**Feature: Fishing and the human element**

Fishing and the human element

The Nautical Institute and the FISH Safety Foundation take a fresh look at fishing safety

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The positive contribution of fishing to the world economy, and the vital need to secure a safe and sustainable food chain, is well known and understood. But the true human cost of fishing is less well known. The ILO estimates that some 24,000 deaths occur annually in the pursuit of fishing – making fishing the most hazardous occupation in the world. And this is without counting the disproportionately high negative health effects of fishing on industry participants.

In an effort to improve safety and related issues in the industry, the ILO adopted a new Convention – The Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) and accompanying Recommendation (No. 199) in 2007. The Convention, which comes into force in November 2017, places emphasis on the need to improve occupational safety and health standards for workers in the fishing sector, focusing on an evidenced-based, risk management approach when dealing with safety matters.

It’s against this background that the FISH Safety Foundation has been established. The FISH Safety Foundation or FISH (Fishing Industry & Health) was originally conceptualised nearly 20 years ago following a request by the ILO to the current Chief Executive of the Foundation for information regarding the state of health and safety in the South African fishing industry. From this study, the idea of a not-for-profit organisation actively promoting health and safety in the international fishing industry was born.

**Safety – who is responsible?**

One of the issues that became clear early in the development of the Foundation was that there were significant gaps in the coordinated global promotion of safety in commercial fishing. National authorities have always had an obligation to promote safety, but few of them have the resources to provide a dedicated approach to fishing safety. And while there are a number of individuals and organisations doing sterling work in the industry, these efforts are generally focused on local initiatives, or have at most a national focus. This inhibits the free flow of knowledge and information internationally, often resulting in similar local efforts being duplicated and resources wasted.

The FISH Safety Foundation aims to fill that gap, acting as a safety thinktank and a forum for all the industry’s participants to exchange views and experiences. Other high-risk industries – most notably aviation – have utilised similar approaches very successfully.

**Creating a safety culture**

Ultimately our work is about fostering a strong safety culture in the industry. But safety at sea – and the management of safety – is a complex subject. Traditionally the maritime industry has concentrated on keeping the ship safe, and thus by default keeping the crew safe. Resources are focused on preventing the ship from sinking, burning or running aground. And statistically this focus was justified. Studies have shown that some 50 to 80% of fatalities at sea occur as the result of the vessel sinking.

However, there has been less focus on the area of occupational safety and health, which is often recorded as ‘accidents to persons’ or ‘personal safety’. These are accidents primarily caused by behavioural factors such as human error, incapacitation, and insufficient knowledge of (or ignoring) safe operating practice.

While there is clearly a direct link between the two, the emphasis at sea has generally been on vessel safety. It would also be fair to say that there has been much less emphasis placed on the occupational safety and health of seafarers than that of their land-based colleagues.

Now, with the risk-based approach advocated by the Work in Fishing Convention, a focused management approach to safety and health in the fishing industry is needed. The Foundation has developed and now promotes three distinct, but interrelated initiatives.

The three main projects are the Fishing Alert! series, the crewSAFE safety management programme and the FISHER confidential event reporting programme.

**Fishing Alert! series**

Paying close attention to the human element is critically important if we are to reduce the accident and fatality rates in commercial fishing. In 2003 The Nautical Institute launched the hugely successful Alert! series, setting the industry benchmark by producing 40 human element-themed publications and a number of accompanying videos.

FISH has been given permission to use this material to help in developing and launching a material for the fishing industry. This series, Fishing Alert!, will focus on human element topics and will be updated on a regular basis.

**Alert! series**

The series will cover a wide range of topics, including:

- Safety management
- Communication
- Decision making
- Fatigue
- Stress
- Training
- Crew health

Each Alert! will be written by a specialist and reviewed by a panel of experts, ensuring that the information provided is accurate and relevant to the fishing industry.

**crewSAFE**

crewSAFE is a safety management programme developed by the Foundation and launched in 2010. It is designed to help fishing organisations improve their approach to safety and health, by providing a comprehensive framework for risk management.

**F ISHER**

FISHER is the Foundation’s confidential event reporting programme, launched in 2011. It encourages seafarers and industry participants to report safety incidents and near misses, allowing for evidence-based analysis and learning.

**Summary**

Creating a safety culture in the fishing industry is a complex subject. The FISH Safety Foundation is working to address this by promoting three distinct, but interrelated initiatives: Fishing Alert!, crewSAFE, and FISHER. These initiatives aim to improve occupational safety and health standards in the fishing industry, focusing on an evidenced-based, risk management approach when dealing with safety matters.

Read Seaways online at www.nautinst.org/seaways
focused project addressing a range of critical human element issues for the fishing industry. The Fishing Alert! project will be closely based on the original Nautical Institute Alert! project, with a strong emphasis on a ‘lessons learnt’ approach.

By re-developing the original Alert! series to reflect the particular needs and circumstances of commercial fishing participants, we will be able to provide a much needed resource for the fishing industry.

**The crewSAFE Safety Management Program**

We have developed a structured program for managing safety on board fishing vessels, based on our experience of developing and implementing safety management systems over the past 20 years.

The crewSAFE Safety Management Program is a risk-based safety rating program, designed to provide the user with the framework for an effective Safety Management System (SMS), which can be systematically introduced and then audited on any fishing vessel. This practical set of guidelines provides an easy path to implementation, and allows for objective measuring of safety performance against the required/best practice standard.

The crewSAFE Safety Management Program includes a comprehensive standards manual with an objective index-rating audit protocol, an implementation package (documentation, registers, checklists, etc) and promotional material to launch the program on board.

The index-rating approach is not new. In fact this type of program has been used by many of the world’s leading organisations to provide a basis for their management systems, as well as to gain an objective assessment of their performance to these set safety standards.

crewSAFE is designed to provide an effective framework to enable a systematic safety management program to be implemented on board fishing vessels. It is divided into six chapters:

1: System Management  
2: Fire & Emergency Protection  
3: Safe Working Practices  
4: Vessel & Equipment  
5: Occupational Health  
6: Environmental Protection  

Programs like these have worked well internationally because there has been recognition of effort and accomplishment for those involved. The program can be broken down into many smaller modules, so more people can get involved and therefore many more can get recognised for their input. The practical nature of the intervention and program focus means that many of the results are immediately visible in higher housekeeping standards and cleanliness, better demarcation and signposting around fire and emergency equipment.

Communication is also improved because there is regular feedback to crew on safety matters. Correctly implemented, this approach will promote a positive safety culture onboard. We know that an organisation’s culture is often described as ‘the way we do things around here’ – the emphasis being on the word do. Safety guru James Reason sums up this approach as follows: ‘... acting and doing, shaped by organisational controls, lead to thinking and believing (in safety).’

The crewSAFE Safety Management Program is being promoted globally as a tool to be used by vessel owners and operators.

**The FISHER Confidential Event Reporting Project**

A dedicated confidential reporting platform is critically important in improving safety standards and practice in the fishing industry. The Foundation is setting up an industry-specific confidential event reporting system, the FISHER (Fishing Industry Safety & Health Event Reporting) Project.

The FISHER Project will allow all participants in the fishing industry to submit confidential reports of any health and safety event or occurrence – an occurrence here means any safety-related event which endangers or which, if not corrected or addressed, could endanger a fishing or other vessel, its occupants or any other person.

**FISHER Reports** could cover:

- Vessel and operational incidents & accidents,  
- Onboard living conditions and nutrition,  
- Unsafe practices,  
- Personal accidents,  
- Near miss situations,  
- Critical equipment failures,  
- Human factor issues,  
- Occupational health issues,  
- Disregard of legal requirements,  
- Not following good practice/seamanship,  
- Personal observations,  
- Any methods you have adopted to prevent repetitions, and  
- Anything else that would be of value to the rest of industry.

The FISHER Project is a confidential portal to exclusively report fishing industry safety and health events. It has an international scope and is totally independent, free from any regulatory influence. Information gained from the FISHER project will feed back into the Fishing Alert! Program and crewSAFE Program initiatives. Further, we will provide a report-back portal to share the stories, and the valuable learnings.

We will also use the information gained in ongoing research, especially in the human element and occupational health disciplines.

The Foundation is thus ideally placed to undertake specific research projects for industry participants and other organisations. FISHER reports will form a valuable data base of industry practice, providing for effective risk management advice and assistance to industry participants.

The Chief Executive of the Foundation, Eric Holliday (an Associate Fellow of The Nautical Institute), has been invited to act as an international Ambassador for both The Nautical Institute Mariners’ Alerting and Reporting Scheme (MARS), and the CHIRP Maritime Confidential Hazardous Incident Reporting Program. The Foundation will actively promote both these programs, and act as the ‘middle man’ for the fishing industry to report safety and health events – confidentially. This will give the industry a direct input into IMO discussions on fishing safety.

So, lots happening in fishing safety! Please take a look at our website www.fishsafety.org and our Facebook page – we’d welcome feedback on our work. If you’re interested in helping in any way, please feel free to contact us at eric.holliday@fishsafety.org ±

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