

AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON THE  
ORGANIZATION'S STRATEGIC PLAN  
12th session  
Agenda item 10

CWGSP 12/10  
12 September 2011  
ENGLISH ONLY

## ANY OTHER BUSINESS

### Measures to reduce meeting costs

#### Note by the Secretariat

##### SUMMARY

*Executive summary:* This document provides information on the relationship between working arrangements and costs for interpretation of IMO meetings

*Strategic direction:* 4

*High-level action:* 4.0.5

*Planned output:* 4.0.5.1

*Action to be taken:* Paragraph 13

*Related documents:* C 106/D (paragraph 3(b).2(ii)); C 106/3(b) (paragraph 6.3); C 105/3(b)

## Introduction

1 The Council, at its 106th session (27 June to 1 July 2011), in considering the report on the Secretariat's risk management exercise 2010, noted the main areas of risk highlighted by the Working Group and agreed, inter alia, and in the context of other identified risks, to revisit measures to reduce meeting costs that had previously been rejected (C 105/3(b) annex 2, page 36). Although every possible effort should continue to be made to provide IMO bodies with the best opportunities to enable them to make optimal decisions to enhance safety, security and environmental protection, this document, in responding to the Council's request, discusses measures to reduce meeting costs related to the length and frequency of meetings and the use of interpretation services.

## Background

2 The working conditions and rates of pay of freelance interpreters within the UN-system organizations are, in principle, governed by an Agreement between the UN-system organizations and the "Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence" (AIIC). This Agreement, of which IMO is a signatory, is re-negotiated every five years. The current Agreement is due to finish at the end of this year and a new five-year Agreement is currently under negotiation.

3 IMO's current working arrangements for freelance interpreters go back over 30 years. At that time, owing to the level of the then prevailing rates of pay and the limited availability of local interpreters with the required language combinations, a separate working agreement was reached with the interpreters whereby, rather than working eight sessions in a five-day contract, as first laid down in a report from the UN Health Services and as stipulated in the UN/AIIC Agreement (chapter VI, paragraph 20, subparagraph 2 of UN/AIIC Agreement), they agreed to work 10 sessions in a five-day contract. A session being a three-hour period, which in practice in IMO is from 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. or 2.30 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. For agreeing to work these two additional sessions, it was decided that the interpreters would be compensated at 160% of the Standard Team daily rate for the five days of their contract. In adopting this practice, the Organization applies the "Restricted Team" clause (annex A, chapter VI, paragraph 20 of the UN/AIIC Agreement). However, this long-term arrangement of engaging "Restricted Teams" does not accord with the provisions of the UN/AIIC Agreement which only permits such arrangements in emergency situations.

4 In 2007, when the current UN/AIIC Agreement came into force, a "target rate" which uses as its basis a single core or base rate, applicable to all Headquarters duty stations (there are currently six HQ duty stations – Austria, France, Italy, North America, Switzerland, UK) was set in accordance with the then agreed methodology for the calculation of daily Standard Team rates. It was also agreed that those HQ duty stations where the existing rate was considerably lower than the "target rate" arrived at by the methodology, namely France, Italy, North America and the UK, would attempt to close the gap between their Standard Team daily rates and the "target rate". This would be done through regular increases based on adjustments in real salaries and the movement of the cost of living indices for their respective locations and an additional annual adjustment, which for London was fixed at £2 per annum, applicable on 1 January each year. However, at the end of the five-year life of the current Agreement, it is clear that the methodology has not succeeded in its objective of closing the gap between the Standard Team daily rate and the "target rate" and this gap is particularly pronounced for North America and the UK.

5 Under the Restricted Team clause applied by IMO, the rate payable for each day of the contract is 160% of the Standard Team rate (currently £283.40 a day) for the UK which, in practice, results in IMO paying interpreters at the rate of £453.44 a day. The implementation of the Restricted Team rate, outlined in paragraph 3 above has, up until now and to a limited extent, reduced pressure from the interpreters for IMO to "close the gap" between the target rate for a Standard Team for the UK, calculated in accordance with the current UN/AIIC Agreement and the base rate currently paid by IMO.

6 In the current negotiations, one of the requests made by the AIIC is for all UN Organizations to apply the target rate (£411 for London). If IMO continues to use the Restricted Team provisions, the application of 160% of the Standard Team rate currently used by IMO would result in a daily rate for each interpreter of £656 per day. Under the current financial and budgetary constraints facing the Organization it is clear that IMO will not be in a position to meet this substantial increase.

7 Also requested by AIIC under the ongoing negotiations is that IMO aligns itself fully with the terms of the Agreement by reducing the number of work sessions from 10 to 8.

8 The re-negotiation of the UN/AIIC Agreement and the very firm request from the interpreters has highlighted both a challenge and an opportunity for the Organization. The challenge lies in accommodating the budgetary effects of any increase in rates, whilst maintaining the current meetings programme and also meeting the pressure from AIIC for IMO to fall in line with the working practices stipulated in the Agreement. The opportunity lies

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in enabling IMO to align itself with the working terms and conditions of the UN/AIIC Agreement and also in considering how we can streamline our current working practices through improved planning and efficiency.

### **Working practices**

9 With reference to meetings scheduled to take place for five days, as are the majority of IMO's Committee and Sub-Committee meetings, the current practice in IMO is to recruit one full team of interpreters (14 or 11 interpreters depending on the number of languages) who are required to work 10 sessions (and paid at 160% of the Standard Team rate). Elsewhere in the common system it is normal practice, known as "par achèvement", for one full team to be engaged for five days (in which they are limited to working eight sessions) and another half team (seven or eight interpreters, again depending on the languages) engaged for two days (in which they are limited to four sessions). In this way, a full week of meetings can be serviced and no interpreter works for more than eight sessions in a five-day period. This one and one half team arrangement is fully in line with the present UN/AIIC Agreement. Therefore, under the terms of the UN/AIIC Agreement IMO would be required to engage one and one half teams to meet the conditions for providing interpretation for every day (10 sessions) of a five-day meeting week.

10 With reference to meetings scheduled to take place with an intervening weekend, the current practice in IMO is to recruit one full team of interpreters (14 interpreters) who are required to work six sessions the first week and 10 sessions the following week (this applies to MSC sessions of more than five days). In order for the Organization to align itself fully with the Agreement as above, IMO would have to recruit one full team (14 interpreters) plus an additional one half team (eight interpreters) to be engaged and remunerated for the duration of the meeting (each interpreter would be limited to working 13 sessions in total over the week and a half duration of the Committee). Finally it is to be noted that, for Assembly meetings scheduled over two weeks and with the possibility of two Assembly committees meeting at the same time for a number of days, IMO's current practice is to recruit two full teams of interpreters (14 interpreters per team) to cover all sessions of the two committees, as necessary. This is in line with the UN/AIIC Agreement; however, it may be necessary to consider careful planning of the activities of the two committees to ensure that the terms of the Agreement, regarding the workload for the interpreters, are followed.

11 Reducing the availability of interpretation to eight sessions in any five-day meeting would also allow IMO to remain in line with the Agreement. This might be achieved by careful planning of the work of the Plenary sessions, particularly of Sub-Committees, where it is not unusual, currently, for the Plenary not to work for half a day (one session), or sometimes even more. The cost of eight sessions over the normal five-day working week could potentially yield a saving of over 20% per meeting. This arrangement, however, implies that interpreters be informed of the schedule of the meeting at the time of recruitment, which normally takes place well in advance of the meetings themselves (confirmation of the work days for interpreters for regular meetings is done every quarter). If, for operational reasons, extra time is required, this would have to be arranged in accordance with the terms of the Agreement.

12 With reference to meetings scheduled to take place with an intervening weekend (for example, MSC), subject to advance planning of the workload, Plenary could be contained to four sessions for the first week (two days only). In that case, the additional half team would only be required to be engaged and remunerated for the five days of the second week (each interpreter of both full and half teams would be limited to working eight sessions of the second week and no break would be necessary for the first week).

**Action requested of the Working Group**

13 The Working Group is invited to note, in the information provided, the direct relationship between working arrangements and the cost for interpretation, with a view to advising the Council to consider the matter when revisiting the efficiency proposals it had previously rejected and to formulating relevant recommendations, as appropriate.

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