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Agenda item 29(a)

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RELATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

(a) Applications for consultative status

Note by the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

Executive summary: This document contains additional information in respect of document C 90/29(a) on the application for consultative status from the International Maritime Health Association (IMHA).

Action to be taken: Paragraph 3

Related documents: C 89/26/Add.1, MSC 76/23, MEPC 48/21 and C 90/29(a)

New application for consultative status

International Maritime Health Association (IMHA)

1 Document C 90/29(a) contains an application for consultative status from the International Maritime Health Association (IMHA) and relevant documentation.

2 The explanatory memorandum to point 17 of the IMO Questionnaire provided by IMHA in support of its application is reproduced in an annex to this document.

Action requested of the Council

3 The Council is invited to refer the new application for consultative status for screening by the small group of Council Members.

ANNEX

International Maritime Health Association



Explanatory memorandum to point 17 of the IMO Questionnaire
**The contribution of the International Maritime Health Association (I.M.H.A.)
to the work of the International Maritime Organization (I.M.O.)**
Introduction

Background information on the organisation and structure of the International Maritime Health Association (IMHA) is given in the attached questionnaire. This memorandum reviews the work of the Association in relation to the objectives of IMO and the criteria for consultative status.

Health of seafarers and passengers on ships has long been a concern of national maritime authorities. Health problems at sea may:

- Put a vessel at immediate risk because of impaired perception or sudden incapacity in someone undertaking a safety critical task
- Lead to costly and risky diversion or medical evacuation
- Pose a risk to other people on board or at the destination by transmission and dissemination of infection
- Increase the risk to the sufferer because of the limited facilities for treatment compared to those on shore
- Determine the requirements for crew medical training, ship's doctor, medical stores, sick bay facilities and telemedical links to shore.

These risks are mitigated by:

- Selection and surveillance of seafarers, using national or international standards
- Provision of training and health /medical facilities on board and in port
- Requirements for effective control of injury and disease risks arising from ship operations
- Hygiene, immunisation and other interventions to reduce infection risks
- Policies and advice on lifestyle including disease prevention and control of drug and alcohol use
- Advice to passengers prior to a voyage

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At the international level several bodies are involved

- IMO – contribution of seafarer health to maritime safety. Response to maritime emergencies, including sudden illness
- ILO – conditions of work for seafarers including fair and effective health standards
- WHO – medical advice on the management of illness at sea, ship sanitation and hygiene, reduction in the spread of infections – both at sea and by maritime vectors
- International trade unions (ITF etc) – members’ rights to work free from risks and to receive good standards of health care world wide
- Shipowners, maritime employers, insurers – minimising risk and cost from health problems in crew and passengers, including provision of treatment and repatriation when needed
- Professional body (International Maritime Health Association) – Working with other organisations to help define sound and rational approaches to prevention and treatment of health problems in seafarers and ship passengers.
- Research organisations and institutes – investigating risks and interventions to reduce health problems at sea and mitigate their consequences.

IMHA is a truly international body (members from all continents and from 47 maritime nations). It is multidisciplinary (physicians, nurses, administrators, researchers). Its members work closely with maritime authorities, port authorities, shipping companies and manning agencies, maritime trade unions, universities and are in close touch with professional colleagues outside maritime health. However when contributions from health professionals are presented to IMO by bodies such as national and employer organisations they are often modified to align with the wider positions adopted by these organisations in international forums. Hence they cannot reflect the collective wisdom of the maritime health professionals world-wide on issues where this perspective is essential. The only way in which this expertise can be provided is by direct links between IMHA and relevant international bodies such as IMO.

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IMO Objectives and IMHA

The objectives of the International Maritime Organization for the 2000s adopted at their 21st session provide a framework for discussion the ways in which IMHA can directly assist with their realisation

Shifting emphasis on to people. The aspects discussed in the introduction to this memorandum identify the ways in which the health of seafarers contributes to safety. IMHA can advise on the appropriateness of the criteria to be used for taking decisions or giving advice on good practice. Expertise in the nature of health risks and the consequences of impairment is largely derived from onshore experience which is available to its members.

Heart disease in seafarers is the commonest cause of death at sea. Sudden incapacity from a first or recurrent episode can put a vessel at risk. Treatment at sea is less effective than onshore. Evidence is available about preventative strategies and how to assess individual risk both prior to and after an episode. Incorporation into maritime risk management could bring safety benefits to the sector and ensure that more seafarers are able to continue their career until retirement and then enjoy their leisure.

This objective is given substance in the IMO statements on the 'human element: vision, principles and goals'. The positive contributions which IMHA can make to these can be readily identified and many will not be achieved unless their 'health dimension' is taken into account.

(a) Multi-dimensional nature.

Health issues permeate virtually all aspects of crewing, safety and performance, as noted above.

(b) Honouring the seafarer.

Decisions about fitness for seafaring and the quality of treatment provided after illness or injury are both clear markers of the regard in which seafarers are held. Good health and medical practice can ensure that no one is unreasonably denied employment, that safety is not jeopardised by health impairment and that excess morbidity or mortality from illness and injury at sea is minimised. These are areas where the interests of employers and seafarers can sometimes be in conflict and sound advice from health professionals provides an important and respected means of resolving such conflicts

(c) Remedial action following maritime casualties.

Good practice for crew training, medical stores, radiomedical advice and telemedicine, port medical facilities all play a major part. IMHA is actively involved in exchange of information and development of procedures in all these areas

(d) Avoiding single person errors.

Health based standards, for instance on vision and risk of sudden incapacity where IMHA members have a wealth of expertise are a central part of this goal.

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(e) Simplicity of regulation.

The sensible interpretation of complex health requirements into accessible recommendations is part of the daily work of many IMHA members and their experience can assist IMO

(f) Individual capabilities and the work environment.

Both have major risk components associated with health factors. At present IMO has only limited access to advice on these topics.

There is inevitably some repetition in these comments. To summarise: health expertise plays a part in all discussions about the human element. IMO positions need to be based on consensus as far as possible, not directed at meeting the sectional interest of any one employer or employee group or nation and exercised for the widest benefits of the maritime world. Currently IMHA is the sole international body which can collate and distil such expertise based on current practice to support IMO in achieving the health related components of this central objective.

Ensuring effective implementation of existing IMO standards. The medical fitness certificate forms part of the STCW requirements. There are considerable differences in the standards used between signatories to the convention and in a few places evidence of fraud. IMHA is both a source of advice on what constitutes good practice and how fairness and uniformity can be achieved. The forthcoming ILO review of their Maritime Conventions will require IMO to be effectively advised to ensure that their interests in relation to the conventions relating to medical issues are secured. Medical training for crew also forms part of STCW and IMHA members have a wealth of experience on how this can best be delivered and audited. ISM provides a framework for risk reduction on board ship. While many of the key risks are amenable to control by good engineering and sound management systems some such as noise exposure require health surveillance (audiometry).

The identification and control of health risks from physical, chemical and biological agents is an area where many IMHA members have the competencies needed to advise IMO on appropriate standards and, perhaps more importantly, suggest where paper heavy systems of documentation can be simplified by simple risk assessment processes.

Ship types and safety. IMHA members are closely involved with health aspects of safety for different classes of ship from cruise liners to fishing vessels. They understand and can advise IMO on these.

Sudden incapacity or sleep on a bridge with limited manning has been a cause of several recent disasters. The risk of this varies considerably between individuals and its assessment forms part of the work of many members of IMHA

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Developing a safety culture. The extensive onshore experience in high-risk industries has demonstrated that health, both in terms of capability to perform safely and prevention of occupational risks, plays an essential part in any safety management system. This is even more so at sea where work and living are intertwined, environments are constantly changing and distance from high level expertise and care is the norm. The lessons from onshore experience need to be considered and integrated. A number of IMHA members have high level onshore risk management experience as well as an understanding of the special conditions at sea. This could assist IMO in incorporating health factors into the maritime safety culture.

Strengthening technical co-operation programmes. Maritime health practice is grounded in experience with only a limited research database. The quality of evidence underlying safety-related decisions is increasingly questioned. The development of improved resources for health related risk assessment is therefore needed. IMHA and its members can help identify knowledge gaps, specify answerable research questions and work with IMO to organise and manage research and other forms of technical co-operation to fill the gaps.

Unlawful acts. IMHAs contribution is expertise in the ethical management of problems stemming from drug (and alcohol) abuse and the contribution of screening and medical intervention to risk reduction. As already noted IMHA can advise on good medical examination practice and this can help in reducing fraud and associated quality issues in the assessment and certification of seafarer fitness.

Conclusions

The aim of this memorandum is to describe, explain and justify closer collaboration between IMHA and IMO. The central thesis is that health issues are a central and integral part of safety at sea, that IMO needs ready access to high level expertise on maritime health and that the expertise used represents an international consensus. IMHA is the sole body which can currently provide this and thus support IMO in seeking to improve standards of maritime health for the benefit of seafarers and the maritime industry.