

SUBMISSION NO. 2

SEAFARERS



*Often Voiceless
&
Invisible*

“...please help us, we dont have enough food, we are hungry. Our master is cruel to us...our ship is unsafe. We work overtime every day but dont get paid. Our ship keeps stopping at sea and we are scared in the pirate zones. No one cares...please help us...”

(Text message from a seafarer to Sr Mary)

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*“ It’s a good feeling to have a family & a home who welcomes you in a strange place...”*

*I’d like to thank you for giving importance to us seafarers...and also for the attention that we need...and also for feeling our loneliness..”*

*(Message written by a seafarer in who visited the Sydney Seafarers centre)*

## **SUBMISSION**

As a group of Welfare/Pastoral/Chaplaincy practitioners from the community, who work closely with merchant seafarers and have done so for many years, we welcome this opportunity to offer some reflections from our experience and to declare our support for the ratification of the Maritime Labour Convention 2006.

Firstly we would like to acknowledge our indebtedness to seafarers for their service to us in bringing so much of what we need to our shores and our homes. A service that often puts them in danger and not always provides them with adequate reimbursement.

We are passionate about the improvement of seafarers' living and working conditions because we see and hear first hand the issues that seafarers struggle with on a daily basis. As depicted on the cover of this document seafarers are often voiceless and more or less invisible to the public eye, consequently many abuses can occur and go unnoticed or un-reported. Seafarers are usually too scared of losing their employment within the shipping industry if make any formal complaints to do with either their treatment as human beings or their safety conditions onboard.

In our capacity as care-givers we meet seafarers on their ships, in their cabins, at our welfare centres, and hospitals etc. where we witness their individual stories of vulnerability, loneliness, fear, abuse and powerlessness, in a complex system that is the shipping world. Seafarers human dignity is regularly eroded within the current system.

We recognise the importance of the ratification of the entire Convention for the positive impact it will have on seafarers. For the purpose of this submission we will refer to four areas we see as vital to the seafarers and to ourselves as welfare/pastoral agencies.

- **Article IV - Seafarers' Employment and Social Rights**
- **Regulation 5.1.5 - On-board complaint procedures**
- **Regulation 4.4 - Access to shore-based welfare facilities**
- **Guideline B4.4.3-welfare boards**

1. In our role as Pastoral agents/Care-givers/Volunteers, we are confronted regularly if not daily with seafarers' employment problems and issues to do with their 'social rights'. Many of these issues require assistance that is beyond our capacity. Responding appropriately can often drain our very limited welfare, financial resources and our personnel. Therefore we would highly recommend the enforcement of Article IV and Regulation 5.1-5

2. Being involved in the provision of welfare to seafarers, we operate with very limited

resources and are usually dependent on donations or church assistance. This can lead to 'burn out' in our staff and volunteers and consequently a less satisfactory provision of care to seafarers. Therefore we would welcome the provision of a Welfare board to plan for the future and to implement the guidelines provided for in the convention.  
(Regulation 4.4&Guideline B4.4.3)

**Recommendation**

We recommend that the current AMSA Seafarers' Welfare Advisory Committee continue to draw together all those involved in the care of seafarers and those who benefit from seafarers within the shipping industry, for the purpose of dialogue and planning for the future welfare needs. In the light of this we would welcome further Seafarers' Welfare Forums where all groups can be encouraged to work in collaboration for the wellbeing of seafarers.

Thanks for this opportunity to share our reflections and experiences. We are available for further comment at any time and can be contacted at the following numbers or by email .

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