

HTW Committee – Human Element, Training
and Watchkeeping
2025 Mock Session **FINAL ROUND**
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SEAFARER MENTAL HEALTH: GLOBAL CRISIS, POLICY INNOVATION, AND IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

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SUMMARY

Executive summary: This research addresses the critical mental health crisis among global seafarers, presenting a comprehensive framework for “Happy & Healthy Seafarers.” It examines alarming prevalence rates, identifies policy and implementation gaps, and proposes a robust multi-phase strategy leveraging developed nations’ strengths to effect global reform.

Strategic direction: Aligns maritime mental health policies with global safety and sustainability goals, promoting international cooperation, capacity building, and evidence-based interventions.

Output: Policy recommendations including STCW amendments, digital health integration, a €500M International Welfare Fund, and clear monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

Action to be taken:

- The committee requests **IMO**, its member states, and maritime stakeholders to formally adopt the proposed 10-year framework for seafarer well-being.
- **Core Proposal:** STCW reform, telemedicine, and sustainable funding—are fully detailed in **Section II** of the paper.

Related documents: STCW Table A-VI/1-4(PSSR), Resolution MSC.535(107), HTW 11/6/24, HTW 11/INF.15, MSC/Circ.1014, IMO Model Course 1.28-MH

I. Executive Summary and Crisis Quantification (The Basic Idea)

1. **Sectoral Context:** Maritime transport underpins ~90% of global trade, yet exhibits a quantified mental-health crisis necessitating **mandatory regulatory intervention** by developed maritime states. The framework elevates psychological safety from voluntary welfare guidance to an **auditable operational standard**.
2. **Epidemiological Risk Profile:**
 - **Depression:** 25–30% prevalence ($\approx 4\times$ higher than general populations; e.g., 6% in Germany).
 - **Anxiety:** 17–26% prevalence vs. ~5% in land-based industries.
 - **Suicide:** 20% report suicidal ideation; suicide = ~6.5% of seafarer deaths.
3. **Operational & Economic Impact:**
 - Depressed seafarers are **2× more injury-prone** (22–24% vs. 10–11%).
 - Vessel diversions linked to mental-health incidents average **US\$180K per event**.
4. **Quantifiable Stressor Correlation:**
 - **Noise/Vibration exposure:** regression $\beta = 0.23\text{--}0.24$.
 - **Bullying/harassment:** regression $\beta \approx 0.26\text{--}0.30$.
 - Strong statistical linkage to depression and anxiety confirms mental health as a **systemic operational failure**, warranting **regulatory equivalence with traditional safety risks**.

II. Technical and Regulatory Mechanisms (The Proposal)

This paper is proposed to **Correspondence Group of IMO**.

The framework mandates three interconnected technical and regulatory interventions focused on compliance, infrastructure, and sustainable financing.

1. **Mandatory Regulatory Reform (STCW):**
 - Amend Regulation VI/1 to make **MHA/MHFA compulsory, auditable competencies**.
 - Operationalize via **IMO Model Courses 1.43 (MHA) & 1.44 (Crisis Intervention)**, ensuring standardized, multilingual, competency-based delivery.
2. **Digital Health & Telemedicine Infrastructure:**
 - Mandate **fleetwide digital health systems** guaranteeing universal access.
 - Deploy **24/7 MTAS (Maritime Telephone Assistance Service)** with **90% SOLAS vessel (>5,000 GT) coverage by 2030**.

- Integrate **≥1,500 kbps uplink bandwidth** into ISM Code to enable HD-level clinical tele consults.
 - Require **ISO-27001-compliant e-Health records**, with integration ensuring **~85% incident resolution without in-port intervention**.
3. **Sustainable Financial Mechanisms:**
- Establish **€500M International Welfare Fund (2025–2035)**.
 - Finance via **€0.75/ton CO₂ levy** on marine fuel at OECD ports, embedding seafarer welfare in climate-finance/Just Transition policy.
 - Incentivize compliance with **≤15% tonnage tax relief** and **8–12% insurer premium reductions**, producing **>US\$1.3B savings per decade**.

III. Implementation and Monitoring (Action Required)

1. The framework utilizes a strategic 10-year phased roadmap (2025–2035) and a rigorous Monitoring **Phased Implementation (2025–2035)**:
 - **Phase 1 – Foundation (2025–2027)**: Validation of IMO Model Courses in pilot academies; establishment of Welfare Fund governance.
 - **Phase 2 – Rollout (2027–2030)**: Enforcement of STCW amendments; initial deployment of telemedicine systems on SOLAS vessels.
 - **Phase 3 – Optimization (2030–2035)**: Achieve 90% global fleet coverage with continuous research-driven refinements.
2. **Quality Assurance and M&E (Monitoring & Evaluation)**: Standardized clinical outcome tracking through internationally validated tools:
 - **PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire-9)** -for depression prevalence/severity,
 - **GAD-7 (Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7)** -for anxiety incidence,
 - **WHO-5 (WHO’s-Five Well-Being Index)**-for subjective well-being.
3. **Performance Benchmarks (by 2035)**:
 - 40% reduction in depression,
 - 50% reduction in anxiety,
 - 60% reduction in suicide rates.
4. **Data Accountability**: Mandatory annual reporting integrated into IMO’s **GISIS (Global Integrated Shipping Information System)** via a new *Seafarer Mental Health Dashboard*, ensuring transparent global oversight.
5. **Strategic Impact**: Positions maritime governance to mitigate systemic occupational risk, safeguard human capital, and reinforce long-term fleet resilience.

IV. Action requested of the Committee

The committee requests **IMO**, its member states, and maritime stakeholders to formally adopt the proposed 10-year framework for seafarer well-being.

Core Proposal: STCW reform, telemedicine, and sustainable funding—are fully detailed in **Section II** of the paper.