



MIAL and Hunterlink

Australian Seafarer Welfare Survey Results

Survey conducted between 8 February – 7 March 2021

SUPPORTED BY:



Purpose of survey

The consequences of the global COVID-19 pandemic have been tremendous for the world's seafarers.

Border closures around the world and within Australia have made critical aspects of seafarers' working lives such as crew change, shore leave, medical attention and simply attendance at work extremely challenging.

MIAL and Hunterlink acknowledge the hard work and dedication of all seafarers, whether they have been able to work during the pandemic or not.

MIAL has been advocating on behalf of the Australian maritime industry throughout this difficult period to highlight to government the particular challenges faced. In relation to seafarers, MIAL notes that despite strong calls from the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the International Labour Organisation and the UN General Assembly, the Australian government has not joined with 174 other IMO Member States in designating seafarers as key workers.

MIAL's particular interest in carrying out this survey was to ascertain how seafarers' sense of value and worth in relation to their work

has been affected by the pandemic and to determine whether there are any measures that could be taken to enhance this.

Hunterlink is an Employee Assistance Provider with significant experience in the Australian and global maritime industry. Hunterlink has been dealing directly with seafarers in relation to mental health issues and other challenges presented. Hunterlink's particular interest in the survey was to find out how confident seafarers feel in relation to peer support for mental health issues, and what barriers exist to starting conversations of this nature.

This report shows the results of the survey conducted between 8 February – 7 March 2021. MIAL and Hunterlink intend to repeat the survey at 3-monthly intervals to gather the changing data over time. MIAL and Hunterlink sincerely thank all seafarers for their significant efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic and send further appreciation to those who took the time to complete this survey.



Executive summary

The survey received 530 responses in total, however not all questions were answered by all respondents. The number of responses received for each question are displayed in the corresponding graphs.

Significantly, a majority of seafarers (65%) reported feeling less valued by their Government now compared to before COVID-19, with 39% of respondents indicating they felt *much less* valued in this regard.

While 17% of seafarers felt more valued by the company they work for now compared to before the pandemic, 49% reported feeling less valued by this cohort.

The results about seafarers' sense of value in relation to their families was positive, with 66% reporting feeling more or much more valued now by this cohort compared to pre-COVID-19.

Seafarers were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with various statements in relation to their roles, and then were asked to indicate their perception of others' beliefs in relation to the same questions. Responses received in this part of the survey reflect a disconnect whereby seafarers do not appear to feel seen or appreciated by the rest of society in the same way as they perceive themselves.

When asked to look three months ahead, 40% of seafarers anticipated feeling the same in relation to their sense of value in relation to work, and, of concern, about the same number (38%) felt that their sense of value would further decrease in that timeframe.

MIAL was interested to know what measures could be taken to enhance seafarers' sense of value. From the responses received, MIAL believes that the following measures would be effective:

- Designating seafarers as essential workers
- Facilitation of COVID-19 vaccination
- Enhanced communications to seafarers (from Government and employers)
- Recognition and support for Australian shipping, which would lead to job opportunities, enhanced job security and training opportunities
- Facilitation of crew change and transit (border closures)

Seafarers were also surveyed on mental health, and an overwhelming 84.5% of respondents indicated that they had not received any training in this space within the past 24 months.

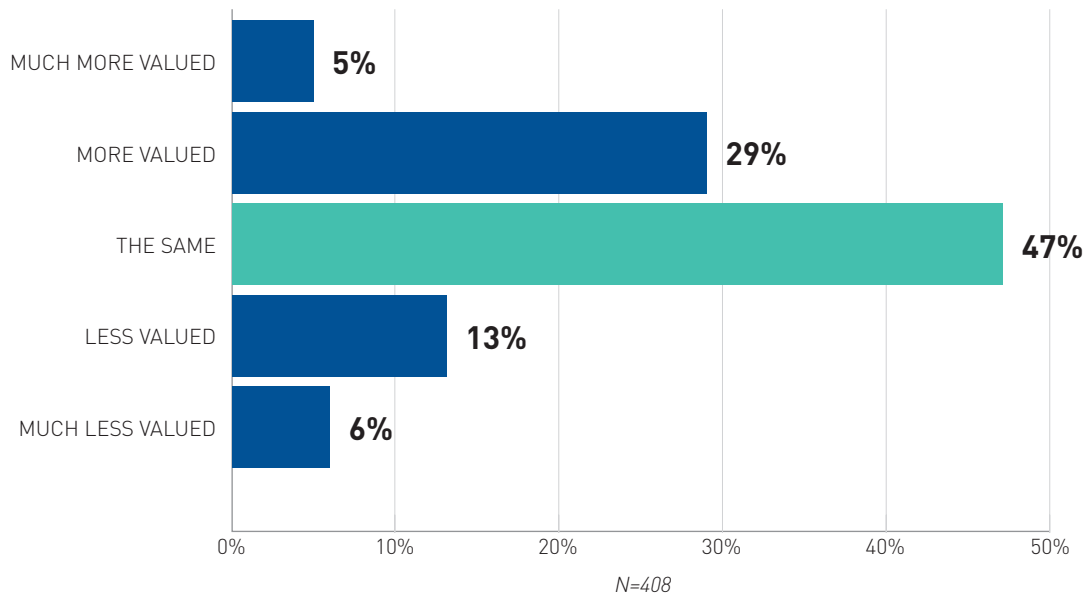
On a positive note, 61% of seafarers indicated that there was at least one colleague on board that they would feel comfortable speaking with about mental health. Seafarers also self-reported as relatively confident in identifying signs of stress, anxiety, depression and fatigue and also self-reported as likely to start conversations with colleagues about these issues.

Hunterlink believes that a peer support approach can be effective in the maritime industry in particular, so seafarers were asked about barriers they perceive to starting a conversation about mental health. The most common response to this question was a lack of training in mental health, followed by a fear of embarrassing a colleague and being unsure about how to approach the subject. This information

underscores the need for employers to refocus on mental health training and ensure that seafarers are provided with assistance to break down some of those reported barriers.

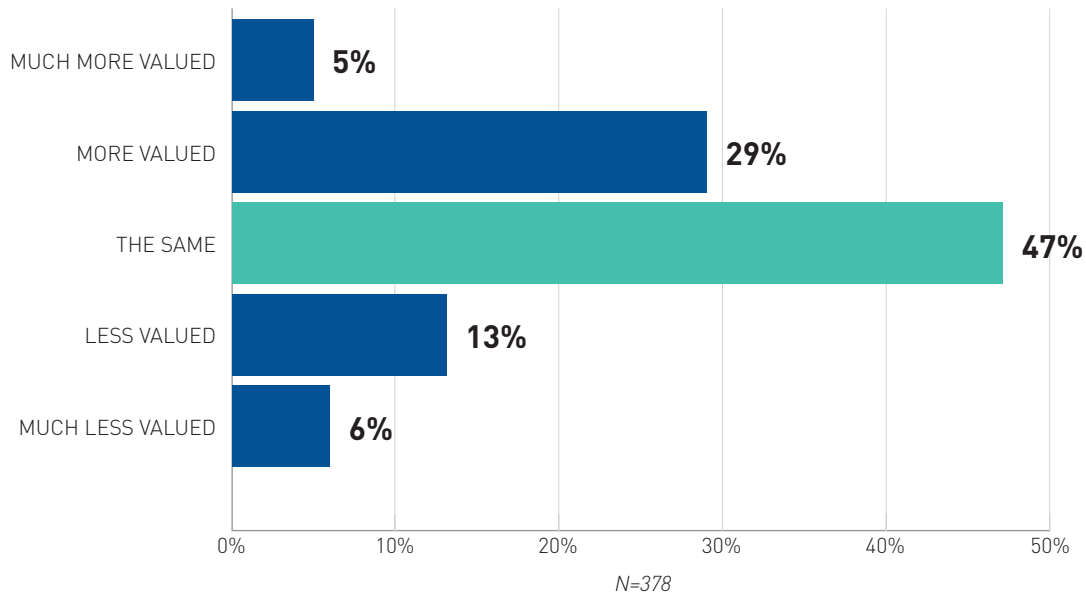
Summary of findings

Compared to before COVID-19, how valued to you feel now by your colleagues



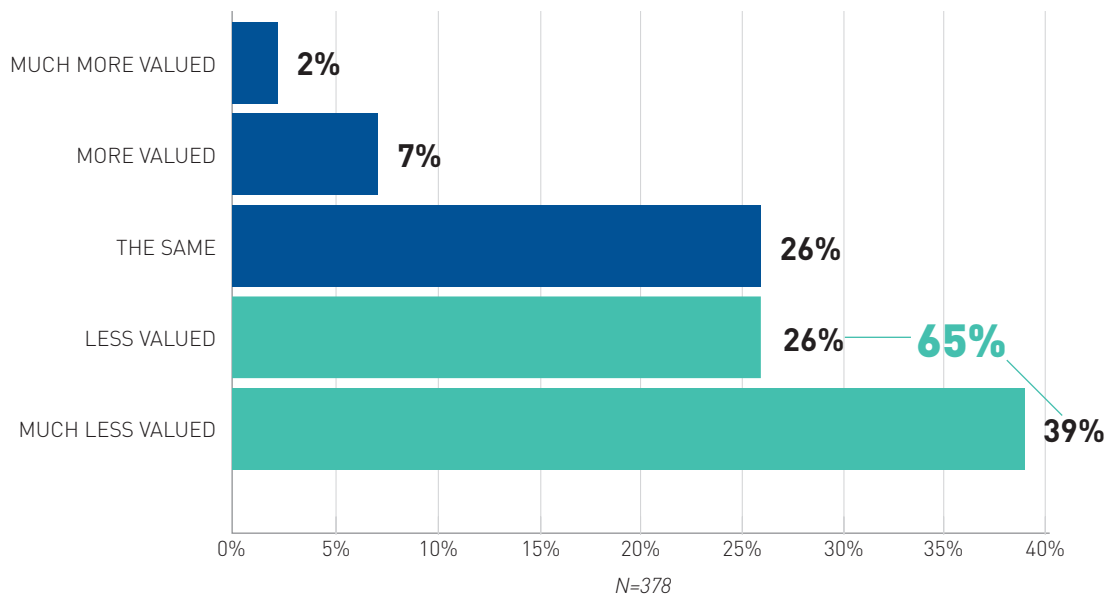
Seafarers reported feeling similarly valued by their colleagues now as compared to before the pandemic.

Compared to before COVID-19, how valued do you feel now by the company you work for?



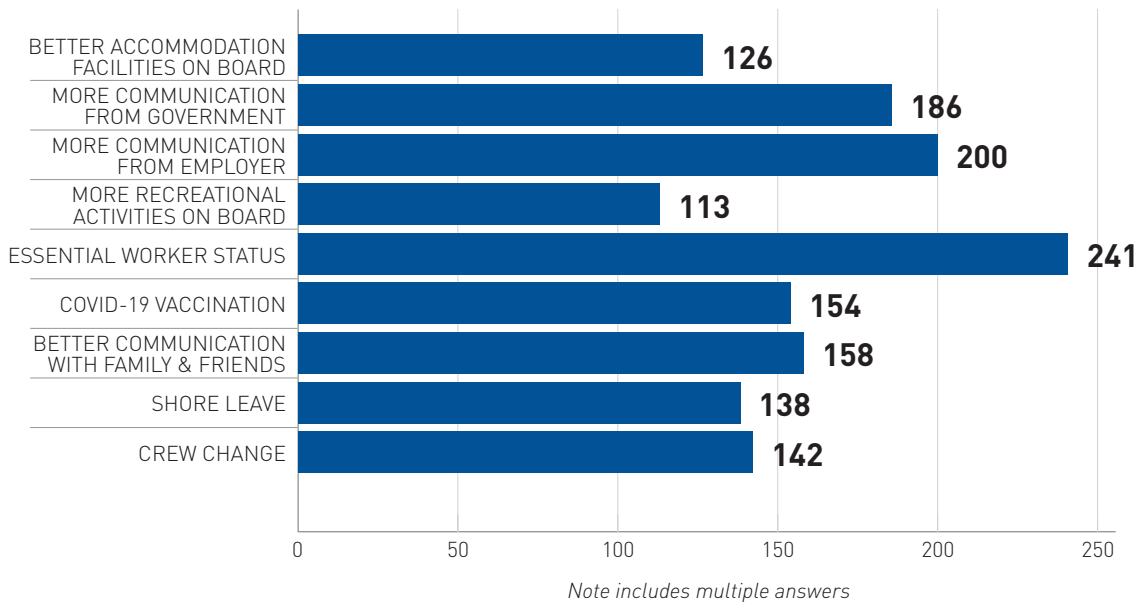
While the most common response from seafarers regarding how valued they felt by the company they work for was 'the same' at 33% of responses, another 50% of responses were in the 'less valued' and 'much less valued category'. When asked later in the survey what measures could be taken to enhance their sense of value generally, more communication from their employer was the second most common response. Interestingly, other popular responses (e.g. essential worker status) fall outside of the control of the employer and predominantly rest with government and regulators.

Compared to before COVID-19, how valued do you feel now by your Government?



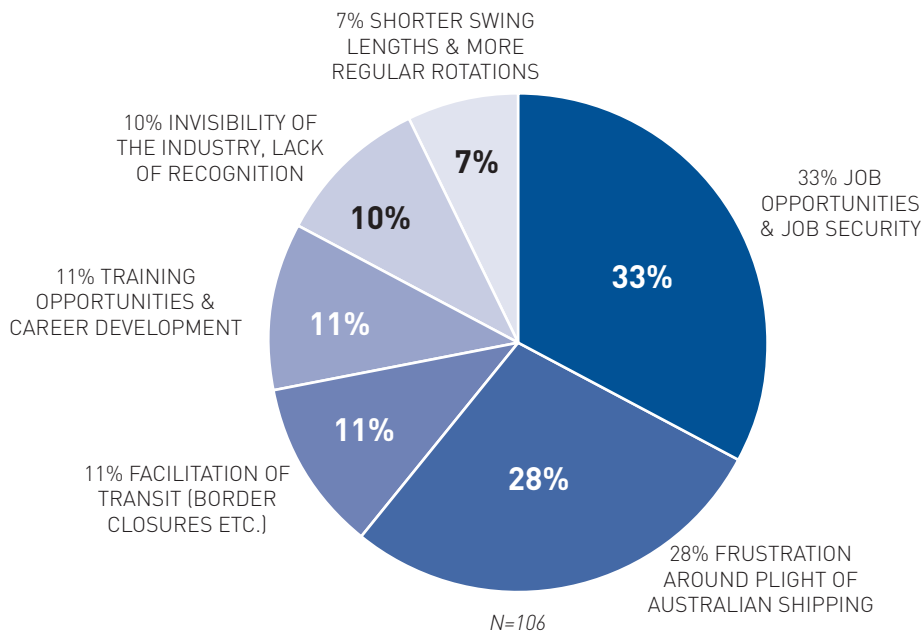
65% of respondents indicating feeling much less valued by their Government now compared to before the pandemic, and significantly, 39% of those responses fell in the 'much less valued' category. As noted above, many of the measures that seafarers indicated could serve to enhance their sense of value (such as essential worker status, COVID-19 vaccination, crew change and support for the Australian shipping industry) do fall within the purview of Government and MIAL will continue to advocate for the implementation of these measures.

Measures that enhance your sense of value



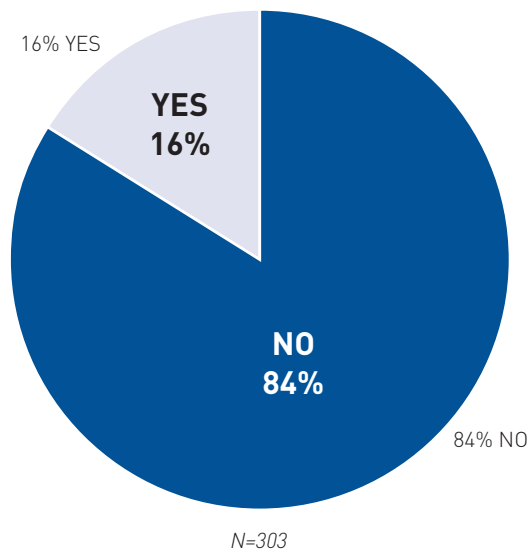
As can be seen from the results of the survey, designating seafarers as 'key' or 'essential' workers is the measure available to Government that would make the most positive difference to seafarers' sense of value and worth in relation to their work. From that standpoint, the importance of this measure cannot be undermined. More than simply providing them with this label however, designation of seafarers as essential workers must be accompanied by practical measures to enable the performance of their essential functions – this means facilitation by government of measures such as vaccinations, transit across borders, crew change and all other practical steps that will assist seafarers to perform their vital role.

Are there any measures you can think of that would make you feel more valued in your role?



Whilst in the short term, essential worker status and measures to facilitate seafarers’ safe movement to perform their duties are what is needed, in the long term seafarers told us in their open response answers that they seek confidence in the future of Australian shipping, more job opportunities and job security as well as more visibility and recognition of the industry. Seafarers share industry’s concerns about the plight of Australian shipping and it is time to address these issues and invest in this critical sector of the nation’s transport infrastructure.

Have you had any mental health training in the past 24 months?

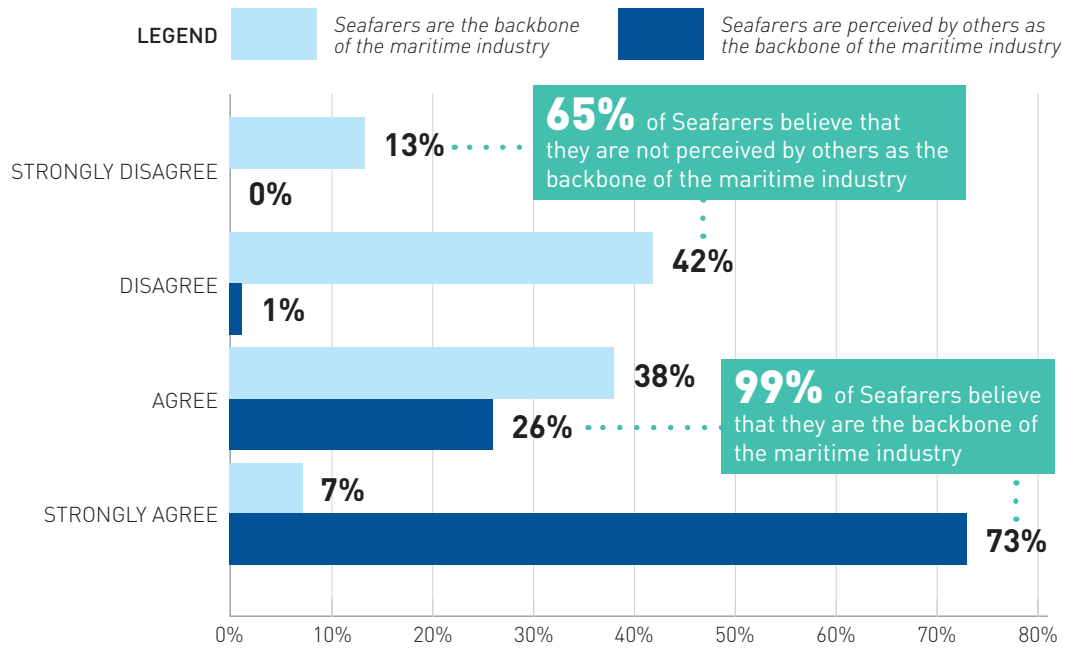


The many challenges faced by seafarers, shipowners and operators alike could foreseeably have resulted in a lack of focus on mental health training. As we adjust to the new normal, training in this area is encouraged to support seafarers and provide necessary skills during this unprecedented time.

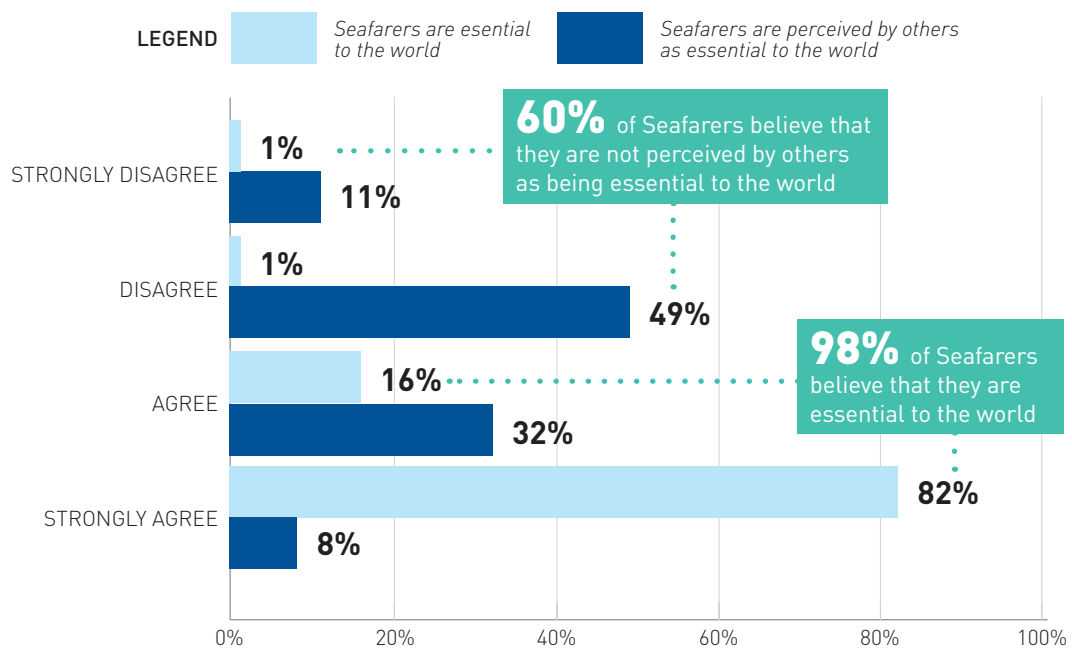
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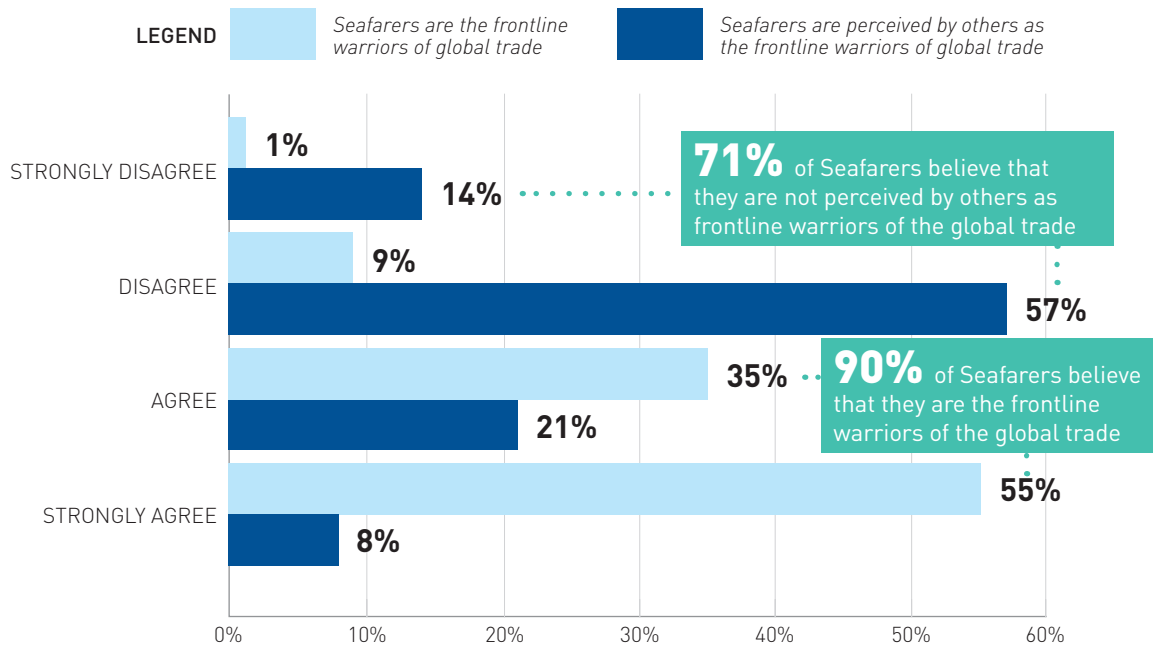
SEAFARERS ARE BACKBONE OF THE MARITIME INDUSTRY



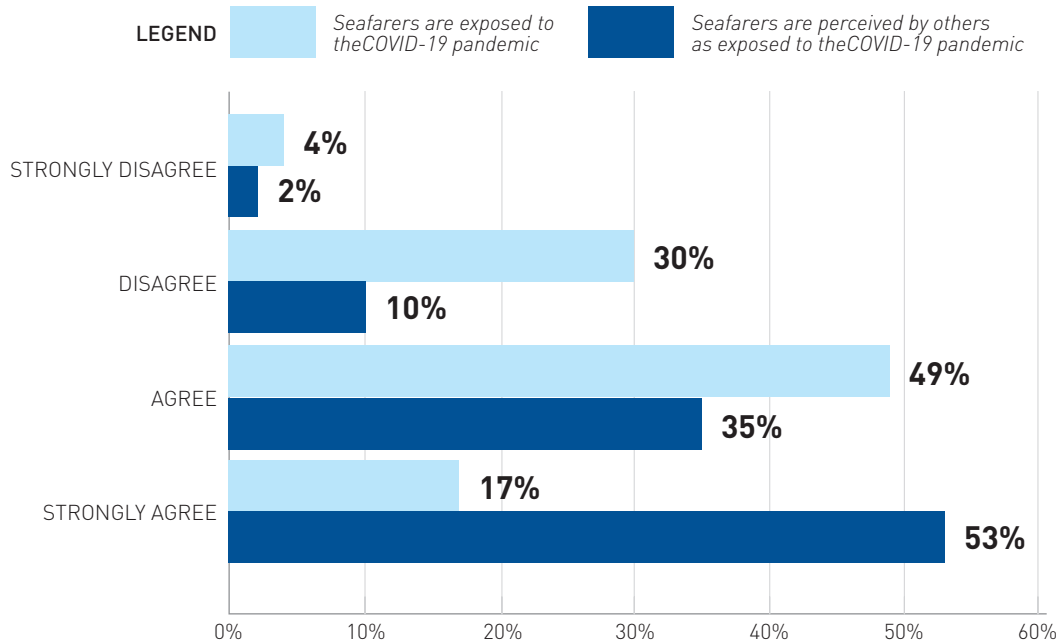
SEAFARERS ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE WORLD



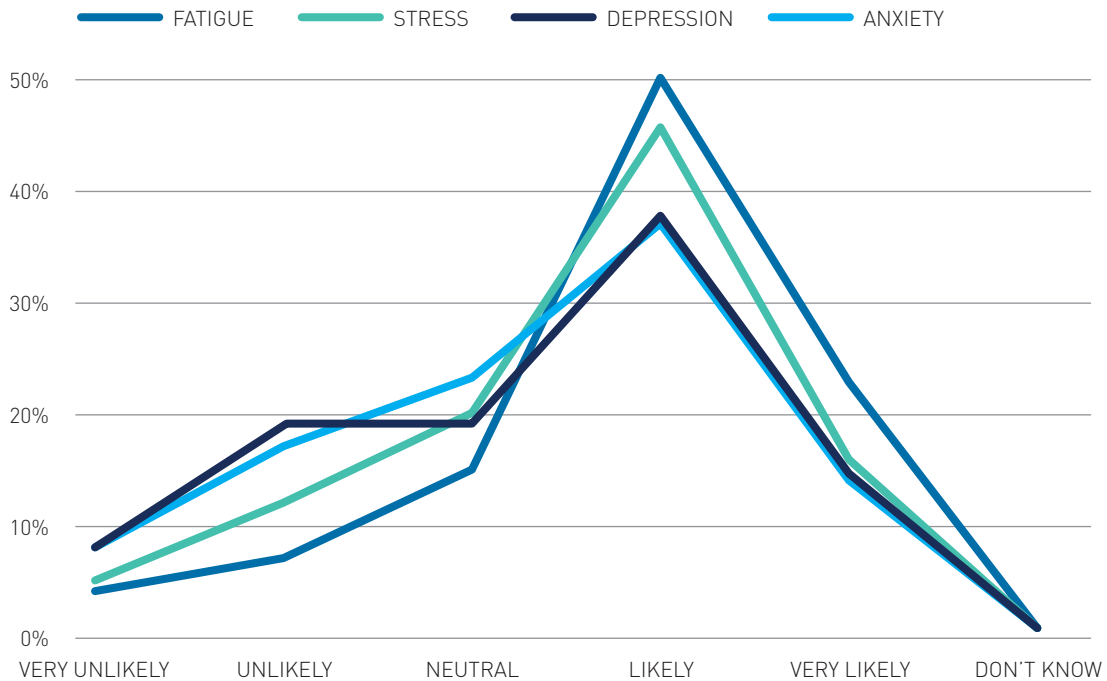
SEAFARERS ARE FRONTLINE WARRIORS OF GLOBAL TRADE



SEAFARERS ARE EXPOSED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

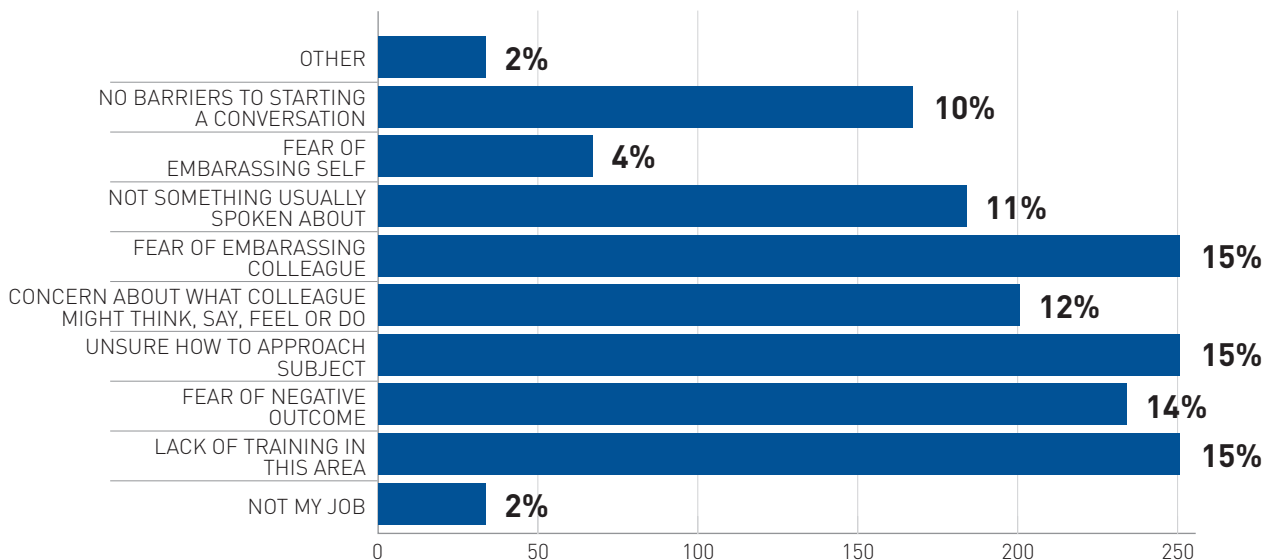


Thinking about your colleagues at sea, how likely would you be to start a conversation with someone about fatigue, stress, depression or anxiety?



Positively, seafarers indicated that they would generally be likely to start a conversation with their colleagues about fatigue, stress, depression and anxiety. However, they did identify a number of barriers to starting these conversations (see next graph).

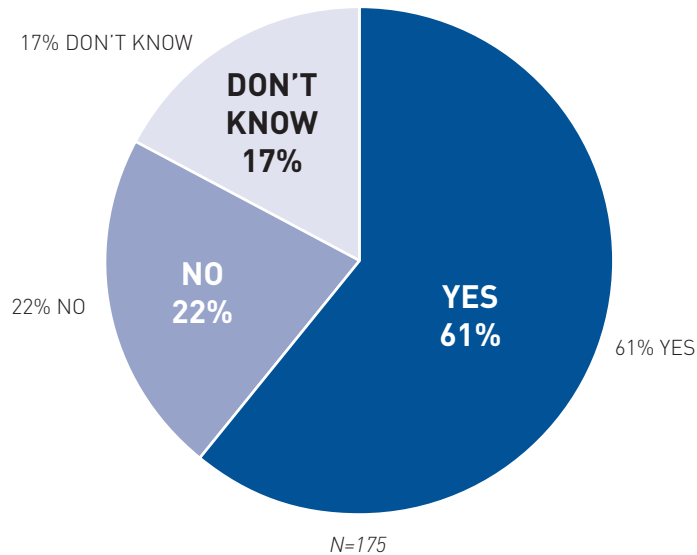
Which, if any, of the following barriers do you perceive to starting a conversation about a colleague's mental health and wellbeing?



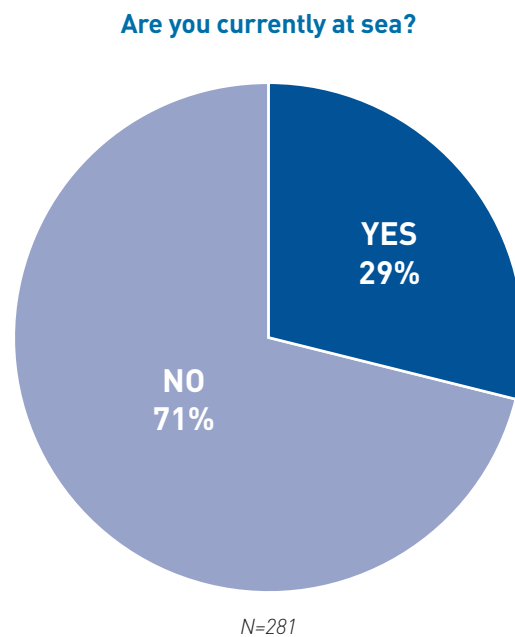
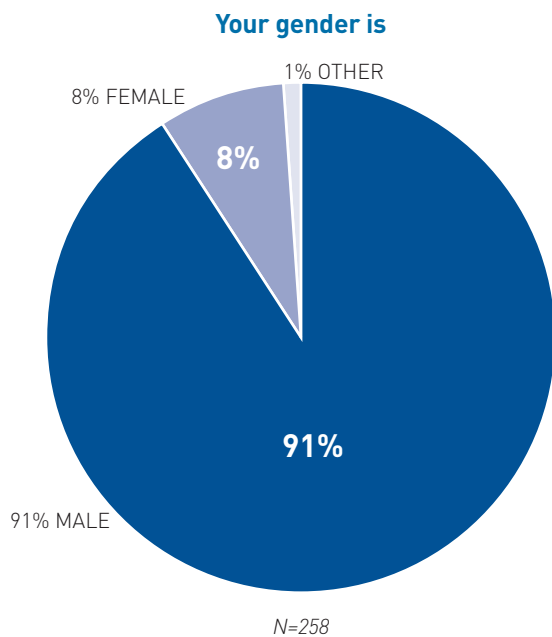
The most common response to this question was a lack of training in mental health, followed by a fear of embarrassing a colleague and being unsure about how to approach the subject. Significantly, 84.5% of respondents to the survey indicated that they had not received any form of mental health training in the past 24 months. This information underscores the need for employers to refocus on mental health training and ensure that seafarers are provided with assistance to break down some of those reported barriers.

Is there at least one colleague on board who you feel comfortable speaking with about mental health?

That the majority of seafarers who responded indicated that there was at least one colleague on board with whom they feel comfortable speaking about mental health indicates that there is a relatively strong platform from which to encourage a peer support approach.



Hunterlink supports the use of mental health and wellbeing peer support programs in the workplace when employees are provided adequate training and they feel comfortable to assist when colleagues reach out for help. Peer support programs work by providing direct and immediate support, by having conversations and encouraging the use of professionals, such as counsellors and psychologists, through their employee assistance provider (EAP). There also needs to be mechanisms in place for the peer support person or mental health first aider to be able to seek their own support when required, as being an accidental counsellor is challenging at times. Hunterlink provides their own training and also links to other training programs that can be provided pending an employer's needs.



Of the survey respondents who indicated that they were not at sea, 51% were on leave and 32% (82) were unemployed.

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