

EMPA *Bearing*

The newsletter of the European Maritime Pilots' Association – dispatches from the ladder, the bridge, and the profession that holds them together.



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President's message

On a change of Editor, worrying developments in Türkiye and Romania, and why EMPA needs to hear from you early – plus Estepona 2027 and the Sines football tournament.

By **Miguel Vieira de Castro** • President, EMPA – European Maritime Pilots' Association



Dear colleagues and friends,

As the summer season draws to a close and we return to our normal rhythm, I want to begin by thanking you for the work you have done over these past months. Summer traffic, holiday cover and reduced staff are a demanding combination in every pilotage station in Europe, and once again our members have handled it with the professionalism that defines us.

This edition marks a change in our Newsletter. On behalf of the Board of Directors and of the whole membership, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to Olivier Allaert, who is stepping down as Editor. Olivier gave this publication his time, his care and his standards, for more than 10 years. A newsletter does not produce itself; someone has to chase the articles, correct the drafts, and make sure the edition goes out on time, edition after edition. Thank you, my friend, on behalf of us all.

I am equally pleased to welcome Arie Palmers as our new Editor. Arie needs no introduction in the pilotage world. Registered Pilot at the Scheldemonden and known across our profession (and well beyond it) for his relentless work on pilot ladders and pilot transfer safety, he has done more than most to make the industry look honestly at equipment that should never have been certified in the first place. He brings to this role a clear voice, a strong technical instinct, and no great patience for nonsense. That is exactly what our Newsletter needs. Arie, welcome, and I look forward to seeing where you take it.

A DIRECTION OF TRAVEL THAT CONCERNS ME

Turning to the substance of our work, I must be direct with you: I am concerned about the direction of travel in parts of Europe.

In Türkiye, the amendments to Ports Law No. 618 and the subsequent Regulation on Pilotage and Towage Services have introduced a concession-based model for pilotage services. Our concern is not with the sovereign right of any State to organise its own pilotage; that right is unquestioned. Our concern is that the tender mechanism is structured as an open auction with no upper limit on the public revenue share, which has produced exceptionally high bid levels and a structurally unsustainable financial burden on service providers. When commercial viability is placed under that kind of pressure, safety becomes the variable that gives way.

It is telling that the Istanbul and Çanakkale Straits have been excluded from the concession model and remain fully state-controlled: that exclusion is an implicit acknowledgement that where navigational risk is highest, pilotage must be insulated from commercial pressure. Our position is simply that this same reasoning applies to every port and coastal area, not only to the Straits. We offered and wish to support our members from TUMPA as soon as they give us the green light.

In Romania, we have followed with concern the Conclusions delivered by the Advocate General on 26 March 2026 in Case C-117/25, insofar as they may be read as encouraging a competitive model or market-type pressure in pilotage. I have written to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Transport and Infrastructure to reiterate, unequivocally, EMPA's position: pilotage is a safety-critical service of public interest and must not be exposed to competition or commercial pressure.

Article 10(1) of the Port Services Regulation is explicit that Chapter II on market access does not apply to pilotage services, and the European Parliament's own legislative record is clear that opening pilotage to competition would jeopardise maritime safety and security, environmental protection and port efficiency.

We have expressed our full support for the Romanian Government's efforts to preserve a fully regulated, non-competitive framework.

I want to be honest about what these two cases represent. They are not isolated national curiosities. They are two visible expressions of the same pressure, and I do not believe they will be the last. Similar situations may well emerge in other Member States over the coming period, sometimes suddenly and sometimes with very little warning. History is instructive here: competition in pilotage was widespread in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and it consistently produced a race to the bottom: more accidents, loss of life, and inconsistent standards. Our modern regulated systems exist precisely because that experiment was tried and it failed.

So, my request to you is practical. If you become aware of developments of this kind in your own country – a legislative proposal, a tender model, a new entrant, a consultation that seems to be heading in this direction – please inform EMPA early. We are far more effective when we are engaged at the outset than when we are asked to respond to something already decided.

A PERIOD OF VALUABLE ENGAGEMENT

On a more positive note, this has been a period of valuable international engagement. I had the pleasure of attending the ETA conference in Istanbul, which offered a timely opportunity for direct exchange on the issues affecting our Turkish colleagues, and the IMPA Congress in Bali, where the global perspective on our profession is always a useful corrective to a purely European view.

Looking ahead, I am delighted to tell you that I have already had the opportunity to visit the facilities for our General Meeting in 2027, which will take place in Estepona from 11 to 13 May. I came away genuinely enthusiastic, as the venue is excellent, the setting is superb, and our Spanish colleagues are preparing something special. Please make a note of the dates now; I very much hope to see as many of you there as possible.

Same applies to the 61st Edition of the EMPA Football tournament that will take place in my home port – Sines – taking place on the 19th and 20th of June 2027 associated with the commemorations of the 50th anniversary of the Port of Sines Authority.

Finally, a reminder that costs nothing and is worth a great deal: use EMPAsafe. Every report turns one pilot's observation into shared

knowledge, and the colleague who benefits may be in another country entirely.

Thank you for the excellent job you perform every day, and be proud, very proud of our profession!!

Fair winds and following seas – be happy, be safe!

Miguel Vieira de Castro
President, EMPA – European Maritime Pilots' Association

LEADERSHIP

Strength in diversity

Reflections on a term as EMPA Vice President, and why the power of this profession was never uniformity – it was always unity.

By **Patrick Galvin** · Chairman, AMPI · Former EMPA Vice President



When I look back on my time as Vice President of the European Maritime Pilots' Association, what stands out most is not the meetings, the travel, or the policy work, though there was plenty of all three. What stays with me is the people. The pilots. The member associations. The sense of shared purpose that binds together a profession spread across so many borders, languages, legal and political systems.

Pilotage in Europe and in the wider EMPA family is extraordinarily diverse. Representing EU and non-EU members, large state-run pilotage authorities, and small commercial harbours responsible for organising their own pilotage services, deep-sea approaches and estuarine channels, ancient maritime nations and younger coastal states. No two pilotage districts look the same, and no two countries organise pilotage in exactly the same way.

And yet, during my time as VP, I saw something far more powerful than uniformity: unity. A unity built not on identical systems, but on shared values: the belief that pilotage is a safety-critical service designed to operate in the public interest, that must remain free from competition, and that high national standards are the foundation of safe pilotage.

One of the privileges of serving as VP was the opportunity to meet pilots across the European area. Whether I was speaking with colleagues in Scandinavia, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, or the Atlantic coast, the same ethos was always present. Pilots everywhere carry the same responsibility: to protect life, the environment, and national supply chains that depend on safe navigation and expert ship handling.

While accents, legal frameworks, and operational challenges have shifted, professionalism, commitment, and pride remain constant among all pilots.

"We are many systems, but one profession, and we share one vision."

PATRICK GALVIN

Across our membership, I saw countries with exceptional training structures, others with would-be best practice in PEC governance, others with strong national oversight, others with advanced simulation capacity, and others with deeply embedded reporting cultures. Each system had something to teach. Each system had something to learn.

And EMPA is the place where that exchange of ideas and shared information happens, strengthening the member associations and the overall value of EMPA. It is where a pilot from a small port can learn from a national pilotage authority. Where a country refining its standards can draw on decades of experience from others. Where innovations in training, fatigue management, or risk management can spread across borders. This is not theoretical. I saw it happen again and again.

One of the most important things I witnessed during my time as VP was the unwavering commitment across our membership to non-competitive pilotage. This was not a slogan. It was a deeply held professional truth built on decades of experience.

Competition has no place in pilotage because it introduces pressures incompatible with safety. It fragments standards. It undermines independence. It creates incentives that run counter to the public interest. Every pilot I met understood this instinctively, because every pilot knows what is at stake when a ship enters confined waters. This shared understanding, across EU and non-EU members alike, is one of EMPA's greatest strengths. It is a principle we defend not out of self-interest, but out of responsibility.

Most countries recognise the value of pilotage as a safety system that works in the public interest and wisely prohibit competition in pilotage, each adopting its own approach; some more refined than others, yet all far preferable to systems that permit competition.

Another lesson from my time as VP is that strong national frameworks matter. Pilotage is delivered locally, but its safety depends on clear national standards: robust training, independent oversight, and coherent reporting obligations.

Countries achieve this in various ways, but the principle is universal: high standards protect pilots, ports, the environment, and ensure that pilotage remains resilient and future-proof. EMPAsafe, developed with Amura Solutions, enables real-time information sharing across EMPA members. Pilots can instantly report

and access technical problems, strengthening both safety and unity throughout the association.

What I loved most about the role and what I miss most is the human connection. The conversations over coffee between sessions. The late-night discussions about training, fatigue, or the future of the profession. The quiet moments when a pilot from one corner of Europe would say, “We had that problem too, here’s how we solved it.”

There is a generosity in this profession that is hard to describe unless you have lived it. Pilots are independent by nature, but we are not isolated. We understand that the challenges facing one district today may face another tomorrow. And we share our knowledge freely because we know that safety anywhere strengthens safety everywhere.

That spirit of solidarity is what makes EMPA more than an association. It makes it a community.

The maritime world is changing quickly. Ships are getting larger. The weather seems to be becoming more volatile. Digitalisation is accelerating. New technologies are emerging faster than regulation can keep pace. Environmental expectations are rising.

In this environment, the profession’s resilience will depend on three things: our unity in defending non-competitive pilotage; our commitment to strong national standards; and our willingness to learn from one another, openly and continuously. These are not abstract ideals. They are practical necessities.

Serving as EMPA Vice President was the greatest honour of my professional life. It gave me a deeper appreciation for the strength of

this profession and the people who carry it. It showed me that while our systems may differ, our values do not. And it reminded me that the future of pilotage will be shaped not by uniformity, but by cooperation.

We are strongest when we stand together, sharing knowledge, supporting one another, and upholding the standards that keep Europe’s ports safe. Yet EMPA’s true strength flows from the active involvement of each member association. Instead of asking what EMPA can do for us, let us also ask what we can do for EMPA. By contributing our ideas, sharing our experiences, and participating fully, we help ensure EMPA remains dynamic, influential, and a genuine voice for our profession. As EMPA’s story continues, I am filled with pride for what we have built together and optimism for what is yet to come.

EDITOR’S NOTE

The previous EMPA Newsletter included an article on the GREENPORT Alliances project, which omitted the name of its author. The article was written by Capt. Patrick Galvin. We sincerely apologise for the oversight.

SAFETY & LAW

Ladders and liability

The captain rigs it. The pilot climbs it. When a non-compliant setup ends in injury, the courtroom asks a harder question than either expects.

By **Arie Palmers** · Registered Pilot at the Scheldemonden, EMPA’s NL Editor

Regarding pilot transfer arrangements and basically everything that goes on on board, the captain is ultimately responsible for everything. So obviously the captain is also responsible for having a pilot ladder in good condition as well as a proper rigging of the ladder. At some pilot stations the question is asked before the pilot boards: “Can you confirm that the pilot transfer arrangement is compliant with international law and regulations?” It will not surprise you that the answer is always affirmative.

Pilots have the right and duty to reject and report a non-compliant pilot transfer arrangement. The new and improved SOLAS Regulation V/23 is quite clear on that in paragraph 12: “where a pilot or other personnel suspect the pilot transfer arrangement provided is non-compliant, they should inform the master and refuse to use the arrangement until it is made compliant.” In an ideal world the article could end here. After all: the vessel has to rig a compliant setup and if not, the pilot politely declines and waits until

things are sorted. One could argue that the word “should” has been used and state that should is a recommendation rather than a legal requirement. In maritime law however, the word “should” implicates an official standard of professional care and therefore creates a legal standard for what a trained pilot is expected and supposed to do in these circumstances, so there you go.

WHAT MADE THE CREW THINK THIS WAS OKAY TO RIG?



Unfortunately, the world is far from ideal. The IMPA safety campaign of 2025 came with a general level of non-compliance from around 14% (one in seven). As you might know from my own tally I publish after every workweek on

my social media called the WEEKLY LADDER MISERY, I am well over 50% non-compliance. This also means to me that a lot of pilots are not aware of regulations; otherwise, they'd also come up with 50% and that is not the case.

NON-COMPLIANCE, BY THE NUMBERS

14%

General non-compliance rate, IMPA Safety Survey 2025 – roughly one in seven arrangements

50%+

Non-compliance logged by the author's own "Weekly Ladder Misery" tally

One of the most important changes arising from the amendments to SOLAS regulation V/23 is a mandatory safety regime for pilot transfer arrangements, including new Performance standards for pilot transfer arrangements (IMO resolution MSC.576(110)). In many instances where "should" is used today, it is replaced with "shall". You will see from the SOLAS regulation V/23.12 quote that it is an exception, but it makes no difference to what is expected of pilots or the standard of professional care they are to exercise.

The first reason is that the word "should" is used because SOLAS can only impose obligations on States that have ratified the Convention. It cannot bind States to the actions of others, including pilots and other users of pilot transfer arrangements. The use of "should" does not mean that IMO regulation V/23.12 is a recommendation – it cannot be, as it is in an IMO Convention. The direct legal obligation on pilots will be reinforced by the transposition of SOLAS regulation V/23 into applicable national legislation.

The second reason is that what SOLAS says, or does not say, does not diminish the fact that a trained pilot, as an expert in the use of pilot transfer arrangements, is expected to recognise a non-compliant pilot transfer arrangement and exercise professional care.

We also know that a lot of pilots climb non-compliant setups all the time and I thought it could be interesting to do some research on what would happen should a pilot get injured whilst encountering a non-compliant pilot transfer arrangement.

For this research I didn't need the library anymore; internet is of great assistance. As I stated above, the captain is primarily and ultimately responsible for having a compliant setup, especially responding affirmatively to questions asked beforehand. Using a non-compliant setup however can have some nasty

implications for the pilot when all goes wrong. Since we know the pilot has the right and duty to refuse and report a non-compliant setup, using it can lead to so called "contributory negligence". If a pilot's own actions have contributed to them falling down, financial compensation may be reduced based on their degree of fault.

Typically, insurance companies, or even better and more correct: Protection and Indemnity (P&I) clubs if you wish, would react with a "defence and investigation" stance because the incident is a breach of international law (SOLAS V/23, IMO A.1045 etc.). On the other hand, when it turns out in the investigation that the vessel has knowingly rigged a non-compliant setup, the insurer could argue "gross negligence" or wilful misconduct and deny the claim for the ship which means the shipping company has to pay out of their own wallet.

These kinds of claims are very expensive because the pilot might lose their income; ladder accidents are often career ending or worse and besides that, when a ship gets blacklisted, their normal running costs will definitely go up as well.

This is what normally happens, P&I clubs investigate and pay out (for the record: P&I clubs are non-profit associations where both the insurer and the insured are members; pay to be paid). Now we're going to have a look at what happens when a pilot gets injured using a non-compliant arrangement. A pilot can never be solely liable in maritime law when they get hurt, BUT they can be held partially liable when they willingly used a non-compliant setup. On one hand the vessel has the duty to rig a safe setup and on the other hand the pilot has the duty to take care of their own safety and not endanger themselves and that makes perfect sense; why would you voluntarily endanger your life?

So, when the pilot gets hurt using this non-compliant setup, the court may find them partially liable for their own accident. Further down in this article I'll include some anonymised examples of where this has happened.

Since pilots are considered experts in the field they work in, they're also expected to have in depth knowledge of pilot transfer arrangements and the regulations involved around these transfers. Given the difference between my own tally and the results of the annual IMPA safety campaign, there is a lot to gain. Pilot associations and individual pilots have the duty and responsibility to obtain the necessary knowledge. This can easily be implemented in initial training for apprentice

pilots and been kept at the required level by means of sessions in continuous personal development.

Deficiencies can be either patent or latent; patent means they are obvious to spot, in plain sight. You can think about broken or loose steps, damaged sideropes, illegal trapdoor systems, incorrect stanchions and what not. Latent flaws can be errors in rigging or in a ladder that does not meet the required standards (fake ladders) etc. When a pilot uses a ladder with hidden flaws, there is not much to hold liable against them when things go wrong; the pilot could not have spotted any error and especially when "the" question has been addressed positively, they can climb the ladder in good confidence, no liability towards the pilot.

When however, this pilot used a setup, knowing it was non-compliant and therefore dangerous, liability and insurance pay-outs can change overnight. They basically took a part of the risk by using such a setup where they should have rejected and reported. Below I'll add a few cases where things went wrong.

FROM THE CASE FILES

PORT A

A pilot got killed trying to board a vessel at a different location than the official boarding spot. Ladder was loosely hanging in the air close to the stern of the vessel and the moment the pilot stepped up the ladder, the launch (small tugboat) unexpectedly came up on the 2m swell and killed the pilot. Court ruled against the pilot for "active negligence", and it was first after a 6-year battle in court when the Administration got convicted for a lack of inspection on the means of transfer and the relatives received compensation.

PORT B

A pilot got seriously injured and could not continue his job. Compensation was brought down to 50% because the pilot willingly used a non-compliant arrangement.

PORT C

Insurance did not pay out because the pilot had used a non-compliant arrangement eventually leading to his death.

PORT D

A seriously injured pilot sued the shipowners for \$130,000 to cover medical bills and loss of income. Court ruled the shipping company was guilty of not rigging a safe arrangement but the compensation to be received by the pilot was significantly brought down because he continued to disembark the vessel knowing it was a dangerous setup.

PORT D (COLLAPSE)

As I said before the captain is primarily responsible for having a safe and correct system. In Port D, a pilot had a serious accident where he fell 7m onto the deck of the pilot launch due to a snapped ladder. Investigation proved that this ladder had not been properly stored or checked regularly, something we've added in the new rules and is now international law. The vessel was fined \$32,000 and the captain \$5,000. In a similar case a year before, a vessel was fined \$30,500 for being negligent towards pilot transfer safety.

All together we can state that the implications from a ladder accident are in most times severe. Chances of getting into an accident are statistically small when you look at the number of boardings and disembarkations worldwide every year. The problem with statistics is, however, it hurts when it happens to you: most accidents are career-ending and sometimes even life-ending. When after everything that happened, you're being held partly liable for climbing a non-compliant arrangement, it hurts even more. So please all be careful out

there and check every ladder before you use it. To ship crews, I'd like to say: please take ladders seriously, it's all we have and our lives depend on it. Buy only from reputable manufacturers, stay away from cheap knock offs with fake certificates.

Please stay safe everyone! – Arie Palmers

TECHNOLOGY • AHEAD OF PORT SENTRY

Reading the ladder

Why pilot transfer compliance is about to get harder to fake, and easier to check.

By **Capt. Gary Clay** AFNI • Humber Pilot

Every marine pilot has, at some point, stood on the bow of a pilot boat, looked up at a ladder swinging against the hull, and made a judgement call that no amount of paperwork can fully substitute for. That judgement – refuse, request changes, or board – is the last line of defence in an operation that the industry can never, quite rightly, make routine. It is also, still, one of the most dangerous few minutes in a pilot's working day.

A STATISTIC THAT WOULD NOT GO AWAY

Data compiled by the International Maritime Pilots' Association (IMPA) puts the toll in stark terms: at least 32 marine pilots were killed worldwide in transfer accidents between 2000 and 2023, an average of nearly two lives lost every year among a global pilot population of roughly 8,000 (IMPA accidentology report, Capt. André Gaillard; coxlogs.com). That works out to an occupational fatality rate of around 21 per 100,000 pilots – more than double the rate recorded in commercial aviation over a comparable period, and this in a profession most of the shipping industry barely thinks about between one embarkation and the next (Lloyd's List, 2023).

32

Marine pilots killed worldwide in transfer accidents, 2000–2023 (IMPA)

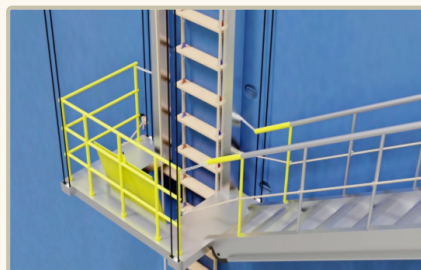
21/100k

Occupational fatality rate – more than double commercial aviation

13%

Non-compliance across 4,052 IMPA boarding reports in 2024

The injuries behind those headline deaths are far more numerous. IMPA's 2024 global safety campaign – now in its tenth year of data collection, feeding directly into IMO reporting – recorded 4,052 pilot boarding reports, a 13% non-compliance rate, and pilot ladders responsible for over half of all non-compliant elements found. In the UK alone, MAIB received over 400 pilot-ladder-related incident reports in a single year out of roughly 96,000 UK transfers, led by shackles used in place of rolling hitches, poor ladder condition, and unfit handhold stanchions. Tokyo MOU data for 2024 recorded 523 deficiencies and 12 detentions tied to pilot transfer arrangements, and a dedicated Focused Inspection Campaign found deficiencies in more than one in fourteen of the 2,357 ships checked.



It was one specific death that finally moved the regulatory needle. On 30 December 2019, New York harbour pilot Captain Dennis Sherwood fell while attempting to board via a non-compliant trapdoor combination arrangement. His death, and the investigation that followed, became the case most widely credited with

reopening SOLAS V/23 for the first meaningful overhaul in a decade (Maritime Executive; IIMS). Other names have followed since and the status quo could no longer be tolerated in an increasingly regulated world.

“The days of pilots ‘turning a blind eye’ are over.”

FATHOM SAFETY

WHAT 2028 ACTUALLY CHANGES

The IMO's Maritime Safety Committee formally adopted the response at its 110th session in June 2025: amendments to SOLAS V/23 (Resolution MSC.572(110)) and, for the first time, mandatory Performance Standards for Pilot Transfer Arrangements (Resolution MSC.576(110)) (DNV). The headline changes are significant, and none of them are cosmetic:

No Grandfather Clause

New installation and inspection requirements apply from 1 January 2028 to all ships, existing and newbuild alike; existing SOLAS ships must comply by their first survey after 1 January 2029, and non-SOLAS ships by 2030.

Type Approval

Third-party type approval becomes mandatory for pilot ladders, manropes and intermediate securing devices – closing a long-standing gap that allowed uncertified equipment onto the market.

Service Life

A hard maximum service life: 36 months from date of manufacture, or 30 months after being put into service, whichever comes first – after which a ladder is out of service. Retesting of ladders will no longer be an option.

Right to Refuse

An explicit, protected instruction to refuse to use an unsafe or non-compliant arrangement – putting into regulation what pilots have long asserted informally.

The UK Maritime Pilots' Association, UK Harbour Masters' Association, Port Skills and Safety and the BPA/UKMPG Marine Pilotage Working Group have already published a joint Code of Safe Practice supporting voluntary early adoption of the new standards ahead of the 2028 deadline (British Ports Association, 2025). The direction of travel is unambiguous. The scale of the compliance task it creates, however, is one the industry has not yet fully reckoned with.

TWO PILOTS, ONE PROBLEM

Fathom Safety was founded in 2020 by two working Humber pilots, Gary Clay and Andy Birley, who between them had spent over 50 years at sea and on the pilot boat noticing the same thing from opposite ends of the same problem: crews were rarely being negligent, they were simply undertrained, under-resourced, and working with equipment and procedures that had barely changed in a century of otherwise transformed shipping (fathomsafety.com/about; PTR Holland). What started as an e-learning platform for pilot transfer training has grown into a fuller service – ladder audit and management, equipment supply, and accident investigation staffed by serving and recently retired senior pilots – built on the conviction that the industry needed education, not condemnation. Fathom Safety's own analysis suggests the stakes of the 2028 changeover are severe: on current fleet condition, the company estimates that **80–90% of vessels** would be rendered non-compliant if the new legislation came into force today.

THE PAPER TRAIL HEADACHE

A ladder's compliance status is never written on a single line. It is scattered across a manufacturer's plate, a MED or "Wheelmark" certificate, a class society survey report, a load-test date, sometimes a UK MER or USCG-specific stamp, and increasingly a QR code linking back to an online register. Individually, each of these documents carries real information. Read together, and cross-checked against the manufacturer's own database, the vessel's IMO number and flag state, and the specific rules of the port the ship is calling at, they can tell a Pilot, Dispatcher or Harbour Master a great deal about whether a ladder is genuine, current, and fit for use – and whether the underlying paperwork itself looks legitimate.

The trouble is that doing this properly, for every vessel, on every call, is not something a busy port authority or boarding pilot can realistically do by hand. A thorough check means opening several regulator and manufacturer portals, correlating certificate numbers against issuing bodies, checking whether a MED approval has since been withdrawn, and doing the arithmetic on load-test intervals against today's date – before the pilot boat has even left the jetty. In practice, most of that verification simply does not happen, and compliance is inferred from a glance at a laminated certificate rather than confirmed against source data.

BUILDING PORT SENTRY

This is the gap Port Sentry was built to close. It is an AI powered verification engine, not a replacement for physical inspection: it reads a submitted certificate, extracts the vessel identity, manufacturer, certificate number and issuing regime, cross-checks that data live against the relevant regulatory databases – EMSA's MED register for European approvals, class society and notified body portals, UK MER and USCG equivalents, and manufacturer-specific reference data used to catch counterfeit or altered certificates – and returns a structured, evidenced verdict: **USE**, **USE WITH CAUTION**, or **DO NOT USE**.

Crucially, the rule logic is not one-size-fits-all. A ladder presented on an EU registered vessel is assessed first against current MED requirements, a US one against USCG rules, and so on, with SOLAS and ISO 799 as the underlying baseline throughout. On top of that, Port Sentry layers in the incoming 2028/2029 SOLAS requirements as a forward-looking readiness check, so a port authority can see today not just whether a ladder passes current rules, but whether it will still pass once the new performance standards and 30/36-month service-life limits take effect. Local port rules – where they exist, and where a harbour authority chooses to codify them – sit on top of that same structure, so the same engine can be tuned to a specific port's own requirements without discarding the SOLAS, MED, MER or USCG logic underneath.

WHERE AI ACTUALLY HELPS

None of the individual checks above are new in concept. What is new is doing all of them, correctly, in a fraction of the time a manual check would take. That is the specific problem artificial intelligence is well suited to: not judgement calls about the pilot's confidence in a given rig, which remain irreducibly human, but the exhausting, error-prone clerical work of extracting data from a scanned certificate, querying multiple regulator databases in the

right order, applying the correct jurisdiction's rules, and flagging the discrepancies a tired human eye would miss at the end of a long shift.

Done well, this does not just save time. It can genuinely improve on unaided human judgement, because it never gets tired, never skips the database check because the pilot boat is already on the way, and never assumes a document is genuine because it looks official. The role of the pilot and the harbour authority does not shrink in this model; it sharpens, because the routine paperwork burden is handled automatically, leaving the human judgement for the parts that actually need it. The system isn't however limited to ladders. The compliance engine is just as adept with manropes, securing ropes and portable ship-side securing devices (magnets).

BELT & BRACES APPROACH

Port Sentry is not just about the documentation though. It also delivers a short, immersive, targeted training video that demonstrates to the vessel's crew exactly how the port in question expects the pilot transfer arrangement to be rigged. Because the short training relates specifically to the type of arrangement the vessel is actually using it ensures it remains completely relevant and improves assimilation of the information to be imparted.

INTO THE FIELD

Port Sentry has been built and tested against real certificates from ports across three continents, and the engine's rule logic has been deliberately hardened against the kind of edge cases that matter most – a ladder that is within its manufacture-date service life but has no valid load-test retest on record, for instance, is treated as a categorical do-not-use, not a borderline case, because that is exactly the scenario the incoming performance standards are designed to close off for good.

The next step is to take that logic out of the test environment and into working ports. Fathom Safety is about to begin real-world trials of Port Sentry with port authorities in the UK and in Australia – two jurisdictions with very different regulatory starting points, from the UK's MER framework to Australia's AMSA-led approach, and exactly the kind of contrast the engine needs to prove itself against before wider rollout. With the 2028 SOLAS deadline now inside most operators' planning horizon, the industry does not have the luxury of waiting to find out the hard way whether its paperwork matches its ladders. Better, surely, to know before the pilot boat is alongside.

From a conversation to a tool for pilot safety

The best ideas often emerge from the challenges we encounter in our daily work. EMPAsafe was no exception.

By Amura



The best ideas often emerge from the challenges we encounter in our daily work. EMPAsafe was no exception. The story began in 2023 during a maritime conference held in Mexico. It was there that Miguel Vieira de Castro, President of the European Maritime Pilots' Association (EMPA), met Airam Rodríguez, CEO of Hiades Business Patterns.

During their discussions, a recurring question emerged, one that many maritime pilots across Europe had been asking for years: how can we improve the exchange of safety-related information between pilot organisations operating in different ports and countries?

The need was evident. Despite the existence of international regulations, pilot transfer procedures and extensive safety guidance, pilots continue to encounter improperly rigged pilot ladders, incorrectly fitted retrieval lines, technical deficiencies and other conditions that may compromise a safe transfer.

The objective was never to replace existing procedures or create another administrative burden. The idea was both simpler and more ambitious: to ensure that critical information reached the next pilot *before the vessel itself*.

Following those initial discussions, EMPA and HIADES began working together on a solution that would connect the European pilot community through a platform designed specifically for the needs of maritime pilots. What initially appeared to be a difficult concept to turn into reality gradually took shape through continuous collaboration between pilots and developers, combining operational experience with technological expertise.

EMPASAFE TODAY

26

Countries with recorded activity, active users across Europe and Canada

60th

General Meeting, Ghent – latest developments presented

Since then, EMPAsafe has continued to evolve. The platform now records activity across 26 countries and has active users throughout Europe and Canada. Countries such as Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Finland have played an important role in the growth of the platform, while new user communities have recently emerged in Sweden, Croatia and France.

However, the true value of EMPAsafe should not be measured solely by the number of users or reports submitted. Its importance lies in something much simpler: providing pilots with relevant information before a manoeuvre takes place, allowing them to prepare more effectively and make decisions with greater situational awareness.

The data presented during the 60th General Meeting showed that pilot transfer-related deficiencies remain a persistent concern. Incorrectly rigged retrieval lines, improperly secured pilot ladders and various technical deficiencies continue to feature prominently among reported incidents. These figures do not necessarily indicate that more problems exist today than in the past; rather, they demonstrate that pilots now have a practical means of documenting and sharing situations that previously remained confined to local conversations.

Perhaps one of the most significant findings is that the rate of formal reporting to the competent authorities remains relatively low. This highlights that there is still room to strengthen reporting culture across the maritime sector. The more information that flows between pilots, authorities and shipping

companies, the greater the industry's ability to identify trends, address recurring deficiencies and improve the safety of those involved in pilot transfer operations.

For this reason, a significant part of the presentation delivered in Ghent focused on the latest developments introduced to EMPAsafe. The purpose of these enhancements is not to add complexity, but to make the platform more useful and more accessible to pilots in their day-to-day operations.

The ability to select multiple home ports now enables users to view incidents from different operational areas simultaneously. Automatic IMO number validation improves data quality and consistency. A new option allows users to indicate whether a deficiency has been reported to the relevant authority, providing greater visibility and follow-up of reported incidents. In addition, direct sharing links make it easier to distribute information through messaging applications, social media and professional communication channels.

Particular attention was given to the platform's new notification logic. EMPAsafe can now distinguish whether an incident was identified upon arrival or upon departure of a vessel. This allows notifications to be directed automatically to the most relevant pilot organisation, ensuring that information reaches the right people at the right time and improving cooperation between pilot organisations operating in different ports.

The vision that inspired EMPAsafe remains unchanged from the conversation that first sparked the idea in 2023: that no pilot should have to face a known risk without first having the opportunity to know about it.

THE VISION BEHIND EMPASAFE, SINCE 2023

Can fatigue make you a better pilot?

What if fatigue could be trained – not away, but through?

By **Javier S. Polo** · Pilot, Port of Gijón

Every pilot wants to become better. Throughout our careers we refine shiphandling, strengthen Bridge Resource Management, analyse incidents, train in simulators and learn from colleagues because we know that professional performance can always improve. But what if one of the greatest opportunities for improvement had nothing to do with shiphandling, communication or technology? What if it was fatigue? More precisely, what if we could train the brain to perform better when fatigue is already present?

Not by ignoring tiredness or simply trying harder, but by recognising cognitive decline early enough to prevent it from becoming a safety issue. Imagine being able to identify the exact moment when attention begins to narrow, working memory starts to fail and judgement becomes less reliable—before anyone else notices, and before those changes influence a manoeuvre. Most pilots would want to learn that skill.

Fatigue rarely announces itself with a dramatic mistake. It usually begins with something far more dangerous: the brain quietly accepts a level of performance that, when fully rested, it would immediately recognise as degraded. That is precisely why fatigue is so deceptive. Long before an incorrect helm order, a misunderstood communication or a delayed decision, something more subtle has already changed. Not necessarily performance, but capacity.

These two concepts are often confused, yet they describe very different realities. Performance is what others observe. Capacity is the cognitive reserve still available to cope with the unexpected. A fatigued pilot may continue to perform at an apparently acceptable level while the mental resources needed to deal with a machinery failure, an unexpected gust, a misunderstood instruction or a rapidly changing situation have already diminished.

A pilot may execute twenty routine helm orders perfectly while fatigue is already eroding the cognitive reserve needed to respond to the twenty-first, when something unexpected happens.

Fatigue does not reduce performance first. It reduces capacity first. Performance is often the last thing to fall.



For maritime pilots, this distinction is critical because pilotage is not simply the execution of a plan. It is the continuous adaptation of that plan to an environment that changes minute by minute. That adaptation depends on sustained attention, working memory, anticipation, mental flexibility and, perhaps most importantly, the ability to recognise that our own thinking is beginning to deteriorate. Ironically, this last ability is itself one of the first affected by fatigue. The most dangerous consequence of cognitive decline may therefore be losing the ability to recognise that it has already begun.

Can this be trained? The answer is yes. Not because training removes fatigue—it does not. Sleep cannot be replaced by motivation, professionalism or experience. But the fatigued brain can be trained to recognise its own limitations earlier and to respond more effectively when those limitations begin to appear. High-fidelity simulation, realistic operational scenarios, conflicting information, interruptions, time pressure and increasing cognitive workload allow pilots to observe how their decision-making changes as mental resources become progressively depleted. The objective is not to build endurance. The objective is to build awareness.

Training the fatigued brain means learning to detect fixation before it becomes tunnel vision, recognising when anticipation has been replaced by reaction, identifying when working memory is no longer keeping pace with operational demands and deliberately activating compensatory strategies before safety margins begin to erode. Those strategies may include slowing the tempo of a manoeuvre, verbalising intentions, increasing safety margins, reinforcing the Master-Pilot

Exchange, involving the bridge team more actively, redefining decision points or requesting additional support. In other words, we do not train fatigue. We train the brain that must continue making safe decisions despite being fatigued. The purpose is not to eliminate human limitation but to prevent diminished capacity from silently becoming diminished safety.

Perhaps the most valuable skill of all is learning to compare two variables that are constantly changing: Available Cognitive Capacity and Required Cognitive Capacity. Neither remains fixed throughout a manoeuvre. Available Cognitive Capacity may decline as wakefulness is prolonged, workload accumulates or recovery becomes insufficient. Required Cognitive Capacity may increase suddenly because of deteriorating weather, traffic, equipment failure, poor communication or an unexpected change in the original plan. Safety depends not only on either variable in isolation, but on the margin between them.

The same level of fatigue may be entirely manageable during a straightforward daylight movement yet completely unacceptable during a complex LNG operation at night in adverse weather. The relevant question therefore is not simply, “Am I fatigued?” It is, “Does the cognitive capacity I still have match the cognitive capacity this manoeuvre now requires?” Professional judgement begins with that comparison.

NOW READ THIS AGAIN

If you have reached this point hoping to become better at working while fatigued, you have probably read this article exactly as intended. You were looking for techniques, methods and practical ways to protect your performance when your brain is no longer performing at its best. There is nothing wrong with that. Everything discussed so far can genuinely make a fatigued pilot safer than one who has never trained those skills.

But now read the article again. Because the ability to compensate for fatigue creates a risk of its own.

The better pilots become at recognising and managing cognitive decline, the easier it may become for organisations to depend on that ability. A safety barrier can gradually be treated as operational capacity. What was designed to

protect the pilot when fatigue enters the system may begin to justify keeping the pilot in that system for longer. That is the dangerous conclusion.

Fatigue should never become another professional competence by which pilots are expected, assessed or informally encouraged to extend their availability. Training must not transform human limitation into additional organisational tolerance.

We train for crosswinds because we cannot eliminate the wind. We train for machinery failures because ships sometimes fail. We train for tug failures because equipment occasionally breaks. Fatigue is different. In many cases it is not an unavoidable operational hazard; it is the consequence of how work is organised, how availability is managed and how operational pressure is distributed.

Training the fatigued brain is therefore not an excuse to normalise fatigue. It is the final safety barrier when fatigue has already entered the

system—not a reason to allow it to remain there.

The real objective is not to produce pilots who can work longer while fatigued. The real objective is to create organisations in which pilots rarely need to rely on those emergency skills.

The safest pilot is not the one trained to compensate for fatigue. It is the one whose organisation never needs him to.

WELLBEING • SPAIN

When safety starts with the people who make it possible

A new peer-support network for Spanish pilots borrows a decade of lessons from commercial aviation – and closes a gap the maritime sector has yet to regulate.

By Ignacio Expósito Graña & José Antonio Pérez Lorente – Colegio Oficial Nacional de Prácticos de Puerto



On the bridge of a vessel entering port, the pressure is real. The available sea room is limited, under-keel clearance may be tight, the wind can change within seconds and, as a result, the level of risk can increase exponentially. Maritime pilotage is a profession that demands a very high degree of technical competence, but it also carries an emotional burden that, for far too long, has remained largely invisible.

The Spanish Maritime Pilots' Association (Colegio Oficial Nacional de Prácticos de Puerto) has recently taken an important step towards changing this. On 28 May 2026, following its official presentation at the Association's National Assembly in Valencia, **PAPIPRA** – the Maritime Pilots' Assistance Programme – became operational. It is a structured peer-support initiative adapted specifically to Spanish maritime pilotage, drawing on well-established models from commercial aviation, where programmes of this kind have demonstrated their value for more than a decade.

Maritime pilotage and commercial aviation share a fundamental characteristic: their professionals operate in high-pressure

environments, where decision-making carries significant responsibility, errors may have serious consequences, and a certain degree of professional isolation is inherent in the nature of the work itself. A pilot boards the vessel alone, meets the Master, discusses and agrees the pilotage plan, guides the manoeuvre and, once it is completed, disembarks. Job done! The heart rate gradually returns to normal. It may seem easy to cope with it, does it not? For highly qualified and extensively trained professionals, perhaps it does. But things are rarely that simple. There is an emotional load behind the whole process.

A REGULATORY GAP, NAMED AFTER A TRAGEDY

Commercial aviation addressed this issue decades ago, and not always voluntarily. The Germanwings Flight 9525 accident in March 2015, in which the co-pilot – who had concealed severe depression from his employer – deliberately crashed the aircraft into the French Alps, killing all 150 people on board, became a turning point that forced the sector to examine itself critically. The tragedy demonstrated, in the starkest possible way, what can happen when safe and confidential channels are unavailable for professionals in safety-critical roles to seek support without fearing the loss of their medical certification or professional status.

The regulatory response followed. In 2021, EASA introduced requirements for psychological support and peer-support programmes for European commercial pilots. The maritime sector, by contrast, still lacks an equivalent international regulatory framework.

IMPA and EMPA promote good practices among their members, but there are still no universally established formal peer-support programmes across the profession. This regulatory gap is real. PAPIPRA was created precisely to begin closing that gap from within the profession itself, rather than waiting for regulation to be imposed from outside.

PAPIPRA is a network of volunteer maritime pilots – known as **PEERS** – trained in CISM methodology (Critical Incident Stress Management), the same approach used in peer-support programmes in commercial aviation and among other professional groups exposed to high levels of operational pressure. They are not psychologists, nor do they seek to act as such. They are fellow pilots who understand the realities of the profession from first-hand experience and who have received specific training to listen, provide support and, where necessary, guide colleagues towards appropriate professional resources.

The programme provides support in relation to any personal or professional situation that may generate pressure, stress or distress: from the aftermath of an operational incident to the everyday demands of a profession that combines high levels of responsibility with continuous exposure to challenging and sometimes adverse conditions.

It is built upon one non-negotiable principle: absolute confidentiality. All PEERS sign a confidentiality agreement. No records or written files are generated. Participation in the programme has no consequence whatsoever for a pilot's professional certification, licence, authorisation or career.

Only in cases involving an immediate risk to life – exceptional circumstances that are clearly defined – is a specific protocol activated under clinical supervision. Outside those situations, the conversation remains strictly between the PEER and the colleague seeking support.

Spanish maritime pilotage is not the first community to address this issue. To give just a few international examples, France, through the FFPM's CIRP programme, has for several years operated post-incident intervention protocols based on methodologies derived from aviation. In the United Kingdom, UKMPA operates the **Safe Haven** programme, which includes a 24-hour support line. New Zealand introduced its Peer Assistance Network in 2023, specifically designed to provide safe environments in which professional colleagues can speak openly and confidentially.

What these programmes have in common – and what underpins their credibility – is their approach: peer-to-peer support, guaranteed confidentiality and direct connection with the professional environment of the person seeking assistance. This is precisely the model adopted and adapted by PAPIPRA for Spanish maritime pilotage. International experience

supports the effectiveness of this approach: attention to emotional wellbeing can improve professional retention, support operational performance and reduce the risk of post-traumatic stress.

It may still be tempting to regard professionals' mental wellbeing as a secondary matter, or at least as something separate from operational safety. The evidence suggests otherwise. A maritime pilot suffering from unmanaged stress or carrying the psychological consequences of an incident without adequate support, may face an increased risk in subsequent pilotage operations. This is not because the pilot has become less technically competent. Rather, it is because the human element – situational awareness, attention, decision-making under pressure and the ability to manage unexpected developments – is directly influenced by the individual's emotional state.

HOW IT WORKS IN PRACTICE

Access to the programme is straightforward and is available to every maritime pilot in Spain. Through the Association's website, pilots can consult the network of available PEERS, select a colleague – either from their own pilotage organisation or from another port, depending on personal preference – and request contact. The PEER will then make contact as soon as reasonably possible.

PEERS have received specific training in active listening and empathy, supportive communication, personal stress management and teamwork within the peer-support network. They are experienced maritime pilots who understand the operational demands of the profession from within and who have voluntarily committed themselves to this supporting role.

PAPIPRA also ensures access to external professional referrals where required, protection and support for the PEERS themselves, recurrent training, and clearly defined exceptional limits to confidentiality in situations involving an immediate threat to life or safety.

In conclusion, the maritime industry has taken longer than aviation to address the emotional wellbeing of its professionals in a structured manner. There are many reasons for this: a professional culture historically shaped by resilience in the face of adversity; the absence of a regulatory framework requiring such measures; and, perhaps, the difficulty of finding the right language to describe something that has always existed but has rarely been openly discussed.

With PAPIPRA, Spanish maritime pilotage is taking a step that relatively few pilot organisations around the world have yet taken. It is doing so not in response to an external requirement, but through the deliberate decision of a professional community that has chosen to care for its people with the same level of commitment as it safeguards the ports it serves.

Finally, the Spanish National Association of Maritime Pilots would like to express its sincere gratitude to Captain Eugenio Taboas, Iberia airline pilot, for delivering the training, and to Ms Mariluz Novés, psychologist and specialist in Aviation Psychology, for her technical assistance, patience and proactive contribution towards achieving this important milestone.

Because safety in our ports starts with the safety and protection of the people who serve them.

Ankie Peeters-Buijk

Scheldemonden Pilot, on chasing independence at 19, apprenticeship on the Amazon, and what it means to become “Mrs. Teacher.”

By **Arie Palmers** • Registered Pilot at the Scheldemonden, EMPA's NL Editor



For this pilot profile, we sat down with Ankie Peeters-Buijk at her lovely house in the beautiful town of Bergen op Zoom to have a little chat with her about this topic. Of course, we started with a nice coffee and the big question WHY?

Ankie told me she always wanted to travel and with travelling she didn't mean the tourist side of travel or an occupation in tourism. Her older brother went to Maritime Academy in Vlissingen and that gave her the idea to follow in his footsteps. After high school she also went to the Maritime Academy in Vlissingen to pursue her dreams. That step to Maritime from high school was quite a big one because in high school she had graduated in a direction that did not directly match with the lessons at the academy in Vlissingen, so she had a difficult start over there but nevertheless she graduated within the 4 years necessary, not in the least because the education fitted her like a glove so she told us.

During her time in Vlissingen, she also met the man of her life who was doing the same thing there, and they have been together ever since, with 2 lovely kids as the result of their love and commitment.

Already when Ankie was a child she always joined her parents and brother on her parents' motor yacht (not much to choose of course

when you're like 6 years old), so the connection with water and the sea has always been there.

So, when Ankie was 19 she graduated and did her cadetship. What struck her in a positive way was the amount of independence and responsibilities that were given to her during this period and directly after she finished the 6 months at sea, she was offered a contract to keep working with that same shipping company. Ankie gave it some thoughts and she had some doubts: me as deck officer of 19 years old, giving instructions to people more than twice my age? I dunno....

Ankie decided to go back to the academy in Vlissingen for 2 more years to get her bachelor's degree and also gain some more experience in life and of course more knowledge. She graduated when she was on board of a cargo ship somewhere on the Amazone river. Right after that she found herself in New Orleans and Galveston.

“Hey, I wanted to travel the world so here it is!”

ON GRADUATING ON A CARGO SHIP ON THE AMAZON, THEN FINDING HERSELF IN NEW ORLEANS AND GALVESTON



Despite the fact that Ankie and her partner Bart received the same education, they were never on board of the same ship together. They did however manage to combine time on board and off time together, so they had the opportunity to build their lives together. Then at some day, Bart was told by the company

where he worked that all Dutch officers were to be replaced by officers from other countries. That would make it difficult to be at sea and at home together for Bart, so he was able to secure a job ashore as a surveyor.

At that moment pilotage crossed Ankie's mind again: being on ships and being at home at the same time – week on, week off. She was already on the list of Nederlands Loodswezen and started her pilot training in February 2008. Another reason to start the training was, so she told us, to have more control over your work life balance and be at home more often.

This is a reason for many people, including myself, to turn to pilotage. You can be at sea and at home and can even have relationships, kids and a social life! Ankie graduated as a pilot in the spring of 2009 and has been piloting the Scheldt River, her ports and the adjacent sea area ever since.

Last year she took up the job to teach the next generation of apprentices in the wonderful art of pilotage. The pilot training is of course done “in house” by fellow pilots who do these jobs as an extra besides piloting. Once graduated, the apprentices hold the official title of “Master in Maritime Pilotage” for it is an official master's degree that comes after bachelor. She told us, it felt a bit strange to be Mrs. Teacher all of a sudden because she still remembered very well, as we all do, how it felt to be as an apprentice in that same classroom.

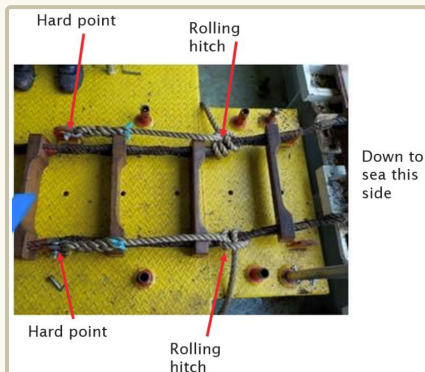
“And now all of a sudden, I am the teacher... I know their stress, I see their worries but all we want every time is all of them to graduate, because we need them all dearly.”

Ankie thank you very much for giving us some insights into your life and into what drove you towards piloting.

Securing pilot ladders at intermediate lengths

Why polypropylene beat manila, how the new MSC.576(110) slippage requirement forced a rethink, and what PTR Holland's KRATOS rope changes on deck.

By **Joris J. Stuip** · Vice President (Global), PTR Holland Group



Over the past few years, a great deal of effort has been expended on ensuring ships secure pilot ladders correctly at intermediate lengths. It is rare for a cargo vessel to have a perfectly sized ladder that can simply be shackled through the top thimbles to the deck. As the vessel will normally use the same ladder in both loaded, part loaded and ballasted conditions there is invariably a need to secure the ladder at an intermediate length.

The first task was for ship's crew to understand that shackles over sideropes, bars and deck tongue arrangements were definitely not compliant, nor was simply bracing the spreader against the stanchions or rails! This seemed like an easy learning point but even this took several years campaigning from the likes of Arie Palmers, Kevin Valance, Jesus Señeriz and Adam Roberts and is still not completely eradicated from the maritime consciousness.

Once this was completed we now needed to explain how the ladder should actually be secured with adequate securing ropes. IMO Resolution A.1045(27) only stated that the ropes used to secure the pilot ladder at an intermediate length were of "at least as strong as the pilot ladder side ropes". Since each side of the ladder is made from two 20mm manila ropes with a minimum breaking load of 24kN per rope, the total strength of each side of the ladder is 48kN, and therefore the securing ropes need to be not less than 48kN.

A PIONEER'S LEGACY

In determining the best method of securing the ladder, a New Zealand pilot, the late, great Troy Evans was a pioneer. Working in his barn, Troy had conducted numerous tests using a variety of securing methods including ropes and lifting slings to try and find the sweet spot of both simplicity and holding power. Following

Troy's untimely death, his work was taken up by IMPA who, in partnership with Southampton University, conducted scientific trials to determine the best solution.

Their detailed analysis demonstrated that the most effective combination was the use of a polypropylene rope secured using a rolling hitch. Now it may seem intuitive that manila rope would be the best material for a securing rope since the friction co-efficient of manila on manila would naturally out perform polypropylene on manila. However the issue with this is minimum breaking load. In order to comply with the minimum 48kN MBL a manila rope would need to be a minimum of 28mm in diameter and at this size it becomes impractical to tie a functioning rolling hitch around the pilot ladder side ropes. All that happens is the ladder side ropes slip through the oversized rolling hitch and the weight of the ladder (and the pilot!) is taken up by the chocks, securings and steps. These items are not designed to be load bearing in this manner and can become damaged or fail should this happen.

For several years at PTR Holland we had manufactured 20mm polypropylene securing ropes for use on vessels. However with the advent of MSC.576(110) this had to change. Whilst the polypropylene securing ropes were good, the new standards increased the performance requirements of such ropes.

"6.3 There shall be a means of securing a pilot ladder at intermediate lengths which shall be capable of securing the pilot ladder to strong points described in paragraph 6.1 by gripping each set of side ropes of the pilot ladder. The means of securing, shall have a breaking strength of not less than 48 kN and be designed to prevent any slippage of the side ropes under the conditions of the ladder and step attachment strength test and unrolling tests described in a standard acceptable to the Organization."

IMO PERFORMANCE STANDARDS,
MSC.576(110)

The issue for securing rope design was the requirement that they must prevent any slippage of the side ropes under the conditions of the ladder and step attachment strength test. This test is defined in ISO799 and requires a weight of 880kg being applied to the ladder steps.

The tests conducted by IMPA and Southampton University had demonstrated that polypropylene slipped on average at 2.2kN. It was clear that if a securing rope had to meet the new standard we were going to have to rethink our securing ropes.

DESIGNING KRATOS

Working in conjunction with the guys at Fathom Safety we developed a new securing rope that combined the key requirements of adequate strength (min 48kN MBL), flexibility enough to tie an effective rolling hitch, and a friction co-efficient against manila that prevented slippage under the step strength test.

Our new KRATOS securing ropes ticked all of these boxes. The braid-on-braid design gives a super flexible rope that makes tying an effective rolling hitch much easier than with pretty much every other alternative (including polyprop and manila). The ropes have a MBL of 58kN and grip the manila ropes tightly without damaging them.



Destructive testing carried out in our Rotterdam factory demonstrated just how good these ropes were. The rolling hitch did not slip and ultimately the manila rope parted at 52kN and, upon removing the rolling hitch, the manila rope beneath showed no visible signs of damage.

The final element we considered was the look of the finished ropes. It is important that these ropes are properly looked after, stored correctly and most importantly of all, not be used for any other purpose. To ensure the crew respected the ropes we gave them a premium look and feel with a dark blue finish on the rope and a contrasting, bright orange, powder coated thimble!

Our KRATOS ropes come with permanent metal disc tags through the thimbles and DNV backed certification to allow for simplified checking by pilots or port state control officials.

Whilst the new performance standards do not explicitly specify a lifespan for intermediate securing ropes this rope in accordance with paragraph 36 of the Performance Standards, it is considered a component included in the type approval of the pilot ladder; therefore, it should be replaced at least the same interval as the pilot ladder.

Our new KRATOS ropes are already being used on vessels worldwide so it won't be long before you encounter them. We hope they will continue to keep pilots safe and once again demonstrate that PTR remain both innovative and committed to the highest standards of pilot transfer safety.

European Maritime Pilots' Association vzw

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