Crew crisis is shipping’s ‘most acute problem’ in 50 years

THE TENS OF thousands of seafarers left in limbo on board vessels because of port state restrictions provoked by the coronavirus pandemic has presented shipping with its worst crisis in the half-century, when one of Greece’s most prominent shipowners launched his career.

“We have always faced problems, but Greek and international shipping never had such an acute problem as this in all the years since we began,” said Captain Panagiotis Tsakos.

His group runs about 100 vessels across several sectors, including the tanker and liquefied natural gas carrier fleet of publicly listed Tsakos Energy Navigation and the privately owned fleet of Tsakos Shipping & Trading.

The combined fleet is managed by Tsakos Columbia Shipmanagement, established in 2010 in a joint venture with Schoeller Holdings.

Capt Tsakos, who became a master in the Greek merchant marine at 26 and launched his own company in 1970, warned that the damage being wrought on shipping is multi-faceted. Crews are reaching breaking point and the longer-term consequences are likely to include waning appetite for seafaring jobs even in those countries that continue to supply sea-going labour.

“There is an impending danger that the young men and women we have tried for so long to attract to the sea will be discouraged by seeing the inhuman way in which seafarers are being treated,” he said.
“If this happens, the dismantling of the web that now constitutes world trade and the world economy will begin. Cargoes will cease to be transported, raw materials will not be enough, industries will close, jobs will be lost, homes will starve.

“And all this because governments are reluctant to take measures that, by facilitating the movement of seafarers to and from their ships, would ensure the unimpeded flow of international trade and peoples’ well-being.”

Capt Tsakos was speaking at an event at which a number of masters and engineers provided personal testimony of hardships.

Some spoke of many months since last stepping foot ashore, another fell seriously ill but was denied hospital treatment for weeks, while another master reported that one of his crew lost both his parents within a matter of days, but had been unable to attend the funeral.

The master of the panamax product tanker *Andres* likened the situation on vessels to “a hand grenade that any moment can explode”.

“For the sake of our seafarers, we must unite our efforts so that the return to ‘normalcy’ is not too late for them,” Capt Tsakos said.

While insufficient concern was being given to crews trapped on board, no one had given much thought to the other half of the seafaring community that were being denied work that in some cases they had expected to begin months ago.

According to Harry Hajimichael, general manager of Tsakos Shipping & Trading, cadets being trained at maritime academies, including Tsakos’ own nautical school in Chios, would also find their education disrupted as they are missing out on the required practical onboard experience.

“We are struggling to get regular people on board so obviously it is even harder for cadets,” he told Lloyd’s List.

As shipowners we are doing what we can, but seafarers cannot remain trapped on their ships indefinitely. The situation is unsustainable and at a critical point,” said Mr Hajimichael. “If we cannot change our crews, then the ships will not be able to continue operating.”

He said that Tsakos and many other shipping companies were “willing to face the extra financial burden” by themselves although the additional expenses were difficult to calculate and changing all the time.

Air fares for repatriating crew had shot up, in some cases by multiples of seven or 10, because of the scarcity of flights, but even at such prices they were difficult to find.

“Even when we finally find the ticket, bureaucracy in the few ports open for crew prevents the repatriation of the seafarer because there are delays on the ships and the seafarer cannot immediately be put on the plane for a variety of reasons, with the result that the tickets are lost and repatriation is indefinitely postponed.”

Mr Hajimichael said that crew changes had been virtually impossible for ships in Latin America, Asia and the Middle East, while in Europe there were some prospects.

Tsakos had been making “every effort” to route vessels through Greece where crew changes were “possible, under certain conditions” and there was just enough flexibility to allow non-Greek crews to get repatriation flights “sometimes even next day”.

The effort included sometimes accepting less remunerative charters, he said.

Mr Hajimichael had strong words for charterers.

“Charterers have not shown sensitivity,” he said. “There have been cases when we have wanted to divert to change crew and have not been allowed. There has been no flexibility.”

According to several group executives, certain charterers have begun rejecting ships that has crew on board for excessive periods because of safety concerns.

“They do not put it like that but they ask if you can comply with their matrix and with crews that have been trapped on board for so long, in some cases you can’t,” he said.
POSIDONIA, the biennial international exhibition that draws the world’s maritime industries to Greece, has been cancelled this year after weeks of soul-searching by organisers.

The decision was taken over the weekend and was arrived at “following close consultation with many exhibitors and with our shipping community stakeholders, after assessing the current state of Covid-19 in countries around the world,” the organisers said in a statement. It mean the next event will be held in 2022.

“The worrying increase of cases in certain jurisdictions and the inability to predict reliably where the pandemic will take us in the months ahead, compounds the uncertainty that now prevails, imposing upon us circumstances that are beyond our control,” the statement said.

“Furthermore, the shipment of exhibits and the complexities of international travel which are constantly being re-evaluated as events develop, pose major challenges and practical restrictions to our international exhibitors and visitors, with the distinct possibility that many will not be able to visit Greece. Without them Posidonia would not be the same.”

Earlier Lloyd’s List had broken the news of the event’s cancellation, noting that the organisers were expected to brief as many key supporters and national exhibitor liaisons as possible before going public.

Organising company Posidonia Exhibitions cited a “worrying increase of cases in certain jurisdictions and the inability to predict reliably where the pandemic will take us in the months ahead”.

It said that transporting exhibits and international travel complexities under the current circumstances would impede many international exhibitors and visitors and “without them Posidonia would not be the same”.

The decision comes as many countries continue to struggle to bring the coronavirus epidemic under control and as fears persist of a “second wave” of infections.

Originally, Posidonia 2020 was scheduled to take place in its usual spot of the first week of June, but had been postponed to the second half of October.

Just 10 days ago the organisers were “cautiously” hopeful that the event might yet proceed, but could not say for certain given the “rollercoaster” of news and reaction stemming from the global pandemic.

A package of health and safety measures that in in some areas exceeded already stringent government regulations had already been introduced to help manage the risk as well as possible.

These included “Covid-shield” certification for the venue, wider corridors between exhibitors’ stands as well as measures to avoid crowding and ensure an even distribution of visitors throughout the week.

Posidonia is widely seen as providing an unparalleled opportunity for “speed-dating” between international maritime builders, manufacturers and services on the one hand and on the other a Greek shipping community that is considered the world’s biggest buyer of their products.

The decision will come as a blow to the already battered Greek tourism sector with hotels, taxis and caterers among the many interests that were willing the exhibition to take place.

Greece itself has garnered praise for the decisive and effective way that its government has managed to control the spread of the virus and, at the time of writing, is continuing to report relatively modest numbers of cases despite moves to open up to foreign tourists again.

But many countries are continuing to have to enforce strict measures to stem the spread of the virus.

Increasingly that has left many of the event’s key international exhibitors potentially facing travel restrictions, quarantines on return to their country of origin, and logistical headaches for delegations — if allowed to travel.
UK detains vessels as seafarer contracts expire

THE UK’s Maritime and Coastguard Agency detained five vessels in June for failing port state control inspections.

That takes the total number of foreign-flagged vessels that remain under detention at UK ports to nine, the MCA said in a statement.

Four of the newly detained cruiseships are Bahamas-flagged, while the fifth is Portuguese.

The MCA cited expiry of Seafarers’ Employment Agreements, and in some cases non-payment of wages, as reasons for the detentions.

A total of 1,449 seafarers are on board the five vessels including nationals from Indonesia, India, Myanmar and Mauritius, according to a Nautilus International union press release.

Dwain Hutchinson, chief executive of the Bahamas Maritime Authority, said his authority was carrying out an investigation and making arrangements to ensure the ships complied with Maritime Labour Convention requirements.

“We are taking action,” Capt Hutchinson told Lloyd’s List, adding that it was liaising with shipowners, making it clear their obligations to repatriate their crew.

The BMA has been working closely with the International Maritime Organization, the International Labour Organization, and the International Transport Workers’ Federation through the “unusual” coronavirus crisis, he said. It has issued guidance and technical alerts to shipowners to take measures.

Force majeure has had to be declared by mutual agreement in some instances where borders at home countries of crew are closed, or restricted, making repatriation impossible.

Australia has also been detaining vessels for crew contracts expiring, while Brazil held a vessel because of unpaid crew.

The UK was among 13 countries that signed an action plan earlier in the month to relieve stranded seafarers.

ANALYSIS

Taking an axe to Wärtsilä’s core will release innovation, says Voyage chief

CORPORATE transition is tough. Usually it is left far too late because senior executives lack the courage to change direction. This is the dilemma faced by much of the maritime sector, where the burden of legacy often hinders agile leadership.

By its own admission, Wärtsilä has not found it easy to change direction.

The decision by chief executive Jaakko Eskola to split the 185-year-old technology business into Marine and Energy, and then to split Marine into Power, Systems and Voyage, it was the first — and probably the most difficult — a step in a transition.

“To put an axe into the core of the business and split it into four. It was a bold step, and the right step.”

Mr Fernback did not rise through the ranks at Wärtsilä. He’s an outsider to both the company and the industry. That has given him the latitude to say it like it is. “We have been trying to run this digital business like an engine business,” he says.

He describes the vision of smart marine as “a little abstract”.

“The company has struggled to find its way in this paradigm shift in commercial marine from the old world to the new, going into the digital arena,” he says.

Wärtsilä made a lot of acquisitions, spent a lot of money, had various people run it at different stages and in different styles. Then they broke it up.
“So now we are starting again,” says Mr Fernback, adding that a transition could not have been done any other way. “You need a different mindset; it takes between seven and nine years to develop a new engine, but seven to nine minutes to deploy a new piece of software.”

Mr Fernback was appointed because his career combines making things, running things, fixing things, turning things around, and hiring the right people. An eclectic mix of technology, business development, and operational skills.

As chief executive he executed a turnaround at C-Map, the navigational chart specialist, albeit very small compared with Voyage. The company had been snapped up by Boeing when it acquired the Jeppesen brand, however Boeing was not interested in it.

“They destroyed it,” Mr Fernback says. “We went from a 75% market share in commercial charts to just 12%. However, we built it up well, and within 18 months we were growing at 30% a year.” In July 2018, he merged C-Map with Navico, the leisure marine business.

Previously he had led the product development team at rapidly-expanding TomTom International, moving on to a similar position at Finnish mobile technology business Nokia.

“There’s no lack of ambition and great ideas at Wärtsilä, but we have to make sure we develop the right products and services at the right time because the industry is changing rapidly.” The key criterion is affordability. “We must be careful how we pick our battles, so we have a customer for the products and services at the right time.”

This is critical for a business transitioning from product-driven to customer-driven. Just as Apple believes its customers do not really know what they want, so Wärtsilä is working with customers who have a similarly fuzzy idea of what would be operationally advantageous, environmentally innovative and affordable.

“We shouldn’t create a solution for a problem they do not have,” he says.

He senses the beginnings of a groundswell of interest in utilising data to optimise performance. Wärtsilä has products and services that meet that need. But he cautions that, while data is a big subject for the industry, it’s not well understood.

“There are issues about how we apply data, how we share it, what platform do we share it on, which data sets do operating companies want to keep to themselves, and how we educate them that there’s value in sharing data.”

One of the most important pieces in the puzzle for Sean Fernback will be identifying and appointing a “single point of authority” for data. There are competent data specialists in-house, yet the net is likely to be cast widely until the right person is recruited.

The creation of Wärtsilä Voyage began late in 2019 and has been refined and honed throughout the first half of 2020. It was firmly in place ahead of the launch on July 1. As an amalgamation of many acquisitions, Voyage can expect to see many changes.

“We need to be clear about the cost structure: where we spend and make money. How does each element – Ecdis, navigation, radar, services – sit in terms of profitability. Then we have to break it into newbuildings, servicing, and retrofits.” Only when there is a better understanding of these fundamentals, he says, can decisions be made about moving forward.”

The two items at the top of the agenda are understanding cost and defining the portfolio for the future. That will mean taking hard decisions about where funding for legacy products might be stopped and what part — if any — Wärtsilä will play in the autonomy space.

“Wärtsilä is not a bottomless pit of money. We have to manage ourselves in a sensible way. It’s about affording what we should be doing, what we need to continue investing in to innovate in some of the legacy product lines, and what do we need to move away from.”

It’s hard to sell off bits of the portfolio that no longer fit, yet Mr Fernback is comfortable making such bold decisions in a dispassionate way. The challenge, he believes, is “bringing everybody with you in that transition. We are going to use our energy, effort, and funding to build this future”.

Voyage is new and the recruitment process is ongoing. There are gaps to be filled as a result of splitting the company and expertise to be brought in to lead the push into the data world.

Making a success of Wärtsilä Voyage will depend on
competence and cohesion. “Tech won’t be the problem. What will be challenging is bringing it to market, positioning, messaging, convincing, educating the industry, working at the pace of the industry as it changes.

A parallel issue is creating a single culture with a unified vision.

**Tackling bulk emissions at anchor**

EMISSIONS reductions from shipping remain in the spotlight. Various measures relating to ship operations in general will be taken forward to the fall 2020 meeting of the Marine Environment Protection Committee of the International Maritime Organization, writes Trevor D. Heaver, professor emeritus at the Sauder School of Business, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

The MEPC’s Global Industry Alliance to Support Low Carbon Shipping (GIA) suggests a practice that can reduce emissions irrespective of vessel attributes by reducing the time that vessels wait at anchor.

Its document — Just In Time Arrival Guide: Barriers and Potential Solutions — recognises that JIT arrival is most likely to be applied first to container shipping.

Wärtsilä’s application of its Navi-Port system on cruiseships in Hamburg illustrates the potential of JIT. Container and cruise shipping are trades in which vessels are scheduled and the boxes and people arrive mostly on time. Only chronic situations lead to visible traffic disruptions.

The main uncertainty in timing usually rests with the ship. It is practical then to focus on details of the various relationships between port activities and ships to pinpoint opportunities for JIT operations.

In export bulk trades, ships are scheduled to meet the availability of particular cargoes. A core requirement to reduce anchorage in these trades (and to increase throughput) is to improve the matching of vessel arrival with the availability of cargo for loading.

Emissions from bulk vessels at anchor can be significant. In 2015, the last year with available data, the emissions of ships at anchor in Vancouver, Canada, exceeded those of the vessels at berth by 42% and 33% for pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions respectively.

Management based on shared data through digitalisation is the key to reducing anchorage: visibility in inland and terminal logistics and visibility of vessel progress. A logistics chain approach enables implementation of a vessel arrival system (VAS) to reduce anchorage. The coal trade of the Australian east coast port of Newcastle is an example of what can be achieved. The port of Vancouver, Canada, is an example of trades where better domestic logistics and VAS could lead to economic and environmental benefits.

Prior to 2010, no record was kept by the Newcastle Port Corporation (NPC) of the time that vessels visiting the port spent at anchor.

For the coal trade, prior to the introduction of VAS in 2010, a vessel was registered in the coal-loading queue when it crossed a line 10 nautical miles from the port. In 2009, vessels averaged 11.1 days between the time that they joined the queue and entered the port.

Under VAS, the NPC monitors vessel movement from 14 days out so that when confident of a vessel’s progress, usually seven days out, a Notified Arrival Time places the vessel in the coal loading queue.

This is taken as the Notice of Readiness under some contracts. Vessels may slow steam to be at anchor for a planned maximum of 48 hours. In 2017-2019, 64% of the arriving vessels did not anchor.

The Newcastle VAS system was built onto an inland logistics chain, the Hunter Valley Coal Chain, that through visibility and collaboration generates a high reliability of cargo availability and of loading performance.

This provided the foundation for the participation of buyers along with sellers in the agreement to introduce VAS in a supply chain in which sales contracts more closely match delivery capabilities.
The result has been higher throughputs than many had expected and ongoing independent studies indicate substantial reductions in the time ships are on berth. The reductions in emissions from slow steaming, reduced anchorage and reduced time on berth are substantial.

The current situation in Vancouver has a number of similarities with Newcastle in 2009.

There are no accurate data on the duration of total anchorage. The Vancouver Fraser Port Authority (VFPA) has records of the anchorage within its waters but not in other spillover locations in southern British Columbia, the Southern Gulf Islands (SGI). Anchorage there has increased from about 200 vessel days in 2010 to 3,000 in 2018, when the authority recorded 8,361 anchorage days in its waters.

The frequency of anchorage reflects the varied level of logistics challenges among commodities and the varied level of visibility and collaboration in the logistics of the bulk trades of Vancouver.

The grain trade is challenged by widely distributed origins and multiple commodities and grades. However, the limited visibility and collaboration between the grain companies and railways, while improving, is still a major impediment to matching cargo availability with vessel arrival. Uncertainties exist about the delivery of cars expected yesterday.

The grain companies still place heavy reliance on the use of railway-owned equipment. Rain is still allowed to delay the loading of vessels. Vessels for the grain trade are estimated to make up 60% of total anchorage days for the port region. Over the years 2015-2018, grain ships averaged eight days at anchor in Vancouver Fraser Port Authority waters alone; 11.27 days in 2018.

The logistics of coal is simpler, with fewer origins and better integration through the use of dedicated unit trains but served in large part by a multi-user port terminal. In 2015-2018 coal ships averaged 4.9 days at anchor with an exceptional 9.5 days in 2018.

The most integrated chain is that of fertilisers, dominated by the potash exports of Canpotex, which owns the rail cars of the unit trains, owns its terminal facilities and sells dominantly on CFR terms. The reliability of the fertiliser chain is reflected in the low anchorage: 2015-2018 average was 3.3 days, with a high of 4.4 days in 2018.

The level of anchorage in Vancouver suggests that there should be opportunities for slow steaming.

Unfortunately, companies have not initiated their own practices and the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority only assigns anchorages. However, a few weeks ago, it commissioned a study of VAS systems.

For VAS to work, buyers as well as exporters should be involved because vessels whether owned or chartered need to respond to the practices in the system. It is in their interest as it saves fuel.

Achieving a high reliability of cargo availability and loading contributes to the engagement of buyers as well as exporters. It is the basis for improving the match of sales contracts to delivery capability and the adoption of VAS as a method to manage the final sailing speed of vessels to a port. The resulting emissions savings from reduced anchorage for bulk carriers can be significant.

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**MARKETS**

**Carriers reduce blanked sailings**

The slowing rate of announcements of additional blanked sailings indicates that carriers have now reached a point where they believe sufficient capacity has been removed from the market, according Sea-Intelligence.

“In recent weeks we have seen the level of blank sailings slow considerably on the main East-West trades, and a large number of previously blanked sailings have been re-activated,” the analyst said.

It added that 48 of 235 announced transpacific blank sailings had been re-activated, while the Asia-Europe trade had seen 18 of 189 scheduled blanked sailings being re-activated.

Only three new blank sailings announced on the transpacific and two on Asia-Europe routes in the past week.

New blank sailings announcements on the
transpacific route have become sporadic, while carrier alliances continue to extend suspensions of already suspended services on Asia-Europe to maintain capacity.

Even with the announced blankings, eastbound capacity on the transpacific for the coming 12 weeks is forecast to be up by 7.2% on the corresponding period last year, indicating increased volume demand.

“While we should caution that this could simply be a question of the carriers being too optimistic, or alternatively that they are planning to sail heavily underutilised for the peak season, this is likely not to be the case,” said Sea-Intelligence.

“Carriers have throughout the pandemic shown an incredible affinity for balancing supply to demand, to keep freight rates up. For now at least, it looks like we might actually have a 2020 transpacific peak season.”

The analyst cautioned that this was the slowdown in the number of new blanking announcements should not be viewed as a recovery on its own.

“This does not mean that demand has come back to normal — in fact global demand dropped 15.9% in April and 11.4% in May — but rather that the carriers seem satisfied with the level of blanked capacity already announced.

“As the markets continue to be in a depressed state, this level of blank sailings may yet become the new normal.”

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**IN OTHER NEWS**

**Abandoned LPG carrier crew paid after stand-off**

The crew of an abandoned gas carrier stranded in Manila Bay have been paid after a four-month standoff with a shipowner.

The Spain-flagged, 7,300 dwt liquefied petroleum gas carrier Celanova, owned by Madrid-based Globalgas, has spent months at anchor after it lost its rudder in a storm in December.

The International Transport Workers’ Federation appealed to Filipino and Spanish authorities to help the mostly Cuban crew, who the union said had not been paid since October and lacked vital provisions.

**Titan LNG to expand fleet with EU support**

Dutch liquefied natural gas supplier Titan LNG is expanding its operations with funding from the European Union.

The firm announced it has secured €11m ($12.6m) from the EU and it will be adding three new bunker barges to its fleet to support future bio-LNG services. The three barges will be deployed in Zeebrugge, Rotterdam and Lübeck.

Titan LNG said in an emailed press release that the barges would be “similar” to its two existing 1,500 cu m FlexFueler barges.

**Product tanker crew kidnapped in Gulf of Guinea**

The crew of a Liberia-flagged product tanker have been taken hostage in the furthest offshore act of piracy recorded in the Gulf of Guinea, according to Dryad Global.

The 11,321 dwt Curacao Trader was targeted on the morning of July 17 by an armed gang who kidnapped more than a dozen seafarers, Dryad said in an incident report.

The attack took place 244 nautical miles south Cotonou, Benin, and south-southwest of Nigeria, it reported. Curacao Trader was later reported to be drifting by Greece-based Alison Management, the vessel’s management company.

**Maran rejects widow’s compensation claim as ‘weak’**

A claim for compensation by the family of a man killed while working on the breaking of a very large crude carrier is “particularly weak” and has almost no chance of success, according to a barrister linked to the case.

The High Court in London ruled last week in favour of Hamida Begum, who has brought a case of negligence against Maran Tankers after her husband, Khalil Mollah, died while working on the demolition of 300,294 dwt tanker Maran Centaurus in 2018.

The ruling concluded that while Ms Begum’s claim for unjust enrichment is unsustainable, she has prospects of success both in her claim of negligence and in establishing that the claim is governed by English law.

**Euronav continues share buyback programme**

EURONAV is buying back more stock as it seeks to create value
in the absence of support by the public markets.

The Hugo De Stoop-led tanker company has spent $37.3m in share buybacks since the end of June, the company disclosed. It brings its holding to 4.26% of the outstanding share count.

The company, which trades on both the New York Stock Exchange and the Brussels Stock Exchange, had said on July 9 that shareholders had authorised it to buy up to 10% of the company

Classified notices follow
SHERIFF’S SALE
VESSLE “SAM JAGUAR”

In The Cause Of Admiralty In Rem No. 52 Of 2020
By Virtue of Warrant Of Arrest In Admiralty Action No. 10 Of 2020

PARTICULARS OF VESSEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Vessel</th>
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<tr>
<td>Type</td>
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Note: The net value of bunkers on board “SAM JAGUAR” is USD 434,117.03/- which is excluded from the sale, and have to be paid by the purchaser. The amount payable is not negotiable.

Pursuant to the Order of Court dated 18th June 2020, all interested parties are invited to bid for the purchase of the vessel by private treaty. The bids must be submitted in United States Dollars together with a deposit of USD 50,000.00/- in local cashier’s order made in favour of The Sheriff Of Singapore and should be placed in a sealed envelope marked “Tender for SAM JAGUAR” and sent to the Sheriff’s Office, Legal Registry, Level 2, 1 Supreme Court Lane, Singapore 178879, to reach him no later than 3.00pm on Tuesday, 4th day of August 2020. Bids made without the accompanying deposit will be rejected. The deposit shall be returned to unsuccessful bidders. The vessel will be sold on an “as is where is” basis and the sale is on the Sheriff’s standard Terms and Conditions of Sale. Permit to inspect the said vessel may be obtained on application to the Sheriff. Please refer to the Supreme Court’s website at http://www.supremecourt.gov.sg/services/lists/sheriff’s-sales for the Sheriff’s Conditions of Sale and further information of this vessel.

All bids are to remain valid for a period of 3 months from the date the bidding closes.

The Sheriff reserves the right not to accept the highest or any bid.

Sheriff-in-charge:  
Mr Michael Koh  Tel: + (65) 6332 3964
Mr Teo Pua Wei  Tel: + (65) 6332 4288
Mr Mattias Low  Tel: + (65) 6332 4287
Mr Ling Thai Chuan  Tel: + (65) 6332 4286
Mr Desmond Lua  Tel: + (65) 6332 1066

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