

Latest Seafarers Happiness Index report reveals seafarer welfare crisis at tipping point

LONDON, 30 JULY 2020 – The latest Seafarers Happiness Index, published today by The Mission to Seafarers, has revealed the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on the welfare of international seafarers and their families.

The report makes it clear that the seafarer community is in the midst of a mental health crisis. The report shows the continuing decline of happiness at sea, largely due to the inability of seafarers to sign off and return home. Heavy workloads, virus fears and a perceived lack of COVID-19 precautions on board vessels are exacerbating the decline in satisfaction. Without immediate action, there are significant risks for the mental and physical wellbeing of crew and a growing risk to safety.

The latest survey, undertaken in association with the Shipowners' Club and Wallem Group, analyses the experiences of seafarers across the global maritime industry between April and June 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, seafarer happiness has dropped from 6.30 in Q1 2020 to 6.18 in Q2 2020.

Welfare crisis threatening seafarer and vessel safety

The latest report shows vessels are sailing with fewer crew, increased sickness onboard and a pressure to keep hygiene standards at almost hospital-like levels. The demands of meeting these standards while also maintaining social distancing are relentless and seafarers are struggling to adhere to new guidance.

This level of workload has been relentless since the outbreak of COVID-19 and is clearly taking its toll. Seafarers have reported feeling unsupported and stressed, and without respite, which is impacting work standards as well as the welfare of seafarers. Combined with the challenge of accessing medical services, the risk of an increase in incidents of self-harm and in the number of accidents is very real as stress impacts work, compromising safety at all levels.

Steven Jones, Founder of the Seafarers Happiness Index, commented: *"We are in the midst of a welfare crisis. While Q1 showed us how seafarers suffered as COVID-19 struck home and provided insight into the support that was needed, the Q2 report highlights the cost of inaction and the need for immediate solutions. It is paramount that we see progress, with crew changeovers, onboard PPE and improved communication between shore and sea, to defuse this ticking time-bomb. Protecting our seafarers comes first and the industry must now come together before it is too late."*

Louise Hall, Director - Loss Prevention Director at the Shipowners' Club

commented: *"Among other issues, this report highlights the toll that social distancing has taken on relationships and connectivity on board. Reports of additional safety measures, such as separating tables and limiting the capacity of mess rooms at meal times, has made even the most habitual social interactions difficult. This, coupled with extended periods of time at sea, raises serious concerns for seafarers' mental wellbeing as feelings of loneliness and isolation intensify."*

Frank Coles, Chief Executive Officer, Wallem Group, commented: *"Never has the statement 'money doesn't buy happiness' had more meaning than in the crew crisis. No bonus or extra pay can resolve the anguish, mental stress and problems being faced by the crew today."* The report also reaffirms the importance of communication to seafarers. With many seafarers unable to leave their vessels or contact their family due to the crisis, online access is fundamental to their wellbeing. Without the connection to home and restricted support from ship visitors and port chaplains, seafarers are on the edge of serious mental distress. It is reported that many companies are not communicating well with their seafarers and little support is on offer. With little or no communication, seafarers are trapped on vessels, imagining the worst.

The Q1 2020 Seafarers Happiness Index identified the pride that seafarers feel in their work and their hope that the industry would protect them. Today, this is clearly tempered with disappointment that seafarers are not recognised as key workers. The challenges being reported are reaching intolerable levels, due to contracts being disregarded and growing reports of sexism, racism and bullying and drunkenness onboard. Seafarers are at a tipping point and it is essential that faster progress is made to protect seafarers and stop the industry from falling into a deeper crisis.

The message is clear: crew changes are needed, and those who can make them happen must do so, now. Only once seafarers can return home to their families and those serving at sea feel safe can we avert the both the immediate and the long-term impact of a mental health crisis among our seafarers.

The Mission would like to offer it's thanks to all seafarers who completed the survey.

To read the latest Seafarers Happiness Index report in full, [click here](#).



ENDS

Notes for editors

The Shipowners' Club is a mutual marine liability insurer, providing Protection and Indemnity insurance for small and specialist vessels since 1855. The Club is a member of the International Group of P&I Clubs and works with more than 600 brokers globally to insure over 33,000 vessels across a range of operating sections and geographical areas.

The Mission to Seafarers provides help and support to the 1.5 million men and women who face danger every day to keep our global economy afloat. We work in over 200 ports in 50 countries caring for seafarers of all ranks, nationalities and beliefs. Through our global network of chaplains, staff and volunteers we offer practical, emotional and spiritual support to seafarers through ship visits, drop-in seafarers' centres and a range of welfare and emergency support services.

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