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Domestic logjams are main barrier in crew-change problem

THE SLOW PACE of seafarer repatriations to major crewing nations continues to exacerbate the mounting crewing crisis that has left hundreds of thousands of seafarers stranded even as key crew-change hubs open up and governments promise to ease restrictions.

The latest figures released by the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs on Sunday reveal that 29,302 sea-based workers having been repatriated since February.

According to ATPI, the specialist maritime industry travel agency, that figure represents a small fraction of the mounting backlog of travel requests now logjammed due to coronavirus restrictions that have left Filipino seafarers unable to leave their ships despite having expired work contracts and in some cases expired visas and passports.

ATPI head of shipping Nikos Gazelidis told Lloyd's List that that out of the 3,000 to 4,000 crew movements normally seen every day, just 10% had been achieved in April, increasing only slightly to under 20% by May.

Previous government restrictions had limited 400 Filipinos to fly into the country per day and while that has now been lifted to 600 per day, the pace of repatriations has been slow and the volume is nowhere near the required volume to match the number of crew changes.

The flight quota does not differentiate between arrivals and offers no clear policy to prioritise the huge backlog of seafarers repatriations.

The DFA numbers work out to an average of just over 240 seafarers being repatriated through official channels per day.

“We should at least be considering seafarers as critical employees who need to come and go more than other workers,” argued Mr Gazelidis.

There is now growing frustration among shipmanagement officials who are struggling with an increasingly chaotic and sporadically implemented set of government guidelines at national level. “There is no common sense being applies in the political world,” said one shipmanager.

Mr Gazelidis said ATPI had been selected by the International Maritime Employers’ Council to work together on the International Maritime Organization’s 12-step plan for crew changes and has since accumulated about 20,000 requests for travel.

But the problem arises from not being able to fulfill these requests due to the limitations being imposed by the seafarers’ home country governments.

For example, commercial flights are still severely restricted in the Philippines and are completely stopped in India. This is being partially overcome by charter flights but is limited, as approvals for these flights are still controlled by the authorities in these countries and are being trickled through in many cases.

This contrasts with the developments being made with crew change hubs and the efforts of the rest of the maritime community and puts the focus on seafarers’ home country governments as previously highlighted.

Behind the scenes, an increasingly frenetic pace of industry lobbying is still struggling to get the shipping message heard in the right places.

Initial hopes of a ministerial level meeting at the International Labor Organization that had been scheduled to take place today never materialised and both the ILO and International Maritime Organization are now pursuing a more targeted set of bilateral meetings as an alternative.

Senior industry officials report that while the urgency of shipping’s repeated requests to prioritise seafarer repatriation are being heard at a senior level, they are in many cases still failing to make it onto national agendas where more urgent political crises are taking priority.

Despite the slow pace of progress in many crew centres, Singapore has continued to bolster its status as a crew-change hub by designating two facilities, an offshore accommodation vessel and a seamen’s hostel, to accommodate crew who are unable to transfer directly to vessels or flights and require temporary transit facilities of up to 48 hours.

The Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore also noted that it has approved about 6,000 crew changes since March 27, when it first allowed limited transfers.

Why shipping needs to shout louder about the crewing crisis

ANGRY chief executives, unprecedented unity between the usual in-fighting and sniping, regular missives from every secretary-general, president and head honcho you care to mention, a front page on the Financial Times and support from the Economist, personal interventions from the UN secretary-general and even divine intervention from the Pope himself....

The list goes on.

Nobody could accuse the shipping industry of not pulling out all the stops to get its message heard when it comes to the hidden humanitarian crisis that has left tens of thousands of seafarers stranded at sea with already extended employment contracts now expired and the threat of strikes looming.

Or could we be doing more?

Shipping is by no means the only industry struggling to outrun a news cycle in overdrive and plant a flag in a political priority list that is being ripped up daily as more pressing matters emerge.

Others are spending their way into national agendas with lobbying budgets already passing the multi-million dollar stage. Some are lucky enough to have vote-winning narratives.

Sadly, shipping lacks both the centralised firepower or the sway of election-winning demographics to further its cause.

There is no easy culprit to demonise here and no single issue to campaign on.

The logjam of domestic crewing nations' repatriation policies is not broken easily.

The widely reported contradictions and confusions that are daily seeing government statements contradicted on the ground by officials confused and overburdened by an unprecedented storm of bureaucratic bewilderment, is no one persons' fault.

The fact that flag states are now further extending already extended and cancelled contracts by another three months is not a decision that has an obvious solution and while the threat of strike action now looms large, even that comes with its own, even more complex, set of problems that will ultimately only leave the seafarers further imperilled.

These systems were flawed to start with and the current chaos is only exacerbating the red tape that shipping normally navigates through trial error and deep pockets of pragmatism.

Shipping officials and high-level representatives are doing their bit, but having quickly won over the industry echo chamber, they are still struggling to get those outside of transport and labour departments to either pick up the phone or understand the problem if they do.

A high-level ministerial meeting at the International Labor Organization had been mooted for today, but it fell over amid an international diplomatic diary meltdown and has been replaced by a series of bilateral approaches that will continue to see those trying to engender change shouting at those who have other priorities to deal with.

If that all sounds futile, it's not. The industry needs to keep the pressure on and outrun that news cycle so determined to skip over the fact that the backbone of global trade is about to break and slot it into that "and finally..." section of the nightly news.

The angry chief executives currently talking to Lloyd's List need to keep shouting, but use whatever networks they have to get the message heard outside of their usual echo chambers.

The frenetic pace of diplomatic phone calls being made hourly by the industry's representative bodies, UN officials and secretary generals, needs to continue.

Shipping needs to keep shouting, but not to itself. This is a message that needs to be heard outside of the industry and it is the duty of all if us to turn up the volume.

OPINION

Can shipping chart a green course in a post-coronavirus climate?

THE European Union has taken measures aimed at the collective reduction of greenhouse gases to zero by 2050. Box carriers are responsible for emissions that damage the environment, *writes August J Braakman, a specialist in Dutch and European antitrust law.*

Its regulation covering the period 2020-2030 determines both the percentage by which the member states must collectively have restricted their GHG emissions in the next decade and the annual linear limit value to be achieved by each individual member state.

In 2018, the collective percentage was set at 40% compared with 1990 emission levels. In the course of 2020, the EU will issue a proposal on increasing this target, likely to arrive at 50% to 55%.

The regulation does not provide for specific penal sanctions as might compel a member state to achieve its annual linear limit value.

Regulations are legal acts that apply automatically and uniformly to all EU member states as soon as they enter into force, without needing to be transposed into national law. They are binding in their entirety. Therefore, in default of specific penal sanctions, the European Commission may where appropriate revert to the general sanctions prescribed by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

Parallel to the EU measures at governmental level, the commission has put in place the EU European Trading System, which limits emissions from some of the most important energy-intensive sectors, such

as power stations, industrial plants and commercial aviation. The system covers around 45% of the bloc's GHG emissions.

The system works on the "cap and trade" principle. A single EU-wide cap is set on the total amount of GHG emissions covered by the system. Within the cap, companies receive free of charge or can buy European Emission Allowances, known as EEAs, which they can trade with one another as needed.

An allowance is like a voucher that allows the holder to emit one tonne of GHG emissions within one calendar year. The price for one is currently around €25m ($28m). The expectation is that this price will increase over the years, since the total quantity of EEAs decreases each year. During the period 2021-2030, the decrease will be subject to an annual linear factor of 2.2 %.

Companies that are active in sectors covered by the European Trading System are required to participate. Failure to comply with European Emission Allowance could lead to the imposition of heavy fines.

Maritime transport is responsible for around 940m tonnes of CO_2 emissions annually and for about 2.5% of global CO_2 emissions. These emissions are projected to increase significantly if mitigation measures are not put in place swiftly.

According to the International Maritime Organization, shipping emissions could under a business-as-usual scenario increase by between 50% and 250% by 2050.

Maritime transport is currently exempt from the European Trading System. The EU cannot afford to continue this exemption much longer. The quantity of the CO_2 emissions is simply too great. Therefore, carriers should prepare themselves.

Support for economies

The International Monetary Fund sketches a pitch-black picture of the European economies as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.

In March, the European Commission adopted a new State aid Temporary Framework to support the economies of the member states. The framework, which was amended in April, enables member states to adopt aid measures to remedy a serious disturbance in the whole of, or an important part of, their economy.

Member states must show the commission that the measures are necessary, appropriate and proportionate to remedy the effects of the outbreak. The litmus test is whether they are of a kind as to be useful in the making good of damage caused by the outbreak or instead are general measures unconnected with the alleged damage. Therefore, the test must be carried out from the perspective of the overall financial position of the beneficiary enterprise, which existed before the health crisis.

The impact of the pandemic on the economies of the member states is such that due consideration should be paid to the situation where a member state contends that its annual linear limit value of the collective reduction of GHG emissions at EU level — even without being increased — cannot be achieved.

This viewpoint is likely to be underpinned with the argument that the financial support given to its economy apart from healthcare support — if such extension of financial support were to be decided on anyhow — is inadequate for it to be able to (continue to) comply with its community obligations.

In the occurring event, the commission is required to apply the general sanctions prescribed by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Failure to do so is likely to induce member states to lodge a complaint, stating that the member state concerned infringes directly applicable EU law. The commission cannot but deal with the complaint. The GHG emission obligations having been set out in an EU regulation there seems to be little scope for the Commission for not concurring with the complaint.

Apart from member states also enterprises, which qualify as interested parties, have a right to lodge a complaint with the commission, stating that the non-compliance of a member state with its obligations under the regulation has caused them, and will continue to cause them, to suffer severe and irreparable damage during the period from 2020 to 2030. For the same reasons as stated above, the commission cannot but deal with the complaint.

If the commission concurs with a complaint lodged by a member state and/or an enterprise that qualifies as an interested party, the member state in default will be severely fined.

Once maritime transport has been included in the European Trading System, carriers that are found not to meet their EEAs will also be subject to heavy fines. However, the nature of both fines is that they pertain to public law and as such do not constitute compensation for damage suffered.

Enterprises may consider instituting proceedings under private law to determine compensation for the harm that has been suffered. Consistent case law by the court ensures that a member state is obliged to compensate for damage that has been incurred as a result of an infringement of directly applicable EU law it has committed.

Non-compliance by member states and/or enterprises with their GHG emission reduction obligations as a result of the coronavirus crisis may well have serious effects on fair and undistorted competition in the market of containerised liner shipping services.

These effects are aggravated by the ever-increasing use of logistics solutions with very advanced state-of-the-art features and the ensuing lack of up-to-date and reliable concepts for addressing competition issues in this market, being the definition of the relevant market and the Consortia Block Exemption Regulation.

It is up to the European institutions to create both the juristic scope and the atmosphere required in order to induce both member states and enterprises to make the proper choices.

If either this scope and/or atmosphere are wanting or inadequate, the lack of the right balance between climate and coronavirus resulting therefrom just might prove to herald the armageddon of a climate-neutral EU.

ANALYSIS

Livestreaming brings class revolution nearer

CLASSIFICATION will see greater changes in the next five years than in all the years since the Second World War, predicts Paolo Moretti, chief commercial officer at the Italian class society Registro Italiano Navale.

These changes will affect not only the way class societies work but also the range of services they offer.

Mr Moretti was speaking to Lloyd's List after successfully completing the first statutory and intermediate surveys using livestreaming remote technology. The work was carried out on the 2012 built, 37,000 dwt bulk carrier *Cielo di Gaspesie*.

The ship was in Poland, the class surveyors in Italy, representatives of ship owner d'Amico Navigazione were in Singapore, and flag state representatives were in the US.

"The big news is that we carried out a full remote survey via livestreaming," said Mr Moretti. "The survey was carried out traditionally by a surveyor, although he was remote in Genoa. He visited the ship via our app. He had all the drawings of the vessel and the pipework in front of him, and could see them, in real time, via the app."

One of the ship's officers was given training in how to use the app. The survey team prepared the inspection hold by hold, tank by tank beforehand. "The officer shows the structure; you can stop him and ask to zoom in. With the drawings and fatigue strength calculations available, you know already which areas are more prone to corrosion."

A drone is used to livestream structural conditions in inaccessible areas of a hold, via the app.

Following the completion of the survey, *Cielo di Gaspesie* was assigned the new class notation "Remote" by Rina. This new notation identifies the ships deemed by the society to be eligible to be surveyed remotely for the largest scope of class surveys as well as periodical ones.

Mr Moretti is convinced that surveys will never again be carried out as they have been for the past 150 years.

"We are changing the way we conduct our surveys," he said. ``The first step was the drone, the second is full livestreaming of remote inspections. The third step will be a telemetric approach to data. We have sensors, Artificial Intelligence, and algorithms. We can customise inspections more on a preventative maintenance basis."

The initial livestreaming inspection on an eight-year-old ship did not find anything concerning.

"We had to start with an owner who understood the technology, and an enthusiastic flag state. Liberia was very impressed by the quality of the livestreaming," he said. "The second ship we do might be a container ship, then a tanker. We have now faced all the difficulties of a dry cargo ship.

The next step is to refine the technology for tankers."

"It is a very visual process, which is why we will need to develop robots with the capacity to climb and take thickness measurements." And that is the reason Rina is not expecting to carry out hull renewal surveys remotely.

"When the vessel is in drydock for renewal there will be a moment in which the surveyor has to go and stay there. Renewal surveys are the basis for another five years of class. With the annual surveys you check the vessel maintains the characteristics of safety."

As classification becomes more technology- and data-driven, it is likely there will be a change in focus for senior surveyors staying in the control room, mentoring the junior surveyors. There will always be an expert available anywhere in the world, Mr Moretti says, without flying them there.

The new technology could also make a significant difference to recruitment. Class survey work is male dominated. "The more technological class becomes, and as less attendance is required, the more accessible it will be for women."

MARKETS

Box lines set sights on a profitable year

EARLY forecasts of container carrier performance this year are being torn up following new evidence supporting a much brighter prospect for the sector this year.

With the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in February, initial estimates based on an expected fall in volumes led to scenarios that saw the box shipping sector as a whole losing up to $800m in a best case scenario that saw rates remain stable, and as much as $23bn if rates were to slide in line with volumes.

But a number of new data points have now led to a revision of those scenarios that could see carriers actually improve on the $5.9bn aggregate profit they made last year, according to analysts at Sea-Intelligence.

Throughput figures from Container Trades Statistics confirm that volumes have indeed fallen sharply this year. First-quarter liftings were down 5%, with a sharp 16.9% drop in April bring the year-to-date fall to 8.1%.

"With the levels of capacity reductions on key trades peaking in May, we are likely to see 15%-20% demand decline for the second quarter," Sea-Intelligence said. "Hence for now we will maintain the 10% annual volume decline as a baseline."

Freight rates, however, had responded far more positively than had been expected earlier in the year.

"In early April, it was seen as a success for the carriers if they were simply able to maintain rate levels in an environment of sharply dropping volume; they simply had never been able to accomplish this before," Sea-Intelligence said. "However, they have done even better and increased the rates."

Despite the fall in volumes, the China Containerised Freight Index is tracking 7.4% above the level it was at during the first half of 2019.

"The most optimistic earlier scenario was that carriers maintained rate levels, and this would lead to a combined loss of $800m," Sea-Intelligence said. "But now, if the carriers hang on to their 7.4% rate increase, their collective profits in 2020 will actually be $9.7bn. If rates were to drop down to 2019 levels for the second half of 2020, the annual profits would still be $4.5bn."

Even a "worst-case scenario" that saw capacity discipline falter in the second quarter, leading to a collapse in rates, would see carrier losses capped at $7bn, Sea-Intelligence added.

"In essence, only one thing has materially changed since early April: the carriers have been able to increase rate levels instead of just maintaining them," Sea-Intelligence said.

There is still the downwards scenario where capacity, and hence rate, discipline falls apart. But for now there is nothing indicating that we will see such a collapse; rather the opposite in fact. The severity of the negative scenario is so material, that this is likely a key component in the carriers' newfound ability to be very disciplined in their capacity management."

Smaller bulkers set to see improved earnings

THE smaller-sized bulkers should expect to see higher earnings in the second half of the year, spurred by Black Sea grains exports, and a scattering of other sweet spots.

"I expect higher earnings in the second half of the year from where we are today," said Torvald Klaveness' head of research Peter Lindstrom. His view stems from low fleet growth in the segment combined with an expectation of a recovery in certain trades.

"A recovery from coronavirus will sequentially increase industrial production around the world, which is positive for demand" for these types of vessels, he said, adding that it will take very little by way of demand growth to outweigh fleet expansion.

"That will then tip the balance even more favourably," he said.

The smaller segments are likely to receive support from the bigger sizes too — capesizes have been boosted by higher demand from China, while panamaxes are likely to be stronger closer to the US grains season.

A big swing factor will be China's policy in terms of coal quotas, according to Mr Lindstrom. "If domestic coal prices continue to increase going forward, we might see a relaxation of quotas which will be positive" for panamaxes and for supramaxes.

However, he warned that a second wave of global infection, although of low probability, should be taken into account as a risk factor as it would be a "high-impact" event.

Black Sea grains are expected to lift the segment, with an overall 2% rise in shipments in 2020 from a year earlier, according to shipbroker Braemar ACM.

It expects Russia's wheat exports to rise by 8% to almost 23m tonnes in July to December from the year-earlier period, with supramaxes carrying the bulk of the volume. Handysizes should also "enjoy a boost in shipments."

The gain in Russian shipments will however be offset by a 2.5m-tonne drop in Ukrainian supplies due to poorer growing conditions.

Volumes will likely head to traditional outlets in the Middle East, the Mediterranean and the Indian subcontinent, with expected increasing supplies heading to countries in Southeast Asia such as Vietnam and the Philippines, according to the brokerage's dry bulk analyst Nick Ristic.

He also sees higher volumes moving into East Africa, where locusts are eating into crops. That will help the supramax segment.

Corn exports from the Black Sea region, dominated by Ukraine, should keep up with last year's records, he noted, aiding handysizes in particular, which saw employment exceeding 400 ships in 2019 compared with the average of 200 per year in the past five years. The 2020/21 season starts in the fourth quarter.

Last year, increased volumes were seen into Egypt and Turkey, as well as China, a trend likely to be emulated this year.

Maritime Strategies International, a London-based consultancy, holds a similar view, seeing positive developments from the Black Sea grains trades. Stagnating fleet growth will also support the segments, helping to boost earnings for the rest of the year.

It expects the handymax fleet, ranging from 40,000 to 65,000 dwt, to stagnate in the third quarter, given that 1m dwt is due for delivery versus an estimated 1m dwt to be removed.

Earnings are forecast to rise to about $9,000 per day in the fourth quarter, according to MSI estimates.

At the time of writing, the Baltic Supramax Index was at $7,130 per day on the London-based exchange.

Forward freight agreements reflect the positive tone, with the third quarter at $9,650 per day, and the fourth quarter at $9,500 per day, according to GFI broker figures at the close on June 19.

Handysizes, in the size range between 10,000 dwt to 40,000 dwt, see a similar fate to their larger counterparts, receiving support from grains, MSI said, adding that it expects the fleet to shrink in the fourth quarter, for the first time since the first quarter of 2015.

Earnings are forecast to rise to just shy of $8,000 per day, it said.

The Baltic Handysize Index was at $6,375 per day on June 18.

Minor bulk trades have taken a "heavy hit" from the pandemic, according to MSI analysts Will Fray and Will Tooth, who anticipate a contraction of 0.9% this year. The biggest fall will come from steel products, expected to drop by 5.8%.

The World Steel Association is expecting a 6.4% contraction in steel demand this year, followed by a 3.8% rebound in 2021.

While the rest of the world will see a heavy drop due to coronavirus, China's use is set to increase by 1%.

Domestic steel use is rising in China, reflected in lower exports, down by about 3m tonnes in the first five months of the year versus the same period in 2019, according to a Europe-based analyst, who expects this trend to continue through the year.

But China's imports have more than doubled in a year to 1.6m tonnes, which is benefiting the supramax and handysize segments via intra-Asian shipments. So far, Japan and South Korea have been the biggest suppliers of steel products to China.

A Singapore-based supramax broker noted a change in the market, whereby charterers were now chasing shipowners, as fresh cargoes emerged. That has resulted in many "active" areas, giving owners' confidence. As a result, a number of period fixtures were being concluded.

China was "back in the game" with more imports and exports, the broker said, adding that this was a move to make up for losses in product volumes that took place during the height of the pandemic earlier in the year.

A flow of salt, iron ore and steel cargoes out of the west coast of India to China were being reported, as well as Indonesian coal stems, which were boosting the supramax Pacific market, according to Braemar.

For handysizes, fertiliser trips from the Baltic to the east coast of South America and the US Gulf were heating the Atlantic market, with bagged cement and steels heading to the Caribbean and north coast of South America from Turkey, it noted.

IN OTHER NEWS

MPC Containers facing risk of potential bankruptcy

MPC Containers has said it is facing the "risk of potential bankruptcy" as it seeks a new equity boost and possible sale of some vessels.

The situation has arisen in connection with a $200m bond, the terms of which the company wants to amend to avoid covenant breaches next month.

The company said in the past month that it had opened talks with creditors about liquidity pressures caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Baltic ends review of BCI with changes to multipliers

THE Baltic Exchange has ended a review of its capesize index with a proposal to drop the multiplier effect on voyage routes.

The review has been ongoing since February, after the Baltic Capesize Index turned negative at the end of January and stayed that way for more than two months. This was largely seen as a technicality after the C16 backhaul route breached a threshold. It then dipped back into negative territory for a couple of days in May.

"Owing to exceptional changes in market dynamics, we saw the BCI move into negative territory," the London-based exchange said in a statement outlining the changes.

Chinas Dalian and Yingkou ports to merge

DALIAN and Yingkou, two major ports in northern China, are poised to merge as the local government presses ahead with consolidation in the sector.

Dalian Port Co said in an exchange filing that it was planning to absorb and merge Yingkou Port Liability Co via a share swap on the Shanghai Stock Exchange.

The former and latter are, respectively, the listed arms of state-owned Dalian Port Group and Yingkou Port Group — the main operators of the two largest ports in China's Liaoning province.

India entices shipowners to national flag

THE Indian Ministry of Shipping is inviting global shipowners to flag their ships in India to take advantage of the 'Make in India' policy.

Owners of oceangoing ships have previously found it unattractive to register their vessels in India owing to the lack

of a level playing field and the high cost of operating a ship registered in the country when compared with the costs of registering in other jurisdictions.

The government has overhauled the 'Make in India' policy for public procurement. Under this policy, no global tender enquiry shall be issued, except with the approval of the competent authority, for procurement of all services with estimated value of less than $26m.

APL England freed after Steamship Mutual pays bond

AUSTRALIAN authorities released *APL England* from detention at Brisbane after insurer Steamship Mutual agreed to pay fines and costs of up to $22.5m.

The Singapore-flagged, 5,506 teu vessel, which lost 50 containers overboard in bad weather off Sydney last month, will return to China for repairs without cargo and under a different master.

The previous master is facing pollution and safety charges after investigators found inadequate lashing arrangements for cargo and heavily corroded securing points for containers on the deck of the vessel.

Trafigura bunker unit head steps down after three months

TRAFIGURA's joint-venture bunker unit head is to step down "in a mutually agreed exit" after less than three months in the role.

Anders Grønborg, who joined the company as chief executive on April 1, will leave on September 30. No details were given for the decision. The business will be managed by its existing leadership until further notice, a spokesperson said.

Earlier this month, Trafigura reported "a satisfactory start to operations" for TFG Marine, which is the bunker supplier venture with John Fredriksen's tanker company Frontline and his dry bulk outfit Golden Ocean Group. It was formed in August 2019.

Classified notices follow

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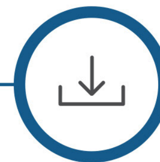

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