Isle of Man Ship Registry
Maritime Labour Notice

MLC Title 4.3(C) Health and Safety (Noise)	Ref. 4.3C (Rev.1) Issued: 07/08/2026

1. Introduction

The purpose of this MLN is to set out guidance for managing noise on Isle of Man-registered ships. It explains the standards that ships shall follow to reduce excessive noise, safeguard seafarers' hearing, and maintain safe working and living conditions on board.

In line with MLC Regulation 4.3, shipowners must take reasonable precautions to reduce and prevent seafarers' exposure to harmful ambient factors, including noise. This MLN reflects the mandatory IMO Code on Noise Levels on Board Ships (MSC.337(91)) and provides guidance on requirements to help operators protect seafarers from the adverse effects of excessive noise for vessels to which the Code does not apply.

During an MLC inspection, the inspector will verify that a suitable and sufficient noise risk assessment has been carried out, that noise levels have been properly evaluated, and that appropriate measures have been implemented where exposure action or limit values have been exceeded.

2. Changes to Previous MLN Version

This MLN has been updated to replace references to the superseded IMO Resolution A.468(XII) with IMO Resolution MSC.337(91) which is the mandatory Code on Noise Levels on Board Ships adopted under SOLAS II-1/3-12.

The Noise Code introduces updated measurement procedures, calibration requirements, mandatory maximum noise limits, and a standardised format for noise survey reports.

The requirement to comply with the Noise Code arises from SOLAS regulation II-1/3-12, which makes the Noise Code mandatory for vessels specified in Section 3. As a result, any Isle of Man-registered ship falling within the scope of application must demonstrate compliance with the Code's prescribed noise limits through an approved noise survey as part of its statutory certification.

Although the IMO Noise Code is mandatory for certain ships, this MLN remains necessary because:

- MLC Regulation 4.3 applies to all ships to which MLC applies, regardless of the application of the Noise Code
- This MLN provides practical guidance for shipowners on noise assessment, mitigation, and seafarer welfare measures; and
- It ensures consistent Isle of Man implementation of MLC obligations, even where the Noise Code does not apply.

3. Application

This MLN applies to all Isle of Man–registered ships, but the requirements differ depending on the ship's construction date, tonnage, and certification. It provides guidance for all Isle of Man-registered ships, including vessels not covered by the mandatory IMO Noise Code, to ensure consistent noise-management practices across the fleet.

The IMO Code on Noise Levels on Board Ships (MSC.337(91)) became mandatory under SOLAS II-1/3-12 for ships which are:

- 1,600gt and above, and
- Within the Scope of Part A-1 of SOLAS Chapter II-1; and
    - Are constructed on or after 1 July 2014, or
    - Are in the absence of a building contract, the keel laid date is on or after 1 January 2015; or
    - the delivery of which is on or after 1 July 2018

In addition, the Code does not apply vessels which are:

- Dynamically supported craft
- High speed craft
- Mobile Offshore Drilling Units
- Pile Driving Vessels
- Dredgers

Ships meeting the criteria for application of the Code must comply fully, unless the Ship Registry deems that compliance with a particular provision is unreasonable or impractical.

MLC Vessels Outside of the Above Application Criteria

Vessels falling outside of the Noise Code application as set out above are not required to comply with the mandatory provisions and do not need to retrospectively meet SOLAS noise limits.

These vessels should still, however, comply with MLC Regulation 4.3, and therefore with the guidance Section 4 to 14 (as applicable) of this MLN, by *inter alia*:

- conducting a noise risk assessment;
- controlling seafarers' noise exposure so far as reasonably practicable; and
- providing hearing protection and health surveillance where applicable.

The MCA Code of Practice for Controlling Risks due to Noise on Ships may additionally be used as recognised guidance for these older vessels. For vessels outside of the above application criteria, the guidelines in this MLN do not preclude the shipowner from demonstrating an equivalent or higher standard as an "alternative method" of evidence of compliance.

4. Yachts

Yachts must comply with the noise-control provisions set out in the Red Ensign Group (REG) Yacht Code (The Yacht Code). In accordance with section 22.5 of the 2024 Edition:

- New yachts (as defined within the 2024 REG Yacht Code) of 1,600 GT and above are required to be constructed to reduce onboard noise and protect personnel in line with the IMO Code on Noise Levels on Board Ships (MSC.337(91)), unless the

Administration determines that compliance with a specific provision is unreasonable or impracticable.

- New yachts under 1,600 GT must give due regard to the IMO Noise Code. Where the Code applies, these vessels are expected to meet its requirements so far as is reasonable and practicable.

The IMO Code on Noise Levels Onboard Ships is not mandatory for existing yachts (as defined within the 2024 REG Yacht Code), however operators should note that the Code provides internationally agreed guidance on noise control and best practice methods for measuring noise at key listening posts.

With respect to existing yachts, the Yacht Code:

- Highlights the need to ensure that sound signals and VHF communications remain audible at the navigating position under normal operating conditions;
- Outlines recommended noise limits for specific spaces (based on hearing-damage risk and assuming the use of appropriate hearing protection) -
    - 90 dB(A) for machinery spaces that are continuously or routinely manned,
    - 85 dB(A) for workshops and stores, and
    - 110 dB(A) for machinery spaces that are only intermittently attended.
- Requires for spaces where noise levels exceed 85 dB(A) that safety signage and warning notices be posted at all entrances to the affected spaces.

Existing yachts are not required to undertake a new noise survey following in accordance with the noise code, however, operators must ensure that their noise risk assessment remains suitable and sufficient (Refer to Section 7).

Risk assessments should be reviewed at appropriate intervals, typically, every two years or whenever operational changes, equipment modifications, or evidence from health surveillance indicate that noise levels may have changed. Where updated measurements are required to maintain the validity of the assessment, these should be undertaken as part of the review process.

This MLN complements the 2024 REG Yacht Code by detailing the MLC-related duties that apply to all yachts, including noise risk assessment, control measures, hearing protection, training, and the monitoring of seafarer health.

5. Health effects of noise exposure

Noise on board ships can lead to both temporary and permanent hearing loss. Temporary hearing loss may occur after leaving a noisy environment and will often recover within a few hours. However, it should not be overlooked, as it is an early warning sign that ongoing or repeated exposure could result in permanent damage. Permanent hearing loss can also occur instantly if a person is exposed to a sudden, extremely loud noise, such as from explosive or cartridge-operated equipment.

In most cases, hearing loss develops gradually due to long-term exposure to high noise levels—for example, working repeatedly in an engine room without adequate hearing protection. Many people do not realise the extent of their hearing loss until the cumulative effects of noise exposure are combined with age-related hearing decline.

Hearing loss is not the only concern. Excessive noise can also cause tinnitus—described as ringing, whistling, buzzing, or humming in the ears—which can be persistent and distressing, often affecting concentration and sleep.

6. Definitions

'*A-weighted'* is used to measure average noise levels;

'*C-weighted'* is used to measure peak, impact or explosive noises;

'daily noise exposure level' is the time-weighted average of noise exposure levels for a nominal eight hour working day, consistent with ISO 1999:2013, it covers all noise at work, including impulsive noise;

'Impulsive noise 'is a noise event of short duration which occurs as an isolated event or as one of a series of events with a repetition rate of less than 15 per second;

'Peak sound pressure' means the maximum value of the 'C' frequency weighted instantaneous noise pressure;

'weekly noise exposure level' is the time-weighted average of the daily noise exposure levels of a nominal week of five eight hour working days consistent with ISO 1999:2013.

7. Risk assessment

It is the shipowner's responsibility to ensure the levels of noise to which seafarers are exposed are risk assessed. This is to help decide what action is needed to be carried out to ensure the health and safety of seafarers who are exposed to noise.

The risk assessment must –

a) identify harmful exposure, determine whether exposure action or limit values are exceeded, and, where necessary, be based on measurements; and
b) if necessary, shall be based on the measurement of the level of noise to which seafarers are likely to be exposed.

The person carrying out the risk assessment must identify where noise may pose a risk, and which seafarers are likely to be affected. This can begin with a walk-round of the vessel to pinpoint areas where harmful noise levels may occur. Discussions with seafarers are also important to understand what portable tools they use, how much time they spend in noisy spaces, and whether suitable hearing protection is available and if it is used.

Where portable hand tools are in use, any information relating to noise-emission that is provided by the manufacturer should be reviewed. Additional information, such as health-surveillance records, may also help determine whether noise presents a problem on board.

As a guide, potentially harmful noise levels are likely in situations where seafarers:

a) need to shout to be clearly heard by someone standing 2 metres away;
b) experience temporary hearing dullness or ringing in the ears after leaving a work area;
c) are exposed to impulsive noises, such as the sudden release of compressed air or loud explosive sounds from cartridge-operated tools;
d) are exposed to high-impact noise from activities such as hammering on metal surfaces or using chipping hammers; or

e) work in machinery spaces.

If the initial risk assessment identifies any areas of the vessel or work activities where potentially harmful noise levels may be present, it may be necessary to carry out noise measurements. As a simple guide to help determine whether measurements are required, the following test can be used:

Test	Likely noise level	Noise measurements will be needed if seafarers are subject to this level of noise for more than
The noise is intrusive, but normal conversation is possible.	80 dB(A)	6 hours
You have to shout to talk to someone 2 metres away.	85 dB(A)	2 hours
You have to shout to talk to someone 1 metre away.	90 dB(A)	45 minutes

If any of these tests fail, then a series of measurements will be necessary to assess the seafarer's noise exposure to determine if the exposure action value or exposure limit values have been exceeded. If any of these levels are exceeded there are additional requirements that must be carried out (refer to Sections 4, 5 & 6).

The noise measurements can be performed by an employee of the shipowner or an external consultant. The person carrying out the measurements must have sufficient training or knowledge in carrying out noise measurements and practical experience in using sound-measuring equipment.

Any measurements taken may include sampling which must be carried out to accurately represent the daily exposure of a seafarer to the noise being assessed. Measurements must also take account of the particular characteristics of the noise to be measured, the length of time seafarers are exposed, any exposure to impulsive noise and other ambient factors. The characteristic of the measuring apparatus also has to be considered which includes the accuracy of the equipment and any calibration tests required to be taken.

When a seafarer's exposure to noise varies significantly from day to day, weekly noise exposure levels may be calculated instead of daily exposure levels.

Further details on the evaluation and assessment of exposure to noise can be found in the following publications:

- Maritime and Coastguard Agency publication: Code of Practice for Controlling Risks due to Noise on Ships;
- IMO Resolution MSC.337(91) – Code on Noise Levels on Board Ships;
- ISO 1999:2013 Acoustics – Determination of occupational noise exposure and estimation of noise-induced hearing impairment.

Once the noise assessment has been completed, the risk assessment shall:

a) record the significant findings, including the measures the shipowner has taken or intends to take to eliminate or control exposure to noise, and any information or training that must be provided to seafarers;

b) state the hearing protection that has been made available;
c) where applicable, explain the reasons why noise-level measurements were not considered necessary; and
d) be retained on board for inspection purposes.

The risk assessment must be reviewed if there are any significant changes in work conditions, or if any health surveillance undertaken indicates seafarer's health is being affected. Noise levels can increase on a ship over time due to wear on machinery or a change of work equipment, so it is good practice to review the risk assessment at two yearly intervals.

8. Exposure action values and exposure limit values

The *exposure action values* and *exposure limit values* described in this MLN are as follows:

	Daily or weekly noise exposure	Peak sound pressure	Action required
Lower Exposure Action Values	80dB (A-weighted)	135dB (C-weighted)	If the noise levels are higher than this value – a) suitable and sufficient information, instruction, and training are to be provided to seafarers; b) the shipowner is required to provide hearing protection.
Upper Exposure Action Values	85dB (A-weighted)	137 dB (C-weighted)	If the noise levels are at or above this value – a) the shipowner shall ensure as far as practicable that seafarers are wearing hearing protection; b) the area shall be identified by a sign specifying hearing protection is worn and access to the area must be restricted as far as is practicable. If the noise levels exceed this value a programme of technical or organisation measures (or both) shall be established to reduce exposure to as low as is reasonably practicable.
Exposure Limit Values (When applying this value account may be taken in any reduction in exposure provided by hearing protection.)	87 dB (A-weighted)	140 dB (C-weighted)	Seafarers must not be exposed to noise exceeding this value. If the noise levels exceed this value, the shipowner shall ensure that action is taken to reduce the exposure limit to below this value.

9. Eliminating or controlling the exposure to noise

8.1 Upper exposure action values

If the upper exposure action value has been exceeded or the risk assessment has identified any other risks arising from exposure to noise, the risks must be either eliminated at their source or reduced to a level which is as low as is reasonably practicable.

If it is not reasonably practical to eliminate a risk at source a programme of technical or organisational measures (or both) shall be established and implemented to reduce the exposure. This may include -

a) using other working methods that reduce exposure to noise;
b) replacing existing equipment with equipment, which is quieter, for example a low noise purchasing policy can be adopted when replacing handheld tools or items of machinery;
c) altering the design and layout of workplaces and workstations (if practicable);
d) instructing and training seafarers to use work equipment correctly, in order to reduce the exposure to noise;
e) reduce noise levels through technical measures, such as using shields, enclosures, or sound-absorbing materials to lessen airborne noise, and applying damping or isolation techniques to reduce noise transmitted through the ship's structure;
f) carrying out appropriate maintenance programmes for machinery;
g) imposing a limit on the time a seafarer spends in noisy areas or working with noisy equipment.

After the technical and organisational measures have been implemented, their effectiveness must be evaluated. If noise levels still exceed the lower or upper exposure values, the additional requirements set out in Sections 5 and 6 must then be applied.

9.2 Exposure limit values

Seafarers must not be exposed to noise levels exceeding the exposure limit value.

If the exposure limit value is exceeded, action must be taken immediately to reduce noise exposure to below that limit. The reasons for the exceedance should be identified, and the technical and organisational measures used to control exposure must be reviewed and improved to prevent a recurrence. The shipowner shall also consult with the seafarers, or their representatives, regarding the measures being taken to ensure compliance with this requirement.

10. Hearing protection and signage

10.1 Hearing protection

Hearing protection has to be made available by the shipowner to any seafarer who is likely to be exposed to noise above the lower exposure action values.

If the noise levels are at or above the upper exposure action values the shipowner must ensure as far as practicable that hearing protection is worn by the seafarers.

Hearing protection must be effective and should reduce noise levels to below 85 dB at the ear. When selecting suitable protection, consideration should be given to comfort, hygiene, and

compatibility with other personal protective equipment, such as hard hats and dust masks. Hearing protectors must also be properly maintained to ensure they continue to function effectively.

10.2 Use of signage

Where the noise level in machinery spaces (or other spaces) is greater than 85 dB(A), entrances to such spaces shall carry a warning notice comprising symbol and supplementary sign in the working language of the ship as prescribed by the Administration (see below an example of the warning notice and signs in English). If only a minor portion of the space has such noise levels the particular location(s) or equipment shall be identified at eye level, visible from each direction of access.. All signs should comply with the following requirements: -

1) Sign with symbol: the background colour should be blue, and the symbol should be white and placed centrally on the background. Blue should cover at least 50% of the area of the sign. The diameter should be 150 mm or 300 mm; and
2) Supplementary sign: this should be rectangular. The background colour should be white with black letters or alternatively the background may be the same colour blue as the sign with the symbol and have white letters. The height of the letters should be a minimum of 20 mm. The sign should be written in the working language of the ship.

Sign with Symbol	
Supplementary sign	

11. Seafarer information and training and health surveillance

11.1 Seafarer information and training

If the risk assessment indicates that seafarers are exposed to noise at or above the lower exposure action value, suitable and sufficient information, instruction, and training must be provided. This shall include: -

a) the nature of such risks, including the exposure limit values and the exposure action values;

b) the measures taken to eliminate or reduce to as low as is reasonably practicable the risks from noise, including the circumstances in which such measures apply;

c) the results of the risk assessment, together with an explanation of the significance and potential of such risks;

d) the availability and correct use of hearing protectors;

e) the circumstances in which seafarers are entitled to health surveillance;

f) safe working practices to minimise exposure to noise; and

g) how to detect and report signs of hearing damage.

11.2 Health surveillance (hearing checks)

The outcome of the risk assessment may indicate that, due to the level of noise on board, seafarers are entitled to health surveillance. In this context, health surveillance involves assessing a seafarer's hearing to enable the early detection of any noise-induced hearing loss. This can be achieved through regular hearing checks carried out by an occupational health professional.

Ideally, health surveillance should begin before seafarers are exposed to noise so that a baseline hearing record can be established. However, it can be introduced at any stage. As a general guide, hearing checks may be carried out annually for the first two years, followed by assessments every three years. If any hearing problems are identified, or if the risk of hearing damage is considered high, the frequency of health surveillance should be increased.

The results of any hearing tests can be used to monitor a seafarer's hearing throughout their employment. Seafarers must always be informed of the outcomes of their hearing checks. The results of health surveillance should be reviewed and analysed to confirm whether existing noise-control measures are effective. All personal health information relating to individual seafarers shall be treated as confidential.

12. Accommodation and service spaces on the vessel

Except in an emergency, noise in the accommodation and service spaces should not exceed the following limits -

Area	Maximum Noise Limit dB(A)
Accommodation Space	
Cabins and hospitals	60 (55 dB(A) on ships ≥10,000 GT)
Mess rooms	65 (60 dB(A) ≥10,000 GT)
Recreation room	65 (60 dB(A) ≥10,000 GT)
Open recreation areas	75
Offices	65 (60 dB(A) ≥10,000 GT)
Service spaces	
Galleys, without food processing equipment operating	75

Serveries and pantries	75

The maximum noise limits stated above shall be interpreted in accordance with IMO Resolution A.468(XII), which establishes updated mandatory maximum permissible noise levels for accommodation and service spaces under SOLAS II-1/3-12.

13. Exemptions and further information

13.1 Exemptions

An exemption may be permitted in the following circumstance -

'where because of the nature of the work the full and proper use of personal hearing protectors would be likely to cause a greater risk to health or safety than not using such protectors.'

The application will need to detail the work procedure for which the exemption is sought, including information on the seafarers affected, equipment used, and the frequency and length of time the seafarers will be exposed to the noise.

The Ship Registry will only be able to grant an exemption if the following conditions have been met:

a) the risks have been reduced to as low as reasonably practicable. Supporting evidence for this could be if the exemption has received due consideration by a relevant and appropriate medical body, institution, or qualified person, this can be an occupational physician, specialist consultant or institution with appropriate expertise;
b) the application for exemption has been made following consultation with the seafarers concerned, or their representatives; and
c) health surveillance has been increased to monitor the safety of the seafarers concerned.

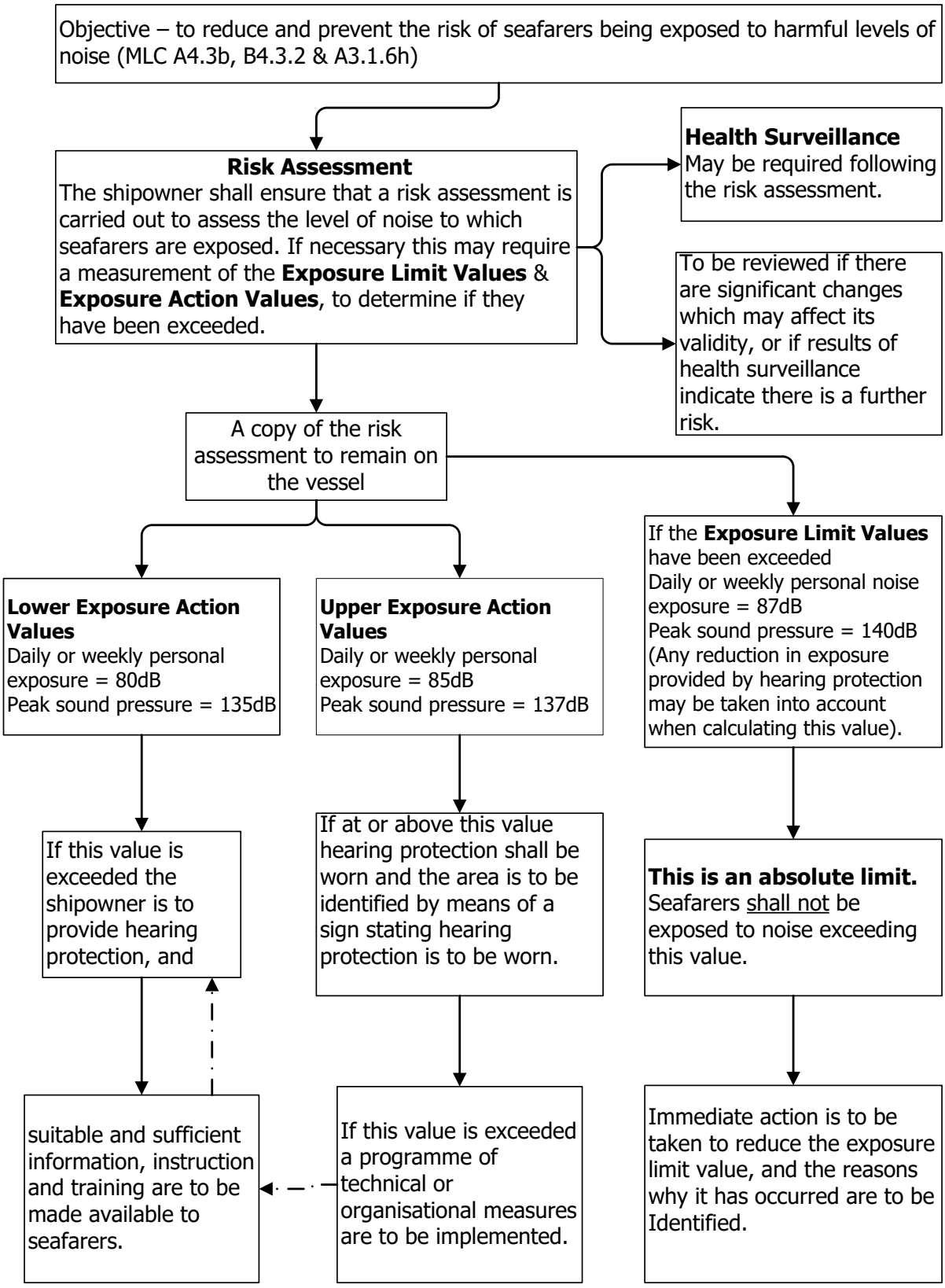
Once issued the exemption may be altered or cancelled by the Ship Registry after giving reasonable notice to the shipowner.

Further information

Further information on controlling noise levels in the workplace can be found in -

- Health and Safety Executive publication: Noise at Work, INDG362 (rev2);
- Maritime and Coastguard Agency publication: Code of Practice for Controlling Risks due to Noise on Ships;

Control of noise on Isle of Man registered vessels



Documents referred to in this notice:

Maritime Labour Convention 2006 (MLC);

Health and Safety Executive publication: Noise at Work, INDG362 (rev 2);

Maritime and Coastguard Agency publication: Code of Practice for Controlling Risks due to Noise on Ships;

IMO Resolution MSC.337(91) - Code on Noise Levels on Board Ships;

ISO 1999:2013 Acoustics - Determination of occupational noise exposure and estimation of noise-induced hearing impairment.

Most regulations and notices are available on the Isle of Man Government website: www.iomshipregistry.com or by contacting marine.survey@gov.im

Please note - The Isle of Man Ship Registry cannot give legal advice. Where this document provides guidance on the law it should not be regarded as definitive. The way the law applies to any particular case can vary according to circumstances - for example, from vessel to vessel. You should consider seeking independent legal advice if you are unsure of your own legal position.