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MEDIA RELEASE | April 23, 2021

GOVERNMENT URGED TO RESPOND TO SEAFARERS' NEEDS IN PANDEMIC

Stella Maris Australia, a Catholic agency that provides spiritual and practical support to those working at sea, has joined an international coalition calling for better treatment of seafarers during the pandemic.

Stella Maris is one of hundreds of organisations that have signed up to the Neptune Declaration on Seafarer Wellbeing and Crew Change.

The Neptune Declaration calls for seafarers to be considered essential workers, and therefore have earlier access to COVID-19 vaccines, as well as for better practices to facilitate changes of crew.

It also seeks greater collaboration between maritime and aviation industries, in partnership with governments, to manage the transportation and deployment of seafarers to ports where they are needed.

Stella Maris has, on several occasions, raised concerns about the welfare of seafarers during the pandemic. They have included the expiration of contracts for some workers, the inability for seafarers to disembark at ports and the mental and physical health challenges seafarers face.

Those issues are among the ones the Neptune Declaration raises. Despite efforts from unions, governments, industry groups, employers and non-governmental organisations and a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, key issues remain unresolved.

"This is not an acceptable way to treat seafarers, who are the frontline workers of the maritime industry carrying 90 per cent of global trade," the Neptune Declaration states.

"Fatigue after extended periods at sea has significant consequences on the physical and mental wellbeing of seafarers."

Stella Maris Australia national director Roslyn Rajasingam said in addition to international advocacy, the organisation is also supporting local efforts to approach the Australian Government. In particular, the Government will be asked to help solve the global crisis by designating seafarers as key workers.

"Almost 70 countries have taken that step, recognising what critical work seafarers are already undertaking and the important role they will play during and beyond the pandemic," Mrs Rajasingam said.

"Australia's location makes our reliance on the delivery of goods by sea greater than many countries, which underlines the need for this long overdue step to be taken by the Commonwealth Government."

[Click here to access the Neptune Declaration.](#)