



The Canadian Merchant Service Guild

A NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MASTERS - MATES - PILOTS - ENGINEERS AND OTHER MARINE OFFICERS

La Guilde de la Marine Marchande du Canada

ASSOCIATION NATIONALE DES CAPITAINES - OFFICIERS DE PONT - PILOTES - MÉCANICIENS ET AUTRES OFFICIERS MARINS

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Blue Economy Strategy Engagement Paper

Submission by
The Canadian Merchant Service Guild

1. ABOUT THE CANADIAN MERCHANT SERVICE GUILD

The Canadian Merchant Service Guild is a national association of ships' officers, established by an Act of Parliament in 1919, updated in 1981. The objectives of the Guild are to keep Canada's marine trade routes and waterways safe and efficient, while promoting the social, economic, cultural, educational and material interests of its members. The Guild represents the vast majority of the thousands of ships' officers and marine pilots in Canada's maritime sector.

The Guild negotiates collective agreements on behalf of its members covering every segment of shipping, from offshore supply vessels to tankers, freighters, towboats, lakers, deep sea vessels, passenger ferries and pilotage operations in every part of Canada from Newfoundland to British Columbia. The Guild actively participates in consultations and advisory committees established by government on a wide variety of subjects affecting seafarers, including issues related to marine legislation and regulations.

The Guild is an important voice for the interests of Canadian ships' officers, and advocates for improvements to a host of regulations directly related to the safety of life at sea and the well-being of all seafarers.

2. DEVELOPING THE NECESSARY WORKFORCE AND SKILLS

The *Blue Economy Strategy Engagement Paper* identifies the importance of having the necessary labour force and skills in place to support growth and prosperity.

The Engagement Paper identifies an aging population in sectors such as fishing as a challenge that needs to be addressed. The Guild agrees with this statement, but also confirms that an aging workforce is both a reality and a matter of concern for the entire domestic maritime workforce. The Guild recognizes the risk that this trend could result in a significant shortage of qualified Canadian personnel to meet the requirements to operate the country's domestic shipping fleet.

In cases where qualified Canadians are not available for positions on Canadian-flag vessels, work permits can be issued to foreign nationals to allow them to occupy jobs that would otherwise be filled by Canadian citizens and permanent residents. This has serious consequences for Canada. In the first instance, it means that good jobs are lost to Canadians, and the economic benefit derived from these positions, including tax revenue, is foregone.

Moreover, Canada's merchant marine is a principal source of qualified mariners should the need arise to rapidly expand strategic sea-lift capability for either domestic or international purposes. This source would be gravely compromised from a reduction in seafaring jobs held by Canadians. Such a circumstance could only increase Canada's security risk exposure. Our domestic shipping fleet is also the source for highly skilled and experienced mariners for Canada's pilotage system and for shore-based positions requiring marine expertise in academia and in various government departments and agencies.

Behind the phenomena of an aging workforce in the maritime sector are demographic and cultural shifts affecting Canada's population, reducing the pool of potential candidates for qualified positions onboard vessels. The Guild is committed to working in partnership with employers in the sector, and with the government and marine training schools to develop strategies and programs that encourage and incent a new generation to seek a future at sea. Canada's newly-established Canadian Marine Industry Foundation has been formed as a cooperative effort by the many stakeholders in the marine sector who share the same goals. The Guild participates and contributes to the ongoing work by this Foundation.

Canada's marine training institutes can play a crucial role in helping ensure there is a robust candidate pool for seafaring jobs. Graduates from the seven principal training institutions become officers in the domestic fleet, beginning a career path toward Master or Chief Engineer, a process that takes at least 8 to 10 years of combined sea service and applied education. More can be done to encourage young Canadians to enroll at these institutions and thereafter pursue a career as a mariner.

The marine institutes can also play an important part in upskilling the workforce. The Engagement Paper identifies the challenge of cultivating the right types of skills for Canada's growing blue economy. This challenge could be met, in part, by accelerating the introduction and approval of accessible training modules, in partnership with marine institutes, by which current members of ships' crews could acquire new qualifications as might be needed to maintain and upgrade competency in the face of technological and other changes.

3. DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE

Generally speaking, women and visible minorities have been historically underrepresented in the Canadian marine industry. While this is changing, the pace is much slower than that of the rapidly changing face of the country's population.

The Guild is ready to play its part in both identifying barriers to a more diverse and inclusive workforce, and doing what is possible to eliminate them. Because the Guild is just one participant in a maritime industry that includes many players, collaboration with other stakeholders and government will be required to achieve meaningful results.

4. RESILIENCE

The Blue Economy discussion paper identifies the need to enhance the long-term resilience and competitiveness of businesses in the marine sector. The Guild believes that this question of resilience should include a review of industry readiness to respond to health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. The quality of the sector's responsiveness in this regard can have a direct impact on business continuity. In the case of maritime transportation, this is vital for maintaining an uninterrupted supply chain, ensuring the availability of goods and services to Canadians.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the need to review and improve the process used to designate vaccine priority for essential workers, and vaccine delivery procedures for vessel crews.

While Public Safety Canada classified maritime transportation workers as "essential" for the continued movement of goods and people, and the National Advisory Committee on Immunizations' guidance on key populations for early COVID-19 immunization stated that priority be given to seafarers as essential workers, ships' officers and ships' crews were not accorded such priority by provincial authorities.

Living and working in very close quarters, which is a fact of life for onboard crews, combined with a highly contagious virus, such as COVID-19, is a recipe for disaster. This was illustrated by outbreaks on large vessels on the Great Lakes where the crew became infected, with the inevitable very tragic and disruptive consequences that ensued.

Relevant protocols should be revised to ensure seafarers across Canada are given priority access to a vaccine if similar circumstances were to arise again.

Consideration should also be given to a system that more effectively and more quickly makes a vaccine actually available to a seafaring workforce that is highly mobile and often shipbound and away from home for varying periods of time. Ships' officers and ships' crews are in most cases not able to leave the vessel for a vaccine appointment and face an added challenge if the ship is alongside in a port that is outside their province of residence, as is frequently the case.

The Guild would welcome an opportunity to participate in a review of this matter, always with the goal of ensuring better practices in the event of future similar health emergencies.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the *Blue Economy Strategy Engagement Paper* and welcome further collaboration on the issues discussed in this submission.

Yours truly,

Mark Boucher
National President
Canadian Merchant Service Guild