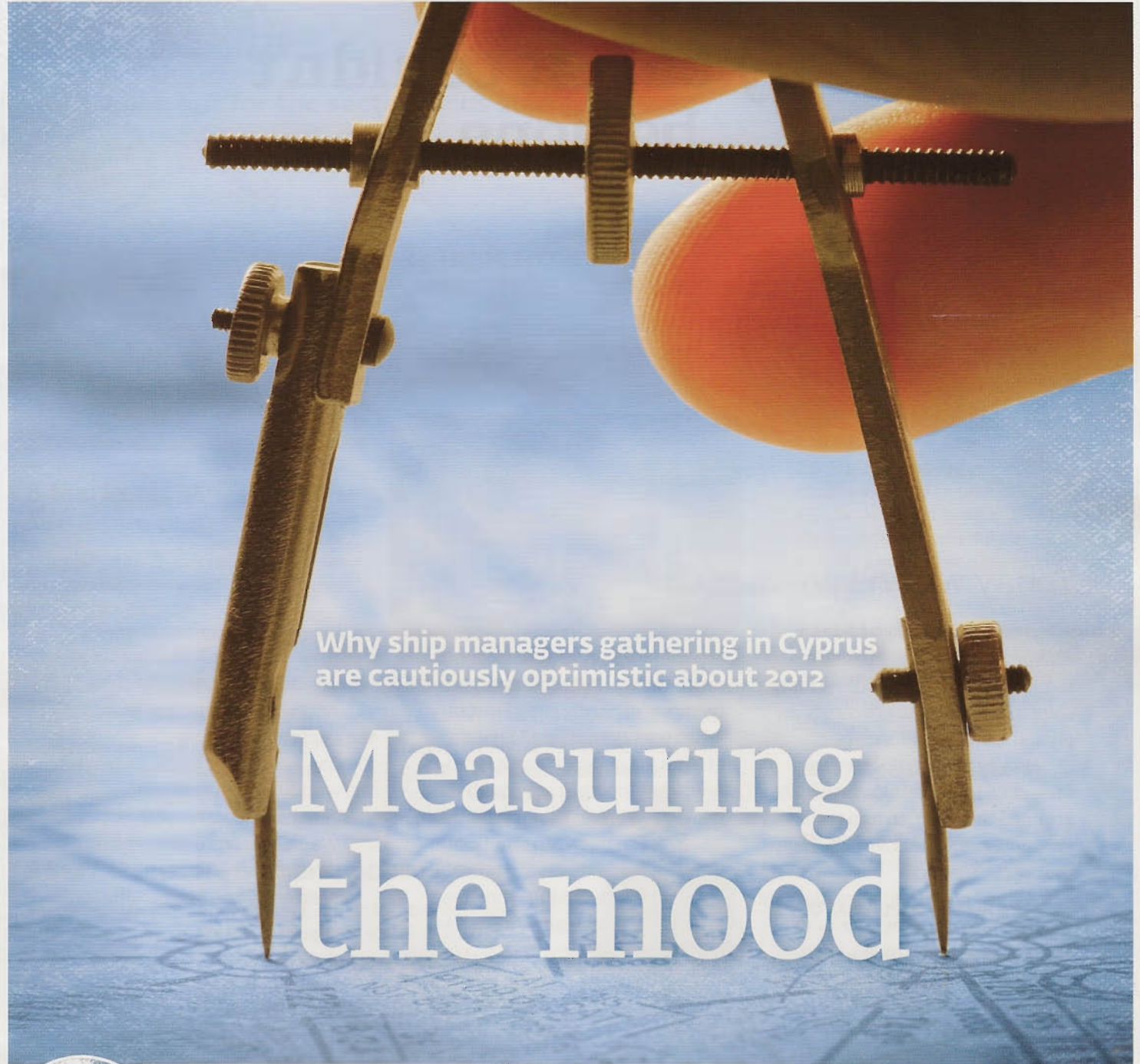


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Why ship managers gathering in Cyprus
are cautiously optimistic about 2012

Measuring the mood



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Wi-fi effect keeps crew on board



SMS and email are seen as an essential service

Gone are the days of crewmen using the bridge satellite phone while the first officer timed the call and deducted the bill from their wages as shipowners strive to hold on to valued crew.

Voice calls for crew have never been cheaper and SMS and email services have taken on an increasingly important role for ships' crews. Providing these services has gone from being an optional extra to an essential.

Evidence gathered from seafarers suggests communication with loved ones while at sea not only improves morale and productivity, but can also make the difference between crew staying with a fleet or signing-off.

3,000

crew emails per vessel per month sent and received since 2010

But as crew communications packages are proliferating, they come with technical challenges. Personal communications must be kept separate from ship's business and there is a need to put the connectivity where the crew can use it safely – in the mess or in their cabins.

German shipowner NSC Schiffahrtsgesellschaft now provides wi-fi on many of its 55 vessels and Katrin Wolter of its crewing department told *Fairplay* that feedback from crew indicated

their importance to seafarers. "There is a positive impact on crew welfare and retention," she said. "If we did not provide these services then crew members might choose to work for a different company."

In particular, it helps Filipino crew members stay in touch with home. "Most crew members would be very happy to be able to use a solution that allowed them to use their own laptops or smartphones to access these services," she added.

The company uses Telaurus se@COMM message management software, a system already in use on thousands of ships, according to Telaurus Communications product manager of value added services, Geoff Davison. "We recognised that with very little outlay, we could use the ship's existing satellite connection to enable wi-fi for the crew with very little intervention and at very low cost."

Since its first wi-fi hotspots were installed in 2010, more than 3,000 crew emails have been sent and received per vessel per month, said Telaurus, part of Globecomm Maritime, in a case study prepared for *Fairplay*. Its latest version has an upgraded router and the first installation has been running for the three months on a container vessel.

Davison said for existing customers the only cost of adding wi-fi is normally the addition of the router, which can easily be installed by crew.

For new customers, the service is usually provided at no extra charge. For the crew, the upgrade provides messaging at rates rarely more than \$0.08/message. ■



Government must act to save seafarers' jobs

Philippines managers want reform after criticism

Lobbyists are pressing the Philippines government to protect seafarers from the threatened loss of EU recognition of the Philippines-issued STCW certificates (*Fairplay*, 4 August, p22).

An estimated 90,000 Filipino crew members on board EU ships would be affected if derecognition happens and managers and manning agents

have been encouraging their government to respond to an end of August deadline set by the European Commission.

The dilemma stems from deficiencies in the country's maritime administration and seafarers' education and training, identified by a team from the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) in reports in 2006 and 2010. They were highlighted again in a follow-up report in June this year, based on inspections made in April.

The Philippines crewing



Polsteam works closely with Poland's academies and employs only Polish seafarers

Polish crewing holds up

Seafaring remains attractive to Poles but that may change

The opening up of the European Union to young Polish workers has done little to diminish their

appetite to be mariners, although recruiters fear this may change with growing affluence.

Since Poland joined the EU in 2004, its young people have become established in the workforce across the continent. At one point, about 1M Poles