

Arctic Council – Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment - PAME

Opening Address: H.E. the Minister of Infrastructure, Mr. Eyjólfur Ármannsson, Iceland.

Dear all.

It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to welcome you all to this webinar on the Cape Town Agreement and its value for the Arctic.

The safety of the men and women working at sea has been a great concern of Icelanders for centuries. From the time of the settlement of Iceland in 874 A.D. Iceland's connection to the world has always been via sailing and the sea.

From the earliest days of settlement, Icelanders relied heavily on the fish in the sea to feed the population. Fishing has always been Iceland's most important livelihood and industry.

For centuries, life at sea was marked by great hardship and danger, and little could be done to prevent the accidents that claimed the lives of countless sailors. Today trust is placed in knowledge, education, safety awareness, and the culture of safety that seafarers and fishing companies have embraced.

The impact of Iceland's emphasis on safety of fishing vessels in the last decades has been incredible. The number of vessels lost, as well as the number of accidents and fatalities at sea, has been greatly reduced over the last decades.

In the 1950's more than twenty lives were lost at sea yearly. Today the number is less than one life lost at sea per year. Iceland is immensely proud of this achievement. Today, the most dangerous occupation in Iceland is not fishing. The fishing vessels are a safe place to work and an attractive workplace for people.

This achievement did not come about by chance, this is the result of determined efforts and clear prioritisation, leading to improved safety training and a heightened awareness of safety among seafarers.

The Cape Town Agreement is the backbone of the national legislation in Iceland concerning the design, construction and equipment of fishing vessels. We stand ready to share the benefits Iceland has gained from the ratification of the Cape Town Agreement and our experience of the implementation.

Today you will hear from Bogi Þorsteinsson, the principal of the Icelandic School for Seafarers Safety and Survival Training. He will speak about the vital role the school has played in strengthening the safety of fishing vessels and protecting the lives of their crews. I encourage you to listen carefully to his message.

The Cape Town Agreement, once entered into force, will have other positive implications than just greatly enhance safety of fishermen at sea.

For example, it will greatly level the playing field for companies in the fishing industry, because same CTA safety standards will apply for fishing vessels operating in the same waters and selling their products on the same markets.

The CTA safety standard, a recognized international standard, will increase the value on the second-hand market for fishing vessels, as the vessels are designed, constructed and equipped to the same recognized international standard, the CTA safety standard.

Iceland encourages all states to ratify the Cape Town Agreement without delay, so fishermen and -women around the world can enjoy the benefits of safe seas.

Thank you again for inviting me to welcome you all to this webinar on this very important issue. I now give the floor back to Mr. Kingston and wish you all productive and fruitful discussions throughout the day.