



# Seafarers Happiness Index

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Quarter 2 2018



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# Seafarers Happiness Index Quarter 2 2018

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The Seafarers Happiness Index is to give seafarers a collective voice, and thereby enable the maritime industry to review and address the issues that are raised.

The Happiness Index is designed to monitor and benchmark seafarer satisfaction levels via 10 key questions and serves as an important barometer of seafarer satisfaction with life at sea.

Happy people are loyal, motivated, and embrace challenges. If the industry chooses to act on the responses to these regularly updated surveys, it will not only reap the rewards with a more enthused, dedicated, and hardworking workforce, but it will attract new talent to the industry, something which is sadly lacking at the moment.

We are extremely grateful to all those who complete the survey and who share their thoughts and experiences. Out of respect for them, we work tirelessly to ensure that the reports reflect the reality as they see it. Some of the findings are negative – but they need to be addressed, so we need to talk openly about the challenges facing the industry.

The Seafarers Happiness Index has been nominated for a series of industry awards and we were extremely proud to be shortlisted for a prestigious Seatrade award recently. We have also been nominated for a 2018 SAFETY4SEA award, and your votes can make a difference, so please do take a moment to vote. The voting process is open until September 7th, 2018, and you can vote for us at <https://events.safety4sea.com/2018-safety4sea-awards/>

The success of the Seafarers Happiness Index gives is vital, as it gives seafarers a platform to share their hopes and concerns, a voice to be heard. We also hope it can ensure that seafarers are seen as people, not simply a “Human Element”.

The shipping industry has made progress, but we need to do more collectively to ensure that crew receive the assistance they need. In this regard, we the Mission to Seafarers commits to promote, encourage and drive the safety of seafarers; we are working today in over 200 ports worldwide, and we do so to raise seafarer’s welfare and wellbeing.

The Seafarers Happiness Index is an important part of this, it provides a unique snapshot to the lives of the men and women on whom this industry and the world depends. The Mission to Seafarers has provided welfare facilities to crews for over 156 years – we are uniquely placed to give them a voice and a platform to share their hopes and concerns for their working life.

We are champions for seafarers’ wellbeing, welfare and human rights, and the happiness Index gives the industry a space in which to discuss the vitally important issues surrounding seafarers. We want the Index to be a live barometer of what life at sea is truly like. We want to challenge the industry to think more creatively about how it supports the men and women who work at sea, and we want to be a part of the conversation.





# Welcome to the Seafarers Happiness Index

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This 2018 second quarterly report of the Seafarers Happiness Index shows a rise in the overall seafarer satisfaction levels at sea – and the current average figure sits at 6.56 out of 10. Which shows a fall from the previous quarter, which recorded an average of 6.69.

As ever, there were a range of fascinating insights from seafarers – and the written responses showed some positives, some problems and with room for improvement. On the upside, there is an overwhelming sense of professional pride and of excitement at being a seafarer – and there was a definite feeling that the “lifestyle” of going to sea and providing for family was one that many respondents enjoy. Once again, as we have seen across earlier reports, the seafarers who responded spoke in positive terms about their fellow shipmates, talking in terms of friendships, professionalism and support. There is a definite sense that camaraderie is still strong and important at sea.

However, there are problems too. Isolation and loneliness, fatigue and stress were again mentioned repeatedly by respondents. While it was also felt that “boredom” is a factor at sea. Seafarers gave a sense of trips to sea as, “killing time” and of life being “dull”. Something that is perhaps at odds with the potentially dangerous nature of the job.

This was not helped by a lack of access to shoreleave, and of too many seafarers feeling that even where internet access was provided, then it was often too slow, intermittent or expensive. There were repeated calls for good internet access for seafarers to be made compulsory on all ships, an argument that does not show signs of going away.

There was also an observation that despite seafarer happiness, wellness and mental health coming to the fore, some felt that there needed to be someone named in the shipping company as having clear responsibility for this side of human resource management. It was noted that responsibilities for so many aspects of operations were clearly laid out, but not so the satisfaction of the crew. An interesting point, and one which perhaps merits further discussion.

From an operational perspective, it appears that inspections,

heavy work load, unsupportive management onboard and ashore, are negatively affecting happiness. This quarter’s results saw criticisms aimed at managers and office workers ashore, also concerns that a high level of staff churn ashore can mean problems with relationships between ship and offices. While seafarers were also concerned that a lack of experience or knowledge ashore means that seafarers are being asked to do more. They reported being asked more and more questions, and of being pushed to respond. Also, there was a sense that all too often recommendations from shipboard staff are not listened too when it comes to management systems.

Paperwork remains an important and divisive issue. Seafarers reported often spending longer completing the paper work for a task than the job itself. There were many that questioned the sense of a system which favours documentation over doing the actual job.

Wages were subject of much discussion – and the Seafarers Happiness Index numbers dropped this time around, perhaps reflecting the fact that a number of respondents felt that static pay levels over the past few years are cause for concern. It was noted by some that the Joint Negotiating Group (JNG) had agreed on an increase of 2.5%, though that will not take effect until 2019 – so we will watch the figures with interest and hopefully the happiness levels will rise as the wages do.

The issue of pay “discrimination” for different seafarer nationalities is causing frustration and anger, with allegations of “racism” being levelled at the industry. There were also seafarers who reported stress about their savings, and concerns that they had not been able to put enough aside for their families when they returned home.

Food remains a key concern – this quarter saw criticisms of chandlers who are felt to be sending cheaper, lower quality

brands to ships. There were also allegations that some owners deliberately run with very low levels of food onboard. Something which means that rationing was occurring.

Exercise was discussed, and while the numbers rose a little, seafarers reportedly felt the relentless demands of operational life mean some crew find it hard to get time to exercise. There were reports of a “Diet Dilemma” – with medicals and companies requiring seafarers to maintain a certain Body Mass Index (BMI) – there was a concern their schedules and time off watch does not factor in the exercise to help them do so. The fact that seafarers often feel they do not have the time, equipment or occasionally the inclination to exercise is a concern.

A new study from Yale University in the US, states that regular physical activity lasting 45 minutes three to five times a week can reduce poor mental health. A total of 1.2 million people reported their activity levels for a month and rated their mental wellbeing. People who exercised had 1.5 fewer “bad days” a month than non-exercisers, the study found.

Also, social sports activities reduce isolation and are good for resilience, while also reducing depression.

As we struggle to safeguard seafarer mental wellbeing, and while there are major concerns about social cohesion onboard, it seems perhaps sports onboard are the answer. Training saw some positives, but problem area too. Seafarers who expressed their dissatisfaction spoke of resentment about the impact of training on their leave when they are required to visit training centres instead of being at home. A number of respondents also levelled criticism at the frequency and repetition of refresher training.

The issue of cyber security was repeatedly mentioned. It was stated that some companies have introduced new rules which seafarers often do not fully understand, or which do not seem to tally with the realities of what crew are expected to do onboard. There were also questions as to why more common-sense solutions are not applied when it comes to protecting shipboard equipment.

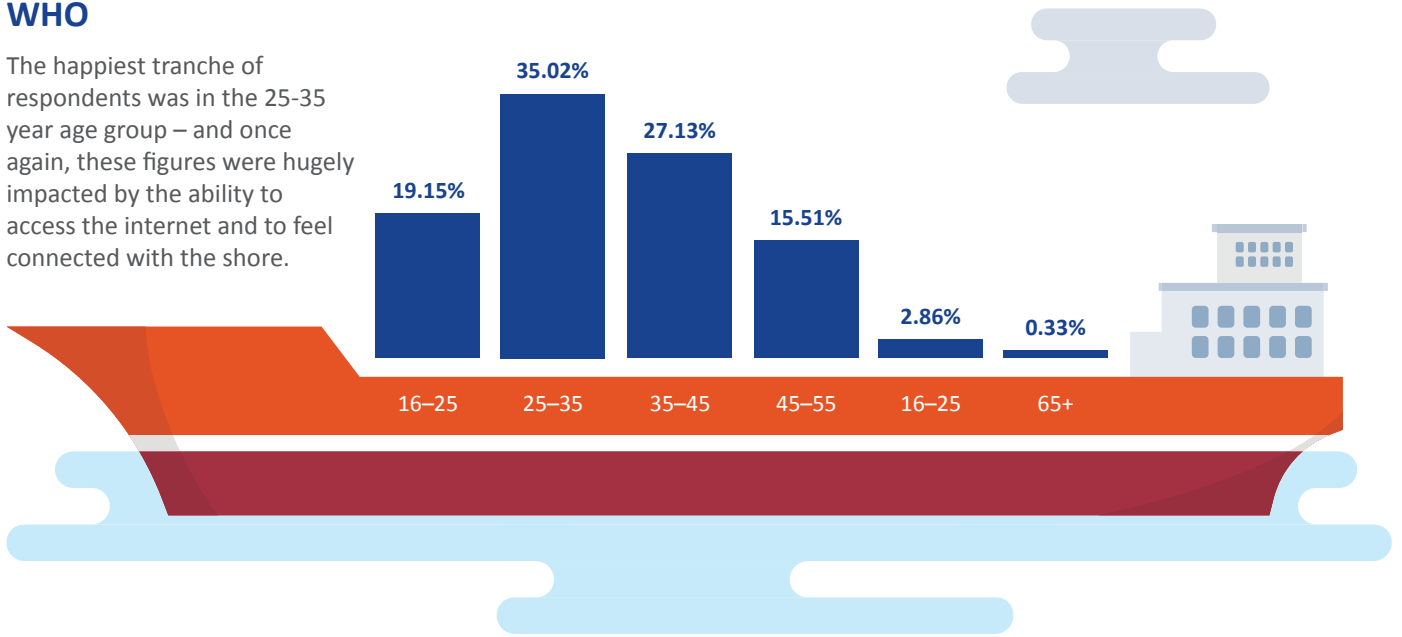
**Steven Jones**  
Founder of the  
Seafarers Happiness Index



# The Story So Far: Q2 2018

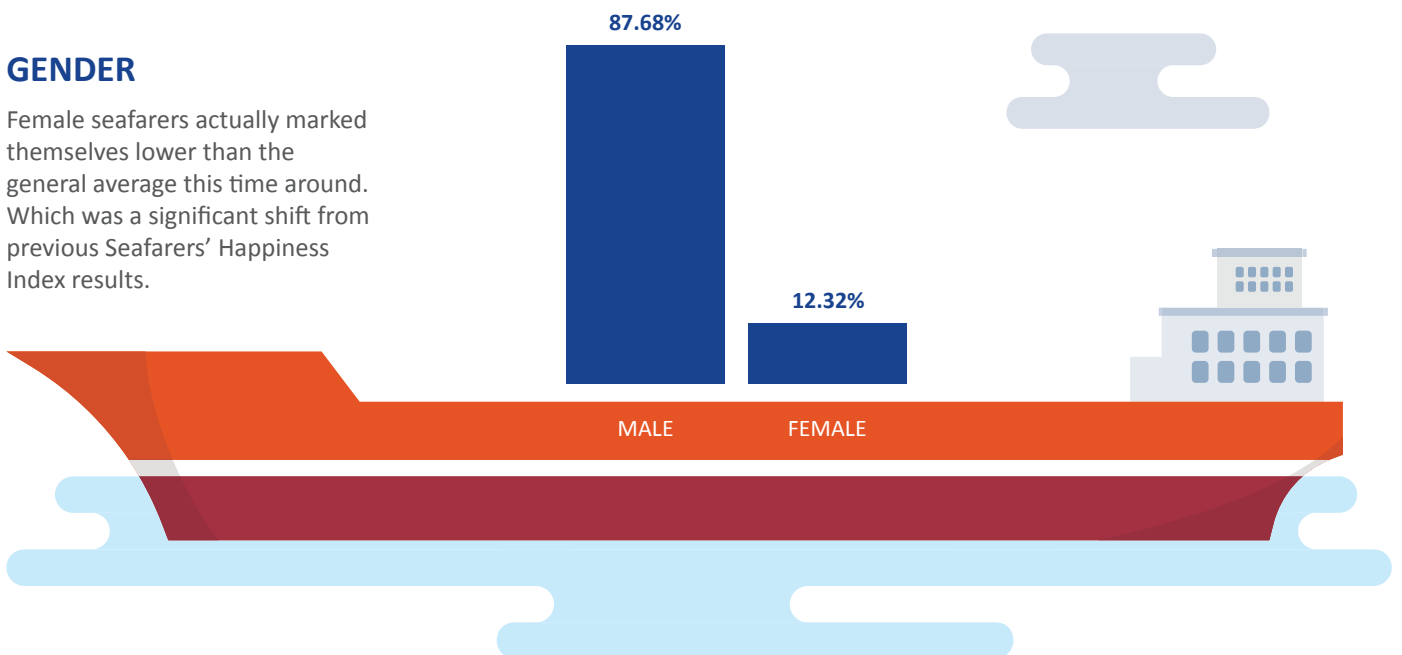
## WHO

The happiest tranche of respondents was in the 25-35 year age group – and once again, these figures were hugely impacted by the ability to access the internet and to feel connected with the shore.



## GENDER

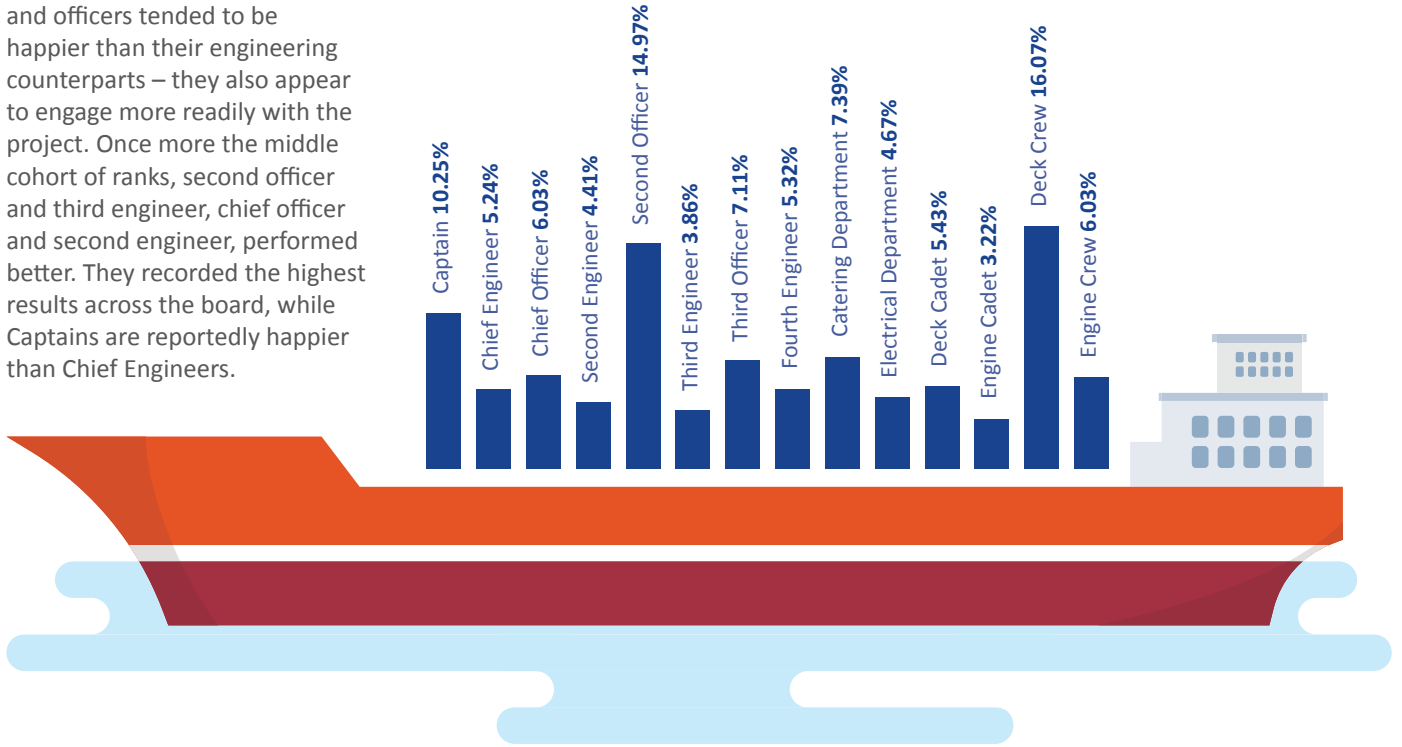
Female seafarers actually marked themselves lower than the general average this time around. Which was a significant shift from previous Seafarers' Happiness Index results.





## RANKS

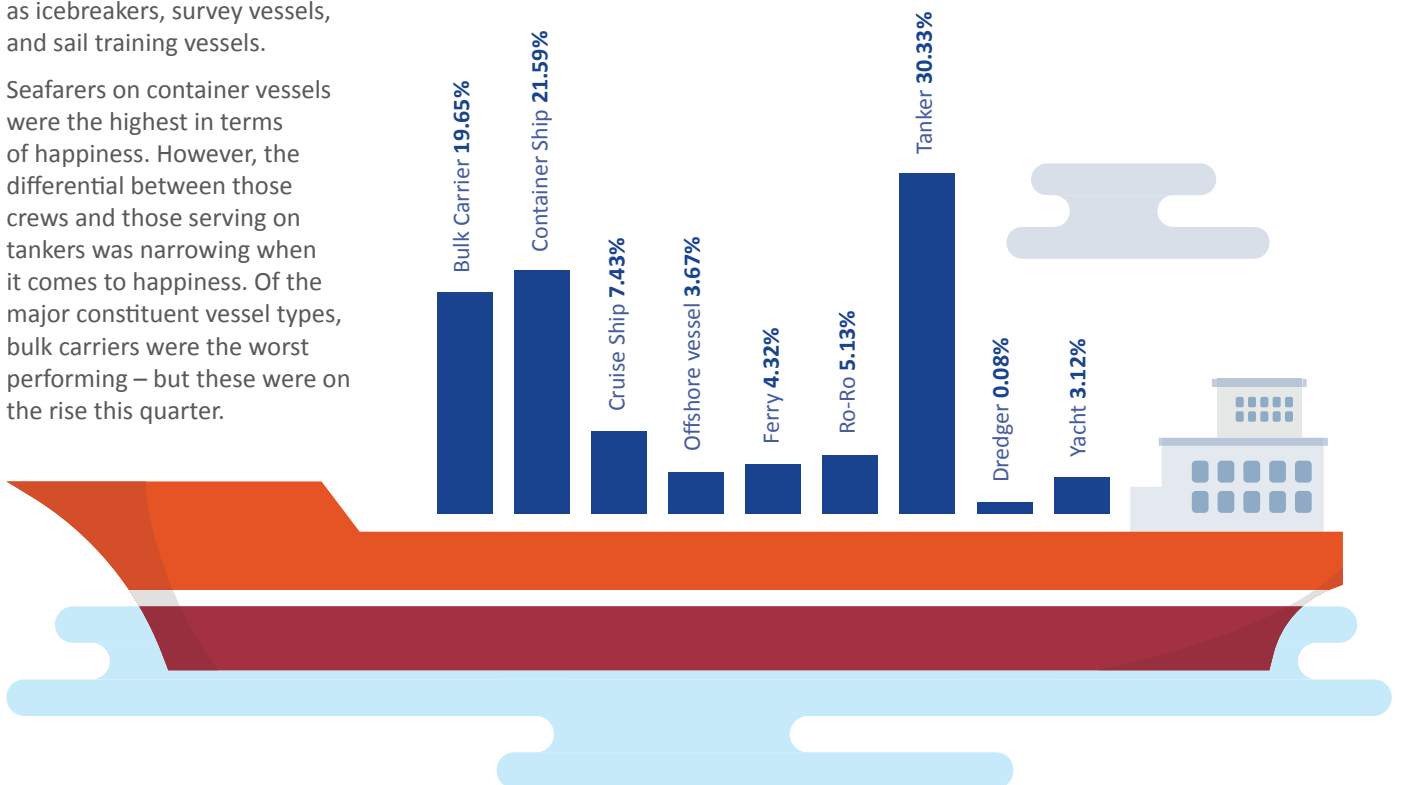
As has been the trend across previous Seafarers Happiness Index results, deck crew and officers tended to be happier than their engineering counterparts – they also appear to engage more readily with the project. Once more the middle cohort of ranks, second officer and third engineer, chief officer and second engineer, performed better. They recorded the highest results across the board, while Captains are reportedly happier than Chief Engineers.



## WHAT

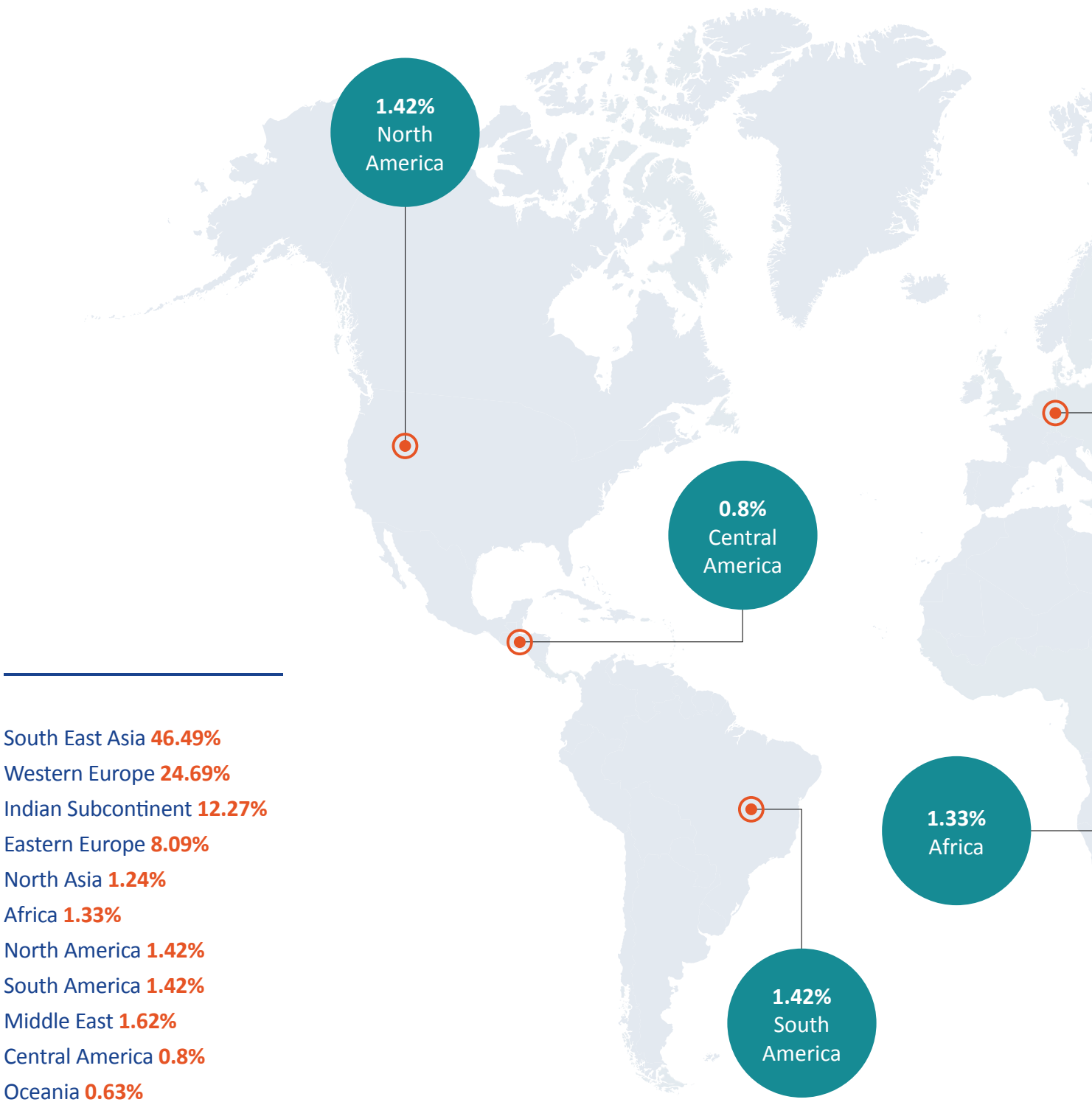
Other 3.96% These included gas carriers, general cargo, specific kinds of offshore vessels, as well as icebreakers, survey vessels, and sail training vessels.

Seafarers on container vessels were the highest in terms of happiness. However, the differential between those crews and those serving on tankers was narrowing when it comes to happiness. Of the major constituent vessel types, bulk carriers were the worst performing – but these were on the rise this quarter.



# Where

Once again, respondents from South East Asia tended to record higher happiness marks in their responses.

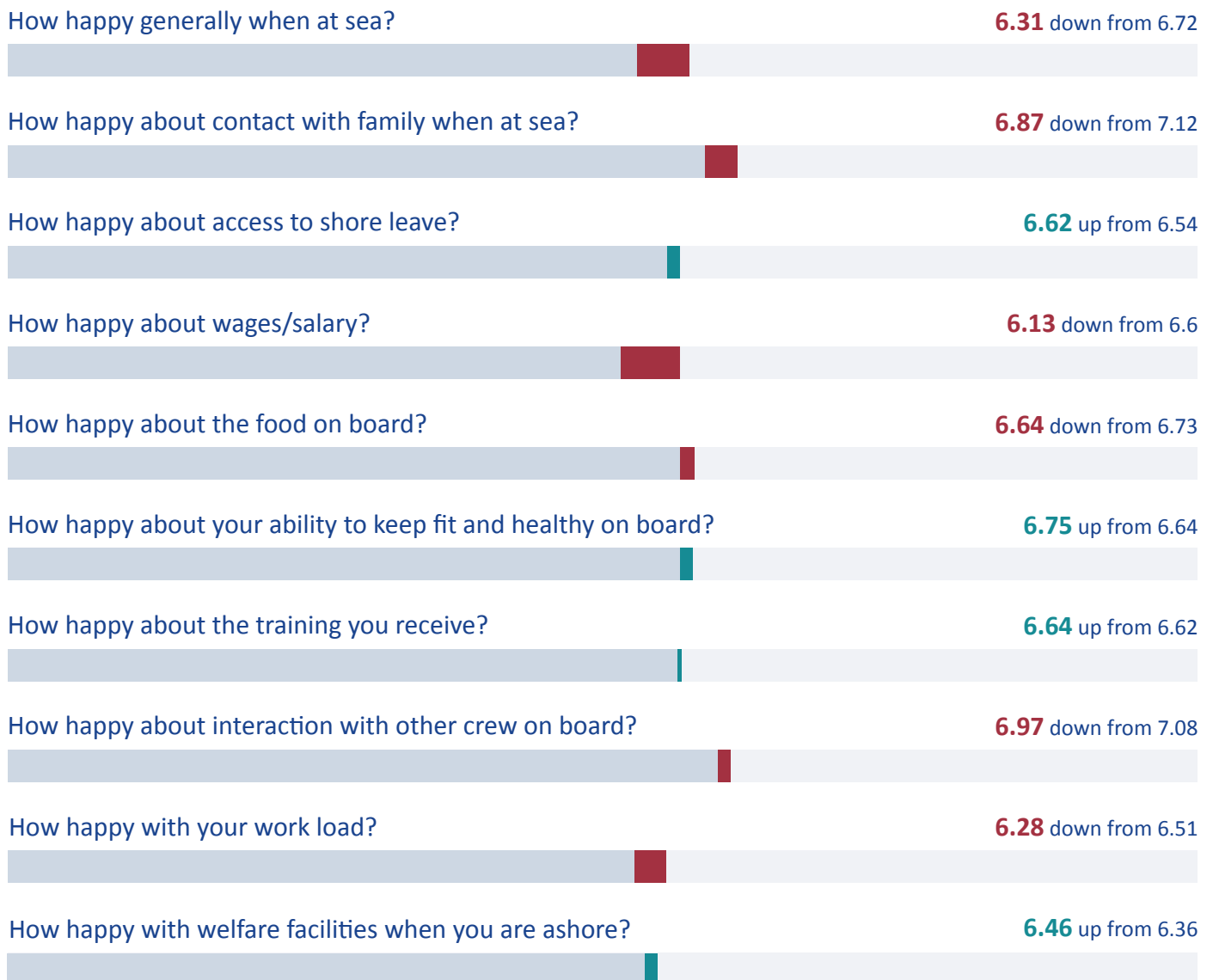




# Seafarers Happiness Index

## Data: Q2 2018

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# Dialogue behind the data

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Let's look at the stories behind the numbers. An increasing level of respondents took the time to explain how they felt and why – so this is their story, their life at sea and the experiences that they have in the job and career as a seafarer.



## Question 1 - 6.31 ↓ from 6.72

### How happy generally when you are at sea?

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In analysing the general levels of overall happiness of seafarers, the level fell slightly to 6.31 this quarter. Underpinning the figures there were direct comments which highlight scope for further improvement.

Issues such as shipboard inspections, work load, management onboard and ashore, and isolation and loneliness all emerged as having a huge impact on how seafarers feel and of how their time at sea is spent.

It is not all bad news – there is still an overwhelming sense of professional pride at working onboard ships, and seafarers who shared their views said they felt “born to do the job” – and were pleased at the opportunity to put their skills and training into practice.

From the positive responses, the happiest most satisfied seafarers claimed that being at sea is a “lifestyle” – and it can be one of the most amazing feelings. To experience the “time with shipmates, a good ship and a regular rotation”. Despite the challenges, they are happy in their role.

The positive outcomes associated with the work were also stated as playing a major part in the happiness of those at sea. The ability to earn money, to support families at home and to have a

sense of “pride in a job well done” was quoted repeatedly. While the concept of getting, “a good job, good salary and security” were the key facets of seafaring which made the difference.

From the more negative responses and experiences, there were some key themes which emerged. Loneliness, disconnection and distance from family and friends has a terrible effect on happiness. While paper work and a heavy work load were once more seen as having a major impact on quality of life at sea.

Once more, as in previous surveys the attitudes, experience and conduct of management ashore were called into question. There is a growing sense of tension between offices ashore and vessels. Something which is hugely troubling.

Fatigue and stress were again mentioned repeatedly by respondents. Several respondents gave a sense of trips to sea as, “killing time” and of life being “dull”. One factor which emerged was the fact that some seafarers find the shipboard environment less than stimulating.

Comments were made that seafarers feel that new ships are well equipped, but that the design and finish of ship

interiors are too often very sterile. Areas which are intended for social use are finished in the same manner as every other part of the ship, the same panelling, furnishings and detailing – long gone are the sense of a cosy, friendly space which encourages interaction and crew commented that these places, “do not feel like somewhere you want to be”. This could be another reason that seafarers do not feel attracted to leave their cabins as social spaces are not being designed with social interaction in mind.

There were also comments from respondents that they felt there was a lack of managerial “ownership” about seafarer happiness, wellness or mental health. Even though these issues seem to be in vogue currently, some felt that there needed to be someone named in the company as having clear responsibility for this side of human resource management. It was noted that responsibilities for so many aspects of operations were clearly laid out, but not so the satisfaction of the crew.

**There is a diet dilemma for some as they wrestle to remain at an appropriate weight.**

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## Question 2 - 6.87 ↓ from 7.12

### How happy are you about the contact you are able to have with your family when you are at sea?

The issue of contact with family and connectivity is a hugely significant issue and has been one of the more contentious issues since we first began the Seafarers' Happiness Index. There was a drop in the levels this quarter as certain issues remain. It has been stressed repeatedly that seafarers crave the connection that internet, calls, messaging can bring.

Again, there is a clear hierarchy at sea between those ships that provide crew with internet access. However, discussions are more nuanced, with differing levels of services and costs also coming to the fore.

Where even just a couple of years ago there was a clamour to simply be connected – now there are calls for faster, cheaper and better service. Seafarers are becoming ever more discerning in what is an acceptable level of connectivity.

There were seafarers who despite receiving free internet access, were also pressing for improvements. They stated that “200mb free internet is too low, we need at least 1 GB”. Some claimed that the levels of access they were granted were actually far lower than they were told they could have.

The shipboard connectivity genie is well and truly out of the bottle. Seafarers who experience the satisfaction of being connected are now clamouring for more. Which mirrors experience ashore – the more people have, the more they want.

There is a growing sense that until the provisions at sea reach some comparable level with ashore, then tensions will remain. Reliable internet available and reasonable priced satellite phone cards seem to be the absolute minimum that many seafarers demand.

There were strong criticisms of companies who over charge their seafarers for access. There are companies who make a profit on the communications of their crews – something, which was felt by respondents to be morally and ethically wrong.

Seafarers without connectivity are seemingly amazed that they should be denied the access which so many people take for granted. One seafarer stated, “In this age when the whole world is connected by high speed Internet, only seafarers are left out. Even on ships where Internet is available it is available at an insanely high price.”

There were repeated calls from those who wanted to see pressure to make internet access for seafarers' compulsory on all ships. If and only, they said, all vessels were connected to the web, that would make seafarers even happier.

**In this age when the whole world is connected by high speed Internet, only seafarers are left out.**

## Question 3 - 6.62 ↑ from 6.54

### How happy are you about your access to shore leave?

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Shoreleave is an issue which remains fairly static in the Happiness Index returns – and despite a marginal rise this time round, seafarers expressed many of the usual concerns and frustrations.

The ability or lack of opportunity to spend time ashore is a perennial problem area for the modern seafarer. Once more the returns we received painted time alongside as a time of inspections, and more work to be done, rather than relaxation or a chance to get off the ship.

This was a pattern repeated in responses and while the recent downward trend of the Happiness Index has at least been arrested, there are still a number of issues which keep arising.

Restrictions, stringent security and high costs placed on seafarers are seen as being majorly significant, and they have a negative effect. Commonly repeated words in these responses related to the need for seafarers to gain some much needed “relaxation”.

Seafarers claimed that the benefits of being able to unwind and escape the pressures of shipboard life, even for a short period, were hugely important. The chance to break free from the norm is seen as being hugely beneficial, but seafarers feel they are being denied the

opportunity to get ashore. Some claim there are physical security barriers which stop them getting shoreleave, while others state that it is cost, seafarers repeatedly stated that even getting ashore would cost them at least 100 USD.

There were also more reports that there is culture developing onboard which looks down on seafarers seeking to get ashore. There were comments in which respondents claimed that masters and senior officers did not condone crew seeking to get ashore.

Some felt that this was to do with impact on rest hours, while others felt that officers were becoming increasingly embroiled in inspections and audits, and so there was almost a “jealousy” and “resentment” which was helping to make shoreleave even less attractive. One response even likened shoreleave to being on “parole” – with officers back on the ship apparently, “always trying to ensure that you got back as quickly as possible, and seemingly without having had any enjoyment”.

Time and time again, respondents stated that shoreleave is becoming an “impossibility” – even more so on some vessels. Tankers were singled, but there were common threads across vessel types.

**always trying to ensure that you got back as quickly as possible, and seemingly without having had any enjoyment.**

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## Question 4 - 6.13 ↓ from 6.6

### How happy are you about your wages/salary?

The issue of wages is always bound to be a contentious issue. Given how many seafarers have responded about how important it is for them to provide for their families ashore, then perhaps it takes on even more importance.

The subject saw a jump up on the happiness index, up to 6.66 from 6.18 previously. However, there seemed to be rather more negative comments than last time around, and there definitely seemed to be something of an edge to comments about “foreigners” taking jobs and accepting lower pay. This was repeatedly mentioned and was a source of annoyance for a number of respondents.

The issue of “cheaper crews” undercutting salaries was a significant feature of the responses. Multiple respondents focused on the same issue, and some claimed it was “devastating” the industry. One comment received stated, “Well the big question, we are all seafarers with international recognized certification, yet the salaries are not equal. Two crew members doing the same job should be entitled to the same salary. While many seafarers syndicate fight for their own, when shall we see a common spirit to fight for better rights?”

Related to this issue, there were concerns raised about Open Registries. Some felt that “Flags of Convenience are killing the industry”. Again, this appeared to relate to the use of multinational crews on differential pay scales.

Wage stagnation was another repeated issue – and there was a sense from seafarers that they had not received a pay rise in years. Some mentioned five years, others as many as ten years.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this issue was the fact that seafarers are still being taken advantage of by rogue “manning agents”. Respondents spoke of having paid money for work, only to have their cash and the agent go missing.

Fake shipping companies claiming to offer good work, but then defrauding and cheating seafarers is a feature of the landscape in some countries. Respondents from India and the Philippines were particularly affected by this issue. Many respondents felt that this was a form of parallel face of what is traditionally considered “seafarer abandonment”.

These scams see crews “employed” by companies that do not even exist, and then simply left to fend for themselves

when they ask about wages, or when a cargo consignment is delivered. The mysterious, fake shipping companies simply vanish, and seafarers are left to count the cost.

It was felt there needs to be a better international mechanism for checking on companies. While the Maritime Labour Convention has supposedly closed some loopholes, many seafarers feel it is not simple or easy enough to find out the truth about employers.

As with most areas of the Index, it was not all bad news. Again, the positives which emerged focused on the pride that seafarers feel in being a provider for their family. Numerous responses stated that was the main driver for them and their career at sea.

**Well the big question, we are all seafarers with international recognized certification, yet the salaries are not equal.**

## Question 5 - 6.64 ↓ from 6.73

### How happy are you about the standard of food you eat on board?

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Seafarers naturally feel so much happier when the food onboard is good. Life is better with good food and a full stomach. Food is an incredibly important part of shipboard life – not simply as a fuel to sustain the crew, but as a means of making them feel happier, satisfied and even to safeguard the bonds between those onboard.

It is major issue, but one respondent said crews don't have much choice. He wrote, "You can eat, you can go hungry, or you can go home". Which we think is a way of saying that you don't have much choice, so get eating.

Sadly, such lack of input about diet, recipes and the food served was something which ran through this latest batch of results. With concerns that cooks of different nationalities were not being trained to deliver certain cuisine, through to more allegations of cutbacks and cost cuttings, then there are still concerns over the diet at sea. Across responses, chandlers stood accused of sending cheaper, lower quality brands, in some instances. Crew felt that they got the lesser quality as they were, "out of sight and mind".

For many respondents it is all about the standards, experience and training of

the cooks. Those who were happiest reported having well trained catering crew, who knew how to cater for different nationalities, and who made varied, healthy and tasty meals.

It was recognised in responses that so much depends on the cook and the ability to translate ingredients into good meals. Sadly, and we hope it was said in jest, one respondent even wanted to "kill the cook!!" Food is a very sensitive issue and there can be social problems onboard where the standard of cooking or provisions are inadequate.

There were also specific criticisms of some companies. One large tanker operator came in for reproach, with all food claimed to be "sour or dry". While another, seemingly runs with very low levels of food onboard. Something which means that rationing often occurs.

The industry used to talk in the past about "bad feeders", but sadly the problems seem to remain today. This is particularly depressing and troubling, especially as the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) is supposedly making life at sea better. There seem to still be some problems remaining when it comes to victualling onboard.

**You can eat, you can go hungry,  
or you can go home**

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## Question 6 - 6.75 ↑ from 6.64

### How happy are you about your ability to keep fit and healthy on board?

Fitness and exercise is another major and important component of seafarer happiness. While the numbers jumped up this quarter, there were still respondents who felt that a lack of time and facilities were to blame.

Respondents claimed that stress of their work, combined with relentless demands meant that it was difficult to find time to exercise. They also claimed that changes to schedules meant they felt unable to have a pattern of life onboard which was conducive to fitness and making use of the gym.

This was particularly the case on smaller vessels working in trades which involved numerous port calls and shorter times between cargo operations, as they are in and out of port so often.

Again, there were respondents who stated that their vessels do not have a gym, and while the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) encourages “consideration” of recreational facilities and sports equipment, it seems that many vessels are still going without.

There were concerns voiced by seafarers that their companies require them to maintain a certain Body Mass Index (BMI), but that their schedules and

time does not factor in the exercise to help them do so. Cases such as these seemingly cause heightened levels of stress and concern for seafarers, and there is a “diet dilemma” for some as they wrestle to remain at an appropriate weight. They stated that they want to stay fit and healthy but require support and assistance in doing so.

The constraints of time and culture onboard affect how likely or not crew are to be able to exercise – and sadly it seems that routines onboard are working against seafarers finding the opportunity to work out.

The health and exercise benefits of shoreleave were mentioned in numerous returns. Seafarers claimed they missed being able to go for a walk and stretch their legs. This is perhaps an overlooked aspect of both shoreleave and exercise.

Some seafarers do get to exercise, and the benefits to them make a real difference to the quality of their work life. One seafarer wrote of the pleasure from scheduling in a twice weekly session in the onboard gym and sauna. Alas many others are not so fortunate.

There were comments from seafarers who work on large vessels, particularly container ships, that they get a significant amount of exercise given the sheer size of the vessel. Making their way up and down a large number of decks and around huge stacks of containers is quite a work out, they said.

**There is a diet dilemma for some as they wrestle to remain at an appropriate weight.**





## Question 7 - 6.64↑ from 6.62

### How happy are you about the training you receive?

Training is a subject which seems to throw up competing emotions for seafarers. Many respondents recognise its importance, but some question the costs and the means of delivery. There are many who seemingly resent the impact of training on their leave, and those who felt that the cost impact was a heavy burden for them to carry as individuals.

The frequency and repetition of refresher training also came in for criticism – with respondents stating that the financial implications of the study are difficult for them to budget for. This also ties in with the wage issue and of seafarers feeling squeezed financially when they are paying off the vessel. If they do not feel they have been able to save sufficiently for their families, then that also means they will be struggling to pay for any additional training they may require. This can jeopardise their entire careers and is a major concern.

There was criticism, not so much of the actual training, but of the system which is in place. One commented, “Training is not for catching up with what’s new in the shipping industry, it’s about making money. Money that we seafarers pay from our pocket, and the sums are considerable big. So, no, I’m not very happy!”

There were also critical responses about specific course types and subjects. There was a concern that some training centres are not keeping adequately abreast of the newest training disciplines, and there was some criticism that training staff and lecturers can appear, “behind the times”. There were also some concerns that courses ashore can often deliver too much material over too short a time.

Seafarers stated that, “training for new systems such as the maintenance of chart updating software was woefully inadequate”. The cyber security issue was one that featured across responses. Seafarers said they felt under pressure to keep the ship secure, but that they felt under prepared as to how they could do so.

There were also those who felt that as well as training there was a need for some more practical support. Why, asked one seafarer, do electronic chart systems have USB ports when the last thing anyone would want is “universal” access. It seems a good point and is perhaps something for manufacturers to consider.

At sea, many seafarers expressed gratitude for the support and teaching they receive from other officers, and

more senior staff. There is a sense that such education can strengthen the bond of a crew and make seafarers feel better connected to the company.

For all the criticism, others are very happy with the facilities, standard of lecturers, materials and the subjects they learn. There was praise too for some in-house company training centres, and gratitude too for the ease that online or computer-based training can bring.

**training for new systems such as the maintenance of chart updating software was woefully inadequate.**

## Question 8 - 6.97 ↓ from 7.08

### How happy are you about interaction with other crew members on board?

Team work is an expression which is much used in relation to crew on ships, and the bonds, interactions and support which seafarers provide to each other onboard are vitally important.

With criticisms awash around the shipping industry that there is too little interaction onboard these days, it is an important issue to gauge. This quarters' data showed a drop on what has hitherto remained one of the consistently highest-ranking categories across the seafarer happiness index results.

Respondents have spoken in positive terms about their fellow shipmates, talking in terms of friendships, professionalism and the levels of support and training that crew and officers alike give each other. This was a fact echoed by a report from International Maritime Organization (IMO) Technical Officer Sascha Pristrom who recently sailed onboard a Maersk container vessel. He stated that work at sea is, "a lot easier when you have fun at the same time". That is something which comes across loudly in the Seafarers Happiness Index, crews who have a good rapport are always happier across the board.

Some believe that they have no choice but to get along, "we are literally in the same boat" – one seafarer commented.

While that could explain why the bonds are so important, there are other aspects of life which encourage and foster interaction. Some respondents wrote of the importance and significance of having received training to help them deal with "human relations".

It seems that despite the positives, there are many challenges too. The issue of mixed nationality crews was raised, as has become the norm. While Filipino respondents spoke in glowing terms of their interactions together, they were rather less enthusiastic about dealing with other nationalities.

"Foreign officials" came in for some strong criticisms, and there were allegations that such inspectors or auditors can have a propensity towards "arrogance", especially when dealing with Filipino crews. This could of course be based on isolated incidents – but there were respondents who reportedly similarly.

It can be difficult to accommodate different cultures, languages and religions onto vessels. Some respondents felt such factions can be divisive, but there are clearly efforts being made to avoid any tensions. "Everything is fine, so long as we don't discuss religion", was one comment. Mirroring the need to ensure that

conduct, and conversations are carefully chosen onboard –seafarers summed this up in one word," respect". They felt it was vitally important that there is a culture of respect onboard – regardless of ranks and nationalities, languages or other issues, those who worked on vessels which fostered a sense of respect between the crew were noticeably happier than others.

Sadly, there was a seeming trend of difficulties between sea staff and those ashore. There were repeated mentions that office staff were abrasive, lacked empathy and understanding, and were often quite demanding. There were also comments that staff in the offices ashore changed quite often, and this meant some degree of instability for those having to deal with them. No sooner had they developed a rapport with managers ashore, then there was often change. This leaves seafarers frustrated and relationships are reportedly stifled.

**Everything is fine, so long as we don't discuss religion.**



## Question 9 - 6.28 ↓ from 6.51

### How happy are you with your work load?

Work load and the pressures placed on seafarers are a serious and seemingly ever-present issue at sea. With so many related concerns, such as tiredness, stress and fatigue dogging the industry, it is important to gauge how seafarers see their work load.

As has been the pattern across other reports, there is a definite sense that there remain high levels of work, and sustained pressure but with little time or opportunity to get it all done. This is especially true on vessels which make only short sea voyages.

Frequent port calls and fast turnarounds cause spikes in work load generated by shipboard communications, pre-arrival and departure checks and the paperwork issue is one which is a repeated cause for concern.

Six-hour cargo watches were singled out as a major concern, respondents stated that after a sustained period of these watches they felt completely drained and overworked.

Again, there were criticisms in this section about managers and office workers ashore. Seafarers reported they felt there was an increasing lack of knowledge and experience ashore, and that they were being used to “fill the gaps”. This led to an increase in

workload, as seafarers were having to guide and assist those ashore.

However, it was felt that input from seafarers was not being listened to when it comes to improving or evolving safety management systems (SMS). Respondents stated that they had made suggestions and offered ideas on how to improve or streamline processes, but that these were often ignored. There was a sense that, “managers ashore cannot be bothered with the hassle or changing SMS”.

There was also a concern that regulations are increasing the work load at sea, rather than easing it. With so much to do, so much documentation and processes to follow, seafarers reported feeling stressed and squeezed by the pressures placed upon them.

These issues are not felt by all, and there are some respondents who feel their companies have excellent processes, support and a sensible view of how to manage the risks of over work. The seafarers who are supported, and feel they work under a positive regime and rationale felt far happier than their counterparts in other companies.

Paper work was this quarter, as it is in most others, felt to be a negative element of life at sea. The anecdotal

evidence strongly suggests that most seafarers spend longer completing the paper work for a task than the job itself. Which suggests that some form of rethink may be needed.

**Managers ashore cannot be bothered with the hassle of changing SMS.**



## Question 10 - 6.46↑ from 6.36

### How happy are you with welfare facilities when you are ashore?

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As we have seen, shoreleave is an important issue for seafarers, and it is vital to also explore the parallel concern of what facilities exist for crew if they do manage to get ashore.

When and where seafarers leave the ship, the welfare facilities which are provided are of enormous significance. It is not easy or cheap for crew to get ashore, so it is increasingly important that when they do, then they are provided with services, support and experiences which make it worthwhile.

While the Happiness Index this time round showed a significant leap, it was not easy in the written responses to see why that would be the case. However, the positive responses spoke of “excellent facilities”, and of the “difference that good centres” can make. It would be rewarding from the Mission to Seafarers perspective to suppose that this increase in happiness was due to the proportion of responses which were gathered via hard copies in our welfare centres globally.

The best centres seem to be provide a warm welcome, a place to relax and to talk – as well as good food and drink, sensibly priced goods and free or cheap Wi-Fi. Seafarers do not need much, but

what they do need has to be provided at a fair price and with good service. Those centres with additional facilities – particularly access to sports, even as basic as pool or table tennis, were viewed positively by seafarers, and so the centres that provide just a little more are seen as being such an important haven away from the ship.

There were some comments which suggest that changes to the Facilitation Convention (FAL) could be having a positive impact. Seafarers stated that some ports which had been rather negative about shoreleave had at least removed some of the barriers and difficulties they had in place. This is an issue which we will monitor with interest and hope that it begins to translate to even more ports and countries.

**The best centres provide a warm welcome, a place to relax and to talk.**

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# Global Happiness

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The World Happiness Report 2018 is research based on the subjective well-being of populations within nations. People evaluate the quality of their current lives on a scale of 0 to 10 for each country. Seafaring is obviously very different to “everyday life” ashore, and while populations are not asked the same questions, it is interesting to at benchmark and compare. While the parameters may be different happiness makes the difference as to how people feel.

As such, if seafarers were citizens of their own nation, then this quarter’s happiness levels (6.56) would see them just outside the top twenty nations, sitting at 23rd in the global rankings between Malta (6.627) and France (6.489).

You can access the full global report here [https://s3.amazonaws.com/happiness-report/2018/WHR\\_web.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/happiness-report/2018/WHR_web.pdf) and a reminder that Finland (7.632) currently sits atop the list when it comes to happiness ranked over the various United Nations criteria.

To compare key maritime manpower nations, we see that Philippines (5.524) sits at 71 in the rankings, China (5.246) at 86 (and India (4.190) is way down at 133, Ukraine (4.103) at 138. So collectively seafarers do appear to be happier than the general populations back at home.

# Key Issues Raised

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Overall Seafarers Happiness Index figures have shown a rise, and while it is obviously early days, it is positive to see growth across various key issues.

- Inspections, work load, management onboard and ashore are negatively affecting seafarer happiness.
- Isolation and loneliness are felt as being major issues for seafarers.
- Fatigue and stress were again mentioned repeatedly by respondents.
- There is an overwhelming sense of professional pride at working onboard ships.
- Seafarers feel that being at sea is a “lifestyle”.
- Boredom is a factor at sea. Seafarers reported trips to sea as, “killing time” and of life being “dull”.
- Some shipboard interiors were criticised as being “sterile” and “soulless”. Shared social spaces are not being sufficiently well designed or thought through.
- Connectivity is still the number one demand of seafarers. Now though, they expect better levels of service and lower costs.
- Seafarers keen to make crew internet access compulsory on all ships.
- Shoreleave restrictions, stringent security and high costs are seen as being majorly significant, and they have a negative effect.
- Shoreleave is still viewed as important, and the chance to break free from the normal routine is seen as being hugely beneficial.
- Worrying culture developing onboard which seemingly looks down on seafarers seeking to spend recreation time ashore.
- Pay “discrimination” for different seafarer nationalities is causing frustration and anger.
- Static pay levels experienced over the past few years are cause for concern
- Standard of food an issue, and seafarers accused some chandlers of sending cheaper, lower quality brands to ships.
- Catering is vitally important. The standards, experience and training of cooks is a concern.
- Food is a very sensitive issue and there can be social problems onboard where the standard of cooking or provisions are felt to be inadequate.
- Some owners deliberately run with very low levels of food onboard, allegedly. Reports of rationing.
- Exercise is a concern, and workloads combined with relentless demands mean some crew find it hard to get time to exercise.
- “Diet Dilemma” – some companies require seafarers to maintain a certain Body Mass Index (BMI) – but that their schedules and time does not factor in the exercise to help them do so.
- The health and exercise benefits of shoreleave were repeatedly stressed.
- Maritime training is seen as important, but seafarers resent the impact of training on their leave.
- The frequency and repetition of refresher training also came in for criticism
- Respondents have spoken in positive terms about their fellow shipmates, talking in terms of friendships, professionalism and support.
- Some Filipino respondents spoke in glowing terms of their interactions together, they were rather less enthusiastic about dealing with other nationalities. There were accusations of racism and bullying.
- Workloads are still reportedly high, but seafarers see little time or opportunity to get it done. This is especially true on vessels which make only short sea voyages.
- Six-hour cargo watches were singled out as a major concern.
- There were criticisms for managers and office workers ashore – a lack of experience or knowledge ashore means that seafarers are being asked to do more. Also lack of “ownership” of the issue of mental health onboard within companies.
- Paperwork is still an issue. Seafarers reported spending longer completing the paper work for a task, than the job itself.
- Seafarer welfare centres make a real difference to the quality of life for many seafarers.

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