

Helicopters still top concern!

OCG tells helicopter safety group - we support our members.

The OCG unions representing the 'people in the back' are all too aware that helicopter safety remains the single most important issue in terms of their health and safety for offshore workers. We know our colleagues up front, the pilot's, are equally concerned but their knowledge and personal experience inevitably means there are slightly different perceptions about the issue of helicopter travel and we all have to acknowledge that. We also have to acknowledge that when it comes to one particular aircraft, the Airbus 225, the people in the back have been expressing some strong views as part of surveys we have carried out. The vast majority of these views have been blunt; they don't want to fly in the 225 again!

That message was made abundantly clear by two OCG representatives recently who attended the Offshore Helicopter Safety Leadership Group (OHSLG) which is chaired by the CAA. The group met with representatives from Airbus, the European Aviation Safety Authority (EASA) and the Norwegian CAA. Airbus wanted to share the advances in their on-going internal investigations and the improvements being made to the EC225 helicopter type. Unite and RMT, as the representatives of workforce, 'the people in the back' on OHSLG, are acutely aware of the continuing concerns and the lack of confidence that workers across the sector have in helicopters generally, not just the EC225s.

As we listened to Airbus and EASA discussing findings and their on-going work into gearbox types and the fact they are looking to raise the safety standard in helicopter flight globally - not just fix the problem identified after the interim AIBN reports - we couldn't help but think "we've been here before, you told us it was safe before". We obviously welcome the technological advances that Airbus are looking to introduce to their aircraft models and we

would encourage all aircraft manufacturers to continue this work, it is vital in building the confidence of the workforce.

However, when it comes to the 225 there is no way of changing the facts; we have seen this aircraft type in the sea six times since 2009 with the loss of more than 30 lives. This alone makes any proposal for a return to service extremely difficult and will cause considerable concern for workers. The investigations continue and we have no certainty over a root cause, yet despite this EASA have cleared the aircraft to return with the application of additional checks. OCG representatives suggested these 'return to service' conditions which involve intrusive maintenance make any idea of a return to service an even greater concern to offshore workers. As we put it, conducting more maintenance potentially introduces more risks.

As indicated, helicopters remain one of the highest concerns for the offshore workforce and we in the OCG are more aware of that than most. With that in mind we informed the group we would continue to show our support to the workforce and will not support any return to service until a safety case has been properly demonstrated and the workforce believe it is appropriate to do so.

The Norwegian CAA and the UK CAA have indicated they have no plans to lift their current restrictions on the use of the Airbus 225 aircraft but will review that position after considering the Norwegian Air Accident Investigators report which is scheduled for the end of April.

In the meantime, we await news from investigators in Ireland after a Sikorsky S92 search and rescue aircraft crashed into the sea on Tuesday March 14th. These aircraft carry out a significantly different task to those in the oilfields but this particular aircraft, along with all other S92's, globally underwent recent checks after an incident on the Total Franklin platform last December.

Jake Molloy, RMT

Offshore Contractors Association – Trade Unions Pay and Conditions Claim

Tommy Campbell, UNITE Regional Officer explains the current situation on the OCA ballot results and what it means.

The Trade Unions are seeking a significant pay increase for the offshore workforce, along with improved sick pay and paid travel time to an employer's onshore base.

In a recent consultative ballot, all Trade Union members voted overwhelmingly to reject the latest pay offer from their employers, represented by the Offshore Contractors Association.

We have repeatedly warned the OCA employers that we cannot simply have a race to the bottom, with employers competing with each other to cut the pay and conditions of the offshore workforce.

The ballot result is quite clear and we are now preparing the paperwork for an independent legal Strike Ballot which has to be scrutinised by the Union's Head Office and the legal department.

This is because of anti-union laws in the UK and the ever present threat of court action by the employers to challenge any Union members democratic strike ballots.

We always do our very best to make sure that the strike ballot result is protected from a legal challenge in the Courts.

It is therefore very important that you advise your Trade Union if your employment details have changed recently for example a changed job title or if you have a new employer or if you have a new address or a name change. Telephone conference calls are now being held regularly with Trade Union Workplace Reps whose positive contribution and support for their Union members is second to none.

It's important that Trade Union Workplace Reps hold discussions with offshore workers on platforms in preparation for the strike ballot and any subsequent strike action born from securing a legal mandate for industrial action.

The UNITE, RMT and GMB members within Wood Group know the timescale a ballot takes from their experience with their successful industrial action last year.

We will be keeping Union members and Workplace Reps briefed on the progress of the strike ballot and once it has the green light from the Union's Central Office and legal advisers it will be then down to Trade Union members to make sure they return their postal vote.

We need to ensure that there is a huge turnout for the vote for industrial action so that we can secure the legal mandate to take strike action.

It's anticipated that the strike ballot process will take a few months to be completed which will be in time for the shutdowns planned during the summer months.

It's important that Trade Union Reps and union members keep us informed with specific dates of the planned shutdowns.

All the Offshore Trade Unions are now working very closely together under the banner of the Offshore Co-ordinating Group.

The solidarity and unity of the offshore workers will give strength to the determination of their Trade Unions to secure a decent pay increase and halt the race to the bottom of any further cuts in pay or other terms and conditions.

Tommy Campbell, UNITE

RMT Jake Molloy fills us in on the goings on within their camp.

ODIA - With the Offshore Diving Industry Agreement, we have agreed with the employers that no further review will take place until the scheduled anniversary date which is November 1st 2018. Talks will commence with the employers early 2018.

COTA - The Catering Offshore Traders Agreement which is a Unite and RMT agreement we had the employers final offer for the 2016/17 period which was a freeze on all conditions. This was put out to a referendum/ballot and was rejected by RMT and Unite members with 68% to 32% voting to reject. The employers have requested a further meeting with the Unions/Joint Shop Steward negotiating committee and this was due to take place the week we were producing this update. Members should look out for further updates which will be released by Unite and RMT.

OCA - Offshore Contractors Association is an agreement with Unite & GMB and the members of both unions have rejected an improved offer from the OCA employers. The Trade Unions will now move to a ballot for industrial action and have asked if RMT members employed by OCA companies will also participate in a ballot for industrial action. This matter is being considered by the RMT National Executive Committee and a further update will be released.

Gulfmark - Is a supply vessel company agreement and we are currently seeking a meeting with the company and its new management team. We need to discuss the agreement and the current market conditions which have caused the company serious difficulties and cost our members significant redundancies and cuts to conditions.

OCG - The Offshore Coordinating Group has successfully secured funding from Scottish Government to employ a project worker as part of the Scottish Government's "Union Modernisation Fund". Our new colleague, Nikki, had previously been made redundant from the oil and gas sector and has been engaged until the end of April 2017, with the potential for a further year. Nikki was selected by the OCG through interview and subsequently RMT has been asked to manage the post from our Aberdeen office. The priorities of the project are the creation and release of a regular Newsletter (you're reading it and we need your input); the organising of a National "Road Show" in early April (see page 4); and the staging of on-line/interactive "Webinar meetings" (look out for more information). You can email Nikki with your reports, letters and comments at ocg.project.coord@gmail.com

Jake Molloy, RMT

"We cannot simply have a race to the bottom"

Nautilus

has seen the downturn in the North Sea have a massive impact on British seafarers. More than 25% of Nautilus members work in the offshore oil and gas industry, with highly specialist skills helping to ensure the safe operation of platform supply vessels, emergency response and rescue vessels, seismic survey ships, dive support vessels and many others besides.

Since the downturn began, hundreds have lost their jobs and many more have been forced to accept massive cuts in their pay and conditions. Even now, Nautilus is negotiating with companies over threats to slash salaries by as much as 40%!

We're starting to hear the talk about the sector starting to bounce back – but it's clear to us that there's still a lot more that must be done to reverse the race to the bottom. OCG chair Tommy Campbell recently rightly highlighted the way that contracts invariably go to the lowest bidder and the way this undermines attempts to create a sustainable industry. Seafarers suffer particularly hard from such cost-cutting practices.

It's a global industry – perhaps the most globalised of all – and things like flags of convenience have allowed the philosophy of lowest common denominator to rule!

It is especially galling for us to see companies employing western European and British seafarers continuing to struggle to win tenders against others using crews from low-cost countries.

The scandal of the two Indian-flagged offshore support vessels Malaviya Seven and Malaviya 20 illustrates this perfectly. Not only were these two ships competing for work against British-flagged and British-crewed ships, the Indian crew were not even being paid properly – with the seafarers being owed hundreds of thousands of dollars in owed wages.

Such shoddy practices should have no place in the modern world – and it really is time our government intervened to protect jobs on its own doorstep!

Steve Doran, NAUTILUS

BALPA gives us a little insight into top subjects on their agendas.

Babcock MCS Offshore Helicopters

Mick Brade, National Officer at BALPA is leading a major recruitment and organising campaign amongst Pilots and Air Crewmen employed by Babcock MCS Offshore. The aim of which is to secure formal recognition sooner rather than later. The early indications would suggest that the campaign is going well and moving forward at quite a pace.

Bristow Helicopters

Pilot fatigue is quite rightly at the very top of the BALPA agenda and that is why we have launched an extensive fatigue survey amongst our Bristow membership. The survey opened on 27th March and will close on 10th April. As many members as possible are being urged to take part in this very important flight safety initiative.

CHC Scotia Helicopters

Following a lengthy pay freeze for everyone at Scotia we are very pleased to report that the finishing touches are being put to our 2017 pay claim which will be submitted to the company at some stage over the next few weeks. Clearly the industrial landscape right across the offshore industry is still very difficult but we are hoping that an early agreement can now be reached.

Mick Brade, BALPA

GMB Alan Ritchie giving the background to the problems our members are facing in the oil industry.

The GMB along with UNITE have balloted our members in the OCA Agreement and both have returned a majority decision for industrial action. The employers made an offer of 2% but limited it only to workers on the basic OCA rate.

We have emphasised to the employers the need to increase the offer. Both unions emphasised the cuts and changes to the conditions that our members have gone through. This offer means many of our members will receive no increase which is scandalous and rightly so the members have rejected the offer.

The employers have consistently maintained that the clients they work for refuse to compensate them on the contracts they are working on, for an increase in pay that the trade unions are seeking. In fact the clients are driving down the conditions under the banner of efficiency, but what it looks like is a race to the bottom.

This approach is not good for anyone in the industry, it reduces morale. Workers see that Directors pay and their conditions are not affected therefore the only ones to sacrifice are the workers.

Some clients we have been told are taking tenders from companies where it is known they put their workers on a form of zero hour contracts; this is a scandal and has got to be fought by everyone in the industry.

I cannot emphasise the need for workers to join a trade union as we face those challenges in the OCA and elsewhere in the industry.

Our members in Billfinger Salamis have seen changes to their terms and conditions and the company refusing to have collective wage negotiations with the trade unions. The future looks bad for these workers and I can assure you we will fight these proposals to make sure the company has to properly pay workers an increase each year and this is to be justified and negotiated with the trade unions.

I would again remind all members to update your details with the GMB as because of the anti-trade union laws brought in by the conservatives, it gives more rights to the employer. The purpose of course, is to take away your democratic right in participating in industrial action and of course I would also remind all members to return your ballot papers when they come out it is your voice so make sure you make it is heard.

Alan Ritchie, GMB



**OFFSHORE COORDINATING GROUP
OCG
WE ARE HITTING THE ROAD AND COMING
TO YOU**

Location	Venue	Date	Time
Newcastle	Jurys Inn (city centre)	Monday 3 April 17'	6pm - 8pm
Glasgow	Premier Inn, George Sq.	Tuesday 4 April 17'	6pm - 8pm
Dundee	Queens Hotel	Wednesday 5 April 17'	6pm - 8pm
Aberdeen	Jurys Inn	Thursday 6 April 17'	1pm - 3pm

**Want to be heard?
Want to be involved?
Do you want YOUR say?
We want to hear what you have to say, come along and
visit us at one of our road shows, more venues to be
confirmed!**



IDEAS FOR THE WORKFORCE, BY THE WORKFORCE

**For further info, please contact Nikki on
OCG.Project.Coord@gmail.com**