



Seafarers Happiness Index

Quarter 1 / 2019



The
Seafarers
Happiness
Index

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



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Seafarers Happiness Index 2019

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The Shipowners Club

The Shipowners' Club is a mutual insurance association which offers Protection & Indemnity (P&I), Legal Costs Cover and associated insurances to small and specialist vessel owners, operators and charterers around the world.

The Club is committed to promoting the positive health and wellbeing of the seafaring community and as part of this endeavour, is proud to support the Happiness Index.

Seafarers Happiness Index Quarter 1 2019

When the shipping industry wants to know how seafarers feel about the challenges facing them at sea there is a need for data and for dialogue. That is why the Seafarers Happiness Index (SHI) exists, to provide an ongoing study into how people at sea feel about a range of key areas.

The SHI from The Mission to Seafarers is a vital tool in measuring how happy people are about the various elements of their working life, providing a picture of the real successes but also highlighting problems within seafaring, delivering opportunities to improve and develop.

The Index is made up of a standard set of ten questions and these cover key areas, such as mental and physical health, diet, rest, workload, connectivity, training, access to shoreleave, as well as relationships at home and onboard. These are answered anonymously, and seafarers are encouraged to complete their answers during each trip.

By sharing their feelings on a scale out of ten, and by providing some written insight – the Index gives a voice to seafarers and addresses the fundamentals of why people are happy to go to sea, or not as the case may be.

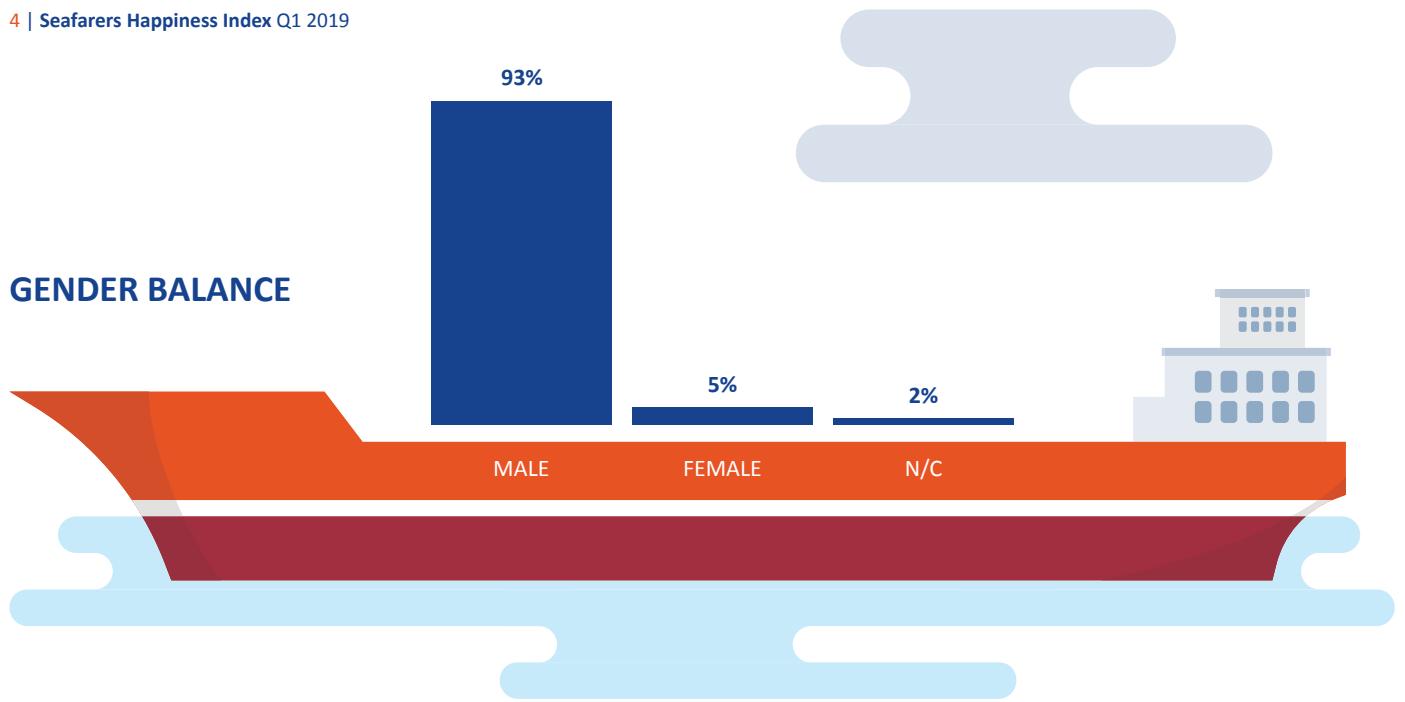
Every quarter, seafarers provide their input and insight – so we would encourage people at some point during each trip to sea to just take a few minutes to share their thoughts. The Seafarers Happiness Index can be completed at www.happyatsea.org

So please, whether you are a seafarer or whether you work with seafarers – we need to hear the real-life tales onboard ships today. We urge you to complete the index during every trip to sea, that way we can build data and weave together the stories of what is truly being experienced during life at sea.

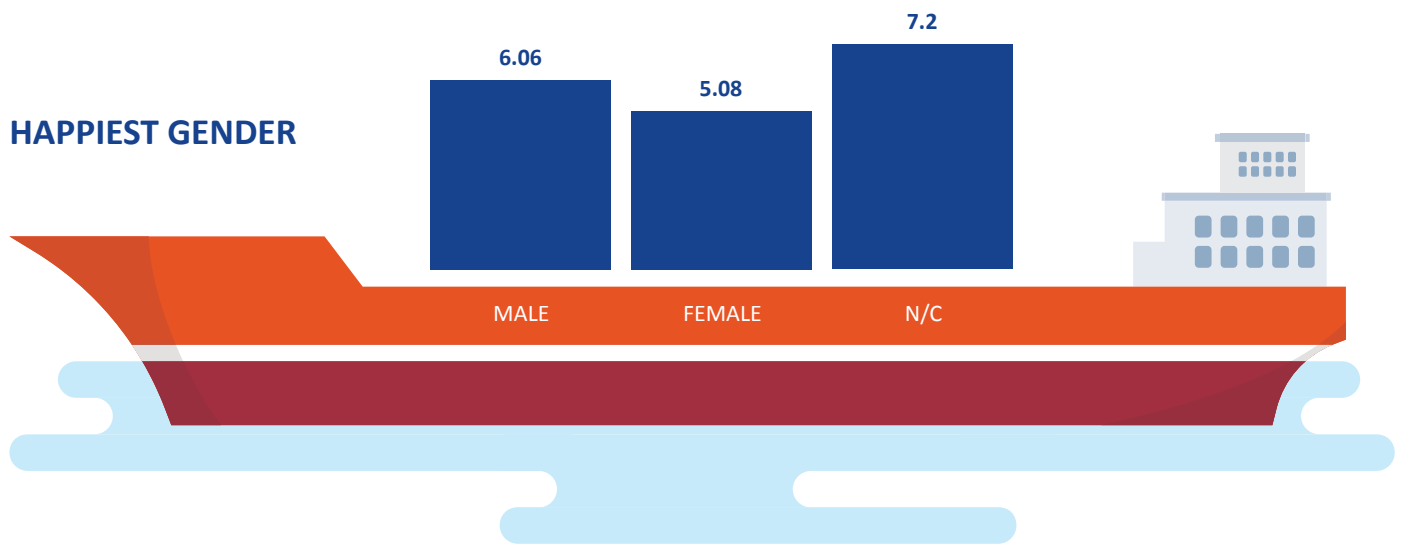
Executive Summary

This time around the combined figure across ten key questions is **6.31/10**. Down from **6.69** in 2018. Across our new website and survey function, as well as social media channels and by those visiting our centres, we were contacted by more than 2000 seafarers.

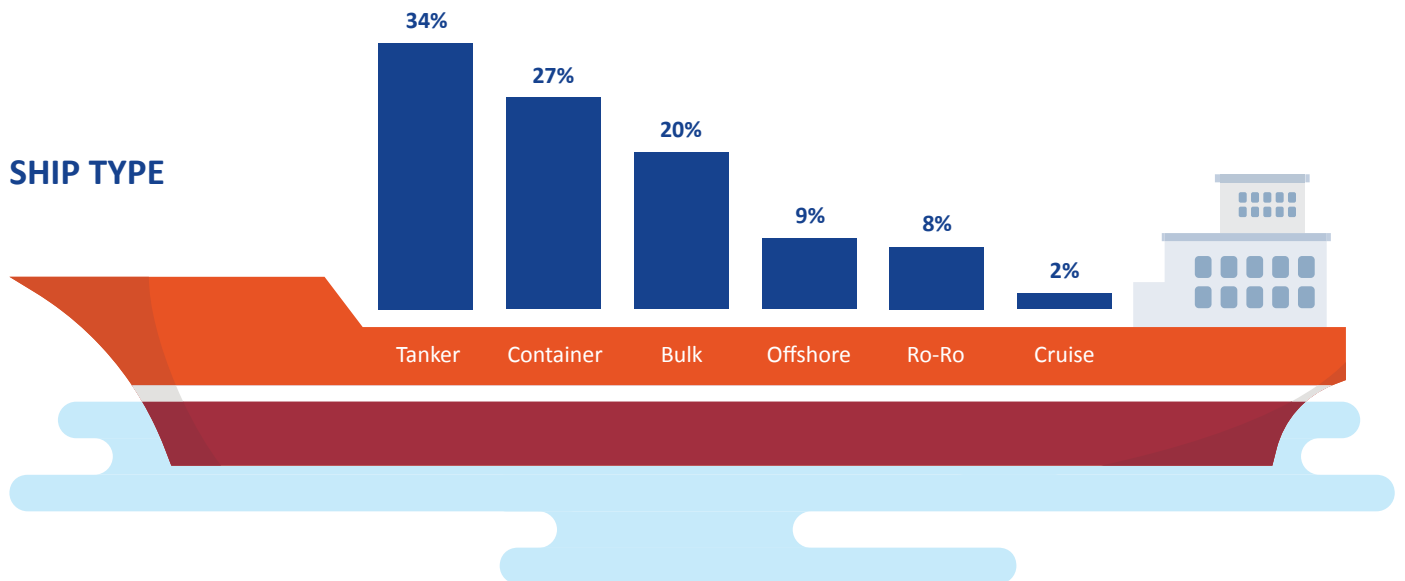
GENDER BALANCE

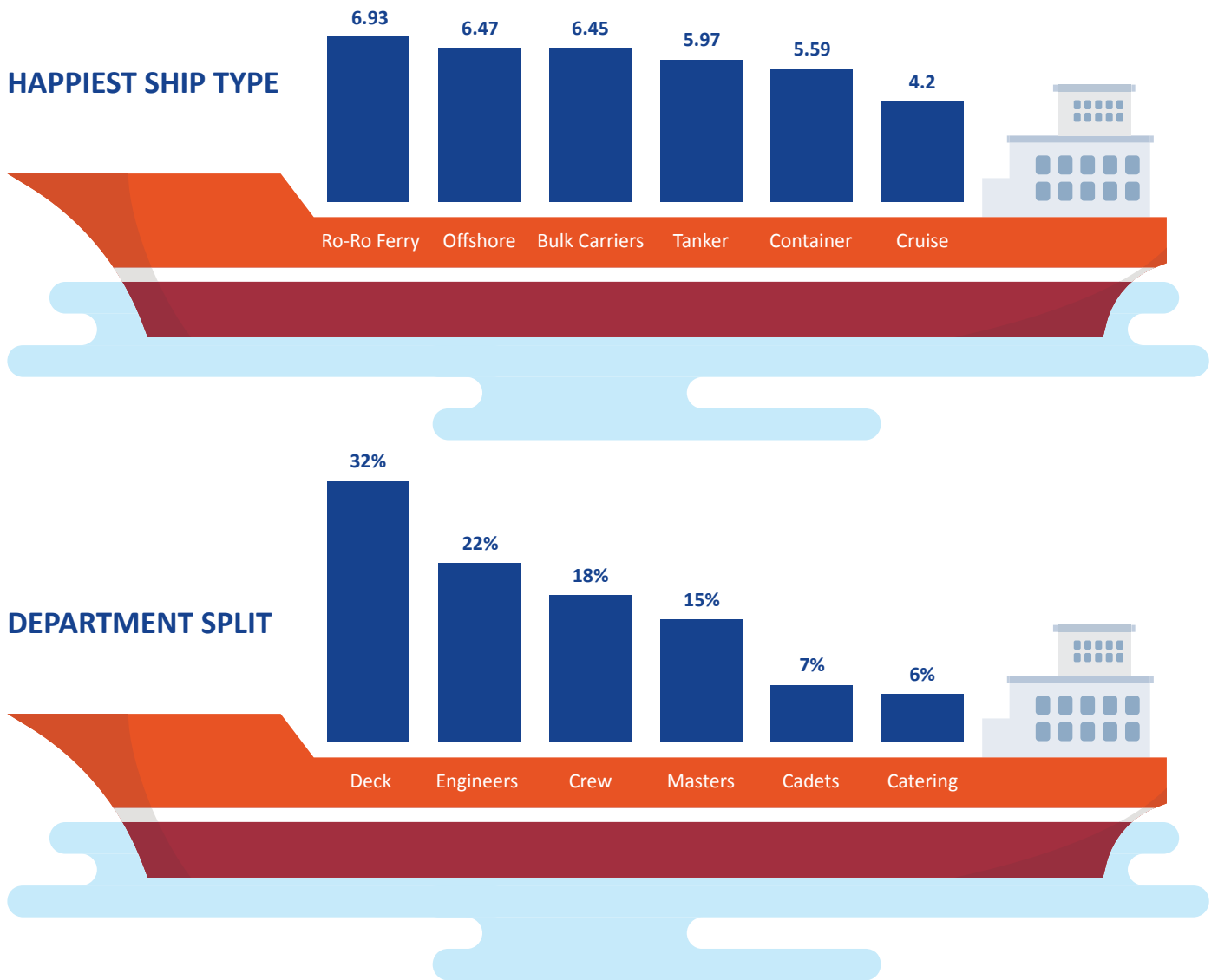


HAPPIEST GENDER



SHIP TYPE





How happy generally when at sea? -

6.03 ↓ from 6.72

General happiness levels have fallen this quarter, and there have been some vociferous responses. Seafarers have bemoaned a lack of government support for their profession, while others stressed what is becoming a long standing commentary, that of concerns about a lack of social life, and limited access to entertainment and the internet.

Time and again seafarers talked of the significance of others when it came to their general happiness. They suffer the effects of feeling far from home and their loved ones, and

this is either soothed or exacerbated depending on their relationships onboard. Surrounded by good people and supported by those ashore makes for a happy ship. There were a number who felt underappreciated, but over worked – which seems a toxic combination.

For all the fact the data fell, there were respondents who proudly spoke of the fact that they “Love to sail”, and that “sea life is a good life”.

How happy with your work load? -

5.99 ↓ from 6.51

A big fall was seen in the data around work load. Once again, excessive paperwork was the target of a number of respondents' frustration. Seafarers felt that far from assisting, often checklists and paperwork meant they were actually less effective in achieving goals.

They complained that the paperwork created unnecessary stress. This was particularly prevalent when vessels were engaged in constant changes in trade, especially with spot cargoes involved. There was also some frustration with companies who were continuing to have paper charts for navigation back up. One navigator spoke of the frustration at having two functioning ECDIS, but also paper charts as well.

6-on-6 off watch systems continue to be a cause of dissatisfaction and annoyance. There were numerous issues relating to hours of rest, and even Masters' claimed that if they logged their time correctly then there would be constant violations.

How happy about the training you receive? -

6.63 ↑ from 6.62

The only data set which showed any upward movement was training – and even then the movement was marginal. However, we did receive numerous positive comments about career/development opportunities, and the importance of training.

There was some concern expressed when it came to payment of courses. A number of recipients felt let down by the fact that their company would pay for mandatory courses, but would often neglect simple training courses such as working at height. The criticism was that this approach actually undermined the safety regime and the permit to work system onboard.

A number of junior officers said how much they appreciated the time and attention that senior staff gave them, and they praised them for sharing their knowledge and encouraging others in the profession. However, there was criticism of some training institutes ashore, as they were criticised for not providing courses or teaching which adequately reflected what "really happens onboard".

How happy about interaction with other crew on board? - 6.95 ↓ from 7.08

There is a real clamour for more social activities onboard, and seafarers repeatedly called for the most to be made of any welfare budgets that vessels have. This, it was stated, “has a big impact on crew morale”.

The impact of social events cannot be underestimated, seafarers repeatedly talked about how important it was to have events, such as BBQs, movie nights, table tennis or even videogame competitions. These opportunities to break the monotony, to chat with others and to break free of the work and cabin cycle are so important.

The alternative is for crew to be isolated, to retreat to their cabins and to potentially spiral into mental health issues. Watchkeepers keep their twilight hours, while for day workers seafarers said that all too often cabin doors closed at 1730, and people were barely seen again until 0730.

This is particularly problematic for those seafarers who are the only nationality within a mixed crew. A number of seafarers in this situation talked about the loneliness they faced and how difficult it was to get through their trip.

How happy about access to shore leave? - 6.16 ↓ from 6.54

Time constraints, workload and even commercial pressures are further eroding the access and opportunities for seafarers to access shore leave. There seems to be disrespect from employers demanding more, while even onboard colleagues do not seemingly like to see others get ashore.

One seafarer said it was now standard procedure on his tanker for shore leave to be banned during normal working, only during dry docking and refits were crew allowed off. This is deeply concerning as it goes against both the letter and spirit of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC2006). It is to be hoped that such situations are not becoming the norm.

Resentment is building, and this further eats away the very concept of shore leave. Respondents repeatedly spoke of the extended periods between getting shore, 4 months and even 6 months were mentioned.

The combination of isolated port infrastructure, and rapid turnarounds, means that stays alongside are too short to get the distances needed to go and enjoy time away from the vessel. All this is compounded by the noise and activity onboard, which actually makes catching up on rest difficult.

Those who do get ashore produce markedly higher happiness index responses, and they speak of their enjoyment and appreciation at getting time away to clear their heads and recharge. Shore leave is clearly still a vital component of wellbeing and mental health.

WAGES / FOOD / FIT AND HEALTHY / CONTACT WITH FAMILY

How happy about wages/salary? -

6.3 ↓ from 6.6

There appears to be a grudging sense that while pay should be higher, it is often more than many seafarers would receive back in their home nations.

Worryingly though, there were multiple responses from seafarers who claimed that they were becoming increasingly concerned as to whether they would get paid at all. One seafarer stated, “we did not take salary for last two months and soon we need to the next month. We don’t know if the company will pay. We are 50 crew on board the fleet, and plus the other around 35 crew on leave”. This is the issue of non-payment of wages live from those suffering it.

Imagine the pain, torment and frustration, and also the fear of telling those back home that money may not be paid. It is reprehensible for seafarers to be exploited in this way, kept in the dark and made to worry and be stressed.

How happy about the food on board? -

6.47 ↓ from 6.73

A good cook makes all the difference, and those who scored highest on the Happiness Index about food, all said that it was down to the excellence of the catering staff.

Those caterers who are able to turn out food for mixed nationality crews, who make meals that taste fresh and tasty, well they are the “heroes of the ship”. While cooks who repeatedly make unhealthy meals and provide only deep fried or fatty/sugar loaded options, they are the focus of much frustration. There was even a suggestion that deep-fat fryers should be removed from all ship galleys.

Bad food is terrible for crew morale and happiness, and the impacts of it are felt across all aspects of the Index. It seems that time and again diet, food quality and catering proficiency are foundations for a happy crew.

Poor quality provisions, lack of adequate consideration for different cultures, and a lack of imagination and diversity of choices makes meal times a hit or miss.

How happy about your ability to keep fit and healthy on board? - 6.29 ↓ from 6.64

There is so little “free” time onboard now, that it is very difficult to get into a positive exercise timetable. With pressures of work, a need to rest and to do other important tasks, there just do not seem to be enough hours in the day for many of the seafarers who responded. While for others, the lack of equipment was more of a barrier.

Rather strangely there were a couple of responses which said that sometimes older officers “frowned” upon gym usage. It would be troubling to think that colleagues at sea would not support each other in getting fit.

One respondent said the vessel didn’t have a gym, but as it was a tall ship it was basically like a “big climbing frame”, so exercise was easy to come by. Those not on such vessels do say that it is getting ever harder to exercise. One stated, “With little free time and always an email asking answers from various places and persons in the world, agent, charterer, owner, there is no free time for fitness. Accommodations are designed to be as small as possible. Companies do not want to spend on equipment.”

How happy about contact with family when at sea? - 6.79 ↓ from 7.12

Shipboard connectivity is a constant focus for seafarers, and yet again as with every Seafarers Happiness Index report, those with cost effective and good quality access are far happier than those without. Phone calls are still used, but less frequently – and many seafarers felt that they would rather use any data allowance for messaging or online activities.

Where the provisions of connectivity are not felt to be good or cost effective, then seafarers place the blame squarely on the company. There were repeated versions of the comment that “the company does not want to pay for decent equipment”. So this is clearly a serious and contentious issue.

Again, seafarers were incredulous when companies do not invest or provide them with the access that they crave, and are very grateful when they do have internet connection onboard.

WELFARE FACILITIES

How happy with welfare facilities when you are ashore? - 5.53 ↓ from 6.36

There was a rather mixed element to the responses to this question, indeed some marked their scores lower as their shore leave was not forthcoming, so they were unable to access any local centres. Not being able to use a centre is a source of immense frustration for seafarers.

In the main, the respondents are positive about centres. They are made to feel welcome, and value the sense of belonging, the access to support and also the things they wish to buy or use. While some centres were praised directly, there was frustration that many smaller ports do not nowadays have centres for crews to visit.

There was also some frustration from watchkeepers who felt that there was nowhere for them to go to when their shifts finished. A number of respondents said that finishing their shift at night gave them no alternative but to go back to their cabin, as there was nowhere to go.

The Mission to Seafarers is working hard to address the issues, whether that involves ensuring there is sufficient access to centres or working to ensure that seafarers can access shore leave. While of course, we continue to visit vessels and meet with crews every day all over the world. We take the Seafarers Happiness Index findings seriously and are engaging with industry on the issues being raised. We are concerned to see that the data shows a drop in overall happiness, and so to across almost all areas of concern.

Conclusion

Overall Seafarers Happiness Index figures have shown a rise, and while it is obviously early days, it is positive to see growth across various key issues.

A host of new concerns emerged from the responses, and it was surprising to hear complaints about a lack of government support for their profession. Something which was not only limited to one or two nationalities, so there is a definite sense that administrations need to address their relationships with seafarers.

Regarding onboard issues, long standing concerns were voiced again. Seafarers spoke about a lack of social life, and limited access to entertainment and the internet. Shore leave was again a bone of contention, as was work load and paper work.

The positives are still there to be heard, and time and again seafarers spoke of their pride in the job. Being a seafarer is a proud noble profession still. Those who were scored as being happiest were those who had positive relationships with those onboard, who had internet access, good food, time and ability to exercise and were able to get ashore now and again.

It may seem blindingly simple, but unless these areas are addressed and improved, then seafarers will not be happy in their jobs, and will either switch companies, or perhaps leave the sea.

We urgently need more data, and to hear the stories of more seafarers...and for those who have already done so, to share again. We are building new online capabilities and applications to process the data, to make sure the voices at sea are heard. So please visit www.happyatsea.org to find out more, and to complete the survey. We also want to get these reports spread far and wide across shipping, so please do pass this on.

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