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UNLAWFUL PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH CERTIFICATES OF COMPETENCY

International certificates database

Note by the Secretariat

SUMMARY

<i>Executive summary:</i>	This document provides information on the results of a feasibility study into the development of an international certificates database
<i>Action to be taken:</i>	Paragraph 12
<i>Related documents:</i>	None

Introduction

1 The International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW), 1978, as amended in 1995, requires each Party to maintain a register or registers of all certificates and endorsements for masters and officers and, as appropriate, ratings, which have been issued, have expired or have been revalidated, suspended, cancelled or reported lost or destroyed and of dispensations issued. In addition, Parties are required to make available information on the status of such certificates, endorsements and dispensations to other Parties and companies which request verification of the authenticity and validity of certificates produced to them by seafarers seeking recognition of their certificates under STCW regulation I/10 or employment on board ship.

2 Shipping is an international industry employing seafarers from all over the world. Seafarers from one country Party to the STCW Convention may serve on ships flying the flag of many other Parties. It is necessary for these Parties to have ready access to information to verify the authenticity and validity of certificates to ensure that properly trained and qualified seafarers are employed on their ships. The establishment of an international database of seafarers' certificates could simplify this process and make it more efficient for Parties as it would be necessary to access only one source of information, irrespective of where the seafarer has been trained or certified. In order to investigate the feasibility of making information on seafarers' certificates readily accessible internationally, the Organization, with financial support provided by the Government of Norway, undertook a study to determine the practicability of the proposal and the best way of taking it forward.

Feasibility study

3 The contractor engaged to undertake the study developed two questionnaires to collect information, one for maritime Administrations and one for users of the register data. Questionnaires were sent to a random selection of 49 Administrations and, in addition to completing the forms, the Administrations were requested to forward copies of the users questionnaire to those companies and others that regularly requested information from the register. Responses were received from 38 administrations, of which 29 (59%) provided sufficient responses to the questionnaire for analysis. Only 2 responses were received from users, which provided insufficient information for consideration.

Summary of responses

4 Most Administrations reported storage of information electronically. Many different computer software systems are in use; the most common database used in national registers was *Oracle* used by 7 Parties. Most Parties reported that registers were updated on a daily basis, which indicated a significant number of amendments, additions and deletions. The number of seafarers on the registers of the Parties that provided information varied widely from less than 1,000 to over 100,000. The Parties reporting the highest numbers apparently maintained data on all ratings in addition to those on masters and officers.

5 The number of requests for information from the registers also varied widely, from daily to less than twice per month. The users of the data were reported as including law enforcement agencies, shipowners, port State control and other maritime Administrations. Existing registers are used significantly more within the Party than by other Parties. The most frequently requested information was in relation to the authenticity of certificates. Over 90% of the requests for information were in respect of masters and officers.

6 In response to a request for comments on who should be responsible for maintaining the data in any international database, 44% indicated that this was the task of national Administrations and issuing authorities whilst 26% considered that the task should be delegated to the Organization. In general, respondents considered that users should pay for the services of a register. Most Administrations indicated that they would not wish to contribute financially to an international database. The majority of respondents indicated that, in the event of an international register database being established, they would retain a national register in parallel.

7 From the information available, it is difficult to estimate the size of the required database and how it may change over time. It appears from the data that a small but significant number of seafarers are recorded on more than one register. Domestic legislation in many countries limits access to personal information, particularly medical information. This issue will need to be addressed, possibly by each seafarer giving formal consent to access to his information, before an international database could be set up.

Conclusions

8 As most Administrations are storing data electronically, transferring data to an international database would be relatively straightforward. Management of such a large database would however be a significant task. There is little need for storage of data on ratings on an international database.

9 The responses received do not indicate an unequivocal recommendation for the establishment of an international database but there are a number of advantages including:

- .1 information would be available all over the world;
- .2 all registrations would follow the same format;

- .3 Administrations would be released from providing information directly;
 - .4 it would be possible to search for persons with a certain profile worldwide; and
 - .5 registration in more than one country would be avoided.
- 10 The information also indicated some disadvantages of an international database, including:
- .1 illegal access and use of the information would be difficult to prevent;
 - .2 some Administrations might have little knowledge of their registered seafarers;
 - .3 some Administrations might have to change their policies with regard to access to data; and
 - .4 organizations would have no option other than computer access to the data.
- 11 If an international database is to be established, two alternative approaches are proposed. One method might entail transfer of all existing data to an international database that is partitioned to enable each Administration to maintain its own data. Alternatively, data might continue to be maintained electronically on national registers but in a standard format to enable it to be accessed via an international search engine. In both of the approaches, consideration will have to be given to security of access to the data.

Action requested of the Sub-Committee

- 12 The Sub-Committee is invited to note this information and comment as appropriate.
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