



香港商船資訊

HONG KONG MERCHANT SHIPPING INFORMATION NOTE

Electronic Certificates and Electronic Logbooks

To : Shipowners, Ship Managers, Ship Operators, Recognized Organizations, Masters, Officers and Crew

Summary

The purpose of this Note is to advise the parties concerned on the implementation of the electronic certificates and electronic logbooks for Hong Kong-registered ships as from 21 July 2023. The Hong Kong Merchant Shipping Information Note No. 21/2020 will be revoked on 1 August 2023.

Background

1. With the advent of digital encryption and other cybersecurity technology, electronic certificates in place of their paper-based counterparts are increasingly popular worldwide. In addition to providing a higher degree of convenience to shipowners in applying for and receiving the electronic certificates/licences/permits (collectively referred to as “e-certs”), the electronic authentication system of e-certs also offers a higher level of security against forgery. Similarly, electronic log-books (“e-logbooks”) are becoming more prevalent than traditional paper log-books¹. E-logbooks reduce the workload of shipboard staff in reproducing the data on paper and help ensure the accuracy of entries by automatic feeding of data from a ship’s equipment to the e-logbooks directly. In this connection, the International Maritime Organization (“IMO”) first published in 2013 guidelines for the use of e-certs² that seek to set a global standard on the functions and security requirements of e-certs. Together with other relevant international organisation, IMO has also adopted guidelines for use of electronic records to which reference could be made in regulating the use of e-logbooks.

¹ Log-books are a record of important events in the management, operation, and navigation of a ship, such as incidents during passage, navigational activities, ship machinery parameters, performance, maintenance and malfunctions, radio-communications, etc.

² Relevant guidelines have now been updated as the Guidelines for the Use of Electronic Certificates (FAL.5/Circ.39/Rev.2).

2. The Shipping Legislation (Electronic Certificates and Electronic Log-books) (Amendment) Ordinance 2023 (“Amendment Ordinance”) has been gazetted on 21 July 2023 with immediate effect. The Amendment Ordinance is to amend seven pieces of shipping legislation, namely the Merchant Shipping (Safety) Ordinance (Cap. 369), Merchant Shipping (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Ordinance (Cap. 413), Merchant Shipping (Liability and Compensation for Oil Pollution) Ordinance (Cap. 414), Merchant Shipping (Registration) Ordinance (Cap. 415), Merchant Shipping (Seafarers) Ordinance (Cap. 478), Merchant Shipping (Security of Ships and Port Facilities) Ordinance (Cap. 582) and Bunker Oil Pollution (Liability and Compensation) Ordinance (Cap. 605), to facilitate the use of e-certs and e-logbooks for Hong Kong-registered ships under the Hong Kong Shipping Register and seafarers.

Features of Electronic Certificates

3. The issuance of electronic certificates by the Marine Department will be in accordance with the IMO Guidelines for the Use of Electronic Certificates, FAL.5/Circ.39/Rev.2, and will commence on 1 August 2023 with the following features: -

- (a) Validity and consistency with the format and content required by the relevant international convention or instrument, as applicable;
- (b) Protected from edits, modifications or revisions other than those authorized by the Marine Department;
- (c) A unique tracking number used for verification;
- (d) A printable and visible symbol of the Marine Department that confirms the source of issuance.

Verification of Electronic Certificate

4. The following procedures are for the verification of e-certs issued by the Marine Department: -

- (a) On the web browser, enter the verification website of the Marine Department. Select the type of certificate and enter the unique tracking number of the

certificate³; or

- (b) Scan the QR code on the certificate to link to the verification website of the Marine Department. The type of certificate and the unique tracking number of the certificate will be automatically filled in. Further information⁴ may be required to be entered for some certificates.
- (c) Enter the Captcha code as appeared on the screen.
- (d) The information on the certificate (e.g. whether the certificate is valid or not, the name of the vessel, ship's numbers, name of seafarer, etc.) will be displayed.

5. Regarding the e-certs issued by the Recognized Organizations (RO) of the Marine Department, concerned parties are required to approach the relevant RO for the verification procedures.

6. Instructions for verifying the information contained in the electronic certificate, including confirmation of periodic endorsements, when necessary, should be available on board the ship.

Management of Electronic Certificate ashore and on board

7. Shipowners, operators and crew on ships that carry and use e-certs should ensure that these certificates are controlled through the safety management system, as described in section 11 of the International Management Code for the Safe Operation of Ships and for Pollution Prevention (ISM Code) of the International Maritime Organization.

8. Except for the exhibit of the Maritime Labour Convention Certificate on board in the form of paper, by making the certificate readily accessible for viewing from an electronic device on board the ship and if the device is not functioning properly, by producing a printout of the certificate on board ship is considered as exhibiting or keeping of a certificate or a copy of that certificate, on board the ship to which the certificate relates is required under a provision of the relevant Ordinance.

³ Additional information of the certificate may be required for some certificates, such as date of issue, IMO ship identification number, etc.

⁴ Further information refers to information such as seafarer certificate number, date of birth or date of issue, etc.

Features of Electronic Logbooks and the approval

9. If an entry or record is required to be made or kept in a log book, such as the official log book, ship's log book, engine room log book, cargo log book, MARPOL or Ballast Water record books, under a provision of the relevant Ordinance, the requirement is also met by making or keeping the entry or record in the log-book in electronic form in an electronic device on board the ship to which the log-book relates and in accordance with the applicable requirements set out in the electronic log-book guidelines⁵. Regarding the approval of electronic log-books on Hong Kong-registered ships, ROs have been authorized on behalf of the Hong Kong SAR Government.

Issuance of e-certs on Commencement of Amendment Ordinance

10. All statutory certificates issued by the RO on behalf of the Hong Kong SAR Government would also be available in electronic format upon the commencement of the Amendment Ordinance. There is no change to the issuance of paper certificates in the Amendment Ordinance and therefore there is no urgent need to replace the paper certificates with electronic certificates onboard Hong Kong-registered ships.

11. With the issuance of e-certs for Hong Kong-registered ships starting from 1 August 2023 by the Marine Department, the service for shipowners and their representatives to collect the Certificate of Registry issued by the Marine Department at the Beijing Office (BJO), respective Economic and Trade Offices (ETO) and Regional Desks (RD) will be terminated. Consequentially, the respective Hong Kong Merchant Shipping Information Note No. 21/2020 will be revoked on 1 August 2023.

12. Details of the Amendment Ordinance can be found on the website of Marine Department (<https://www.mardep.gov.hk/en/msnote/msin.html>) as annex to this Information Note.

13. Shipowners, ship managers, ship operators, recognized organizations, masters, officers, and crew of Hong Kong-registered ships should abide by the Amendment Ordinance mentioned above in handling e-certs and e-logbooks.

⁵ Such guidelines include (i) Guidelines for the Recording of Events Related to Navigation adopted by the International Maritime Organization by resolution A.916(22) on 29 November 2001; (ii) the Guidelines for the Use of Electronic Record Books under the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships ("MARPOL") adopted by the IMO (the IMO Resolution MEPC 312(74) in 2019, as implemented on Hong Kong-registered ships through amendments to local merchant shipping legislation with effect from 1 October 2020); (iii) similar guidelines for shipboard electronic record books issued by the International Organization for Standardization ("ISO") (ISO 21745 – "Electronic record books for ships-Technical specification and operational requirements").

Enquiries

14. For general enquiries on e-certs, please refer to the FAQ at the following website of Marine Department (<https://www.mardep.gov.hk/en/faq/pdf/faqecert.pdf>)
15. Enquiries on this Merchant Shipping Information Note relevant to the Amendment Ordinance may be directed to the Maritime Policy Branch at “hkmpd@mardep.gov.hk”.

Marine Department
Multi-lateral Policy Division

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