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SUB-COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS OF
TRAINING AND WATCHKEEPING
38th session
Agenda item 12

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COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF THE STCW CONVENTION AND THE STCW CODE

Submitted by the International Federation of Ship Masters' Associations (IFSMA)

SUMMARY

Executive summary: It has come to the attention of the International Federation of Shipmasters' Associations (IFSMA) that many SOLAS ships engaged in international voyages sail with only the master and one watchkeeping officer. This practice necessitates the master sharing watchkeeping duties with the only navigating officer on the basis of 6 hours on and 6 hours off. In addition to the ever increasing administrative duties which the master is required to perform both at sea and in port, the master is expected at all times to be available and able to assist, and if necessary take over the navigation of the ship from the watchkeeping officer.

The rest periods in Section A-VIII/1 of the STCW Convention and the working hours provisions in the ILO Convention are predicated on the observance of the normal practice of seafarers at sea that the master is at all times available and able to assist or take over the navigation of the ship. This is the case when circumstance and conditions demand that an error on the part of one person could result in a dangerous situation.

IFSMA is of the opinion that this point should be emphasised in the proposed revision of the STCW Convention and the STCW Code under "Fitness for Duty" provision of Section A-VIII/1. The new section should make it clear that the provisions of the section apply only to watchkeeping officers and that the master should not be taken into account in deciding the composition of the watch in compliance with this section.

Action to be taken: Paragraph 7

Related document: MSC 81/25

1 The Principles of Safe Manning require that ships should be navigated safely at all times in compliance with the COLREGs and also to ensure that the protection of the marine environment is not compromised.

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2 The STCW Convention contains provisions requiring fitness for duty of any crewmember assigned as a member of the watch or on call. When a ship is on passage, the master is permanently on call and is required to be on the bridge when activities taking place at any time, including radiocommunication activities make it necessary. There are other times when unusual demands on the navigational watch may arise as a result of changes in the operational status of bridge equipment, prevailing weather and traffic conditions, the nature of the waters in which the ship is navigating such as passage through restricted waters will necessitate the master's presence on the bridge for prolonged periods.

3 As the back-up officer in the above circumstances, the master should at all times maintain the capacity to provide the required assistance and if necessary take over the navigational watch for as long as necessary.

4 IFSMA is of the opinion that Section A-VIII/I under "Fitness for Duty" should be amended to emphasize the standby role of the master when a ship is on passage and that the master should not be taken into account in deciding the composition of the navigational watch under this section.

5 Referring to the burden of watchkeeping when there is a master with only one officer on board, consideration should be given to working the vessel in port and the need to keep a safe cargo watch and the implication of this with respect to keeping a safe navigational watch.

6 Furthermore consideration should be given for the need for pilotage and necessary support to be given to the person conducting the pilotage where appropriate.

Action requested of the Sub-Committee

7 The Sub-Committee is requested to include in the Comprehensive Review of the STCW Convention and the STCW Code, the amendment of Section A-VIII/I under "Fitness for Duty" a provision that the master should not be considered a watchkeeping officer when deciding the composition of the navigational watch under this section.
