

Model behaviour

IMO is pursuing “model regulations” in its latest bid to improve domestic ferry safety – arguably to ensure more realistic expectations when it comes to global adoption



Irfan Rahim, IMO, at the WFSA conference in Bangkok: “We don’t sense the appetite for an international treaty yet”

incorporated into global regulations. The global regulations set out in the 2015 IMO TC65 document [stemming from the 65th session of the organisation’s Technical Cooperation Committee] were great, but not perfect – they could benefit from improvements.”

Rahim was keen to emphasise: “These are model regulations – they won’t become mandatory under any IMO convention unless specifically required by the membership.” However, national governments will be welcome to apply them to their domestic ferry sectors, “and there, IMO will provide assistance”, he said.

When quizzed by some delegates as to why IMO was opting for a “model” approach, Rahim replied: “If the committee decides this has to be an international treaty, then so be it – but we don’t sense the appetite for an international treaty yet. It would be pretty straightforward to implement, if required.” He also described the model approach as an acknowledgement of the “regulatory grey zone” in which smaller commercial vessels operate.

April has seen some fine-tweaking of the draft proposal, as recommended by the IMO secretariat, with the hope of developing a “more concrete, focused proposal” in time for the June MSC 101 session. **SBI**

IMO intends to address the issue of ferry-related fatalities with the introduction of a new set of “model regulations for domestic ferry safety”, Irfan Rahim, head of special projects at IMO’s Marine Safety Division, told delegates at the 2019 Worldwide Ferry Safety Association (WFSA) conference, hosted in Bangkok, Thailand in February.

Rahim’s presentation met with a positive response, especially from Mike Corrigan, chief executive of industry association Interferry, who said that this development “has the potential to be groundbreaking”. Rahim added that the decision to pursue these new model regulations was partly inspired by a submission made by

China at IMO’s 100th Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) session (MSC 100) in December 2018, in response to a number of major ferry accidents.

IMO now plans to put together a draft proposal, in advance of MSC 101 in June this year, which will collect and analyse best practices, followed by the development of online training material related to domestic ferry safety.

Building on TC65

“Our object is not to reinvent the wheel,” said Rahim, “but to collate best practices and advice for valid organisations to identify gaps and fill them. Possibly, the bulk of that guidance can be

Bangladesh calls for improved design

A crackdown on sunken-deck vessels is helping the country to improve its ferry safety record

Many of the inland vessels plying the busy waterways of Bangladesh are still not being built to common structural rules, Commodore Syed Ariful Islam,

director general of the country’s Department of Shipping, told WFSA conference delegates.

Approximately 2,000 of the 12,500+ vessels registered with Bangladesh’s

inland ship registry are identified as passenger ships (the majority by far are fishing vessels, totalling more than 6,750). Naturally, for a highly populated country, overcrowding on ferries is

common; vessels can end up carrying double or triple their actual passenger capacities, as unscrupulous operators look to make as much money as possible on fares. Some Bangladeshi operators have even dispensed with onboard life-saving and safety equipment to fit more bodies on board.

However, ferry safety also needs to be addressed at the vessel design stage, Islam warned. Referring to domestically operated inland vessels, he continued: "Most of these have been built without preliminary longitudinal strength calculations." As a result, he added: "They do not meet the minimum still water bending moment" – which can lead to hogging and sagging, and thus damage to the vessel's bottom. Bottom damage accounts for approximately 3% of all recorded marine accidents in Bangladesh, according to Department of Shipping

figures; the leading accident categories remain collisions (43%), overloading (25%) and bad weather (23%).

Seasonal considerations

Bangladesh should also take moves to ban sunken-deck vessels, which present an inherent stability risk in terms of their design and the country's seasonal variations in weather, Islam advised.

It is essential that vessel designers, builders and operators take these variations into account. "From June to October, weather conditions are often very unsettled over the Bay of Bengal, and these include cyclones, gusty winds and heavy rainfall," he said. "The strong wind creates pressure on the lateral area of the superstructure, or the lateral area of the vessel exposed to the weather, which tends to incline the vessel. The vessel then has to overcome the resistance of the

water exerted on the underwater volume; thus, the ratio of the underwater volume to the lateral area of the superstructure plays a substantial role in the stability of the passenger vessel."

However, Islam happily confirmed that, while there is still room for improvement, Bangladesh's tally of passenger vessel accidents constitutes "a decreasing trend". He attributed this to various factors, including: the country's adoption of an efficient vessel traffic management system (VTMS) and traffic separation scheme; a policy of regularly dredging waterways; and a crackdown on vessels with sunken decks, resulting in their removal from service. "With these measures, the number of accidents has been reduced significantly and, in the last three years, no passenger launch has sunk," he stated. *SBI*

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