

Media Release – 31 March 2021

Vaccination lottery for the dry bulk sector

Once again seafarers are falling victim to the lack of focus and joined up thinking from leaders of governments and the maritime industry, which has become apparent during the current on-going crew change crisis. The vaccination lottery that is faced by the industry is beginning to hit the dry bulk sector hardest, says INTERCARGO, the organisation representing the world's quality dry bulk shipowners.

“We are seeing a number of port states suggesting that all crew on board a vessel must be vaccinated as a pre-condition of entering their ports, and indeed insisting on a particular brand of vaccine. This is of course a very serious problem for the industry as a whole, when we consider the high proportion of seafarers that come from developing countries with no access to any vaccine at all,” says Dimitris Fafalios, Chairman of INTERCARGO. “The dry bulk sector is, however, bearing the brunt of this uncertainty due to the nature of its business. Bulk carriers on tramp trading call at many more ports than other shipping sectors and are at the mercy of the nationalized vaccination policy, applying at the port of call.”

He added: “While the world's eyes were on the situation in the Suez Canal, a very real crisis has been unfolding behind the scenes, unnoticed and ignored by the world's media. The UN IMO and global maritime organisations' efforts must permeate not only every area of the shipping industry, but in addition urgent action outside the maritime sphere is needed by all government leaders at the highest level. Co-ordinating a worldwide vaccination programme for seafarers under WHO and making WHO approved vaccinations available to seafarers in their home country is an urgent priority. In addition, universal commitments for collective action are imperative to resolve the humanitarian crisis at sea with crew change, and to keep global trade moving.”

Dry bulk carriers are the workhorses of international shipping, delivering key basic goods and serving the world's essential needs to sustain life and welfare. In the bulk carrier sector, there are close to 12,000 vessels employing over 300,000 seafarers globally, calling at more than 1,500 ports around the world in non-regular (tramp) voyages to even the most remote areas of the globe.

INTERCARGO echoes the recent statements made by IMO Secretary-General Kitack Lim that the issues around vaccination need to be resolved and warning that the crew change crisis is far from over; also, the heads of five UN organizations calling for maritime and air transport workers to be prioritized for COVID-19 vaccination, given their key role in supporting global trade and mobility, which is essential for a sustainable socio-economic recovery. Whilst the numbers of seafarers requiring repatriation after finishing their contracts has declined in recent months there are still around 200,000 seafarers waiting to return to their homes and families. An equal number are waiting on shore to resume their livelihood and keep the world trade going.

Dimitris Fafalios adds: “INTERCARGO is participating in a joint industry Vaccination Taskforce, led by the International Chamber of Shipping, aimed at providing clear solutions and practical guidance in the increasingly complex situation we currently face. The group has produced guidance on the legal, liability and insurance issues arising from the vaccination of seafarers and is also working on developing a preliminary list of vaccination hub ports.

“Seafarers who have not yet been able to receive a vaccination should be permitted to travel to and from their country of domicile and their place of work without restriction.”

INTERCARGO believes that world leaders should ensure that seafarers are designated as key workers and have access to a prioritised vaccination programme; that they do not miss out on vaccinations while travelling for work and that they are able to access the required number of doses within the timescales recommended by the WHO.

Government leaders must commit to collective action and take to task their counterparts who fail to appreciate that the welfare of seafarers is not only a humanitarian issue, but that the world’s seafarers are responsible for keeping global trade moving.

About INTERCARGO: International shipping is vital for the global economy and prosperity as it transports approximately 90% of world trade. The dry bulk sector is the largest shipping sector in terms of number of ships and deadweight. Dry bulk carriers account for 43% of the world fleet (in tonnage) and carry an estimated 55% of the global transport work. You are invited to view our video [Dry Bulk Shipping: Sustainably serving the world’s essential needs¹](#).

The International Association of Dry Cargo Shipowners (INTERCARGO) unites and promotes quality dry bulk shipping, bringing together some 220 forward thinking companies from 30 countries and representing close to 25% by deadweight of the global dry bulk fleet. INTERCARGO convened for the first time in 1980 in London and has been participating with consultative status at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) since 1993. INTERCARGO provides the forum where dry bulk shipowners, managers and operators are informed about, discuss, and share concerns on key topics and regulatory challenges, especially in relation to safety, the environment, and operational excellence. The Association takes forward its Members’ positions to IMO, as well as to other shipping and international industry fora, having free and fair competition as a principle.

¹ www.intercargo.org/video-2020