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Intervention by Captain Simon Pelletier at IMO NCSR7 on Friday 17th January 2020

Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for recognizing our card.

As many of the delegates know, Captain Dennis Sherwood, a New York pilot, was killed on December 30 from a fall while embarking an inbound container ship. The embarkation in this instance was via a combination arrangement of a pilot ladder and an accommodation ladder. That combination is not unusual. In fact, it is required whenever the distance from the surface of the water to the point of access to the ship is more than nine meters. This particular arrangement, however, involved a trapdoor in the platform of the accommodation ladder with the pilot ladder hanging from a bar near the bottom of the platform and the top step of the pilot ladder significantly below the level of the platform. This requires a pilot to pull himself or herself up through the trapdoor while twisting to get a secure footing on the platform.

This controversial trapdoor arrangement has long been considered unsafe by pilots. It is clearly not in compliance with current SOLAS requirements.

Mr. Chairman, I have considerable personal experience with this arrangement. Hoisting myself up through the trapdoor is extremely difficult – in the best of conditions. To be frank, I hate it. And every pilot whom I have ever heard talk about it hates it too.

Our recent survey of pilot transfer arrangements indicates that despite the inspection requirements imposed in the 2012 revisions of SOLAS V/23 and its accompanying Resolution A.1045, there has been no significant improvement in the enforcement of IMO pilot transfer standards. Captain Sherwood's death is a tragic reminder that much more needs to be done.

We raise this particular matter today to urge all flag states, port states, and ship operator organizations to join with us to do whatever it takes to get rid of this arrangement, immediately.

Thank you.