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WORK PROGRAMME

Proposal for a new output for the review and revision of the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (resolution A.918(22))

Submitted by China and IMLA

SUMMARY

Executive summary: This document proposes a new output for the review and revision of the *IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases* (resolution A.918(22)) to accommodate the changes in maritime communications over the past two decades, with a view to enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of communications on board ships, as well as between ships and shore and ships.

Strategic direction, if applicable: 6

Output: Not applicable

Action to be taken: Paragraph 24

Related documents: Resolutions A.918(22) and A.1158(32); MSC.1/Circ.1610; NCSR 9/23/2 and NCSR 9/24

Introduction

1 This document is submitted in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 4.6 of the *Organization and method of work of the Maritime Safety Committee and the Marine Environment Protection Committee and their subsidiary bodies* (MSC-MEPC.1/Circ.5/Rev.4).

Background

2 Effective communication is essential to the safety of navigation at sea, and standardized marine communication phrases and terms can help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of communication and reduce the risk of misunderstanding. The *IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases* (SMCP) adopted by the twenty-second session of the IMO Assembly through resolution A.918(22) covers the standard English communication phrases in the relevant safety aspects laid down in the 1974 SOLAS Convention and the 1978 STCW Convention. Over the past years, SMCP has played an active role in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of shore-to-ship, ship-to-shore, ship-to-ship and onboard communications and the safety of navigation at sea.

3 SOLAS regulation V/14.4 stipulates that for ships to which chapter I applies, English shall be used on the bridge as the working language for bridge-to-bridge and bridge-to-shore safety communications as well as for communications on board between the pilot and bridge watchkeeping personnel, unless those directly involved in the communication speak a common language other than English. Following the adoption of the 1995 amendments to the STCW Code, the use and understanding of the IMO SMCP is the minimum standard of competence for officers in charge of a navigational watch on ships of 500 gross tonnage or more.

4 It is also noted that resolution A.918(22) authorizes the Committee to keep SMCP under review and to amend them when necessary.

5 The Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communications and Search and Rescue (NCSR), at its ninth session, noted the information in document NCSR 9/23/2 (China and IMLA) on a proposed revision and update of the IMO SMCP, taking into account changes related to the marine environment and maritime communications over the past two decades, and invited interested Member States and international organizations to contact the submitters directly in case of any comments and/or support for the proposal, noting that a new output would be required to be approved by the Committee.

IMO's objectives

6 This proposal is in line with the mission statement of IMO "to promote safe, secure, environmentally sound, efficient and sustainable shipping through cooperation" in the *Revised Strategic Plan for the Organization for the six-year period 2018 to 2023* (resolution A.1149(32)).

7 The proposal is also in line with the description of strategic direction (SD) 6, as contained in paragraph 34 of the annex to in resolution A.1149(32), that "In its role as the global regulator of shipping, IMO will build on work already completed to address the human element and will take the human element into account in the review, development and implementation of new and existing requirements".

Need

8 Two decades after the adoption of SMCP, the navigation environment has experienced significant changes. First, with the rapid development of the global shipping economy, the modernization of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) and the implementation of the e-navigation strategy have resulted in the upgrading of shipborne communication and navigation equipment and technology. Secondly, a number of international conventions, rules and standards that have a significant impact on maritime safety and are closely related to SMCP have been revised accordingly, such as SOLAS, MARPOL, ISPS, VTS Guidelines, etc. Thirdly, with the increasing number of human activities at sea, the content of maritime safety information transmission is constantly enriched. Therefore, the existing SMCP can no longer fully meet the actual communication needs in modern navigation and it is necessary to update the relevant terms and phrases, delete obsolete ones and optimize part of the structure of SMCP as appropriate to accommodate the changes in navigation environment and communication needs, make it more user-friendly, and reduce the risks caused by poor communication or misunderstanding.

Analysis of the issue

GMDSS modernization and e-navigation strategy implementation

9 In the past two decades, with the modernization of the GMDSS, a large number of new marine communication terms have emerged, such as AIS-SART, Digital Navigational Data System (NAVDAT), VHF Data Exchange System (VDES), and some commonly used terms have taken on new meanings in addition to previous definitions.

10 The general terms contain many terms and phrases of different types used in different scenarios which are not easy for users to find or access. It is recommended to organize and classify the SMCP terms into sub-categories according to major maritime services and/or typical scenarios to improve user-friendliness.

11 With the development of radiocommunication and medical technologies, telemedical assistance service has been improving day by day. In Maritime Service 9 – Telemedical Assistance Service (TMAS) of the *Initial descriptions of Maritime Services in the context of e-navigation* (MSC.1/Circ.1610), it is proposed to implement standardized telemedical services such as monitoring the health status of the patients, remote consultations, etc. through the Internet.

12 Therefore, a standardization of the TMAS phrases will help enhance the quality of telemedical practices and treatment. SMCP contains only nine phrases related to requesting medical assistance (A1/1.3), which can no longer fully meet the needs of TMAS, and some phrases, such as "Radio Medical Guidance" (A1/1.3.2.1) and "Radio Medical Guidance on High Frequency Channels/Frequency Arrangements" (A1/1.3.3) are no longer suitable considering the development of TMAS practice. When transfer is required, whether it is ship-to-ship transfer, helicopter transfer or ship-to-shore transfer, consideration should be given not only to the cost of services and the deployment of relevant medical resources, but also to the risks taken by rescuers to save people at sea. In this context, MRCCs, shipowners and medical staff all need to give specific medical advice or make decisions based on their understanding of the basic conditions of the patients.

13 In this respect, it is suggested the *International Medical Guide for Ships* jointly issued by IMO, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), in particular chapter 25 on External assistance, providing guidance on medical advice, helicopter evacuation, ship-to-ship transfer of doctor or patient, and referral information to accompany evacuated patients, should be taken into account.

Amendments to the relevant conventions and regulations

14 In recent years, a couple of maritime safety-related conventions and regulations have come into force, such as the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments, 2004, the ISPS Code, the amendments to MARPOL 73/78, etc., which have increased the complexity of marine communications. Greenhouse gas emission reduction and the development of green shipping have been put high on the agenda, gradually broadening the content of marine communication, for example, the content on the use of low-sulphur fuel or LNG fuel to meet an Emission Control Area (ECA) requirement and the use of shore power, etc.

15 VTS communication is an important part of SMCP (Part A1/6). With the development of VTS, the consistency and applicability of VTS communications worldwide have always been the focus of the shipping industry. IALA has released the *VTS Communications* (R1012) in January 2018 and version 2.0 of the *VTS Voice Communications and Phraseology* (G1132) in

June 2021, respectively. In addition, the thirty-second session of the IMO Assembly, in 2021, adopted the revised *Guidelines for vessel traffic services* (resolution A.1158(32)), which deleted the content on the types of VTS service, and instead highlighted the VTS services in typical scenarios such as timely and relevant information provision, vessel traffic monitoring and management, and responding to unsafe and developing situations. Part A1/6 of SMCP, which was developed based on resolution A.857(20), now revoked by resolution A.1158(32), needs to be updated accordingly to be consistent with the newly adopted VTS-related IALA guidelines and resolution A.1158(32).

16 Besides, SMCP is largely based on relevant conventions, resolutions, standards, circulars, guidelines or manuals. Some references are outdated, for example, the IAMSAR Manual (1998) cited in A1/1.2.3 and B2/6 has been amended to the 2019 edition and resolution A.851(20) on *General Principles for Ship Reporting Systems and Ship Reporting Requirements, including Guidelines for Reporting Incidents Involving Dangerous Goods, Harmful Substances and/or Marine Pollutants* cited in A1/6 has been amended by resolution MEPC.138(53). Some new references such as the *International Medical Guide for Ships* and the *VTS Voice Communications and Phraseology* (IALA G1132) may need to be added. A new appendix is recommended to be developed to list the SMCP normative reference documents and their version information, thus facilitating the use and maintenance of SMCP.

Changes in the transmission of maritime safety information

17 Maritime safety information (MSI) is an important part of SMCP (Part A1/3). With the development of marine activities, the types and content of MSI are also increasing. In this respect, the phrases and terms related to navigation warnings contained in SMCP are insufficient to cover the scenarios specified in the *Revised Joint IMO/IHO/WMO Manual on Maritime Safety Information (MSI)* (MSC.1/Circ.1310/Rev.1) and it is recommended that navigational warnings in relation to large-scale recreational activities and sports, as well as designated areas, should be added. The sub-category of large-scale recreational activities and sports may include water exhibition, regatta, aqua show, etc. while the designated area sub-category may include area to be avoided (e.g. navigation/anchoring, pipeline/submarine cable area, dangerous mine area, anchorage, dumping area, cultivation/entertainment area, fairway, ship reporting point (RP), traffic control area, etc). At the same time, it was noted that the Correspondence Group on Dissemination of MSI and SAR-related Information, established at NCSR 9, also identified the text of SMCP where improvements could be made, which were proposed to be considered under the proposed new output.

Analysis of implications

18 The checklist for identifying administrative requirements is provided in annex 1.

Benefits

19 The revision of SMCP will provide the crew with updated and improved maritime communication phrases by taking into account the continuous development of navigation practices, improve the efficiency and effectiveness of onboard, ship-to-shore, ship-to-ship communications, and reduce the risks of misunderstanding, thus contributing to the enhancement of maritime navigation safety.

Industry standards

20 IALA has developed the *VTS Voice Communications and Phraseology* (IALA G1132), which should be taken into account when updating the IMO SMCP, so as to ensure the coherence and consistency in marine communications.

Output

21 The proposed output is "Review and revision of the Standard Maritime Communication Terminology (SMCP) (resolution A.918(22))".

Human element

22 The checklist for considering and addressing the human element for revision of resolution A.918(22) is set out in annex 2.

Urgency

23 It is recommended that this proposed new output be given sufficient priority and be included in the 2024-2025 biennial agenda of the NCSR Sub-Committee, with two sessions needed to complete the work.

Action requested of the Committee

24 The Committee is invited to consider the information provided above and endorse the request for a new output as proposed.

ANNEX 1

CHECKLIST FOR IDENTIFYING ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS

This checklist should be used when preparing the analysis of implications required in submissions of proposals for inclusion of outputs. For the purpose of this analysis, the term "administrative requirement" is defined in accordance with resolution A.1043(27), as an obligation arising from a mandatory IMO instrument to provide or retain information or data.

Instructions:

- (A) If the answer to any of the questions below is **YES**, the Member State proposing an output should provide supporting details on whether the requirements are likely to involve start-up and/or ongoing costs. The Member State should also give a brief description of the requirement and, if possible, provide recommendations for further work, e.g. would it be possible to combine the activity with an existing requirement?
- (B) If the proposal for the output does not contain such an activity, answer **NR** (not required).
- (C) For any administrative requirement, full consideration should be given to electronic means of fulfilling the requirement in order to alleviate administrative burdens.

1. Notification and reporting? Reporting certain events before or after the event has taken place, e.g. notification of voyage, statistical reporting for IMO Members	NR <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Start-up <input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing
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Description of administrative requirement(s) and method of fulfilling it: (if the answer is yes)

2. Record keeping? Keeping statutory documents up to date, e.g. records of accidents, records of cargo, records of inspections, records of education	NR <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Start-up <input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing
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Description of administrative requirement(s) and method of fulfilling it: (if the answer is yes)

3. Publication and documentation? Producing documents for third parties, e.g. warning signs, registration displays, publication of results of testing	NR <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Start-up <input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing
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Description of administrative requirement(s) and method of fulfilling it: (if the answer is yes)

4. Permits or applications? Applying for and maintaining permission to operate, e.g. certificates, classification society costs	NR <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Start-up <input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing
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Description of administrative requirement(s) and method of fulfilling it: (if the answer is yes)

5. Other identified requirements?	NR <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Start-up <input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing
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Description of administrative requirement(s) and method of fulfilling it: (if the answer is yes)

The output aims to revise resolution A.918(22). If the new version of the SMCP comes out, Member States will be required to organize the related training to enhance the seafarers' practical language skill and competences. Full consideration should be given to electronic means of training so as to alleviate administrative burdens.

ANNEX 2

CHECKLIST FOR CONSIDERING AND ADDRESSING THE HUMAN ELEMENT

	1 Question	2 Yes/ No	3 IMO references	4 Considerations	5 Instructions
	Workload		Other relevant references may be added Strikeout references that are not relevant	If answer to question is "yes" identify considerations. If answer is "no" make proper justification	Identify how human element considerations should be addressed in the output
1	Does the "output" affect workload?	NO		The output aims to revise resolution A.918(22), therefore it will not affect workload.	
1.1	On board, especially in the already intensive phases of the voyage and port operations to:	NO	Revised guidelines for the operational implementation of the International Safety Management (ISM) Code by Companies (MSC-MEPC.7/Circ.8) Guidelines on fatigue (MSC.1/Circ.1598) Principles of minimum safe manning (resolution A.1047(27)) Guidelines for the investigation of accidents where fatigue may have been an issue (MSC/Circ.621)		

	1 Question	2 Yes/ No	3 IMO references	4 Considerations	5 Instructions
1.1.1	Operations including navigation, cargo and engineering	NO			
1.1.2	Maintenance of the ships structure and its equipment	NO			
1.1.3	Onboard administration in support of the ships' management systems	NO			
1.1.4	Onboard administration related to regulation involving flag States, classification societies, port State and other bodies such as charterers and port authorities	NO			
1.1.5	Increased workload or time pressure on personnel if involved in implementation of changes prior to the implementation date	NO			
1.2	Ashore, in a manner that would affect the ships operation to:	NO			
1.2.1	Companies' administration	NO			
1.2.2	Flag State, port State and classification societies administration such that certification and other processes are compromised or delayed	NO			

	1 Question	2 Yes/ No	3 IMO references	4 Considerations	5 Instructions
	Decision-making		<i>Other relevant references may be added</i> <i>Strikeout references that are not relevant</i>	<i>If answer to question is "yes" identify considerations.</i> <i>If answer is "no" make proper justification</i>	<i>Identify how human element considerations should be addressed in the output</i>
2	Does the "output" impact decision-making on board the ship?	NO		The output aims to revise resolution A.918 (22), therefore it will not impact decision-making. On the contrary, this output will improve seafarers' confidence in communication.	
2.1	By confusion with existing requirements and regulations	NO			
2.2	By changing responsibilities as laid out in the ISM Code	NO			
2.3	By creating complexity in its implementation and/or in the safety management systems	NO			
2.4	By requiring increased mental effort, such as the need to find, transform and analyze data or result in the need to make judgements based on incomplete information	NO			
2.5	By limiting the time available to establish situational awareness, decide, communicate (possibly across time zones) or check	NO			
2.6	By increasing reliance on judgement and administrative controls to manage major risks such as oil spills and collisions	NO			

	1 Question	2 Yes/ No	3 IMO references	4 Considerations	5 Instructions
	Living and working environment		Other relevant references may be added Strikeout references that are not relevant	If answer to question is "yes" identify considerations. If answer is "no" make proper justification	Identify how human element considerations should be addressed in the output
3	Does the "output" affect the living and working environment?	NO	Guidelines on the basic elements of a shipboard occupational health and safety programme (MSC-MEPC.2/Circ.3) Guidelines on fatigue (MSC.1/Circ.1598)	The output aims to revise resolution A.918(22), therefore it will not improve the living and working environment directly.	
3.1	By interfering with existing arrangements for abandonment, fire-fighting and other emergency plans or procedures	NO			
3.2	By introducing new materials that could create an explosion, fire, environmental or occupational health risk	NO			
3.3	By introducing new high energy sources such as high-voltage and high-pressure fluids	NO			
3.4	By affecting access or egress and causing lack of ventilation in working spaces	NO			
3.5	By affecting the habitability of accommodation spaces owing to noise, vibration, temperatures, dust and other contaminants	NO			

	1 Question	2 Yes/ No	3 IMO references	4 Considerations	5 Instructions
	Operation and maintenance		Other relevant references may be added Strikeout references that are not relevant	If answer to question is "yes" identify considerations. If answer is "no" make proper justification	Identify how human element considerations should be addressed in the output
4	Does the "output" affect the operation and maintenance of the ship, its structure or systems and equipment?	NO	Revised guidelines for the operational implementation of the International Safety Management (ISM) Code by Companies (MSC-MEPC.7/Circ.8) Guidelines for bridge equipment and systems, their arrangement and integration (BES) (SN.1/Circ.288) Principles of minimum safe manning (resolution A.1047(27)) Issues to be considered when introducing new technology on board ships (MSC/Circ.1091) Guideline on software quality assurance and human-centred design for e-navigation (MSC.1/Circ.1512) Guidelines for the standardization of user interface design for navigation equipment (MSC.1/Circ.1609)	The output aims to revise resolution A.918(22), therefore it is not related to operation and maintenance.	

	1 Question	2 Yes/ No	3 IMO references	4 Considerations	5 Instructions
4.1	By introducing equipment that the user may find difficult to operate or maintain or may be unreliable	NO			
4.2	By introducing new and/or novel technology, or technology that changes the role of the person	NO			
4.3	By introducing requirements for new competencies and roles	NO			
4.4	By overloading existing infrastructure such as power generation and ventilation systems	NO			
4.5	By poor integration with existing systems and controls	NO			
4.6	By introducing new and unfamiliar operations/procedures	NO			
4.7	By introducing new and unfamiliar operating interfaces?	NO			
4.8	By introducing risks to the ship during any modifications required prior to the implementation date of the output	NO			

	1 Question	2 Yes/ No	3 IMO references	4 Considerations	5 Instructions
Measures to address the human element			<i>Other relevant references may be added</i> <i>Strikeout references that are not relevant</i>	<i>If answer to question is "yes" identify considerations.</i> <i>If answer is "no" make proper justification</i>	<i>Identify how human element considerations should be addressed in the output</i>
5	Does the "output" require changes to:	YES	Shipboard technical operating and maintenance manuals (MSC.1/Circ.1253) Revised guidelines for the operational implementation of the International Safety Management (ISM) Code by Companies (MSC-MEPC.7/Circ.8)	The output aims to revise resolution A.918(22), therefore it can help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of communication, reduce the risk of misunderstanding, and promote safety of navigation at sea. Accordingly, it requires Member States to organize relevant training to improve the language skills and abilities of the seafarers.	
5.1	Training	YES		Member States are required to organize related training to enhance the seafarers' practical language skill and competences.	Full consideration should be given to electronic means of training so as to alleviate administrative burdens.
5.2	Practical skill development and competences	YES		If the new version of SMCP comes out, seafarers should develop their language skill based upon this output.	The competent institutions or schools should update their teaching materials.
5.3	Operating, management and/or maintenance procedures	NO			
5.4	Information/manuals for operation and maintenance	NO			
5.5	Spares outfit	NO			
5.6	Occupational safety requirements, including guarding and PPE	NO			
5.7	Shore support	NO			