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## **New Study Sheds Light on Urgent Workforce Gaps in Canada's Marine Sector**

Ottawa, Ontario, May 21, 2025 – The Canadian Marine Careers Foundation (CMCF) announces today the release of the Canadian Seafarers Pathway Study, a first of its kind comprehensive report revealing critical labour and skills shortages in the country's marine transportation sector. The study identifies a pressing need to attract and train new talent, with domestic vessel operators needing to hire 8,300 new workers to meet industry demand and replace retirees by 2029 —the equivalent of more than 30% of its current workforce.

Without significant changes, Canada's marine training system will not be able to meet labour demands, and the study provides a roadmap of evidence-based recommendations designed to help guide the CMCF and the sector in developing and implementing strategies to ensure the marine sector's future viability.

"Canada's marine sector is vital to the national economy, not only for its direct contributions but also for the many industries and communities that rely on efficient marine transportation of passengers and cargo," says Julia Fields, Executive Director of the Canadian Marine Careers Foundation. "Ongoing labour shortages onboard Canadian vessels threaten the sector's future growth and sustainability, posing serious risks to supply chains and economic stability. Without immediate action, the marine sector's workforce challenges could have far-reaching consequences."

Conducted by R.A. Malatest & Associates, the study provides national and regional analysis of workforce trends, recruitment and retention challenges, and examines the capacity of marine training institutions to meet future labour requirements. The study focuses on marine occupations onboard Canada's domestic commercial and public sector vessels, such as cargo ships, ferries, tug and barges, tourism-related boats and Canadian Coast Guard vessels, but also occupations onshore that support vessel operations. It does not include port and terminal operations.

"Canada's marine industry is facing a critical seafarer shortage that cannot be solved by maritime education and training institutions alone," says Fabian Lambert, Chair of the Canadian Association of Maritime Training Institutes (CAMTI). "The Canadian Seafarers Pathway Study brings to light the cumulative factors affecting sustainable supply and growth of the Canadian seafaring workforce, with meaningful strategic recommendations to meet future demand. We need a coordinated effort that includes greater government investment in marine education,

more support for students, and meaningful commitments from industry to create inclusive and sustainable pathways for entry into the sector and career advancement. This Study presents a call to action to secure the future of our marine workforce.”

#### Key Findings and Recommendations:

- **86% of employers report difficulty recruiting**, with over 3,600 seafaring positions unfilled in 2024. The overall sector job vacancy rate of 11% was more than three times higher than the national average for the transportation and warehouse sector.
- **More than 8,300 new workers will be needed in the next five years**; with more than half (56%) of those required for key marine positions onboard vessels such as navigation and engineering officers and ratings deck and engine crew. At current enrolment and graduation rates, marine training institutions **will only meet 40%** of the demand for those key marine positions.
- **Sector-coordinated initiatives are needed** to increase public awareness of marine careers and training pathways, including deepening connections with educators and youth and more targeted outreach to underrepresented groups and geographic locations. Initiatives should include experiential opportunities, debunking seafaring misperceptions and emphasizing the value of mariner expertise for multiple career pathways.
- **Some marine training institutions and programs currently operate below capacity, but even full enrollment and 100% graduation would not meet industry needs.** Federal and provincial governments should increase support for marine education, including enhancing student financial support to reduce barriers to entry, but also funding to help marine institutions increase capacity and expand remote, hybrid and intensive training delivery models.
- **Bottlenecks in obtaining sea-time experience (required for mariner certification by Transport Canada) must be addressed.** The federal government should work with marine stakeholders to develop pilot projects to increase opportunities for onboard training to gain practical experience while accounting for the necessary sea time.
- **Industry stakeholders—including professional/industry associations, employers, and unions — should increase funding** for scholarships, and bursaries for marine officer cadets, as well as allocate more resources to pathways that assist and incentivize marine officers and ratings seafarers to upskill and progress their careers
- **Employers should continue to build a more positive and inclusive onboard culture** through improving work-life balance and the onboard living experience. Employers should also be encouraged and supported to develop, implement, and evaluate both top-down and bottom-up initiatives aimed at fostering inclusion and equity at work. This includes, for example, establishing employee resource groups, implementing anonymous feedback systems, dialogue groups or creating peer mentorship programs.
- **A clearer career progression pathway is needed for ratings (unlicensed) seafarers**, with more opportunities to advance and upskill. The study recommends the marine

sector conduct a research project to evaluate the feasibility and process required to obtain Skilled Trades recognition for specific mariner positions.

- **Marine training programs must keep pace with technological change.** The federal government should work with marine stakeholders to develop and implement effective training to prepare the workforce for new technological developments on vessels. (i.e. related to decarbonization, digitalization, automation, safety).

For more information about the Canadian Seafarers Pathway Study:

- [Summary Report](#)
- [Media Backgrounder](#)
- [Full Study](#)

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#### **Note About the Study Funders:**

This study was sponsored by a consortium of marine stakeholders including the CMCF, the Chamber of Marine Commerce, the Council of Marine Carriers, the Laurentian Pilotage Authority, the Master Mariners of Canada, British Columbia Coast Pilots, BC Ferries, Vancouver Fraser Port Authority, and members of the Western Marine Community Coalition. Grant funding was also provided by the Lloyds Register Foundation.

#### **About The Canadian Marine Careers Foundation:**

The Canadian Marine Careers Foundation (CMCF) is a national non-profit working with over 50 industry, labour, education, and government partners to build a diverse and future-ready workforce for Canada's marine sector. Through its Imagine Marine campaign, the CMCF promotes career opportunities both onboard vessels and at shore by engaging youth, jobseekers, and equity-deserving groups. The CMCF develops unified and sector-coordinated approaches to workforce development, providing labour market data, tools, resources and programs to strengthen recruitment, retention, and training efforts.

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