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TRAINING AND WATCHKEEPING

Date of implementation of proposed amendments on Competences for Ratings

Submitted by the International Shipping Federation (ISF) and the
International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)

SUMMARY

Executive summary: This document comments on the decision of the Sub-Committee on Standards of Training and Watchkeeping (STW) to suggest that the Committee endorse that the amendments of the STCW Convention and Code relating to competences for ratings is postponed until after the Comprehensive review of the Convention and Code has been completed and asks the Committee to consider implementing the amendments at the earliest possible stage

Action to be taken: Paragraph 10

Related documents: STW 38/17 and MSC 81/25

Introduction

1 This document comments on the decision of the Sub-Committee at STW 38 to postpone the adoption of the text of amendments of the STCW Convention and STCW Code relating to standards of competence for ratings until after the completion of the comprehensive review of the STCW Convention and STCW Code (STW 38/17, paragraphs 9.34 to 9.37).

2 ISF and ITF recognize and appreciate the work that has been undertaken in the development of standards of competences for ratings. However, ISF and ITF have concerns that a delay in the incorporation of the competences into the Convention may compound the problems within the industry with regard to the growing shortage of seafarers and would request that the Committee consider adopting the amendments as soon as possible.

Consistency with other international instruments and within the industry

3 ISF and ITF note that the amendments as they stand are entirely consistent with other provisions of international law, such as the ILO Maritime Labour Convention 2006 and ILO Convention No.74 on the Certification of Able Seamen. The former designates this organization

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as the competent authority to regulate on standards of competency while the amendments allow for a transitional period and overlap between the application of ILO Convention No.74 and the entry into force of the amendments. This enables states that are party to both conventions concurrently to issue certificates under either instrument.

4 At present there is no international regime relating to the standards of competency required to qualify as an able seaman. ILO Convention No.74 has only been ratified by 28 States, of which only one can be considered to be a major labour supply country. As such, the present system creates inconsistency within the types of training provided by different states. Those that are party to ILO Convention No.74 are required to train able seamen in accordance with its provisions. However, States which are not parties to ILO Convention No.74 are training their able seamen in accordance with their national regimes, a system which lacks international transparency. With this in mind, the earliest implementation of the amendments can only be beneficial to the industry as a whole, offering a more consistent and pragmatic system of training, more in line with the needs and nuances of modern seafaring, as opposed to a Convention which is now over 60 years old.

5 If, as has been suggested, the new competences for ratings require revision as part of, or in consequence of the comprehensive review of the STCW Convention, then it is surely preferable for such revisions to be effected with the benefit of experience of the new competences. This can only take place if the new competences are in force for a period of time before any changes flowing from the comprehensive review are implemented.

6 Furthermore, the postponement of implementation would contravene the previous decision of this Committee that the proposed review of the STCW Convention and the STCW Code should not, in any way, delay the work already in the Sub-Committee's work programme (MSC 81/25).

Growing shortage of seafarers

7 Existing procedures under ILO Convention No.74 provide for a period of sea service of 36 months, reducing to 24 months where an approved course has been followed. This requirement might have been appropriate in 1946 when ILO Convention No.74 was adopted but with modern training facilities and a structured training programme it should not be necessary. It does not take into account the modern shipping industry, especially as it is possible to obtain a Certificate of Competency (CoC) as Officer of the Watch in a shorter time frame. In recent years it has been well documented that there is a growing shortage of people choosing a career at sea, and this is an area of considerable concern for ISF and ITF. It is beyond the remit of this document to cite in great detail the changes in the labour supply market however, the attractiveness of alternative careers, changes in lifestyle and an increasing number of shore based jobs have led to shortages which, if not addressed, it is feared will become crippling to the industry over time.

8 Given these concerns, it is important that new seafarers are attracted to a career at sea and that they are able to achieve the appropriate levels of competency within an acceptable time frame so as to increase the number of seafarers world wide. The preliminary text of amendments addressing standards of competency as endorsed by the Sub-Committee of STW 38 provides for a reduction in the minimum period of seagoing service required to qualify as an AB in the deck department from 24 to 14 months, while specifying the necessary competences.

9 This reduction will enable ratings to qualify more quickly and assist in addressing the ongoing issues relating to shortages and as such, ISF and ITF consider that the amendments should be implemented sooner rather than later.

Action requested of the Committee

10 The Committee is invited to consider this document and take action as appropriate.
