MEDIA RELEASE

Singapore, 12 June 2020 | For Immediate Release

4000 Approved Crew Change Cases in Singapore during COVID-19 period
Cases span over 300 companies and 500 ships

Global shipping continues to operate 24/7 to bring food and essential goods to our homes. The Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) recognises the importance of seafarers and crew change to safeguard the health and safety of seafarers sailing on board ships. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, MPA continues to facilitate the disembarkation of seafarers on medical grounds, for compassionate reasons and for contracts which cannot be further extended. MPA also continues to facilitate medical treatment of seafarers who require emergency attention.

2. MPA has been working closely with other government agencies, unions, and the shipping industry to facilitate and support crew change. An industry taskforce led by the Singapore Shipping Association in partnership with Singapore Maritime Officers’ Union recently published the Singapore Crew Change Guidebook. The guidebook details a set of procedures for a “safe corridor” which allows crew change to be carried out in a safe environment to minimise any local public health risk and to the shipping community.

3. To date, MPA has approved more than 4,000 cases of crew sign-on and sign-off for over 300 companies since 27 March 2020. The cases involved some 500 ships that include tankers, bulk carriers, container ships and offshore vessels.

4. Today, MPA, together with agencies including the Ministry of Transport, the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore, the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority, as well as shipping companies, facilitated a second chartered flight for crew change. 54 crew members onboard a flight from Mumbai, India will join six ships at the Port of Singapore. 87 crew members will take the same flight back to Mumbai. The use of such chartered flights offers a direct passage to facilitate crew changes in a safe and efficient manner during this period. Two more chartered flights for crew change are scheduled to take place this week. “Executive Ship Management (ESM) is indeed happy to initiate the project taking home Indian seafarers from Singapore and share the flight in the best possible way to facilitate crew change in Singapore by any other ship manager. ESM also heartily acknowledges the support and guidance from MPA, Singapore and Indian High Commission in Singapore to make this initiative a success,”
said Mr B.S. Teeka, CEO of the Executive Group of companies, of which ESM is a member.

5. Ms Quah Ley Hoon, MPA’s Chief Executive, said, “There is a global need for large numbers of crew changes to take place. We have seen a sharp increase in the daily crew change applications since our last Port Marine Circular (PMC). As a major port state, Singapore has a responsibility to facilitate crew change in a safe manner for both the country and the ships, given the ongoing pandemic. The Singapore Crew Change Guidebook sets out a “safe corridor” which companies can now use consistently and reliably for crew changes. We understand that shipping companies face immense challenges operating in this pandemic. MPA will continue to work with the industry and unions on creative solutions, one of which is a floating holding facility for crew; we are finalising the details. We are also heartened to receive kind notes of appreciation from seafarers and companies whose crew we have made a difference.”

6. Mr Michael Phoon, Executive Director, Singapore Shipping Association, said, "As a key maritime stakeholder, the Singapore Shipping Association took the initiative to form and lead the Singapore Crew Change Workgroup (SGCCWG) to co-develop the Singapore Crew Change Guidebook (SCCG). The process was challenging as the protocols had to take into consideration both regulatory requirements and the practical demands by the shipping industry. We are very pleased that the established procedures, which provides clarity to the shipping industry on crew change, have been accepted by MPA and the industry. We certainly hope the accomplishment by SGCCWG and the SCCG protocols can serve as a model for the international maritime industry as we navigate the future together."

7. Mr Esben Poulsson, Chairman of The International Chamber of Shipping, said, “The shipping industry is obviously encouraged by the increasing number of crew changes taking place in Singapore, and we are appreciative of the great efforts made by the MPA and other agencies to bring this about. Given the enormous global scale of the problem, let alone the serious implications of governments not dealing with crew change as a matter of the greatest urgency, we hope that Singapore will continue to take a leading role and at the same time continue to work with the industry to review the protocols.”

8. MPA will continue to review the crew change procedures taking into account Singapore’s circumstances and the global situation.

9. Please refer to the Annex A and B for more quotes from the industry and seafarers.

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About the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA)
The Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) was established on 2 February 1996, with the mission to develop Singapore as a premier global hub port and international maritime centre (IMC), and to advance and safeguard Singapore's strategic maritime interests. MPA is the driving force behind Singapore's port and maritime development, taking on the roles of Port Authority, Port Regulator, Port Planner, IMC Champion, and National Maritime Representative. MPA partners the industry and other agencies to enhance safety, security and environmental protection in our port waters, facilitate port operations and growth, expand the cluster of maritime ancillary services, and promote maritime R&D and manpower development.

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Annex A: Quotes from the Industry

Focal Shipping Services Pte Ltd:

“Focal Shipping Services (FSS) is pleased to have coordinated major crew changes in accordance with the new protocols and guidelines implemented by the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore. FSS team would like to extend our gratitude towards the Singapore Regulatory Authorities for adopting protocols to facilitate the safe exchange of crews during these challenging times. FSS team remains committed for the wellbeing of the seafarers and to provide services to all our valued customers,” said Mr Abishek Krishnan, Operations Manager, Focal Shipping Services Pte Ltd.

Ben Line Agencies (Singapore) Pte Ltd

“The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on all aspects of the maritime industry. The impact has been particularly severe for the crew on board the ships, with their inability to sign off due to the restrictions on the movement of people across international borders. The new protocols issued by the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) for the safe passage of crew on and off ships in Singapore have enabled us to offer our principals the ability to conduct crew changes in a safe and efficient manner. The MPA have been extremely supportive of ships and their crew calling the port during these unprecedented times and this goes a long way to ensuring that Singapore maintains its status as a premier global hub port, supporting the maritime industry,” said Mr Thomas Paterson, Country Manager, Ben Line Agencies – Singapore.
Annex B: Quotes from Seafarers

"I would like to thank MPA, the Governments of Singapore and India for facilitating this crew change. I hope that more countries will be able to provide such crew change as well," said Mr Arya Pankaj, Master of STI Carnaby, Focal Shipping Services Pte Ltd, 39 years old.

"I am very grateful to be able to sign-off at Singapore through a chartered flight," said Cpt Manjit Singh Bhasin, Marco Polo Shipping.