



HELP!

Welcome In this special welcome to Seacurus Monthly, as Managing Director of Seacurus Limited I wanted to share my personal take on developments with regards to seafarer protection against abandonment. It has been an ambition, goal and dream to see the changes needed to better safeguard seafarers and it had been suggested that I would never see a solution to seafarer abandonment. Thankfully, that has not been true, and it truly is now a case of all change.

'Never in my lifetime' was a comment made to me by a distinguished seafarer advocate at an IMO/ ILO seafarer abandonment working group meeting in the early noughties, when I dared to suggest that the commercial insurance industry could provide a solution to the unacceptable practice of seafarer abandonment.

The person in question had many years of lobbying experience under his belt and well understood the inertia that sometimes pervades discussions around the need for international regulatory change. But for the success of the draftsmen and women of the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 (MLC), I fear his statement may have haunted me until my dying day. I am pleased to say, however, that such an unpalatable thought seems all the more unlikely now, given the decisions made at the International Labour Organization (ILO) in April and June of this year.

In April, agreement was reached by shipowners, governments, seafarers, NGOs and other organisations on amendments to MLC 2006 which will place a mandatory obligation on shipowners to provide those working on their vessels with recourse to a system of financial security should they be left high and dry due to their employers' financial situation.

In June, we received confirmation that the ILO had, by a staggering majority, adopted new provisions on the protection of abandoned seafarers and of seafarers injured in occupational accidents. It was further confirmed that a period of two years and six months remains before the regulations will take effect. Then, countries which have ratified MLC 2006 will be bound by the regulations unless 40 per cent of the ratifying nations reject the new provisions in writing.



Captain Thomas Brown
Managing Director –
Seacurus Limited

It was encouraging to hear that only one of the 470 delegates voted against this proposal. With such a large majority, it is to be hoped that the dissenting voices will prove to be few over the next two years.

Another important date for the diary is 20 August, 2014. Under the ILO resolution agreed by member states in 2006, it is from this date that full Port State Control (PSC) can be applied by nations which are a party to MLC 2006, regardless of whether or not the ships being inspected are flagged with nations which have ratified the convention. This is the principle of 'no more favourable treatment'.

This rigorous inspection programme may force shipowners to demonstrate to PSC inspectors that the crew managers and seafarer recruitment and placement services with whom they work can confirm compliance with Regulation 1.4 of MLC 2006 by providing evidence of a system of financial security to cover seafarers' monetary loss in the event of their employers' contractual default.

It is hoped that this partial solution, if properly enforced by PSC, will offer a degree of protection to those at sea over the next two and a half years, while the industry prepares for the now inevitable regulatory requirement in 2017.

MLC 2006, which has been dubbed 'the seafarers' bill of rights', is a watershed development for the international shipping industry, and a challenge for the marine insurance industry. Last year, Seacurus, which is part of the Barbican Insurance Group, launched its CrewSEACURE insurance policy, which provides indemnification in the event of the financial default of seafarers' employers, and offers recompense in respect of unpaid crew wages. The policy will enable all employers of seafarers to meet their regulatory obligations under MLC 2006.

CrewSEACURE is underwritten by first-class A-rated global insurers in the Lloyd's and Company markets in London. It offers an independent round-the-clock claims service managed by Thomas Miller Claims, the world's leading maritime 'people claims' service provider. It also includes a claims mandate which protects the interests of shipowner and seafarer alike to ensure a fair claims process. A 24-hour helpline is available for seafarers and their advisers, who are afforded direct access to the insurers' claims adjusters. In order to deliver the CrewSEACURE product to market, Seacurus acts as managing general underwriter with access to Lloyd's security led by Brit Syndicates Ltd and companies' market security provided by Aspen Insurance UK Ltd.

CrewSEACURE provides cover which meets flag State and port State control approval, and is authenticated by a ship-specific MLC2006 insurance certificate to demonstrate compliance with the Maritime Labour Convention.

Seacurus is well-placed to help shipowners, crew managers and seafarer recruitment and placement services with their insurance requirements in this regard – and all in my lifetime, too!

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MLC Needs Proper Enforcement

Last month at the 103rd International Labour Conference, the International Labour Organization (ILO), with a staggering majority, adopted new provisions on the protection of abandoned seafarers and seafarers who have been injured in occupational accidents.

The new regulations are, inter alia, intended to ensure financial security when a seafarer is abandoned in a foreign port without any economic possibilities of paying the voyage home or is taken ill, for example as a consequence of an occupational accident. Sixty-one countries have now ratified the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC).



Speaking at the conference, László Andor, the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion has spoken on how the European vision of employment is set to be delivered. He spoke of how the pursuit of competitiveness must go hand in hand with promoting decent work. During the Conference, the EU actively contributed to the discussions on informal economy and support the adoption the amendments to the Maritime Labour Convention.

MLC is seen as a key point in addressing the increase in inequality, which is detrimental to economic growth and social cohesion. This is a very positive step, and the speeches are most welcome – however, they have to be matched by real action.

Prompted by these changes, Seacurus has called for proper enforcement of Port State Control regulations. With MLC designed to protect abandoned seafarers and seafarers injured in occupational accidents we felt it necessary to ensure that the convention could be applied and the requirements actually delivered against.

The MLC amendments are scheduled to enter into force in early 2017, at which point those countries which have ratified MLC 2006 will be bound by those amendments unless 40 per cent of ratifying nations reject the new provisions in writing.

Before then, however, on 20 August 2014, an ILO resolution agreed by member states in 2006 comes into effect whereby full Port State Control (PSC) can be applied by nations which are a party to MLC 2006, regardless of whether or not the ships being inspected are flagged with nations which have ratified the convention.

This is the so-called 'no more favourable treatment' clause which seeks to ensure a level playing field whereby ships of countries which have ratified MLC 2006 will not be placed at a competitive disadvantage.

Seacurus managing director Thomas Brown says, "This rigorous inspection programme may force shipowners to demonstrate to PSC inspectors that the crew managers and seafarer recruitment and placement services with whom they work can confirm compliance with Regulation 1.4 of MLC 2006 by providing evidence of a system of financial security to cover seafarers' monetary loss in the event of their employers' contractual default.

"It is to be hoped that this regulation, if properly enforced by PSC, will offer a degree of protection to those at sea over the next two and a half years, while the industry prepares for the now inevitable regulatory requirement in 2017."

A number of seafarer welfare organisations and charities also joined the calls to ensure that not only is the law underpinning MLC fit for purpose but that spirit is applied too. There are many layers and facets of MLC, and it goes beyond just ensuring that wages are paid. Indeed, last month, the Apostleship of the Sea (AoS) voiced support for the adoption of a new protocol aimed at boosting efforts to tackle modern forms of forced labour. The legally binding protocol was adopted by the ILO and is seen as a firm commitment from governments, employers and unions to eradicate contemporary forms of slavery.

AoS said seafarers and fishermen deserved decent and safe working conditions. "Seafarers and fishermen work in one of the most dangerous environments and yet all too often governments and authorities turn a blind eye to the appalling conditions many are forced to endure."

A key role in the application of MLC is taken by the Classification Societies. Recently Philippe Donche-Gay, Executive Vice President and Head of the Marine & Offshore Division of Bureau Veritas, discussed some of the fundamental challenges classification societies face in this second decade of the 21st century.

It has been a monumental task for Class to be ready to act, and preparing for the implementation of MLC was a big job. Bureau Veritas (BV) trained and deployed 264 MLC inspectors globally. In the end, over 6,000 MLC certifications were issued, peaking at 1,600 during the month of August when implementation was due.

According to BV, no ship was delayed, and cooperation with flag states was excellent. "We think it is working better than we expected", Donche-Gay said.

There have been some who have seen MLC as simply old ILO requirements dressed in a new package, but for BV there is far more to it than that. According to Donche-Gay: "There are key new requirements and a different philosophy that in future years will help ensure ships are better built and maintained for crew safety and comfort." On the matter of PSC and flag state compliance and enforcement, BV has found that while things have gone well, new conventions always require some working through.

Which brings us back to our calls for proper enforcement – these are new requirements, they are complex, challenging and require a different rationale to that which has perhaps been applied to maritime enforcement in the past.

It seems almost all sides of the industry are free with their praise and welcoming of MLC, but that does have to be translated in the years ahead into seafarers who are no longer abused and marginalised, and who experience better conditions, and never have to worry about getting paid. That will be the mark of real success and progress.

Some Way Off Perfect

Despite the progress with MLC, the plaudits, back slapping and revelry, at the moment it seems the days of equality, security and protection for seafarers may still be some way off.

A range of news stories from last month featured the reality of what can happen when seafarers are taken advantage of. In one story it was stated that foreign workers on Scottish ferry routes are regularly being paid "poverty pay" well below the UK legal minimum wage.

As a result, the RMT union is demanding government action amid claims some Estonian crew manning a major ferry route in the Western Isles are being as little as £4.19 an hour - far beneath the £6.31 UK minimum.



The claims state that Seatruck is able to pay the low wages to foreign workers because the "Clipper Rangers" sailors' are out of UK jurisdiction. Now the union is demanding the Scottish Government intervene because the "lifeline" ferry route is heavily publicly subsidised.

Elsewhere seafarers aboard a cargo ship banned from leaving a UK port for safety breaches are earning as little as 65p per hour, it has been claimed. The vessel "FB Glory", which is Turkish owned and sails under the Panamanian flag, was detained in Plymouth after surveyors inspected the vessel and its records.

Two Turkish members of the eight crew – which also includes Syrian and Indian nationals – left the ship at Fowey to return home, complaining that they had not been paid. An ITF inspector said, he had never seen the like in his life, as one of the able seamen is on a basic salary of \$48 (£28.60) a month.

There are problems elsewhere too. The Georgian Seafarers' Union has been left supporting the crew of a ship left stranded in the Black Sea port of Poti.

The "Roksalana" was arrested for an oil spill, but the owner could not pay the fine and so sold the ship. Seven of the Ukrainian crew returned home last November, but the rest have remained on board for eight months in the hope of getting their wages owed. The union has been helping them with food and other supplies. "We did not have warm food or heating, and GSU [the union] assisted us," said one of the crew. Adding, "If they had not, we could have died of hunger. Our main goal is to get back home with the pay we are owed."

This is the situation now, and it still doesn't look good – and all this despite the fact that last month saw the fourth annual "Day of the Seafarer" - a day of celebration and a chance to reflect on the jobs done so well and sacrifices made by some nearly one and a half million seafarers.

The day, now recognised by the United Nations, was created by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to increase awareness among the general public of the indispensable services over a million seafarers bring to the world, and to make the lives of those at sea better, safer and more secure.

Sadly, for all the talk of sacrifice, great endeavour and commitment, all too often seafarers are the brunt of all that is bad in shipping. They are taken advantage of, trivialised, over looked, disrespected, ignored and often considered a silent group who can be forced to suffer the indignity of abandonment, have shore leave denied to them, and who can find themselves all too easily in the iron sights of a pirate AK47.

Despite the changes to MLC and despite the fact that there are many good employers and shipowners the shipping industry is beset by labour problems. Even as the bunting was placed outside the IMO and twitter was awash with seafaring hashtags there are seafarers who cannot go ashore, who cannot call home, who are uncertain of whether their wages will be paid.

Alas, as was stressed on a seafarer's forum, there are seafarers who will be eating bad quality, out of date food, who have no leisure facilities and who are expected to work long hours, far in excess of the legal limits. So while it's good to celebrate seafarers on their own special day – it seems we should not forget the bad that often pervades the industry for the other 364 days of the year.

Growing Menace



South-east Asia's pirates are back in the headlines. Noel Choong, Head of the International Maritime Bureau's (IMB) Piracy Reporting Center in Malaysia has issued a stark and terrifying warning about the new spate of SE Asian piracy.

Choong says, "It will become rampant again and you will have a hard time stopping it. He adds, "That's how Somalia got started." After a campaign of increased enforcement about five years ago reduced piracy in the Malacca Strait, a rise in oil and other cargo moving through the high-traffic channel seems to be drawing criminal groups to the area again. Pirate attacks in SE Asia rose from 46 in 2009 to 128 last year and are on a similar pace this year.

The spate of attacks off Southeast Asia is stoking fears that its shipping lanes could once again become a hotspot for piracy unless regional powers act fast. For centuries, pirates were the scourge of the Malacca Strait -- the strategic channel between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore through which a third of global trade now passes. They were largely put out of business about five years ago by stepped-up patrols. But several tankers or cargo ships have been attacked in Southeast Asian waters since April, with pirates hijacking the vessels before syphoning off hundreds of tonnes of valuable fuel or oil.

Pirate attacks in Southeast Asia are on the rise and set to get a whole lot worse. According to analysts, the region's growing global economic clout increases the likelihood that shipping in the region will be ever more threatened. But the problems in the area are not new, according to some, are simply a diversification of the threat rather than a new trend.

"It's a case of new diesel in old tankers," says the CEO of Risk Intelligence, Hans Tino Hansen. "This type of piracy for product theft evolved in South East Asia and we've been following these sorts of cases and some of the syndicates involved for a number of years." Hijacking for product theft can be documented as far back as 1990s in South East Asia. The most active syndicate has usually favoured boarding the pre-selected targets in the same general location.

The area has seen a surge in attacks, and the latest hijackings seem to follow a specific modus operandi, where armed pirates seize a small tanker and siphon off its cargo to large bunker barges or other small tankers in a ship-to-ship operation, the IMB noted.

In some cases navigational equipment is destroyed but the crew are left unhurt. They then release the hijacked vessels. "These types of incidents are not common in this region which makes the situation even more alarming", said the IMB. Though, there has also been a rise in the traditional smash and grab raids, as well as the theft of an entire barge which has completely vanished.

It has also been claimed that some pirates are becoming rather choosy in their choice of targets. According to recent reports, one group of pirates abandoned their plan to hijack a ship because the vessel's cargo was not what they were after.

According to a ReCAAP report, eight armed pirates boarded the 4,147dwt asphalt/bitumen carrier "New Glory" via its port side from a speed boat. The pirates were seeking diesel. However, at the time, New Glory, was carrying a cargo of hot asphalt and so the pirates simply left the vessel.

As a result of these attacks, the IMB is warning small tankers to maintain strict anti-piracy measures in the South China Sea.

Armed Guard Chaos

The latest security advisory for Nigeria issued by the Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO) has caused consternation regarding the use of armed guards commercially placed on merchant vessels.

It seems that Nigeria's navy is forcibly preventing the use of security guards from either private military companies or the country's own police force on ships within the country's exclusive economic zone, despite high levels of piracy in West Africa, according to an advisory note from shipowner association BIMCO.

Separately, the West of England P&I Club has highlighted the arrest of a vessel sailing in Nigerian waters by the Nigerian navy for employing armed guards provided by the Nigerian police.

Merchant vessels approaching Nigeria from within the Gulf of Guinea must understand that the Nigerian Navy are the only authorized body to offer protection via escort vessels only, and not with armed guards on client vessels. The option for Joint Task Force or Police protection is only available within the riverine deltas and not on the high seas.

It is understood that the International Maritime Organization has approached the Nigerian authorities with a request for clarification. An IMO spokesperson said that Nigeria and other countries had been asked to provide further information on their policies towards armed guards on ships. "IMO does not have a position on the carriage of privately contracted armed security personnel on board ships," he said. "However, we would welcome clarity from all coastal states as to what is their position, so that merchant ships do not inadvertently fall foul of coastal state laws."

There are also reports of "blue on blue" violence, where police have opened fire on naval vessels believing them to be pirates, resulting in death or injury to seafarers caught in the crossfire.

The clear indications of increasing inter-service rivalry are a major concern. It should be noted that the Nigerian navy's policy is only to provide vessel escorts, at a charge to owners, and regards itself as having sole authority in territorial waters and the EEZ.

In a recent circular BIMCO stated, "BIMCO has been advised that the Nigerian navy does not provide or permit armed guards on merchant vessels." This applies both to private contractors and marine police, who only have primacy in river areas and ports and harbours out to the fairway buoy.

"The navy has seemingly begun enforcing its alleged authority to prevent the employment of armed guards on board and this has resulted in the arrest of members of the Nigerian marine police and consequent delays to the vessel and unresolved liabilities placed on the owners," BIMCO added.

BIMCO's chief maritime security officer Giles Noakes said that BIMCO was aware of the situation and that potential liability issues were arising for owners. Mr Noakes said that Nigerian police were being used as armed guards by some operators, even though they do not have the necessary authority to do so outside of ports. The navy had arrested some policemen, he confirmed.

It appears to be the case that only the navy can provide protection for vessels, and that this protection is limited to escorts rather than provision of guards, although clarification is being sought. PMSCs are thought not to be allowed to provide armed guards in Nigerian territorial waters.

Need for Safety Focus

If it isn't piracy, then it seems the Malacca and Singapore Straits are being blighted by rash of collisions. Last month the NYK Line car carrier "Lord Vishnu" reportedly suffered severe damage after it collided with two bunker barges in Singapore.

"Lord Vishnu" was said to have suffered several large holes both at and above the water line amidships on port side, though thankfully there were no reports of any bunkers spilled as a result of the incident. The spate of collisions are of particular concern to the insurance industry, especially as navigational incidents are one of the biggest costs of shipping insurance claims; they are a major cause of environmental pollution and the largest threat to a company's reputation and its commercial health. It seems that the recent accidents off Singapore are a sign of a wider malaise. The Standard P&I Club has reported seeing a recent upsurge in the number of navigation related incidents where the bridge team has failed to take early and positive action in accordance with the COLREGS.

According to the Club, this could be because an increasing reliance is given to the electronic aids to navigation and the "art" of the lookout is neglected.

The Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) has also blamed human error and poor judgment for collisions, but a survey of seafarers conducted by Captain Kuba Szymanski, secretary general of InterManager, shows another side to the story. According to the survey, masters complained about small traffic, local vessels not equipped with AIS and not reporting to VTS. So the truth is not so clear, and there are different pressures on all.

It is not just insurers who are desperate for answers – flag States are being to search for answers too. According to the Indian Maritime Administration, reducing accidents depends on knowledge, skill and just as importantly, attitude. They also state that human error is not always just seafarer error.

The Government of India is currently struggling with an escalating death rate attributed to accidents and suicides among Indian mariners, and so the search for answers is both desperate and overdue.

According to the casualty figures released by the Directorate General of Shipping, government of India (the Indian administration) there were 25 accidental deaths, 2 cases of suicide and 8 sailors reported missing during 2012. Year to date data in 2013 suggests a similar and perhaps even slightly elevated pattern.

Though it is good that a Government is rolling its sleeves up to find answers, alas the shipping way -to wait until the horse has bolted, seems to be the approach taken by industry to improvements. Sadly it is disasters, not business and policy planning that drive key safety improvements and future safety policies.



The history of marine safety is soaked in water and written in blood. "There is no other way around it," says Robert Frump, author of "Until The Sea Shall Set Them Free," and Pulitzer Prize nominee, "Changes occur only when there is a meaningful disaster." "I think that most people will tell you that changes in marine safety are almost exclusively disaster-driven," agrees Dr. Josh Smith, a professor at Kings Point and interim director of the American Merchant Marine Museum.

So what about the answers we desperately need to make seafarers and shipping safer? According to DNV GL there is a need for a dramatic reduction in the amount of accidents occurring throughout the shipping industry in 2014. DNV GL's Tor Svensen stated that "the amount of accidents is going up." "Crew fatalities are 10 times higher than land-based best practice," said Svensen. He also decried the fact that there is no global system where we can learn from accidents.

There are resources out there, the Nautical Institute's MARS scheme, Maritime Accident Casebook (MAC) and the CHIRP scheme – but while these are universally recognised, they rely on the goodwill of those who both run and engage with them to drive change. Such a piecemeal approach, while useful and worthy, is not a foundation for such a wealthy global industry to get its safety house in order.

Aside from the clear improvements needed with regards to reporting, watchkeeping and navigation, it seems technology and innovation are flavours of the month in the maritime press.

It's not just ships which are struggling to manage safety – ports are seemingly having problems too. Last month the TT Club urged port operators to focus more on safety to drive claims down. According to the club's data 68% of the insurance claims came from preventable accidents. The club added that a further 14% of claims were from poor or insufficient maintenance. The remainder were weather related. The extensive analysis showed a total of over 9,500 claims over a seven-year period totalled some \$400m and covered bodily injury, property and equipment damage and liability. TT Club believes many of these incidents are avoidable.

While the TT Club seems to think that a greater focus and emphasis on safety is the answer, for the problems of the Singapore and Malacca Straits, it seems the authorities believe that traffic management is key. As such. It has been announced that Kongsberg Norcontrol IT will lead a three-year project called SESAME Straits (Secure, Efficient and Safe maritime traffic Management in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore).

The project aims to create solutions to "significantly improve the safety and efficiency of ship navigation across the world". Quite a claim, and one which we can only hope comes to fruition. For vessels which haven't been managed that effectively, and for which a collision has actually occurred – well, for them, there is the "air bag". No, we are not getting ships and cars confused – as an innovative rapidly inflating balloon technology could keep damaged ships afloat.

It is still in development, and more fine-tuning needs to be done, but there are real hopes that ship air bags could be the secret to saving lives, the environment and vessels in the future. According to the developers, when a ship runs aground, or two vessels crash into each other, the damaged one may lose its stability, or worse, sink. But imagine if after a ship accident, balloons popped up like car airbags to keep the disabled vessel upright and afloat. This would help to avoid pollution of seas and beaches and gain valuable time for evacuation.

The EU-funded project SuSy (Surfacing System for Ship Recovery), has turned the idea into a proof of concept, and development is ongoing. <http://www.su-sy.eu/>

Monthly News Roundup

MARITIME LABOUR CONVENTION AND SEAFARER NEWS

Malaysian MLC: Malaysia will join the ranks of other countries on Aug 20 to implement the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) to protect the welfare of some 50,000 local seafarers as well as some 1.5 million seafarers from around the world who are patrolling the country's waters. Marine Department director-general Datuk Captain Ahmad Othman said by ratifying the MLC, any conflict involving the welfare of seafarers could be jointly dealt with by the department and the Malaysia Shipowners' Association (MASA) as well as the National Union of Seafarers of Peninsular Malaysia (NUSPM). MASA represents shipping companies, NUSPM represents the seafarers.

<http://goo.gl/6m2c7X>

Officer Shortage: While over 90 percent of China's imports and exports rely on ocean routes, the country's senior seafarers are in high shortage. China now has over 650 thousand sailors and seafarers, but only 10 thousand Captains and 10,000 Chief Engineers. Senior sailors play a crucial role in shipping on the oceans. But in recent years, captains like Li Zhenmin has found it hard to find enough experienced shipmates in the company he works for. Moving from a fresh sailor to a captain takes over 10 years of passing all sorts of tests and challenges, and life is not easy on the ship. It's estimated that 20,000 senior seamen will be needed in China by 2015. <http://goo.gl/IMg4Tk>

Bigger Boxships: Work on building a 24,000 teu capacity vessel at South Korean yards could be just two years away, according to a leading shipping consultant. The technical feasibility studies for 24,000 ships have been established, finding that the at-sea costs were 23.1% lower for a 24,000 teu vessel compared to a 12,500 teu boxship, while they were 17.4% less when compared to a 16,000 teu craft.

<http://goo.gl/iMIE7T>

Fair Shipping: While June 25 marked the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) Day of the Seafarer, Nautilus International, the union of maritime professionals, is calling on the industry to back a campaign to create decent working and living conditions for all seafarers on this special day by supporting its 'Fair Transport Mark' campaign. <http://goo.gl/mj8Fd7>



Emergency Fund: Seafarers' charity Apostleship of the Sea (AoS) has launched a maritime emergency fund which aims to provide fast and modest cash grants to seafarers in difficulties. The dedicated fund is designed to respond to emergency financial or welfare requests from seafarers or their families in less than 24 hours, stemming the immediate pressure. AoS Great Britain national director Martin Foley said: "Most seafarers and fishermen enjoy good living and working conditions but there can be circumstances when crew are not paid, cannot access communications to speak to family and loved ones and even lack food, water and heating." <http://goo.gl/X1x5ya>

Boxing Clever: High cube 40ft containers are stealing a march on traditional 40ft equipment and by the end of 2013 represented just short of 50% of the maritime container fleet, according to Drewry's Container Census report. The overall fleet of maritime 40ft high cube containers grew by over 7% in 2013, a much faster pace than the global container fleet whose growth was limited to just 4.3%. "Gains made in the maritime standard fleet came wholly at the expense of standard 40ft equipment, whose count continued to decline, although the 20ft share held stable at about a third," said Andrew Foxcroft, editor of Drewry's Container Census report. <http://goo.gl/TeF3da>

Manning Report: Drewry's recently published Manning 2014 Annual Report states that the current shortage of shipboard officers is forecast to worsen and risks impacting carrier profitability. In recent years owners and managers have been heavily cost focused, as the weak freight rate earnings have yielded poor returns. Manning has become the natural target for cost cutting, being the single largest element in the ship operating costs, with officer recruitment being directed towards the lowest cost source. Drewry estimated that the current officer supply is 610,000, representing a shortfall of 19,000 personnel. This shortfall is forecast to rise to 21,700 by 2018. <http://goo.gl/j2QPkJ>

Flying Flag: The UK Ship Register has become 1 of only around 20 in the world to keep the United States Coast Guard (USCG) award for excellence. The register, which is administered by the UK's Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), regulates and inspects the ships that sail under the UK flag. It was recognised for the USCG's Qualship 21 for 2014-15, thanks to an excellent Port State Control record achieved by UK-flagged vessels. Qualship 21 assesses ships' safety and pollution prevention records and is awarded against a stringent set of criteria, including the requirement for a less-than 1 per cent detention ratio over a rolling three-year average. <http://goo.gl/N8Rygk>

Sulphur Stink: Concerns about port states' implementation of new regulations on sulphur emissions and ballast water management (BWM) dominated discussions at the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) Annual General Meeting. Representatives of national shipowners' associations discussed the apparent unreadiness of many national governments to implement new emissions rules for Emission Control Areas (ECAs) in a uniform way and agreed that port states must resolve questions about the use of alternative compliance mechanisms. "The shipping industry is investing billions of dollars in order to ensure compliance," said the ICS Chairman. <http://goo.gl/7PgOws>

IMO Praise: The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) has defended the speed of action at the IMO and voiced its support for the IMO 2014 theme "IMO conventions: Effective Implementation". The association branded allegations that the IMO is too slow as "unfounded and rather unfair" in its annual review. The chamber also looked ahead to a critical date for the ILO Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), 20 August 2014, at which time full port state control can be applied to ships by nations party to MLC, regardless of where the ship is registered or whether that nation has ratified MLC. ICS called for balance and pragmatism in MLC matters. <http://goo.gl/2Gllg0>

Mission Initiative: The Mission to Seafarers (MtS) has launched a major new programme of essential welfare work for seafarers and their families, with friends, supporters and volunteers in Singapore at a highly prestigious event which was hosted by Antony Phillipson British High Commissioner. The goal of the evening was to raise awareness of their work and the need to raise \$690,000 for the expansion of vital operations in Singapore. Over 250 guests attended from the international shipping and law industries, with the Reception generously supported by lead sponsors The China Navigation Company and Swire Pacific Offshore. <http://goo.gl/iMtq0T>

Massive Growth: The Marshall Islands flag is celebrating having pushed by the 100m gt mark globally, boosted by its strong presence in the Greek market which accounts for roughly 25% of its fleet. "We're number two now in the Greek market second only to the Greek register and that's a great achievement, when I joined 14 years ago I don't think we were number 10," Theo Xenakoudis, worldwide business operations officer for International Registries Inc (IRI) based in Piraeus. <http://goo.gl/jzCYXQ>

Pay Award: Seafarers have won pay rises worth 6.5% over three years after talks between the ITF union and owners' representatives at the International Bargaining Forum (IBF) in Bali this week. A salary increase of 1% has been agreed for 2015, with 2% following in 2016 and 3.5% in 2017. There will also be a 10% rebate for owners belonging to the joint negotiating group (JNG) from the ITF welfare fund, with an additional 2.5% based on an incentive system. <http://goo.gl/djZ4d4>

Skills Shortage: The issue of getting sufficient number of crew and skilled manpower remains a challenge for the offshore marine sector to overcome, industry players have highlighted. The manning and crewing issue is becoming all the more challenging during the booming offshore industry backed by strong oil and gas exploration and production activities. Mark Pointon, of Farstad Shipping said hardware is irrelevant without competent crew to operate them. <http://goo.gl/8InRF2>

PIRACY AND MARITIME SECURITY NEWS

Piracy Trends: UNOSAT issued a report on Maritime Piracy identifying several important trends related to maritime security. Based on a refined and detailed analysis of primarily data from International Maritime Organization (IMO) Global Integrated Shipping Information System (GISIS) «Piracy and Armed Robbery» module UNITAR has been able to explore how trends in geospatial patterns and severity of reported piracy incidents are developing, from 1995 to 2013. Some detailed geospatial analyses focus on the period 2006-2013 due to improved records for geo-locating incidents. The analysis includes the added cost of piracy for the maritime industry. <http://goo.gl/TGklFw>

New Plan: The United States has issued its new “Counter Piracy and Maritime Security Action Plan”. The plan affirms the U.S. commitment to repress piracy and related maritime crimes, strengthen regional governance and rule of law for the safety and security of mariners, preserve freedom of the seas, and promote free flow of commerce through lawful economic activity. The Counter Piracy and Maritime Security Action Plan focuses on three core areas: prevention of attacks, response to acts of maritime crime, and enhancing maritime security and governance; and provides specific frameworks for the Horn of Africa and Gulf of Guinea. <http://goo.gl/d0VJdr>

EU Strategy: The European Council has endorsed an EU maritime security strategy as a framework for effectively and comprehensively addressing the EU’s maritime security challenges. The objective is to secure the EU’s maritime security interests against risks and threats in the global maritime domain, such as cross-border and organised crime, threats to freedom of navigation, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or environmental risks. The strategy covers both internal and external aspects of the Union’s maritime security in a cross-sectorial and comprehensive approach. <http://goo.gl/YqAsD7>

Root Causes: How should maritime piracy in the Gulf of Aden be dealt with once NATO and the EU end their missions there? According to a recent Security and Defence Agenda debate, policymakers need to apply a comprehensive ‘root causes’ approach to the problem. Military operations are crucial to continue to suppress piracy in the short-term. However, a much more comprehensive approach which addresses the root causes of piracy and involves complex elements such as establishing the rule of law, capacity building, gaining the cooperation of local elites, and development, is vital to ensure security in the long term. <http://goo.gl/psTkPs>

New Navy: The Royal Navy’s first ever remotely-piloted air system has taken flight. Just 7 months after the British Ministry of Defense ordered the system from Boeing Defense UK, the ScanEagle has taken flight from HMS Somerset in the Gulf. The system, which can be launched by a pneumatic catapult from Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels, is unarmed and uses for real-time intelligence-gathering and reconnaissance only. Commander Mike Smith, commanding officer of HMS Somerset said: “ScanEagle provides us with a game-changing, persistent surveillance and reconnaissance capability, supplementing our Lynx aircraft. <http://goo.gl/4F90b7>

Tackling Somalia: US Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Wendy R. Sherman of the United States Institute of Peace has been speaking on the U.S. Foreign Policy in Somalia. According to Sherman, the US approach in Somalia is distinctive for the simple reason that Africa today defies generalization. While parts of the continent remain mired in poverty and held back by conflict, seven of the world's ten fastest growing economies are in Africa. The US is working to encourage free markets, investment, trade and an end to piracy. All maritime nations will benefit if piracy can be conquered. <http://goo.gl/tNkKCb>

SHADE Meets: Hosted in Bahrain by the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), NATO and EUNAVFOR, the SHADE counter piracy conference has met once more. SHADE brings together countries that have a shipping interest in the Gulf of Aden, off the Horn of Africa and in the western Indian Ocean. In all, 140 delegates from 32 nations attended representing law enforcement agencies, the shipping industry, other government departments, the military and the fishing industry. Delegates were given briefings on the shipping industry, piracy trends by CMF and on the fisheries off Somalia. The view was that piracy has been suppressed but not eliminated. <http://goo.gl/0k4WCb>

Faith in Tech: The Chief Executive Officer of the Ghana Maritime Authority, Peter Azumah, says the ultra-modern monitoring systems that the authority is using on its sea corridors are efficient and effective enough to protect vessels within Ghana's waters. Explaining circumstances under which the "MT Fair Artemis" allegedly carrying oil on went missing, Mr Azumah said the vessel was not hijacked in Ghana's territorial waters. He told the press what the authority and its collaborators are doing to intercept the missing vessel. <http://goo.gl/QkJmky>

Surveillance System: The Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) has launched its satellite surveillance system, which, in conjunction with the Nigerian Navy and the Nigerian Air Force, successfully rescued Ghanaian Fishing Vessel Marine 711 from suspected hijackers last week. The Ghanaian registered vessel was reportedly hijacked off the coast of Ghana and sailed across Togo and Benin Republic to Nigerian waters when the Embassy of the Republic of Korea contacted the Agency to help rescue the vessel. NIMASA's newly built satellite surveillance system with Cloud Penetrating Radar capabilities located the vessel and a rescue was made. <http://goo.gl/vdu7TV>

Zero Goal: The Oceans Beyond Piracy (OBP) organisation has joined with others in a momentary celebration of the release of the crew of the Albedo. However, they will not be distracted by this success - and have a 'Zero, Zero' goal. The group reported that, "While we are encouraged by their release, we must stay engaged in the work to release the approximately 38 seafarers who are still held in pirate custody". Adding, "until there are zero hostages and zero ships held by pirates, the human cost is too high." <http://goo.gl/0Xmxo8>

Kidnaps Rise: The kidnapping of maritime personnel in West Africa is a rising trend, which experts expect to continue. “During 2011 to 2013 [the number of] kidnappings rose, and we foresee that this trend will continue – we will see more kidnappings in the future,” said Hallvard Flesland of the NATO Shipping Centre. His figures are supported by maritime consulting company Gray Page. A recent briefing reported that “kidnap for ransom increased by 85% 2013 compared with the levels recorded in 2012. <http://goo.gl/ThkqR3>

G7 Commitment: The Leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission, met at the Brussels G-7 Summit. Amongst their declarations was a reaffirmation of the importance of maintaining a maritime order, international cooperation to combat piracy and other maritime crimes, and the freedom of navigation. <http://goo.gl/JSLnMd>

NATO Extension: NATO officials this week decided to extend NATO’s counter-piracy operation until the end of 2016 as Somali pirates continue to threaten ships transiting the Horn of Africa region. Operation Ocean Shield works closely with other naval forces patrolling the Indian Ocean including US-led maritime forces, called Combined Task Force 151, and EU naval forces. It includes ships from Spain, Italy and Turkey operating covering an area greater than 2 million square miles. <http://goo.gl/ctMg9g>

Spotting Pirates: All too often pirates are able to attack vessels without being seen, but a new kind of intelligent radar might put an end to that. The system, called WatchStander, uses radar mounted on either side of a ship to scan the surrounding water for small objects that look like they are moving to intercept. It can automatically sound an alarm and dispense countermeasures to deter the approaching vessels. The system is meant to tackle one of the biggest issues with preventing piracy at sea: spotting them coming. Large ships’ radar systems are designed to pick up large objects that are collision risks and to filter out waves. This means they often miss skiffs. <http://goo.gl/fNKxlz>