

White List

Maritime Safety Committee - 73rd session: 27 November - 6 December 2000

The so-called "**White List**" of countries deemed to be giving "full and complete effect" to the revised STCW Convention (STCW 95) has been published by IMO. The 73rd session of the Organization's Maritime Safety Committee (MSC), meeting from 27 November to 6 December 2000, formally endorsed the findings of a working group established to examine a report made by the Secretary-General to the MSC, which revealed that 71 countries and one Associate Member of IMO had met the criteria for inclusion on the list.

The 1995 amendments to STCW (the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers) which entered into force on 1 February 1997, revised and updated the original 1978 Convention, setting out clearly defined minimum competency requirements for all seafarers and taking into account developments in technology since the 1978 Convention was adopted. A position on the White List entitles other Parties to accept, in principle, that certificates issued by or on behalf of the parties on the list are in compliance with the Convention.

Tighter PSC targeting expected

It is expected that ships flying flags of countries that are not on the White List will be increasingly targeted by Port State Control inspectors. A Flag state Party that is on the White List may, as a matter of policy, elect not to accept seafarers with certificates issued by non White List countries for service on its ships. If it does accept such seafarers, they will be required by 1 February 2002 also to have an endorsement, issued by the flag state, to show that their certificate is recognized by the flag state. By 1 February 2002, masters and officers should hold STCW 95 certificates or endorsements issued by the flag State. Certificates issued and endorsed under the provisions of the 1978 STCW Convention will be valid until their expiry date.

It was stressed at the meeting that giving "full and complete effect" to the revised Convention may not be the same for all Parties. Some may choose not to have any maritime training institutes at all and rely on recognition of certificates issued to seafarers by other states. Similarly, some Parties may only provide a limited scope of training, such as for ratings only.

The fact that a Party is not listed on the White List does not invalidate certificates or endorsements issued by that Party. Nothing in the STCW Convention prevents the employment of any seafarer who holds a valid certificate or endorsement issued by a Party to the Convention. Nevertheless, the White List will become one of several criteria, including the inspection of facilities and procedures, that can be applied in the selection of properly trained and qualified seafarers. Countries not initially included in the White List will be able to continue with the assessment process with a view to inclusion on the list at a later stage.

The publication of the list marks the end of the first stage of a ground-breaking verification procedure in which, for the first time, IMO has been given a direct role in the implementation of one of its instruments. Panels of experts have spent much of the past two years engaged in rigorous assessment of information presented to them by Parties to the Convention concerning their ability to meet the standards enshrined in STCW 95. Panel members were selected, as far as possible, to give a wide geographical spread and a broad coverage of the different facets of the Convention - deck and engineering knowledge, for example. These panels submitted their findings to IMO Secretary-General William O'Neil, who in turn reported to the MSC which has now approved and issued the list.

Challenging task

For most countries, preparation of the submissions to the Secretary-General represented a demanding and challenging task. It required not only reporting on national laws, training requirements, standards and systems in place, but also ensuring that all of those elements met the revised Convention requirements and could pass the scrutiny of persons with detailed knowledge of those requirements.

According to Mr O'Neil, the publication of the White List is a clear demonstration that the global regulatory process for shipping is taking ever greater account of the human element. He said, "The revised STCW Convention and the ISM Code, which takes full effect in 2002, are both aimed squarely at addressing human issues in shipping. Although technical matters will retain their importance, improving the standards of seafarers is a vital part of the safety equation. The White List shows that the human element is taking its proper place in the industry's priorities."

Expanded role for IMO?

Mr O'Neil also said he believed the verification process pointed the way towards a new and expanded role for IMO in the future. "The fact that the authority for assessing implementation of STCW 1995 was delegated to IMO by Member States," he said, "indicates that the will to give the Organization a greater role in implementation does exist." He added, "If this approach can be extended into other areas where quality assurance needs to be reinforced and the name of IMO would lend credibility, then IMO is ready to respond."

It has been estimated that some 80 per cent of marine casualties are due in some part to human error. In setting out unambiguously which countries are meeting the latest standards and requirements, the White List marks a significant step forward in IMO's global effort to rid the world of sub-standard ships and shipping. For the first time, it provides an IMO "seal of approval" for countries that have properly implemented the provisions of a Convention.

Parties included on the "White List" at 6 December 2000

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| Argentina | Latvia | Ukraine |
| Australia | Liberia | United Kingdom*** |
| Bahamas | Luxembourg | Uruguay |
| Bangladesh | Malaysia | USA |
| Belgium | Maldives | Vanuatu |
| Brazil | Malta | Venezuela |
| Bulgaria | Marshall Islands | Viet Nam |
| Canada | Mexico | |
| Colombia | Morocco | Hong Kong China** |
| Croatia | Netherlands | |
| Cuba | New Zealand | |
| Cyprus | Norway | |
| Chile | Pakistan | |
| China | Panama | |
| Denmark* | Peru | |
| Egypt | Philippines | |
| Estonia | Poland | |
| Finland | Portugal | |
| France | Republic of Korea | |
| Germany | Romania | |
| Ghana | Russian Federation | |
| Greece | Samoa | |
| Honduras | Singapore | |
| Iceland | South Africa | |
| India | Spain | |
| Indonesia | Sri Lanka | |
| Ireland | Sweden | |
| Israel | Thailand | |
| Italy | Tonga | * Includes Faeroe Islands |
| Jamaica | Trinidad and Tobago | ** Associate Member |
| Japan | Turkey | ***Includes Isle of Man, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Gibraltar |
| Kiribati | Tuvalu | |