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## **Competence vs Certification – Determining the Correct Balance for Crewing Wind Farm Service Vessels**

### **Abstract:**

By striving for higher quality through increased crew certification requirements, some countries and developers risk reducing competence and therefore safety. The irony of enforcing compliance with the STCW Convention is that an operator is forced to use crew certified to command the Queen Mary II who are not competent in small boat operations to transport personnel within a windfarm, while experienced crews are left on the beach.

Wind Farm Service Vessels (WFSVs) in the UK have evolved from the local angling boats pressed into service on the Blyth and North Hoyle wind farms ten years ago to the purpose built Classed vessels seen today on London Array and Greater Gabbard. However, crewing in general in the UK has not undergone the same rapid evolution as boat design, with the crew today holding the same certificates as their predecessors. The requirements set by the MCA allows vessels to be operated by a Skipper with a commercially endorsed Power Boat or Yachtmaster certificate which includes some basic safety courses and a radio operator certificate, while the deckhand only requires a medical and a basic safety course. Generally, this low regulatory threshold has allowed local fishermen and lifeboat men to move into operating WFSVs resulting in a high level of competence in boat handling and knowledge of the sea but a low level of certification.

As UK vessels are proceeding abroad to work in Denmark or Germany, these countries domestic requirements for STCW certified crews is resulting in a shift in the balance from competence to certification. Operators are forced to leave highly competent crews in the UK and recruit new crew who have the required qualifications but more likely than not, will have no experience of handling small vessels in harsh conditions or wind farm operations. If an operator was able to find a local fisherman competent in small boat operations, it is likely that the MCA will not recognize his certificates for working on a UK flagged vessel. The operator will face increased expense in hiring certificated crew and receive dramatic reduction in competence and safety. It is up to the operator to mitigate the risks as best he can through competence programs and encouraging existing crews to gain higher qualifications while hoping that he can survive until the new crews have achieved the level of competence equivalent to their certification.

This problem is not only brought about by geography, as clients in an attempt to raise the quality standard on their project are now specifying full compliance with the STCW Convention. There is no evidence that this higher standard has brought about the desired increase in safety and performance. The industry to date has not effectively addressed this issue although efforts are being made to produce a standard of competence for operators in the UK. However, no co-ordinated effort has been made to get an alternative to STCW accepted across Germany and Denmark.

This paper will explore the dichotomy between certification and competence through analyzing the rules and regulations and comparing them with actual experience gained from preparing two UK registered WFSVs for a project in Denmark.

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