

## CLASSIFICATION SOCIETIES

# Class at centre of safer, smarter shipping

Looking back on his time as chairman of the International Association of Classification Societies (IACS), Arun Sharma reflects on the important role that IACS plays in shaping the future of class in shipping



► Arun Sharma, outgoing chairman of IACS

When Arun Sharma became chairman of IACS on 1 July 2019, the world was a very different place. Shipping was facing the challenges of key environmental regulatory issues – most notably the sulphur limit which came into force on 1 January 2020 – and then how the industry would meet the very ambitious targets set by the IMO to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 per cent by 2030, compared with 2008 emissions, followed by further reductions of 70 per cent by 2050.

However, as we all know, the world was hit by the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic which completely changed our daily working and social interactions with global travel restrictions making world trade a difficult proposition.

At the time of writing, most major economies are in some form of lockdown with office staff having to adapt to working from home, crew changeovers being difficult to organise and third-party ship visits discouraged to minimise the spread of the virus.

This has meant that shipping companies, including classification societies, have had to think of new and innovative ways of continuing to offer their services to clients within the limits of the ever-changing nature of local, regional and national enforcement measures.

Classification societies have made great use of remote surveys using video conferencing software, which enables document sharing and discussions to take place with onboard personnel to check that all audit requirements have been met.

This has proved to be very successful, winning the approval of flag states and regulators, so much so that many classification societies may continue this practice, with required refinement, even when coronavirus

restrictions are eased.

This is an interesting development particularly in light of the fact that before Covid-19 forced companies to make more use of digital technology, Sharma did advocate in his now rather prophetic opening comments when taking over the chairmanship, that IACS should encourage the use of the “fast paced technological innovations which are radically altering the way shipping companies are interacting with each other”.

*“...maritime broadband providers report that hundreds of ship owners and managers have been upgrading their airtime packages as they realise the importance of connectivity”*

This statement has turned out to become reality as maritime broadband providers report that hundreds of ship owners and managers have been upgrading their airtime packages as they realise the importance of connectivity, not only to improve operational efficiency but also to provide crew with a much-needed internet link to the outside world and enable them to keep in touch with their families and friends.

IACS has also been very proactive in helping shipping companies that have questions or concerns regarding issues relating to the pandemic. There are hyperlinks on the IACS website directing ship owners and managers to relevant sources of information and third parties to help them make decisions based on factual information around the current situation.

Cyber security is another area that Sharma highlighted during his tenure, to encourage a unified approach across all classification

societies. This is particularly relevant in this pandemic as unscrupulous hackers try to take advantage of the current uncertainty using phishing techniques to hack into maritime businesses to cause mayhem and confusion.

Sharma has also encouraged IACS to “work with the industry, especially in the use of data to make more informed decisions, rather than relying on instinct or hunches”.

He understands that shipping companies may not want to share specific data which could contravene data protection laws but feels they may be encouraged to give an overview of their data covering areas such as accidents, equipment issues or technical matters.

To facilitate this ambition Sharma set up a working group, when he was chairman of IACS, to investigate this whole area and define what data IACS would find most useful to benefit class societies and the shipping industry as a whole.

When asked about his legacy as chairman, Sharma replied that he hoped he would be remembered for his policy of “continuously strengthening the systems within IACS towards maintaining and enhancing quality operations and improving interaction with key stakeholders within the industry to foster greater transparency”.

He wishes the new IACS chairman well and will continue to offer IACS his full support and experience as an active member of the association.

More information about IACS is available via the organisation’s website at <http://www.iacs.org.uk/>

## Autonomous ship framework approval granted

Tokyo-based classification society ClassNK has granted an approval in principle (AiP) to NYK Line and MTI for their joint project on the concept design of an autonomous ship framework.

ClassNK is involved in various demonstration projects and continuously works to develop necessary safety standards to support the development and implementation of automated/autonomous

operation technologies from a safety perspective.

In January, the society released its *Guidelines for Automated/Autonomous Operation of Ships*, which comprehensively summarise the requirements for each stage of conceptual design, design development, installation and maintenance during the operation of automated/autonomous operation technologies.

Jointly with NYK Line and MTI, the classification society has verified the safety of system usage conditions, fall-back systems and more, towards the ongoing development of the autonomous ship framework.

The AiP was then granted on confirming the feasibility of the framework through safety evaluation in line with the above guidelines.