

Intercargo urges port states to assist crew changes despite restrictions

'Overzealous' blocking of seafarer movements pose grave risks for society at large as well as crews and the shipping industry, warns bulker owners' association

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INTERCARGO has called for pragmatism in dealing with the movement of seafarers around the world as authorities increasingly lock down their countries to battle the spread of the coronavirus.

The international dry bulk shipowners' association, which has a membership corresponding to more than 25% of the global bulker fleet, warned that too heavy-handed a clampdown on crew changes will put supply chains in jeopardy and ultimately exacerbate current hardships.

It said "many port states" have imposed local regulations, travel and quarantine restrictions that have "stalled" crew changes and presented "logistical challenges" to repatriation of seafarers who have completed their period of sea service.

This was despite International Maritime Organization calls to be mindful of providing access for the seafaring community.

"In many cases neither the seafarers nor the companies know for how long these [restrictions] may prevail," Intercargo said in a statement.

Port states should "adopt a pragmatic approach in assisting shipowners and seafarers to overcome these challenges by removing undue hinderance for seafarers to leave or join a ship in their ports," Intercargo said. "Banning crew changes in ports brings high risks to crews, ships, ports and society."

Without efficient crew changes, the supply chain would break down, "leading to basic product shortages and greater hardships for people around the world".

Said Intercargo: "The world relies on transportation by sea and the dry bulk shipping sector's services. Seafarers need our support and compassion with measured, rather than overzealous, restrictions in relation to the coronavirus."

Authorities should also take into account the mental state of crews eager to reunite with their families after months at sea and potential "adverse repercussions" on safe navigation and operations.