

PRESS RELEASE

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North P&I Club Calls for Collective Action on Crew Repatriation

Leading International Group (IG) Protection and Indemnity member, North P&I has urged maritime stakeholders to seize the opportunity provided by a UK Government summit on July 9th to establish an international action plan to deal with the crew repatriation crisis resulting from COVID-19.

Led by UK Maritime Minister Kelly Tolhurst, the virtual event is the first ‘international summit’ addressing the impact of COVID-19 on crew working conditions. It will bring together representatives from the International Maritime Organization, the International Chamber of Shipping, and other associations. IMO Secretary General Kitack Lim is expected to highlight the need to safeguard crews and the duties of states towards seafarers.

With more than 1.2 million seafarers at sea at any one time, around 200,000 have been caught up in delays to crew changes, as travel and border restrictions have been applied, repatriation refused and medical attention ashore denied. Stopgap contract extensions have been further prolonged, with seafarers trapped on board for months in a stressful limbo, despite many having had no contact with coronavirus and posing no risk, says North CEO Paul Jennings.

“The challenges brought by COVID-19 continue to have a significant impact on the health, safety and wellbeing of crew,” he says. “Recent weeks have seen welcome action, especially as air routes have opened up, and certainly IG club correspondents have been working tirelessly at the sharp end to get things moving. However, this is not simply about logistics and good will.

“Crew changes continue to be hindered by quarantining, visa issues and bureaucracy, and only governments have the power to ensure that different authorities act with common purpose. It is vital that port authorities and national governments treat seafarers with the fairness and respect they deserve, and this requires an orchestrated response.”

In its own right, the UK Government reckons to have helped more than 7,000 cruise ship crew return home, regardless of nationality or circumstance.

Jennings, who is also current Chair of the IG says responses to COVID-19 have included a new tracking tool developed by North for the IG providing daily updates on the virus and new guidance to crew from all 13 IG clubs on social distancing, as well as ongoing support to all IG Members.

However, only far-reaching actions such as recognising seafarers as ‘Key Workers of the Sea’ at a global level can side-step restrictions being re-imposed, in case of any future pandemic or a COVID-19 ‘second wave’, he says.

“We have a shared responsibility to sort this out and ensure that the same circumstances can never be allowed to happen again,” he says. “We support the UK government summit which seeks to find practical steps to the crew repatriation crisis. We are all aware that it is challenging and can take time to find solutions that are globally acceptable but that is not an excuse for inaction.”

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Images:

Paul Jennings, CEO, North P&I Club

About North P&I Club:

North P&I Club is a leading global marine insurer providing P&I, FD&D, war risks and ancillary insurance to over 230 million GT of owned and chartered tonnage. Through its Sunderland Marine brand, North is also a leading insurer of fishing vessels, small craft, aquaculture risks and owners’ fixed premium P&I cover. The Standard and Poor’s ‘A’ rated Club is based in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK with regional offices and subsidiaries in China (Hong Kong and Shanghai), Greece, Ireland, Japan, Singapore, USA and Sunderland Marine offices worldwide. North is a leading member of the International Group of P&I Clubs (IG), with over 12% of the IG’s owned tonnage. The 13 IG clubs provide liability cover for approximately 90% of the world’s ocean-going tonnage and, as a member of the IG, North protects and promotes the interests of the international shipping industry. For further information, visit: www.nepia.com

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