



Focus

Speaking the same language

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This month's Focus comes to you from the bridge of the USCGC *Polar Star* in the Southern Ocean on Operation Deep Freeze 2018.

USCGC *Polar Star*'s Antarctic voyage is just one component of an annual international convergence of shipping on the southern continent. Voyages include cruises showcasing the unique flora and fauna, resupply missions to Antarctic research stations and research programmes in Antarctic waters during the summer navigation season. Many of these efforts are conducted collaboratively. One common challenge to all, however, is the ice.

Antarctica not only calves off massive tabular icebergs from its enormous mantle of glacial ice, but also presents the mariner with pack ice and challenging fast sea ice along its coastlines. During this voyage, *Polar Star* first had to work her way through almost 200nm of degrading first- and second-year sea ice before she reached the Ross Sea polynya (an area of unfrozen sea within the pack ice). After transiting the polynya, the real work began, breaking the track through the tough land-fast ice that extended 30nm.

All around the continent other icebreakers have been completing similar missions. Australia's *Aurora Australis* makes several journeys back and forth between Hobart and Australia's stations. The French *L'Astrolabe*, Chinese *Xue Long*, British Antarctic Survey's *Ernest Shackleton*, South Africa's *Agulhas II* and Chile's *Almirante Oscar Viel* are just a few of the icebreakers that come down to the Antarctic annually, either making supply trips themselves or providing escort to cargo vessels that complete the resupply.

Like many of the ships operating in the Antarctic resupply and research season, *Polar Star* has international personnel aboard. In addition to a RNZN Lieutenant Commander learning first-hand how to operate in ice, I am aboard representing The Nautical Institute. I was invited to sail on Operation Deep Freeze, the US military's logistical support operation for the National Science Foundation-managed US Antarctic Program, to observe *Polar Star*'s ice operations. This gives The Nautical Institute the opportunity not only to share our Ice Navigator Training and Accreditation programme with the United States Coast Guard, but also to benchmark our programme against the high standard of US Coast Guard training. We are providing officers on the bridge of *Polar Star* with the perspective of the Ice Navigators on board the ships that she will escort through the ice of the Ross Sea; and assisting the Commanding Officer and his bridge teams with ice route planning from the perspective of Ice Navigators on board escorted ships.

In July 2017, The Nautical Institute launched the

Ice Navigator Training Accreditation and Certification Scheme, which provides the first international standard in training and certification for ships operating in ice-covered waters around the globe.

The maritime industry has many common international standards of training and certification. They ensure that operators not only have the same high standard of competency, but 'speak the same language' in a particular area of expertise. They give owners, insurers, administrations and charterers confidence that people holding those certifications meet acceptable standards that have been carefully developed and maintained. A prime example is The NI's Dynamic Positioning Officer certification. Similarly, the NI Sail certification ensures a high degree of competency for officers aboard tall ships.

The degree to which the Ice Navigator certification has been accepted is evident from the number of applications under the grandfathering clause. Experienced and highly competent officers who have been operating in ice for many decades have realised the value of an internationally recognised certification in ice operations. Shipowners and management companies are advising their officers that they should apply for certification. They know that showing that their bridge officers meet an international standard from a respected professional organisation such as The Nautical Institute serves as a visible show of commitment to best practice and safety.

As I participated in the daily ice navigation training for the bridge team personnel aboard *Polar Star*, it was evident that they had a very strong safety culture. These incredibly experienced and competent officers were eager to pass on their knowledge to the next generation. Incorporating The Nautical Institute's Ice Navigator Certification and obtaining accreditation for Ice Navigator training within the training regime in a more formal way would ensure the USCG officers could better understand how other bridge officers think and expect to operate in ice.

Striving for best practice and the highest levels of professional competency at sea is our goal. As I have travelled around the globe as President I have been constantly impressed by the dedication our members display, regardless of their nationality or sector of the maritime industry, whether commercial, naval or coast guard. When we all strive for the highest levels of professionalism we all benefit. Constant learning, continued proficiency, adherence to best practice and competency are the hallmarks of a truly dedicated professional mariner. The annual shipping advance towards the Antarctic, bringing together all sectors of modern shipping, highlights the ongoing need for multi-sectoral collaborative seamanship. 🌐