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PRESS RELEASE
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IMPA OFFICIALS SPEAK OUT ON ISPO

Officials of the International Maritime Pilots Association (IMPA), meeting at the organization's headquarters in London last week, expressed their concern over recent press reports that have contained misinformation concerning the "International Standard for Maritime Pilot Organizations" (ISPO). IMPA's Executive Committee, consisting of its President and six Vice Presidents who represent pilots from around the world, authorized the President to reach out to the maritime community to ensure it is properly informed and to clarify IMPA's views on ISPO and quality assurance in marine pilotage.

ISPO is not endorsed by IMPA. The ISPO concept was first presented to IMPA in 1998. In 2004, after six years of study and trials, IMPA rejected ISPO. Not only did IMPA not wish to be the sponsor of the programme, it determined that ISPO was not suitable or appropriate for much of IMPA's membership. That judgment has been reaffirmed several times since then, including at last week's meeting.

ISPO is not a recognized international standard. ISPO was created at the initiative of a small group of European pilots who unsuccessfully sought the approval – and in effect, the "international imprimatur" – of IMPA. The word "International" is understood to be a marketing tool in order to attract customers. IMPA wishes to clarify the obvious confusion that exists as a result of the ISPO's chosen marketing practice. IMPA understands that the ISPO is currently administered by ISPO certificate holders themselves (e.g., a form of "self-regulation"). It has never been adopted by any international organization with regulatory authority over, or representation of, pilots throughout the world. It is not administered by any international standard-setting organization, such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), nor by any international organization with expertise in pilotage or pilotage regulation. IMPA President, Captain Michael Watson said, "There is much concern in our membership that the ISPO is perceived by some as being an 'international standard' that has the full support of IMPA. We want to be very clear on this – ISPO is neither an international standard nor does IMPA endorse it."

Externally audited quality systems have existed in the piloting profession for many years. Like other industries throughout the world, many IMPA pilot groups have long had quality assurance programs, such as quality management systems (QMS), safety management systems (SMS), or risk management systems, meeting the requirements, including independent audits, of recognized international standards maintained by the ISO or other similar organizations. Other IMPA pilot groups operate in heavily regulated systems in which government oversight bodies perform the quality assurance and auditing functions. Captain Watson said, "I have the utmost admiration and respect for all IMPA members and know that the choices they make in designing, building, and operating their pilotage service are the ones most suitable to their own unique environment. This allows them to deliver a quality service while upholding the highest levels of professionalism."

A quality assurance certificate is not a sign of piloting competence. Such certificates are issued by private business enterprises. The issuing company is not implementing government regulations or standards established by any recognized authority that is mandated to act in the public interest. Also, quality assurance certification does not deal with the actual act of piloting but with processes and procedures related to organizational structure. As such, the issuing company has no expertise to assess the quality of piloting performed in any given district. Watson said, "Recent press reports indicating that pilot organisations accredited to the ISPO are in some way superior to other IMPA pilot groups is insulting to our worldwide membership. I'm proud to say that all of our members pursue continual improvement in how their operations are conducted. Most importantly, our members continually learn from each other, and IMPA serves as a conduit for information exchange and collaboration among member nations."

The members of the IMPA Executive Committee are:

Captain Michael Watson, president, USA
Captain Otavio Fragoso, senior vp, Brazil
Captain Steve Pelecanos, vp, Australia
Captain Cahit Istakbal, vp, Turkey
Captain Frederic Moncany de-Saint-Aignan, vp, France
Captain Simon Pelletier, vp, Canada
Captain Stig D. Thomsen, vp, Denmark