



SUB-COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS OF
TRAINING AND WATCHKEEPING
31st session
Agenda item 11

STW 31/11/2
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IMO STANDARD MARINE COMMUNICATION PHRASES (SMCP)

Submitted by the International Shipping Federation (ISF)

SUMMARY

Executive summary:	ISF elaborates on the summary of its comments on the draft SMCP contained in NAV 45/13 and suggests that in view of the references to the SMCP in STCW 95 it is vital that the draft is subjected to very detailed consideration by a working group at NAV 46 which includes English language training experts.
Action to be taken:	Paragraph 11
Related documents:	NAV 45/13, STW 31/11, STW 31/11/1

1 This paper comments on STW 31/11 (Secretariat) and STW 11/1 (Croatia) in accordance with paragraph 46.5 of the Guidelines on the Organization and Method of Work of the MSC and the MEPC and their subsidiary bodies.

2 The International Shipping Federation (ISF) believes it will be helpful to elaborate on the summary of ISF's comments, contained in NAV 45/13, on the draft SMCP.

3 ISF has noted the additional emphasis that has been given to proficiency in English language by the ISM Code and STCW 95, and acknowledges that on ships with multinational crews the working language on board is increasingly likely to be English. ISF is therefore a firm supporter of the proposed SMCP: the computer based ISF Marlins English Language Test incorporates phrases extracted from the draft SMCP, and ISF has financed the production of the new IMO Model Course on Maritime English which makes reference to the draft SMCP to a large extent. The eventual adoption of carefully developed SMCP should make a real contribution towards the improvement of standards of English amongst seafarers, and the considerable amount of work that has clearly been invested in producing the draft is greatly appreciated by the industry.

4 However, having studied the draft SMCP with care, ISF has a number of concerns which we feel need proper discussion within the Organization before it can be formally adopted.

5 At present, the purpose of the SMCP is not sufficiently clear. Short lists of minimal vocabulary, such as the existing Standard Marine Navigation Vocabulary (SMNV) can be useful for those who have only a basic understanding of English and who may need to communicate in a limited way, for example deck watchkeepers communicating with other ships or shore based authorities. In other words, SMNV is clearly relevant to *external* communications. The draft SMCP, however,

appears to combine phrases useful for external communication with those that are only relevant to internal communication where the use of standard phrases is not so important.

6 ISF is concerned about the *enormous* length of the draft SMCP. We have been advised by English language training experts that long lists of phrases can in fact be harmful to understanding if they are used by seafarers that do not fully understand the context in which the phrases are being employed and do not already have a relatively detailed knowledge of English. Within the profession of teaching English as a foreign language we understand that it is not usual practice to use long series of occupational phrases as a teaching tool.

7 A list such as the current draft SMCP is unlikely to be a reliable teaching resource since it could give teachers the false impression that it is the definitive lexicon for effective communication. The effect of this could be that teachers will be encouraged to approach the subject in terms of learning by rote rather than the development of a syllabus that involves the practice of genuine English language communication. We are therefore very doubtful of the practical benefits of using the SMCP, in its current form, as a key teaching material in maritime training institutions. If the SMCP is to be adopted, it should be made clear that the purpose of the majority of the phrases is *only to serve as reference material* which may be used by English language teachers to supplement their teaching of general English language.

8 We also have a number of detailed criticisms of the English used. For example:

- inconsistent deletion in individual phrases of articles or verbs (presumably for the purpose of brevity) which can result in ambiguity in the meaning of phrases;
- inconsistent deletion of indefinite or definite articles (“a/an” and “the”) which can cause confusion amongst non English speakers;
- repetition of similar phrases that may cause students to overlook important vocabulary because they may view the phrases as being almost identical;
- plus other inaccuracies which will probably best be addressed by discussion in a working group.

9 In view of the above, we feel that it is very important that the draft SMCP are not adopted without *very detailed* consideration by IMO. The need for careful consideration of the SMCP is particularly important given that references to the SMCP already exist in STCW 95.

10 In summary therefore, ISF suggests the following:

- .1 the draft SMCP should be restructured so that there is a clear distinction (i.e. entirely separate sections) between vocabulary to be used for external communications and those phrases which may be useful for internal communications between seafarers (and with passengers) on board;
- .2 table II/1 of the STCW Code requires that deck officers should have “the ability to use and understand the Standard Marine Navigation Vocabulary as replaced by the Standard Marine Communication Phrases”. It should be therefore be made clear in the foreword to the SMCP that the references in STCW 95 only refer to those sections which revise the SMNV (i.e. the sections relevant to *external* communications);
- .3 the draft SMCP should be made considerably shorter;

- .4 the introduction to the SMCP should make it clear that the phrases that may be useful for *internal* communication on board ship have been drafted as additional material to which English language teachers may refer, but which seafarers are not actually expected to learn on a phrase by phrase basis; and
- .5 that the entire SMCP be subjected to a detailed review *on a line by line basis*, during a meeting of a working group to be established at NAV 46, so that all inappropriate use of English can be corrected.

Action requested of the Sub-Committee

11 The Sub-Committee is requested to recommend to NAV 46 that in view of the importance of the SMCP, and the fact that reference is made to it in STCW 95, a working group should be established at NAV 46 which will include English language training experts, in order that the draft SMCP is given the detailed consideration which it requires.
