

Fishing vessel safety management

After an unprecedented success in the initial rollout, where next?

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In the December 2021 issue of *Seaways* we published an article outlining the Fishing First Safety Management system. This was a new initiative to improve safety on UK fishing vessels, spearheaded by The Seafarer's Charity, delivered by SafetyFolder and supported by The Nautical Institute.

This initiative involved a pilot project on 50 UK fishing vessels of various specifications centred in the South West of England to run for a period of six months. This was a bold undertaking to introduce the concept of an ISM safety management system to an industry that is renowned for its resistance to change. Contrary to what might have been expected, it was received with enthusiasm.

The concept was to introduce ISM quality auditing to fishing vessels in compliance with the Fishing Safety Management Code (MGN 596F). This code was designed to align with the MCA's surveys and inspections, avoiding duplications and simplifying compliance with ILO C 188, the Work in Fishing Convention. The project was wholly funded by the UK Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and Trinity House.

Participating vessels received professional support to develop an ISM quality safety management system tailored for each vessel, followed by onboard audits from qualified auditors. The project was launched during Autumn 2021 and was fully subscribed within its first week. This enthusiasm for a change in the industry safety culture demonstrated early indications of success.



Project results

At the time of writing, in April 2022, the pilot project is drawing to a close, on time and in budget – a rarity in any project. The emerging results have proven very positive. There have been some unexpected developments – but then, that is why it was a pilot study. Key to success was ensuring that the right stakeholders were involved from the outset, offering support throughout the implementation.

Prior to audit roll out, project administrators SafetyFolder trialled their safety management system audit standards on fishing vessels operating in the Falkland Islands economic zone. They audited 28 vessels to ensure they had a robust auditing model. This was a great way to develop the auditing specification and also to test the ability to communicate, enabling SafetyFolder to make minor adjustments to their system prior to the pilot roll out.

Initially, 10 auditors were identified from a fishing industry background. This was a deliberate choice as it was felt this would allow the auditors and fishers to be more receptive to one another. However, it quickly became apparent that there was a need for an even larger number of auditors, all of whom would need to be trained to ISM standard. The Nautical Institute was able to step forward and offer to develop an ISM Lead Auditor's Course by remote learning as a practical and cost-effective solution.

The popularity of the course was one of the unanticipated successful results that emerged from the pilot study. From feedback received, it was evident that many attendees benefited greatly from the course content. Whilst this particular course had an emphasis on the fishing industry, it has proven so successful it is hoped that further courses will be offered for commercial shipping.

While some course attendees were auditors experienced in other areas, many were vessel owner/operators, and these attendees in particular gained a new safety perspective from the course. This positive outcome drove demand for a second course. This course was again quickly filled and delivered, and produced the same



enthusiastic feedback. In fact, some vessel operators were so impressed as to bring additional vessels in to the project. Students have even suggested that the course is a ‘game changer’ within the industry in terms of more women getting into the industry and contributing in the field of safety and auditing.

Once auditor training had been completed, vessel audits took place in earnest during March and into April. A 100% completion rate looks likely by the end of the month.

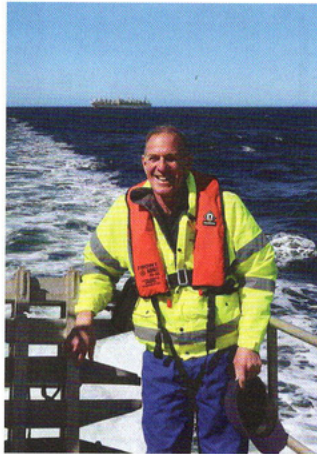
Findings

The pilot study has produced a range of findings, questions and comments that could help to identify the next stages of the implementation. We hope that these will demonstrate how fishing vessels can now be audited by an internationally recognised mechanism to a proxy of an international standard (ISM Code).

1. Vessel owners are willing to be audited and have put themselves forward to allow auditors to attend their vessels and report their findings.
2. The process has the potential to support the Modern Slavery Act in respect of evidencing transparency in the supply.
3. Audits offer the ability to view aggregated data and identify the issues that are most common, helping to target schemes to improve the health, safety and welfare onboard. The aggregation of results is best supported through a specified mechanism. This is slightly different from ISM, and may need further work directly with the supply chain.
4. Similar to the ISM Code, the auditors are qualified and competent.
5. Each auditor will require extra supporting documents and expert advice. These support packs should be completed before the end of the pilot project.
6. Costs of operating the scheme can be considered as minimal, with external audits being shared amongst organisations and direct supply chain auditors.
7. The SafetyFolder provides a free option to support vessels to develop and maintain a Safety Management System. The project could provide detailed print instructions to encourage owner associations, supply chains, and even countries to build their own Safety Management Manuals.
8. It is likely that there will need to be further support to maintain the pace of development. Given national and international interest in the scheme there will be many options to consider.

Robert Greenwood, a Seafarers’ Charity Trustee, said “The infrastructure to deliver the Fishing First Safety Management service has now been developed and well tested in the UK and demonstrated it can be adapted to suit all types of fishing vessel from under 10m to large ring netters. We have also delivered the service to international fishing fleets including Falkland Islands and Korea.

“Next steps are to look at how we can widen the service to the whole UK fleet, offer Fishing First Safety Management to Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the rest of England and continue to improve safety standards for everyone in fishing.”



The Seafarer’s Charity intends to follow up the pilot project with a national roll out across the UK. This could encompass around 4,000 vessels. There are ongoing discussions regarding new funding and the facilitation of training for new auditors, with a proposed five new ISM Lead Auditor courses (50 funded placements) to be held within the next 12 months.

Ensuring supply chain transparency

An interesting perspective that emerged from the pilot was that fish buyers (mainly supermarket chains) increasingly require supply chain transparency and ethically sourced fish. This not only covers how and when fish are caught, but also involves fishing vessel safety standards and properly contracted crew.

Operators adopting a formal safety management system will be in a position to offer better supply chain transparency, and have potential to add value to their business as a producer of high-quality UK seafood.

Long term, there is a proposal to roll out an international project in parallel with the UK national scheme. Whilst this aspect is only at the development stage, it is hoped that the international element will initially concentrate on North America, Europe and South East Asia, with particular emphasis on increasing global visibility of the scheme at the IMO and ILO.

The success of this pilot project could prove a seminal moment for the international fishing industry, and The Nautical Institute will have a major part to play in ensuring its success in the global arena.



Check The Seafarers’ Charity website for updates <https://www.theseafarerscharity.org/what-we-do/our-influence/safety-management-onboard-fishing-vessels-2>