

▶ IG CIRCULAR – CREW CHANGE ISSUES ARISING FROM COVID-19

The International Group and its 13 constituent P&I Clubs, which are in turn mutually owned and governed by their shipowner and charterer Members, have become extremely concerned about the detrimental effect upon the mental well-being of seafarers as a result of the prolongation of their contracts of employment due to the pandemic.

It is fully appreciated that governments and port authorities have many pressing issues to contend with. However, the plight of seafarers should be high on everyone's agenda. To the extent that the issue is not resolved, seafarers' lives and the lives of their families will continue to be adversely impacted. The International Group clubs share the concerns of the IMO and ILO for the long-term wellbeing of seafarers, many of whom have not returned home for over a year and face considerable uncertainty as to when they may be able to do so. Such long tours of duty are mentally and physically draining and can affect their ability to perform duties on board in a safe manner.

The International Group has worked with a number of other industry organisations to try to find a way forward, with the ICS leading on the issue from the shipowners' side. The industry has sought to provide workable solutions to governments to help effect crew changes safely and efficiently, with the most recent update on Protocols for Ensuring Safe Ship Crew Changes and Travel During the COVID-19 Pandemic being submitted to the IMO by the ICS for endorsement on 13 October.

A number of governments have engaged constructively with this process already. It is to be hoped that more and more governments will recognise seafarers as key workers and enable crew changes to take place in accordance with these Protocols.

All Clubs in the International Group have issued similar circulars.