Mark Johnson and Fiona Cain in Hellenic Shipping News Worldwide: 'AUTOSHIPMAN: Considerations for a New Standard Form Agreement'

By Fiona Cain | May 25, 2021

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Later this year, the Yara Birkeland – the first autonomous container vessel – is due to commence commercial operation in Norwegian waters. For the owners, Yara, and the ship management company, Massterly, the terms of their ship management agreement will need to address its operation, initially as a crewed vessel but subsequently, as an autonomous vessel.

In November 2020, the Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO) – working in partnership with Massterly amongst others – took the positive step to start adapting its standard ship management agreement for conventional vessels (known as SHIPMAN) to make it suitable for autonomous vessels.

With the working name AUTOSHIPMAN and with the first version expected for publication this year, it will be the first standard agreement specifically for the new but growing autonomous market.

Key Issues and Changes

Ship management agreements between an owner and a ship management company address the provision of crew, technical and commercial management and insurances arrangements, all of which will need careful consideration in AUTOSHIPMAN.

Crew

Changes will need to be made to address the changing role of and/or the lack of crew. At launch, many of these autonomous vessels will operate with limited crew on board. Therefore, it would be sensible for the agreement to allow for this as well as when the vessel will be fully autonomous and operated remotely from the land via a specialist land-based remote control centre (RCC).

But who are the crew when no one is onboard? While it may not be necessary to change the definition of crew from that in SHIPMAN, an annex distinguishing between personnel who will be on board the vessel and those that will be based at the RCC may be required. This would help to address which crew members need to comply with the STCW (International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978, as amended in 1995), which currently only applies to seafarers onboard, and the specific qualifications and experience of management and personnel that will be based at the RCC.

Excerpted from *Hellenic Shipping News Worldwide*. To read the full article, click here.

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