Global MET Seminar debates on STCW review

The Global Maritime Education and Training Association held a one day conference on “Improving MET through review of STCW and Training Policies”, on June 9, 2007 at Mumbai. Capt. K.N. Deboo, director and principal of Anglo-Eastern Maritime Training Centre welcomed the guests. In his opening address, Capt. Rod Short, executive secretary, Global MET gave a review of the outcomes and recommendations from the eight working group discussions of AMETIAP.

Mr. N. Srinivasan, former director general of CII was the guest of honour. Mr. M.P. Pinto, former secretary, Ministry of Shipping, Govt. of India, was the chief guest. Capt. M.C. Yadav, director (Trg.), FOSMA, was the moderator. Capt. Tim Wilson, director, New Zealand Maritime School and vice chairman of Global MET speaking on “The Competency Crisis: Influencing the STCW Review and Training Policies” said that the shipping industry was heading for a competency crisis. The operating standards were falling, human error, hull and liability claims were increasing and those operators who were endeavouring to operate safe and efficient ship operations were increasingly constrained by a shortage of competent seafarers. He said that these out comes have been entirely predictable for almost two decades. “It is equally inevitable that the problems we are experiencing now are only the beginning of what will become a very severe crisis particularly for senior officers in the next decade. What is more concerning is that the only thing stopping an even more dramatic fall in standards are some of the senior officers who are soon to retire.

“We have heard many reasons over recent years as to why seafarers have not been prepared to stay at sea. These include criminalization, a less than attractive lifestyle, inadequate salary and little company loyalty to crew. I wish to suggest that
there is now another one. Many Masters and Chief Engineers I have spoken to recently have said that the competency of the other officers on board from many countries is now so low that they are no longer prepared to endure the stress that this causes them personally, nor are they prepared to be held accountable for incompetent crew who fail to carry out the most basic of duties. They are therefore choosing to retire early. This is a terrible indictment on the overall training system. The STCW review is therefore critically important for our industry.”

He said MSC had invited STW to identify areas of the Code and Convention that should be reviewed and to report back before 2008. In fact STW completed this work in one session and would report back to MSC in October 2007.

He disclosed that the one small victory of MET was that it had managed to get mandatory BRM and ERM competencies into the review programme.

“Most disappointing to me is that it will probably not consider whether assessment practice needs to be improved so that practical competence is actually determined before we throw out certificates like confetti to the waiting masses. We managed to open the door a little but there is a lot of work to be done if we are to push this item back into the review agenda. What is clear is that there is no training voice at STW. There were perhaps only 8-10 people present at the meeting with any maritime training expertise and I was possibly the only one who had direct influence over the statements made by their delegation. It is very clear that Global MET must work aggressively with existing IMO members and also continue to pursue individual status if our expertise in training and assessment is ever to inform the training and assessment regime. In any other industry, such a situation would be laughable.”

He felt that the revised STCW must demand that assessment practice is dragged into the 21st century. Technology, particularly in the form of simulation, along with significantly increased international experience of competency based assessment methodology; now allowed massive advances in assessment. It was essential that those with genuine expertise in assessment were involved in revamping the two assessment columns of the STCW Code tables. Without this improvement, the havoc wreaked by incompetent but certificated officers would ultimately destroy the minimal remaining respect many seafarers and the public had for the industry, he averred.

He said, “Our challenge as training providers is to advocate for improved competence standards in the industry. We need to do this more loudly and more effectively than we have ever done before. We need to do this alongside other like minded groups and we need to effectively engage with key delegations at IMO. Global MET is key to this happening.” Global MET had the knowledge of how varied the training and assessment standards really were internationally and extensive reach into Europe, North America and Asia Pacific. It also had the knowledge of how to actually fix the problem, he said.

Mr.A.Chatterjee, chief surveyor with Govt. of India, D.G. Shipping, speaking on the Regulatory Policies disclosed that

the STCW Sub-committee began its comprehensive review of the STCW Convention and the STCW Code, by reviewing each chapter and regulation and the related proposals for amendments or new regulations which had been submitted. It prepared a consolidated list of the issues to
be reviewed for approval by MSC83, and agreed that the review should embrace the following principles:

🌟 Retain the structure and goals of the 1995 revision;
🌟 Do not down-scale existing standards;
🌟 Do not amend the articles of the Convention;
🌟 Address inconsistencies, interpretations, outdated provisions, MSC instructions, clarifications already issued and technological advance;
🌟 Address requirements for effective communication;
🌟 Provide for flexibility in terms of compliance and for required levels of training and certification and watch keeping arrangements due to innovation in technology;
🌟 Address the special character and circumstances of short sea shipping and the offshore industry; and
🌟 Address security-related issues.

He elaborated on India’s action plan for selected sector in chapters II, III, IV, V, VI and VIII. He stated that there was also a need to review the need to develop a clear system by which not only the work schedule, but also actual hours worked could be easily verified.

Speaking about training of ratings, he said the Sub-Committee developed amendments to the STCW maritime security and the international Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code apply.

He said that as far as review of the principal for establishing the safe manning levels of ships, was concerned, the Sub-Committee gave preliminary consideration to proposals relating to the review of the principles for the safe manning levels of ships and established a correspondence group to review resolution A.890 (21) Principles of safe Manning amended, to identify possible needs for revision and prepare a comprehensive report for submission to STW 39.

He disclosed that for unlawful practices associated with certificates detected for approval by the MSC., with an aim to assist in focusing the fight against unlawful certificates on the prevalent types of fraud reported, was recommended by the Sub-Committee; which also noted that the certification verification facility, provided through the IMO website, had been used 6,300 times during 2006.

Mr. S.S. Choudhari, Nautical
officer, (from Lal Bahadur College of Advanced Maritime Studies and Research) presented a paper in which they stated that STCW convention & code should be projected in a more user friendly way, so that the users viz. the trainers, trainee and examiners would be able to use it in a very rapid and simple way.

He stated that Amendments, Standards & Guidance should be very specific and non-ambiguous. The standards required for a competence may be interpreted in different ways by student, trainer & evaluator “We must not forget that the end-product must be competent on ships.” He believed that for everything that is taught and everything that is asked to the candidate, the practical relevance on board must be considered. This would automatically rule out obsolete things.

The paper stated, “Some countries may do lot of fundamentals but no practicals while some other countries may teach few practical aspects in great details but keep the student ignorant about many important basic principles. To avoid this problem, methods of teaching as well as evaluation can be an exhaustive and specific so that neither you cut corners at some topics nor you go overboard with others.

“NCV students which generally we come across are more matured, ready to learn types. To make the best use of such potential, we must make the stream more lucrative viz (i) allow the certificate to extend to all coastal areas of World and (ii) The switchover from NCV to FG should be easier.”

Mr. David Birwadkar, vice president of Great Eastern Shipping Co. giving a ship owner’s perspective on the subject stated that more than 90 per cent of the world trade was carried by sea and the World order-book was increasing inexorably, Shipyards were fully booked for 3-5 years. He disclosed that World Merchant Fleet which was estimated to have grown to 960 million was short of competent of officers. He felt that as ship staff were valuable skilled Human Resources, value/vision based training should be imparted, making the candidates a ‘No Limits’ person. He said the institutes should empower leadership quality that spring from the sense of responsibility for that promoting feeling of recognition, security. According to him the objectives of training were:

- Improve standards of health, safety, & quality.
- Obsolescence prevention.
- To enhance vessels cargo outturn, improve quality of service.
- Ship owners stand a better chance of obtaining higher returns on their investment.
- Assist Company in fulfilling its future personnel needs.
- To improve work climate/culture.

There was a need to shift from traditional training to new concepts. The current moderate officer shortage will become severe unless maritime training is increased (beyond STCW certification) and measures are taken to address wastage rates -
Capt. Navin Passey, managing director, Wallem India, Wilco Ship Management Pvt. Ltd. and chairman FOSMA/FGMRO, presenting the ship managers’ point of view said that the STCW Code consisted of Part A, and Part B. Part A of the code is mandatory. The minimum standards of competence, required for seagoing personnel, were given in detail. Part B of the Code contains recommended guidance, which is intended to help parties implement the Convention. The measures suggested here were not mandatory and the examples given were only intended to illustrate, how certain convention requirements may be complied with.

He said that the 1995 version of STCW, though amended four times, since its adoption, needs further amendments as more than 10 years have passed, since its last major revision. The issues to be reviewed, in the Convention and Code, include:

- Security provisions.
- Development of Competence of Ratings.
- The review of Near Coastal Voyages.
- Competence Standards for Tankers especially LNG carriers.
- Demonstration of

Concluding, he said, “Whosoever desires constant success must change his conduct with the times. It’s time to re-engineer the traditional system jointly to set up new standards of training.”

As far as recent & anticipated changes in equipment/technology were concerned, he said that proactive approach towards training had to be adopted, in view of new developments.

Giving his view on Man Management he said it was necessary to have standardized and mandatory training for FP developments in HR. Communication training had to be provided for stress management and cultural integration. Compulsory berths had also to be allotted for trainees in deck and engine department. Standardization of revalidation requirements called for revision in the existing Refresher and Updating Training Course requirements (RUTC). He averred that the Course should be made mandatory in all countries across the globe. He felt that re-assessment of

- The review of Alternative Certification in chapter VII & the Criteria for safe manning and inclusion of rest provisions.
- Recent and future changes in technology & equipment.
- Man management.
- Standardization of Revalidation requirements.
- Re-assessment of Quality Standard for approval of Training Institutes.
quality standards for training institutes approval needed continual improvement of Training Institutes with regular assessment of Training Quality, including assessment of Trainers, in all countries signatory to the convention. A new Maritime Training Centre Quality Standards should also be developed and implemented besides the ISO 9001 Standard, he added.

Speaking about safe manning he said that fatigue had emerged as a significant contributory factor in accidents. This called for Education & Training for Fatigue Prevention, Mitigation and Management there was also the requirement for allocating correct value of job scope. “A simple increase in manning scales will not necessarily solve the multifaceted problem of fatigue or competence”, he stated.

Capt. Rajendra S. Pradhan presenting a sailor’s point of view on the STCW Revalidation courses said, “I am proud that our MMD is the only MMD that requires that we attend a refresher course as part of the revalidation requirements. However I have too much respect for our MMD and the persons involved in bringing this requirement in to force to believe even for a moment that the present from of the revalidation course is what they had in mind. Once again a very good idea had gone horribly of the track and has become problems.”

He added, “Before we go further we need to decide what is the goal of the refresher course is? (1) Is it so that on paper we can prove that the Indian Certificate is better than certificates issued by the other certifying authorities or (2) Is it so that we can convince the owners Charterers & Port State Control that we are employing people who have updated their information or (3) Is it so that we actually bring the Master up to date with the changes that have occurred in the profession during the last five years and changes that have been enacted and are to come in to force in the near future and to answer any unanswered questions that the Master has faced in the last five years.

“If the answer is one or two we have achieved our goal However if the answer is “Three” then sadly we are not achieving this goal, infact we are not even in the same city as the goal post. The purpose of the refresher course is just that. We refresh our knowledge but sadly that is not happening. At present the course requires an attendance of minimum 80 hours and covers certain mandatory topics.

“Is there a requirement that the officer be given practical guidance how to handle the changes in regulation-NO.

“Is there a review process in place that periodically reviews that topics that are addressed in a course and requires feed back from sailing officers attending the course to be addressed-NO.

“Is there a process in place that requires that an Answer be found for a Question faced by a master at sea-NO.”

He said that unless we ensured the answer to all three questions was YES, the refresher course was not serving its purpose and should be scrapped.

While conceding that the refresher course was essential he believed that the format and content should be constantly reviewed. He stated that it was reassuring to see that the review process was being carried out and was actually including sailors. He hoped that the sailors would also be included in the decision making process. He disclosed that when the courses moderators were asked “why they did not give practical guidance?” the answer was that each company had their own SBM manual and they did not want to contradict them!!!

All regulations are implemented by Classification societies and Flag States. Their regulations are very uniform and no SBM manual can contradict Class and Flag State Regulations. All Classification societies and Flag States have issued guidelines to their surveyors and owners on implementation of all regulations. No doubt most of these are very technical and elaborated and may not be easily understood by a Seaman “But why can’t the instructor instead of giving his interpretation of the regulations, use the class guidelines as a basis and strip out the technical jargon and formula and present these guidelines to the candidate in an easy to understand format?” he queried. He added, “I doubt Class of Flag State would object to their guidelines being used as a basis of course material.”

He disclosed, “I have on more than one occasion been given totally incorrect information by a lecturer. When queried the lecturer got upset and was not willing to back his statement with relevant facts and figures, we stopped the discussion as further discussion was pointless.
STANDARDISATION HAS BECOME A FARCE: CAPT. DEBOO

Though the objective of STCW was to standardize the educational standards throughout the world it has failed to do so as every state is free to formulate its own training policies keeping STCW as the minimum. What has been achieved is that some countries have kept to the minimum standards laid down under STCW (sometimes only on paper) while others have gone over the top to prove that they are the best said Capt Deboo in an interview with Water Link. Excerpts from his interview:

The aim of STCW, when it first came out, was to standardize the maritime training requirement. To some extent it achieved its aim of setting minimum standards, but every year the minimum level becomes obsolete because of the fast paced advances in technology. This means that there is a necessity for a 5-yearly review of the standards. Also, though we talk about standardization every country is allowed to maintain its own requirements what they deem is necessary for their nationality. Hence it still continues to propagate disharmony. In reality there is, at present, no standardized global education and training in the maritime industry.

The syllabus as well as the training period varies. The shore based training and the sea time requirement varies from country to country. There are also alternate training schemes allowed through STCW. Thus different levels of training are rampant; which means there is no standardization. A good example would be the ratings in India use back-door entry by joining as a trainee seaman since they did not make the grade of a cadet and then go to UK to appear for their II-mates exam. This is because the seatime requirements, the training requirements and the examination standards are different for that country compared to ours and the ratings find it easier to get their CoC from UK then labour in India.

It is a global business, the crew on one ship could be from many different countries hence for a ship manager to feel confident that whomsoever he employs in a certain rank, holding an STCW certification should be able to perform and deliver to the same standard that he would expect.

On the other hand if everything is standardized then how can one company claim that they are better than the other and get more business than the other. So I think that though we may try for global standards in maritime industry it will not happen.

A broad outline of the competence requirement is given in the STCW and a broad outline of course syllabus is given in IMO model course. But how you actually follow these guidelines, how you impart the training and how the assessment is done, varies; which means that the end-product also differs from country to country.

Actually the purpose of Global MET now is to try and foster some harmony between the training institutions around the world, besides bringing in some quality in the training programmes. This body aspires to set up some quality standards. There are a few areas towards which Global MET is working. One is to have a good networking between institutions so that they can share knowledge to foster growth; the second is the registration of trainers, wherein trainers who satisfy certain criteria can enroll themselves and become Global MET registered trainers. At present there are about 55 individual trainers registered with Global MET at present. These trainers would also be used by Global MET in any projects/contracts secured by the organization.

For quality standards Global MET is jointly working with DNV to set quality standards for training. We have ISO 9001 but it is too general; it is not specific towards maritime training, so we are coming out with maritime training standards for maritime training institutes where the trainers' qualifications, course content, course curriculum, final output of the candidates would be taken into account. A grading system conducted by professionals would be the next stage.

And since this will be done by Global MET it would be globally applicable. Global MET has 106 countries as its members. Last year it was 96. Some European countries have now also become its members. One of the important steps that Global MET is trying for is a consultative status in IMO.

Global MET is related only to training and not recruitment. It will cover the entire gamut of training activities.

During the Panel discussion of Global MET, chaired by Capt Saggi, it was brought to the notice of the participants that the cost of education and the remuneration to the faculty was a catch 22 situation. What is the root cause of the quality of training not coming up to standard. It finally boils down to course fees. If you don’t charge decent fees, you cannot have good infrastructure and equipment, nor can you pay good salary to retain quality teaching staff. If you want to provide quality training like Harvard University, you have to charge fees like Harvard University. One has to set the minimum benchmark for the course fees without which all talk of obtaining high teaching standards is hogwash.

The review of STCW will be complete by 2010. This will review the syllabus and a few revisions will be made but the systems of implementation will remain the same.

A competency course should be based on a modular system where a candidate could do one module at a time, be graded and provide credit for it. The assessment stage is the most critical. Some concrete process should be set for assessment and assessors trained in the methods of assessment.

The system for checking the certificate should be properly developed and should be foolproof. The refresher course was brought out with a good intention but it should be reviewed and revised. One should have different people for different committees, I find that the same people are there in all the committees, hence there are no fresh ideas forthcoming. The revalidation should be kept up to date and this can be done only by people who are actually at sea and it should be done every six months.