going through a long legal process.”

### One step behind

Steven Jones, global security expert and author of the Nautical Institute’s recently launched *Maritime Security – A Practical Guide for Mariners*, describes drug trafficking as a constantly evolving threat. “The minute you get closer to knowing what the modus operandi of the drug

smugglers is, all of a sudden there will be new innovations,” he says.

Awareness is critical in the fight back. “It is making sure that seafarers are aware of the current risks in the places where they are going and companies supporting the vessels in being able to deal with that – whether with information or extra resources. These are the basics of security – understanding the threats you are facing in the first place and what the implications are.

“Information helps to protect yourself in the initial understanding of the drugs getting on the vessels, but also of the legal climate in these places. Masters who have called the authorities to report drugs have [sometimes] then been caught up in this terrible, almost surreal, psychodrama of being ‘in the frame’. That is staggering. I can only imagine the stress placed on the seafarers in this situation.”

He agrees that P&I clubs are an excellent source of information. “The problem is that security threats are almost constantly evolving. Attention, resources and time can go into addressing a particular type of problem, and suddenly there is less and less resource for the more day-to-day security risks. Also, you can’t expect seafarers to be experts in all these things.”

He knows of situations where drugs have been discovered on board and the crew have had the discussion – ‘what do we do, do we get out beyond territorial waters and then consider what to do?’

He says: “The expression ‘fair treatment’ is a lovely one but has a rather genteel nature about it. The reality is that when these things do come to pass, that is far from the reality of what is being faced

– criminalisation of seafarers, whether it’s drugs, oil spills or collisions, is a terrible stain on the industry.”

### More support needed

Jones says security threats and risks are a “terrible burden to shoulder” if seafarers are not getting the support they should, whether that’s moral, ethical, financial or time and resources. As for measures such as observing or videoing cargo loading, he says that it’s all very well to stipulate extra processes, “but if you are not putting extra people on board, it means others have got to do something else. You might have 10 people out on deck – where are they meant to be, what are they meant to be doing? Lots of vessels use crew to lash the containers. You can’t be doing that and be on top of what is going on, looking over the side. You are simply robbing from one task to complete another.”

When he first started out as a maritime security expert, he was often asked ‘what is the one thing that would make the difference?’ “Whenever I said ‘someone extra on the ship’, everyone would look rather crestfallen. But having the right amount of people to deal with the right amount of things to be done makes all the difference. We are stripping away the levels of crewing to the lowest possible allowable, with no wiggle room within that at all. My one wish is that we get rid of the term ‘minimum safe manning’ so it becomes ‘lowest allowable crewing’. With the right resources, you improve safety and security of the people on board and the social dynamic. With the right resources on board, you can solve an awful lot of problems.” 

# Lifting the lithium-ion lid

*Better understanding and education are needed to protect crews from battery risks*

By Line Skeidsvoll, Kerstin Knott and Brynhild Garberg Olsø

The shipping industry is rapidly moving towards batteries and ammonia for propulsion, both alone and in various hybrid solutions. Batteries are often assumed to be mostly beneficial for smaller and domestic vessels. However, these assumptions are not necessarily accurate.

Batteries are already found in many larger vessels in, for example, the auxiliary system, spinning reserve, or utilised in strategic loading for diesel generators. Unfortunately, these battery systems carry with them the exact same number of hazards regardless of application.

Last year, SINTEF, one of Europe's largest independent research organisations, carried out a preliminary study of hazards related to the use of lithium-ion batteries in a maritime environment, focusing on situations where a fire has broken out. After all, batteries are large amounts of tightly packed energy, which is ideal for such an event. Lithium-ion batteries also have the unfortunate property of self-sustaining with oxygen once they catch fire and might also produce toxic gases, such as hydrogen fluoride.

The aim of the study was to investigate if the current regulations cover the hazards related to the upscaled use of lithium-ion battery systems in maritime environments, from the time the battery system is designed until it is disposed of. The study contained a short literature study and a workshop with participants from battery system producers, shipyards, shipping companies, insurance companies and representatives from the Norwegian authorities.

During the workshop the participants identified hazards and challenges related to fire, existing rules and regulations, as well as improvement suggestions from their own experience. The following main concerns were highlighted during the workshop. First, there is a lack of holistic understanding regarding the use of batteries in maritime applications. When considering a battery system from the design phase until they are disposed of, there are



Credit: Tavo Romann, CC BY 4.0 DEED

A li-ion battery cell exploding after being hit by a hammer

several conditions related to the system that need to be fulfilled to ensure safe operation. These might be conditions like stable temperatures, correct ventilation, and a dry environment. All conditions must be maintained throughout the lifespan of the battery system for them to be safe.

## Education found lacking

Second, current educational courses in the maritime industry do not cover the fast-growing development and use of lithium-ion batteries. Battery systems are currently not part of the curriculum for seafarers in Norway and additional training is left to the ship owner or operator. The lack of knowledge and understanding of the hazards related to a battery system is dangerous, both for the individual as well as the environment. Mistakes can be made without even realising it.

Third, there is a lack of co-operation between the different phases of design, construction, and operation. The workshop revealed a lack of safety communication between battery system producers, ship designers, shipyards, ship owners, operators, and rescue services. All parties fulfil their own requirements through rules and regulations, but few were inclined to assess if their requirements were sufficient for the application in question.

Fourth, there is often no formalised

co-operation between the vessel crew and the rescue services. In case of an emergency, the responsible rescue services need information regarding the system, including ship and battery system, active and passive fire protection systems and status of the incident to evaluate appropriate safety measures. Important questions arise from these findings, such as what information must be readily available for the rescue services in case of an emergency and what information should be expected? If a fire and the rescue service is present, who is in charge of the operation? What can be done to prevent and mitigate an accident?

In the future, SINTEF is planning to investigate the topic from various perspectives: system safety, battery system components, and design of and safety measures for battery rooms, to help prevent accidents with lithium-ion battery systems in maritime environments.

In the meantime, education and training for all seafarers and a higher risk awareness regarding the use of batteries in maritime environments are crucial measures to make everyday life on board safer. ☺

*Line Skeidsvoll is a senior engineer and Brynhild Garberg Olsø is a senior adviser at SINTEF. Kerstin Knott is QA manager of the System Safety group at SINTEF Digital.*

# Trailblazing an onboard connectivity revolution

*MOL wants to reduce the sense of isolation at sea*

By Carly Fields

Shipping line MOL took an important step forward last year when it announced that it would install a Starlink satellite communication service on 233 of its ocean-going vessels. These ships will make use of multiple small satellites deployed in low orbit to provide high-speed, low-latency connectivity.

The announcement followed trials on several MOL-operated vessels which saw a “dramatic improvement in the communication environment”, according to MOL, with up to a 50-fold increase in communication speed, enabling seafarers to make video calls with family members and watch videos.

Speaking to *The Sea*, Yuya Inoue, senior coordinator in the innovation lead team at the DX Co-creation Unit at MOL, said that connection at sea is a lifeline. “Isolation affects everything. Attracting and retaining seafarers, particularly the young generation, is a challenge. The role of connectivity is very significant, making the maritime profession an attractive career choice.

“We are navigating towards a future of an interconnected maritime community. The journey we have embarked on with Starlink is more than a tech advancement.”

However, MOL is the exception, rather than the norm and the industry is “still some way from connectivity being a commodity”, noted Marlink’s president for maritime, Tore Morten Olsen. Marlink is integrating the Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite network service Starlink, powered by SpaceX, with its Sealink Geostationary Orbit (GEO) VSAT service and its digital platform on the vessels.

LEO satellites orbit at an altitude of 1,200 kilometres or less, significantly closer to Earth than their GEO counterparts. This proximity allows for lower latency, higher data transfer speeds, and more consistent global coverage, including hard-to-reach polar regions.

In a jointly produced white paper, MOL and Marlink said that LEO networks can significantly improve the quality of life for seafarers by providing reliable, high-speed connectivity even in remote regions.

“This enables crew members to stay in touch with their families and friends, access news and entertainment, and maintain a sense of connection with the world beyond their vessel, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness.”

## Improved access

Additionally, with the support of LEO satellite networks, seafarers can access online training and professional development resources while at sea, allowing them to enhance their skills and stay up to date with industry advancements. “This not only contributes to the personal growth of individual seafarers, but also benefits the maritime industry as a whole by fostering a highly skilled and competent workforce.”

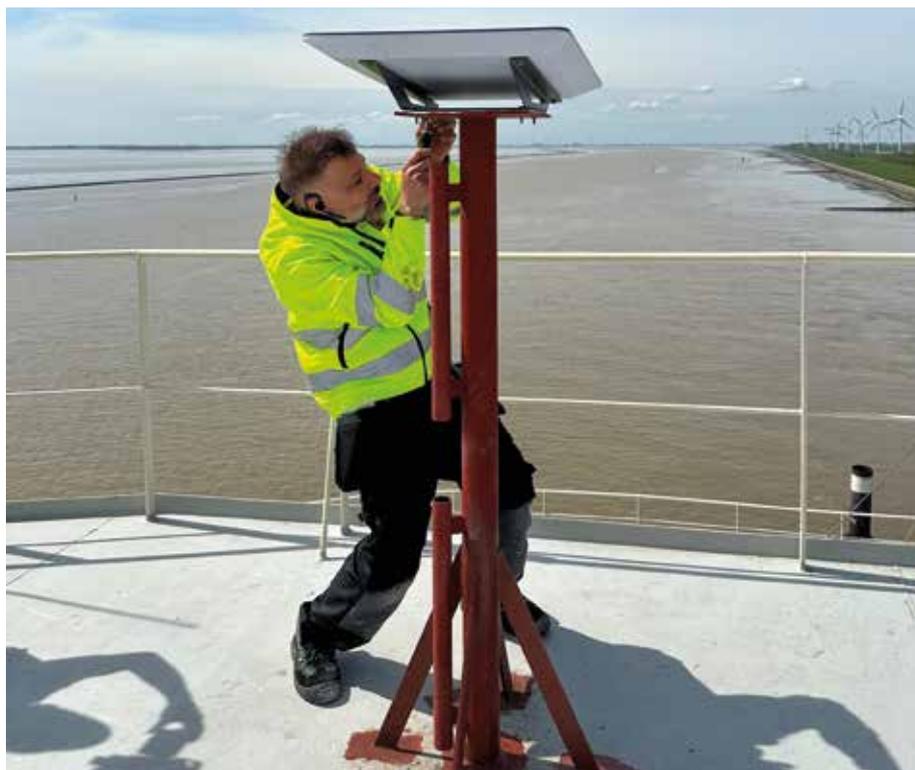
Plus, remote medical assistance can be accessed at the time of need and LEO networks can expand the range of entertainment options available to crew members. “With improved connectivity, seafarers can stream movies, TV shows, and music from various online platforms, providing a wider selection and up-to-date content.”

Looking ahead, Olsen gave an insight into Maritime 4.0, looking at how the industry can take advantage of increasing quantities of data,

facilitated by greater connectivity. He sees greater use of AI and automation, and the arrival of autonomous vessels that will change crew competency requirements. AI will be proactively used on voyage execution and fully smart-enabled vessels will have sensor tech everywhere that customers can use to optimise voyages. By 2023, he sees a fifteen-fold rise in data consumed in shipping operations versus today.

There will also be an increase in remote surveys and data collection will mature for all new ships, while smart ships will become a reality. All this will be underpinned by enhanced cyber detection as the adoption of LEO satellite networks introduces new cybersecurity risks to maritime operations.

“As digital connectivity and data transmission increase, so does the potential for cyber threats. These threats range from unauthorised access, data breaches, and hacking of navigation systems to more complex attacks targeting the ship’s control systems. Ensuring robust and resilient cybersecurity measures is critical for protecting sensitive data, maintaining privacy, and ensuring the safe and reliable operation of maritime communication systems,” the whitepaper concluded. 📄



Marlink is fitting MOL’s satellite service solution

Credit: Marlink

# Unsung heroes of the high seas

*Columbia's investment in seafarers' wellbeing*

Traditionally seafarers have put up with their feelings of isolation and loneliness, coupled with personal worries from home, safety concerns with risks of piracy and traumatic incidents on board, and missing their families back home. They stayed silent and ran the risk of self-medicating their issues or learning unhealthy habits to make their worries easier to handle.

With the growing number of people globally being diagnosed with mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, or personality disorders, the shipping industry is realising it must take the health and wellbeing of its crews seriously. By providing round-the-clock support and promoting regular check-ins on crews' mental health, the risks of poor mental health escalating are reduced.

Although some might feel seafarers today have it better because they can more easily connect with their friends and family regularly through Facetime and video calls, they are also dealing with more stress due to increased social media reliance, global crises such as the long-lasting effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, financial worries and the Ukraine conflict. The recent Red Sea attacks have only added a further level of anxiety for crews who are sacrificing their safety for their jobs.

With demand for mental health services on land higher than ever, it is essential we also offer these services on board, where crews have to consistently deal with work-related stress, risk of burnout, lack of rest

time, family issues, and increasing threats of global crises.

Cultural differences and language barriers add an extra layer of complexity to their daily lives. Mental health and wellbeing were thrust into the limelight during the Covid pandemic and the industry is increasingly recognising the importance of support for seafarers, offering a more promising and supportive future. This acknowledgment underscores a positive shift towards their enhanced wellbeing and a growing appreciation of seafarers, paving the way for a brighter future where seafarers feel nurtured and mental health is something to be openly discussed.

## Investment in wellbeing

Columbia Shipmanagement (CSM), part of the Columbia Group, recognises the monumental challenges faced by seafarers and is committed to supporting and investing in their wellbeing.

CSM demonstrates its dedication to its seafarers through working with different partners who offer round-the-clock access to mental and physical healthcare, nutrition and fitness initiatives, wellness programmes, and the general promotion of healthy and positive lifestyles while seafarers are on board the ship.

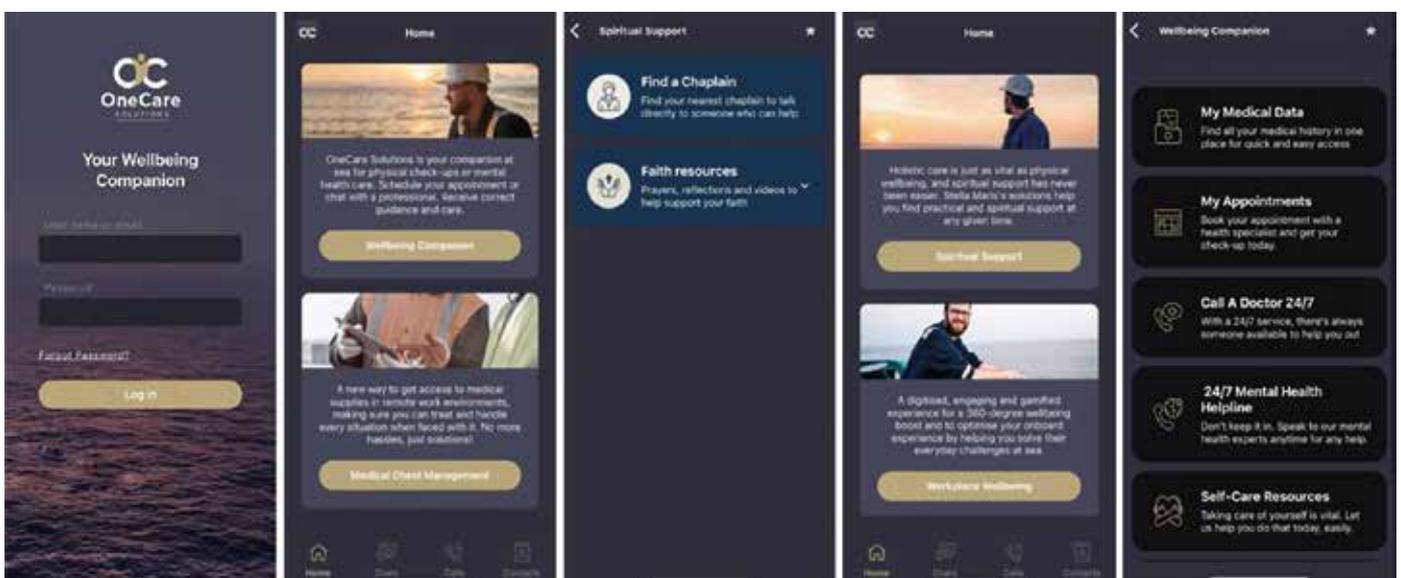
Captain Faouzi Fradi, Columbia Group's crewing and training director, has walked in the shoes of seafarers before transitioning to shore-based roles. His personal experience at sea means he understands the challenges

seafarers endure. This understanding is at the heart of Columbia's dedication to prioritising the health and wellbeing of their crews.

OneCare Solutions, a health and wellbeing platform, has been enlisted to provide professional support to seafarers under Columbia's care. This platform addresses various aspects of seafarers' health, encompassing mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing. OneCare Solutions has established a 24/7 mental health hotline staffed by professional clinical psychologists, managed by Mental Health Support Solutions (MHSS), to ensure seafarers have access to immediate assistance when needed. The MHSS team conducts first aid training for crew members on board, enabling them to recognise signs of mental distress in their colleagues and offer support before professional help can be engaged.

In partnership with Marine Medical Solutions, OneCare Solutions is also focused on providing high-quality medical care to seafarers. Recognising the profound impact of health on mental and physical wellbeing, this initiative aims to safeguard seafarers' health on multiple levels through happiness monitors, a 24/7 telemedical helpline, biomedical preventative maintenance, and medical formulary management.

Poor health not only affects seafarers' mental and physical states but can also impact their ability to perform their duties safely and efficiently. 📞



# Voice of the crew

*New survey aims to gather direct insights from seafarers on concerns and priorities at sea*

By Marco Sumitra

**R**ightShip is a maritime due diligence platform with a wide (and growing) range of products and services – all driving towards our vision of a maritime industry that causes zero harm.

At the heart of the maritime industry are seafarers, and at the heart of our work is seafarer wellbeing. We are committed to improving the safety, security, and overall wellbeing of seafarers, who are the lifeblood of the industry and the key to achieving our vision.

This is a vital factor in all our work: promoting high standards of crew welfare is integral to our vetting and inspections services.

In addition, RightShip is committed to decarbonising the maritime industry, which will empower seafarers and improve and help to de-risk the conditions in which they live and work.

We have also collaborated with the Sustainable Shipping Initiative and the Institute for Human Rights & Business to create the RightShip Code of Conduct, a document that sets standards and best practices around seafarer wellbeing across the industry. Following on from this, we have developed the RightShip Crew Welfare Self-Assessment Questionnaire for businesses to benchmark their performances on this vital matter.

The self-assessment has – as of January 2024 – been adopted by 483 companies covering over 10,588 vessels. It covers various aspects of crew welfare, such as fair terms of employment, health and safety, training and development, social and recreational facilities, and seafarer assistance programs.

The assessment has revealed some areas of success and some areas that need improvement in the industry. For example:

97% of the respondents affirm setting crewing levels based on crew wellbeing and safety.

Only 27% of the respondents support providing recreational facilities and Wi-Fi.

Fair terms of employment: High compliance, with 94% scoring it as basic, 79% intermediate, and 71% excellent.

Seafarer Assistance Programmes: Room for improvement, with 61%



*“Ship owners, charterers, and other stakeholders must continue to improve and enhance conditions for seafarers globally”*

scoring this as basic, 38% intermediate, and 32% excellent.

The assessment also highlights the crucial role of charterers in driving industry progress, as they have the power and responsibility to choose and reward operators who prioritise crew welfare. We are committed to enhancing maritime safety and wellbeing through ongoing improvements to the Self-Assessment Questionnaire and our collaboration with charterers and other partners.

But there is a lot more to do: ship owners, charterers, and other stakeholders must continue to improve and enhance conditions for seafarers globally. This requires a concerted effort, and it can't be done without hearing and understanding the voices of the seafarers themselves, the people who, every day, keep global trade moving.

That's why we have launched the 'Voice of the Crew' survey, a unique initiative to gather direct insights from seafarers on their concerns and priorities when at sea. The survey aims to understand:

- What matters most to seafarers on the high seas?
- What enhances their lives while aboard?
- What contributes to their happiness?

The survey is open to all seafarers, regardless of their rank, nationality, or vessel type. It is an opportunity for seafarers to share their opinions and experiences, and to have a say in shaping the future of the maritime industry. The survey responses are confidential and anonymous, and no names, vessels, or companies will be disclosed.

We encourage all seafarers to participate, as the survey results will help us (and other organisations) to advocate for the rights and interests of seafarers with key stakeholders, including ship owners, regulators, and non-governmental organisations, and to promote best practices and standards in the industry. The survey results can also be used to improve the Code of Conduct and Crew Welfare Self-Assessment Questionnaire, and to promote and enhance best practices.

We invite all seafarers to participate in the 'Voice of the Crew' survey and to make their voices heard. To access the survey, please scan the QR code. It takes about 5 minutes to complete.

Thank you for your time and participation. Together, we can make a difference for seafarers and the maritime industry. 📍  
Marco Sumitra is product manager at RightShip.

# 100 solutions for enhancing seafarer welfare

*Pan-industry project aims to improve conditions at sea*

By Verity Relph

There is much enthusiasm within the industry about improving seafarer welfare, but in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen little in the way of positive change in seafarer living and working conditions. What are the real, tangible changes that could transform life at sea?

Over the course of 2023, industry leaders gathered to debate just that. The Mission to Seafarers facilitated a series of roundtable discussions held in Singapore and London. Building upon data from the Seafarers Happiness Index and with supporting insights from sponsors NorthStandard, Idwal, and Inmarsat, the roundtables brought together a range of industry leaders, shipowners, managers and charterers to engage in wide-ranging discussions over their shared experiences of seafarers' needs. The idea was to leverage their collective energy in order to drive meaningful change in seafarer welfare.

The result? The proposal of 100 diverse solutions, ideas and initiatives that could improve seafarers' overall wellbeing, safety, and quality of life. These solutions cover a wide range of areas, from access to shore leave and connection with loved ones, to career progression and management onboard and ashore.

"This initiative is about having the imagination, vision and determination to fix the ills which are so damaging to seafarers," says Steven Jones, CEO of the Sustainable Shipping Initiative and founder of The Seafarers Happiness Index, who spearheaded the campaign.

"The focus had been to move the debate forward," Steven explains, "to stop talking about the problems and plot a route forward for actual answers. To that backdrop the senior shipping people who engaged have been fantastic at looking at the actual fixes which can make life better at sea.

"At the core, it is about respect, support, collaboration, innovation, and policy change."

## Key focus areas

The proposed 'fixes' and initiatives can be divided across several key focus areas.

The first focus is on better treatment and recognition of seafarers. It suggests ideas like treating crew with respect, tackling criminalisation of seafarers, advocating for their importance, promoting diversity, and improving recruitment.

Actions such as fostering better respect, recognition and empathy from shore management can have enormous benefits for seafarer mental health and ultimately lead to better performance and productivity for the industry.

Another idea is ensuring that cultural differences are explored and managed in the right way, leading to a more supportive and harmonious working environment.

The second focus is on direct support for seafarers. It recommends actions like providing better food, connectivity, working conditions, mental health support, career development, and compensation.

There are diverse ideas ranging from hydroponic-grown fruit and vegetables on board to introducing rolling contracts to provide better job security for seafarers.

The third and final focus is on industry collaboration and innovation. It proposes reaching out and engaging with industry bodies with a view to building a stronger network to share best practices and establish common goals related to seafarer welfare and wellbeing.

This focus area also covers using technology and data to address issues, education and outreach, promoting gender equality, and enhancing engagement.

As well as these short-term goals, the proposals also set out medium-term ideas on topics such as essential worker status, work hours, taxation, and mentoring. Longer-term goals include pre-employment mental health assessments to promote the wellbeing

and safety of seafarers, and introducing IMO/ILO numbers for seafarers to bring greater standardisation, security and accountability to the industry.

## Getting the industry on board

The 100 solutions compel every part of the industry to make improvements, and indeed there are ideas in the report that every organisation can contribute towards.

"There was a sense from the meetings that if implemented collaboratively, these proposals could lead to improved welfare, wellbeing and sustainability", says Steven. However, he also acknowledges the ambitious scope of the proposals: "One has to be careful throwing 100 solutions into the mix. There is a danger of overloading the system, and for good things to go unnoticed or to be ignored. With so many ideas to improve the reality of seafarers then the next steps are about plotting a path forward."

The key, he believes, is maintaining momentum and commitment from stakeholders. The plan is to engage with industry to identify the people, companies and organisations which can champion these changes. He adds that working with ports could be the way to drive tangible changes: "In further discussions, we have seen that focusing on ports and terminals may be a pivotal way of ensuring we can build solutions into the experiences of seafarers."

There will, inevitably, be challenges on the road ahead. "As we know, overcoming barriers like costs, resistance to change, and lack of data may prove challenging," says Steven. "Shipping is about challenges, so they have to be anticipated. What is needed is a means of navigating them. Change is not simple, easy or straightforward. It is about making sure the solutions can work, and about ensuring that they are focused on the right parts and stakeholders within the chain. Changemaking is about bringing the

*"This initiative is about having the imagination, vision and determination to fix the ills which are so damaging to seafarers"*



right vision together with the right people and the best mechanism to deliver the change needed.”

As the latest Seafarers Happiness Index data has shown, there has been a consistent decline in happiness at sea over the course of 2023. It appears that though the world has emerged from the pandemic, conditions for seafarers have not improved. Crews are reporting feeling overburdened, undervalued and disconnected. Exhausting workloads due to crewing shortages and administrative burdens, together with limited shore leave and unreliable connectivity, are just some of the issues reported.

Reflecting on what difference the proposed solutions could make for a seafarer starting out in their career, Steven says: “If fixes work for one seafarer, then they can work for all. If we can find the means of making life more enjoyable, the food better, the connectivity improved, the spaces on board more conducive to interactions, and having access to get ashore and enjoy life, then everyone benefits. If we can have seafarers listened to and respected, then we are on the right path. Which may mean 1 down, 99 to go.”

Ultimately, 100 solutions is about fostering a collective effort to drive through positive changes for seafarers.

The range of challenges facing those at sea can seem overwhelming, but these big ideas and small actionable steps could make seafaring a more attractive and sustainable career, one that is happier, more fulfilling and healthier. The solutions would also ensure that seafarers feel respected and valued, and give them agency over their lives and careers. 🌐

Read more here: <https://www.missiontoseafarers.org/wp-content/uploads/Seafarer-Welfare-Exec-Roundtable-Review-Singapore-2023.pdf>. Verity Relph is the grants and impact manager at The Mission to Seafarers.

## Join the **global Maritime** community this March!

To learn more, visit

[www.cmashippingevent.com](http://www.cmashippingevent.com)

**CMA SHIPPING**

**March 12-14, 2024**  
Hilton Stamford, Connecticut

Brought to you by



Organised by



Proudly Supporting



#CMAShipping



Oleg (back row, third from left) with seafarers on the Day of the Seafarers in 2023

## A rock for Ukrainian seafarers

*Oleg Grygoriuk urges those at sea to support their war-weary colleagues* **By Carly Fields**

The immense pressures on Ukrainian seafarers today might be hard to put into words, but please do not shy away from offering support and solidarity, Oleg Grygoriuk, chairman of the Marine Transport Workers' Trade Union of Ukraine (MTWTU), tells *The Sea*. Oleg advises that non-Ukrainian seafarers stay calm, offer support and say warm words to their Ukrainian colleagues – “because it’s impossible to understand what we’re going through”.

“If you see a Ukrainian seafarer, just give a bit of support and cheer them up because we’re really running through challenging times and every word will matter,” he says.

Ukrainian seafarers face mental, physical, financial, and political pressures, all of which have the potential to impact their life and effectiveness at sea. “You need to be really mentally strong to think about your work instead of thinking about your family in Ukraine with Russian terrorists sending missiles every night to peaceful cities and villages. You never know who’s going to be next,” Oleg says.

### Supporting hand

The MTWTU is there to support all Ukrainian seafarers who need assistance, in whatever guise. “Throughout the two years of the full-scale invasion the support we have offered has been very dynamic. At the very beginning of the war, the largest challenge was the evacuation of our seafarers’ families from the occupied territories, or from territories that were under constant challenge and attacks.”

The Union evacuated more than 500 people over two months from occupied territories and from Odesa to outside of the country. The seafarers who now have to live abroad because of the war then had further challenges to overcome: “They need to pay the rent, they need to pay European prices for food – all those costs have just simply doubled for them, but their salary hasn’t.”

Oleg and his team are trying to push the market up in terms of salaries, but there’s a cap for certain positions on board the ships. “We’re trying to address the shipowners and

shipowners’ associations, and it feels like we have made progress but the seafarers need more: more money, more rest periods, more welfare activities,” he says. They also need trust in tomorrow, as the absence of firm foundations is really difficult for seafarers, there is no chance to plan anything, even short-term. “This is where the role of the union is very important. We can give that sense of optimism, that sense of trust. They know that they can rely on us, and we can help them.”

The Union has also given financial assistance to seafarers and their families to buy the basics, especially for those who lost everything. Oleg and his team also provide mental support for Ukrainian seafarers whose parents or relatives are in the war, those who have lost their properties, those with properties in the occupied territories, and the children of seafarers and families who have suffered from the shelling.

### Loss of cadets

The invasion has had a detrimental impact on the number of Ukrainian cadets training for a career at sea, something that Oleg is working hard to address. “There has been a significant drop in the number of cadets, but we

*“Throughout the two years of the full-scale invasion the support we have offered has been very dynamic”*

continue to support our academies in different ways,” he says. “We have several projects, including a partnership with the ITF Seafarers’ Trust where the first group of 50 cadets from the Kherson State Maritime Academy – who were on their courses when the invasion started – were sent to an academy in Lithuania.

“They managed to study in parallel while they were in Klaipeda and we paid for that and food, lodging, dormitories, and everything else. They were in safety, which was the first priority for us, and they managed to get their diplomas and are now working at sea. We are very proud of that project which we believe was very, very successful.”

Last year, the Union started a project for 10 cadets who were under 18 – the conscription age in Ukraine. “We selected them and sent them to Klaipeda before they turned 18 and now they’re studying in two academies – Lithuanian and Kherson. We’re creating these opportunities, giving the market highly qualified seafarers for the future,” Oleg says.

His passion for the next generation of seafarers is founded in his own early career. He’s from a “maritime dynasty” he tells *The Sea*: both his grandfather and father were chief engineers. “My father told me, ‘You’re not going to be a chief engineer. You’re going to the deck’. So I became a chief officer. That was the beginning.”

He too studied at the Ukrainian maritime academy and on graduation headed straight on to foreign-flagged bulk carriers, ro-ros, and passenger ships. But a run-in with a ship owner 15 years ago while trying to defend his rights brought him to his current job at the Union. While he admits that he sometimes misses the sea he has found his calling in helping others through the Union.

He particularly values being part of the regulatory process at the IMO and discussing the challenges of the Ukraine situation in different working groups. “On every political and social level we want countries to not tire of the situation because it’s almost two years since the invasion and we understand that the focus is changing today – war in Yemen, Gaza, and we don’t know what’s going to happen in Taiwan. All those issues are obviously attracting the attention of the world community and the shipping industry.

“But the war goes on, so that’s why

we need to continue to support by all means the Ukrainian government, Ukrainian seafarers, and the Ukrainian maritime community. Everyone should stand together.” He adds that the best help is companies continuing to hire Ukrainian seafarers with a competitive salary.

### Spreading goodwill

He also promotes Ukraine as a maritime powerhouse through his position as an IMO Goodwill Maritime Ambassador. Through this role, Oleg promotes Ukrainian cadets and encourages school leavers to consider a career at sea. “I’m really proud of this,” he says. “I also lobby for Ukraine as one of the largest maritime nations, which continues to be there for foreign shipping companies.”

In recognition of the work that Oleg has done to support seafarers, he was presented with a Special Award at the Mts’ Singapore Seafarers Awards. The Special Award was added to the Mission’s usual list of six and acknowledged his efforts in leading advocacy for Ukrainian seafarers and their families following the outbreak of the war.

“The award was really touching and amazing – I felt fantastic. We do what we have to do in the given circumstances and when the maritime community recognises your efforts it is really, really touching. It’s really hard to explain how much effort and personal resources I have put in to make all these projects and support



Oleg’s father and grandfather meet each other in foreign port

happen. Thousands and thousands of seafarers and their families have received something from the Union and its partners.

“I believe that without us and without our work and our partners’ work, things could be much worse for Ukrainian seafarers. I’m really proud of that.” He also thanks his “fantastic” staff: “I appreciate their support every day and every minute because they are great as well.”

In a closing comment, Oleg gives his appreciation to the armed forces of Ukraine for defending the country. “These are the bravest men and women in the world. What they are doing is a fantastic achievement. We could lose our country were it not for them. They are the real heroes of today. And I’d like to give a huge amount of appreciation to them from our Union and from our seafarers.”



Oleg with Ukrainian cadets at LMA (back row, second from right)

# What do seafarers need to know?

*Modernisation of the STCW Convention is a challenging project* By Michael Grey

**A**s work begins on the latest revision of the STCW Convention, it is worth reflecting about the task that is being confronted, in making sure that the training of seafarers is entirely relevant to the ships they will be operating. It is not an easy matter in an era of profound change, where autonomy, new fuels, sustainability and artificial intelligence are all intruding into the picture. Indeed, there are so many unknowns about future ships and their technology that trying to anticipate the demands upon those who will operate them is like navigating into uncharted waters.

It might be of some comfort to remember that any attempt to update the curriculum will inevitably fall short in an industry where nothing stands still for long. Every generation of seafarers finds itself being trained, at least in part, to cover areas of their syllabus which has been overtaken by time and will be most unlikely to ever be needed in practice. In the 1960s, for instance, navigators found it faintly ridiculous to be quizzed on how to avoid square-rigged sailing ships when they met one at sea, or learning to semaphore, in an era when VHF radios were becoming ubiquitous.

The trouble is that many old skills are dispensed with at one's peril. Modern navigators probably find it silly to waste a lot of time trying to absorb celestial navigation when the personal sextant is no longer one of the tools of the trade. The mysteries of the magnetic compass, which once demanded hours of attendance at lectures might seem superfluous in the age of integrated

electronic systems. But when there is widespread interference with GPS and ship-borne electronics, as the hackers home in on the maritime world, perhaps this older expertise can still demand attention. The old paper chart may be largely redundant, but it at least gave the user a certain autonomy that could not be put at risk by outside interference, or breakdown.

## Variety of ships

The extraordinary specialisation of modern shipping also makes the task of STCW Convention modernisation an unenviable task. Once the maritime requirements for statutory certification seemed simple – dry cargo ships and tankers, steamships and motorships, home trade and foreign-going. Just think of the amazing variety of ship types that may be found at sea today, and their requirement for specialised skills to operate them safely and efficiently. Similarly, the new requirement of charterers and owners for “experience” in rank places difficult demands upon those who somehow must gain this necessary credibility. Mere certificates are not enough.

There are plenty of problems here, but at least technology offers some solutions, not least in the facility of on-line education and training, that is now available around the world. Courses can be tailored to actual need and delivered without the requirement to physically attend educational establishments, if this is more convenient or cost-effective. The availability of simulator training has developed and expanded to an astonishing realism, which can be designed to suit different ship-types

and a whole range of onboard tasks on deck and in machinery spaces. Techniques can be practised and honed in a risk-free environment and possibly (this will surely form much debate among regulators) tested in examination conditions. The use of digital twins is likely to become an important element in familiarising seafarers with their equipment.

But in all this modernisation and use of revolutionary technology, some things will never change. The sea, in all its variety and occasional violence, and the challenges and hostility of the marine environment will remain a constant, demanding of skill, experience and, above all, respect. The ships may be bigger and more capable than ever, laden with technology to help them in their operations, but seafarers will still have to learn about the sea, and its manifold characteristics, the wind and weather, and the effects from winds and tides. Moreover, the newer demands for environmental sustainability must be grafted on to this more ancient knowledge. ☺

*“The extraordinary specialisation of modern shipping also makes the task of STCW Convention modernisation an unenviable task”*

Are sextants as redundant as paper charts in modern day shipping?



By Steven Jones

# Falling sentiment must be addressed

*A record decline needs to be reversed to keep crews motivated*

There have been constant periods of peaks and troughs across the years of the Seafarers Happiness Index (SHI). Never though, until now, have we seen a full year of falling sentiment.

Down, down, down, and down – that was the troubling trajectory of 2023. The latest decline for the fourth consecutive quarter saw satisfaction ratings fall to 6.36 on our 10-point scale, down from 6.6.

A sustained downward spiral once more highlights growing discontent among crews worldwide. So, what is driving this downward curve and such a consistent sense of dissatisfaction?

At the core of mounting seafarer frustrations are feelings of being overburdened, undervalued, and disconnected. Then, allied to those issues – which would be bad enough – we hear feedback of a sense of feeling under-rewarded and seafarers speak of having to deal with a daily lack of respect from ashore.

Seafarers have raised concerns that within too many companies, shoreside management is seen to lack empathy and their concerns for crew welfare seem superficial – or, at best, only at a compliance level. Seemingly, there are few companies that strive for excellence when it comes to their people. This is not only a huge disappointment, but it will likely come back to bite the industry.

In the current recruitment and retention squeeze, it is extremely dangerous to make our people feel undervalued and frustrated.

However, while we can debate this, there are more prosaic issues and concerns to consider. Over 2023, seafarers spoke out about the fact that while administrative burdens seem to multiply, crewing levels remain static. The problems of paperwork seem to persist, even in an increasingly digital age. This remains a puzzle, and we ask how and what can and should be done to resolve this.

## Security burdens

Towards the end of the last quarter of 2023, the risk of attacks on vessels was beginning to increase and concerns were growing. Associated with those concerns, we also heard of a ramping



Crews say they prefer to keep people together on rotations

*“The problems of paperwork seem to persist, even in an increasingly digital age”*

up of workload, whether through longer trips owing to diversions, or through the work to secure and maintain vigilance on board. We have heard repeated concerns about the escalating response needed by crew to counter piracy and terrorism.

Unfortunately, it seems that once more seafarers are shouldering a disproportionate burden. Extended work hours and disrupted sleep to maintain security watches are on the rise. And the heavy toll of security duties is exacerbated by understaffing.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, shore leave has once more become a casualty of wider uncertainty. Seafarers spoke of their growing sense that security was replacing Covid as the excuse to deny access to shore. The feedback is that procedures and processes are not only struggling to return to normal post-pandemic but are now being altered to reflect security concerns.

In times of sustained satisfaction downturn and frustration, it can be a challenge to find positives to build on. They are there though. One particularly interesting response from a seafarer was on the issue of keeping regular crews together.

Working on ships with people you know and on regular patterns helps to forge bonds and friendships. Those crews are far more likely to be satisfied and enjoy their jobs.

From those seafarers, we heard about how much easier it is to develop a social life on board and how the standard of training and even mentoring is boosted.

So, despite the past year of negatives, there is still a chance to change the trajectory. We can make life better at sea even in the face of falling sentiment. We can make sure that seafarers are supported and have the resources they need to respond to rising security risks. We can explore the paperwork paradox: why is our industry digitalising at pace, but this is not yet having the desired impact on seafarer workloads? And we can rise to the challenge of improving social life and camaraderie by keeping crews together.

Only then can we hope that positives emerge in 2024. It is a worrying time for the entire industry, but with small changes, giving respect to seafarers, and by thinking and empathising, we can hopefully see sentiment rise once more.  Steven Jones is founder of the Seafarers Happiness Index.

# 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.

### MEDIUM LEVEL

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

### TRICKY LEVEL

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

Credit: www.sudokuoftheday.com

### EASY LEVEL

solution (Issue 4 2023)

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

### TRICKY LEVEL

solution (Issue 4 2023)

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

## 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 March 28, 2024. All correct answers will be entered into a draw for a chance to win a Mission to Seafarers' Goodie Bag, containing a 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..."

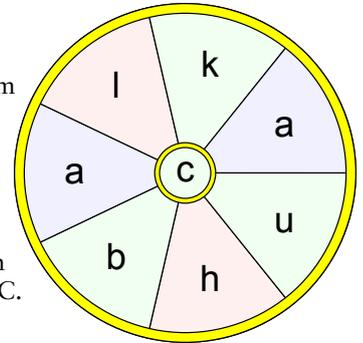
- 1) Acetabog 2) Acapticy 3) Enclhard 4) Soctums

Issue 4, 2023 solutions:

- 1) Deckhand 2) Equality 3) Rating 4) Leave

## Word wheel

This word wheel is made from an eight-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 C.



Answer for Issue 4, 2023 issue:

45 possible words, eight-letter word was Training

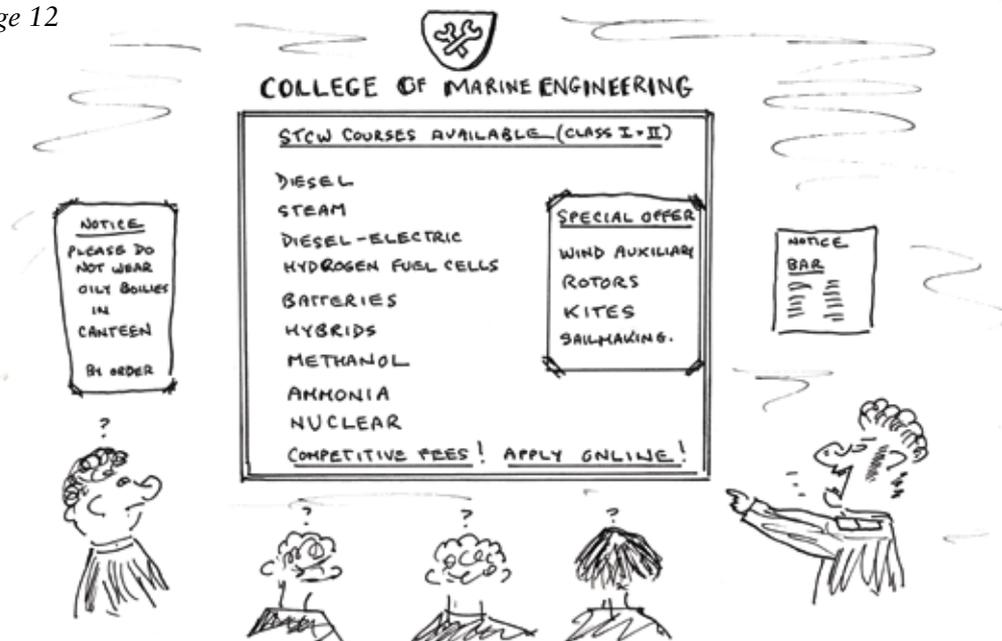
## Flag code

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



Answer for Issue 4, 2023: Shoreside

See Michael Grey's feature on page 12



So much choice – it's like an Indian restaurant menu!

# Help for seafarers around the world

Are you one of the 1.89 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)

 [missiontoseafarers](https://www.facebook.com/missiontoseafarers)

 [FlyingAngelNews](https://twitter.com/FlyingAngelNews)

 [missiontoseafarers](https://www.instagram.com/missiontoseafarers)

## WeCare, now available online through our e-learning programme.

To find out more about our Social Wellbeing and Financial Wellbeing courses, please visit [www.mtswe care.org](http://www.mtswe care.org) **Because together, WeCare.**

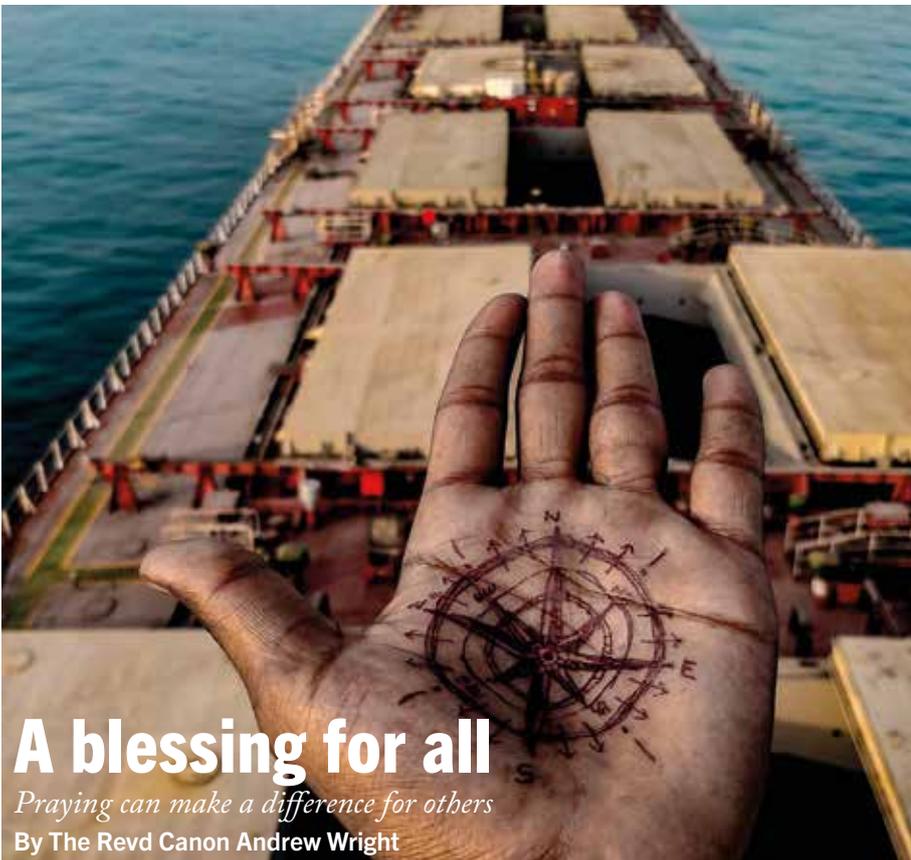
  
**WeCare**  
Wellbeing programmes from  
The Mission to Seafarers

**UKP&I**

**TK**

**PRIME**

DISTRIBUTION PARTNERS:  
**OCEAN**  
Technologies Group



Credit: Mohammed Hijaz, Pixabay

# A blessing for all

*Praying can make a difference for others*

By The Revd Canon Andrew Wright

Write as the New Year has just turned. By the time you read this we will be well into 2024. The dawn of a new year is a time when we often pray or wish for blessings on ourselves and others.

I saw many seafarers over the Christmas and New Year period, and many asked for a prayer of blessing. A prayer of blessing on others is something we can all do, regardless of whether we are clergy or not. In doing so we are asking for God to take care

of an individual or group of people and for them to know happiness and God's mercy in a very special way.

To say a prayer of blessing on someone is a natural expression of love and kindness. There are many beautiful prayers of blessing. I often use an old Celtic one: "May the road rise to meet you, may the sun shine always on your face, may the wind be always at your back, may the rain fall softly on your fields and, until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of his hand."

Many of you will know and love Aaron's blessing in the Bible's Book of Numbers: "May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; may the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."

You may have your own favourite. But to pray a prayer of blessing on someone can be very simple indeed – you do not need special words. However, it was once said that to say a prayer does not change God, but it should change us.

Prayer is something of a mystery but at its heart lies our relationship with God. To pray is a way of building that partnership, of sharing with God and allowing Him to share with us. Such prayer will change us.

When we pray for a blessing on others, that prayer should motivate us to work to be a blessing to others in every way we can. That is a powerful and wonderful thing – to be a blessing to others. To be partners with God in helping answer our own prayers. That is what he calls us to do.

And one of the great things about praying is that we can try and make a difference for others even from thousands of miles away. We can try and think of ways of being a blessing to others, however remote we feel.

God's love spans the world and the universe. May God make us a blessing to others in 2024. ☺

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

## A prayer for seafarers

*Our Lord Jesus Christ be near you to defend you,  
Within you to refresh you, Around you to preserve you,  
Before you to guide you, Behind you to justify you, Above you to bless you,  
Who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, God for evermore,  
Amen*

Please donate to  
**The Mission  
to Seafarers**

Please visit [missiontoseafarers.org/donate](https://missiontoseafarers.org/donate)  
or scan the QR code opposite.

