FOREWORD (new)

Maritime pilotage is, by its very nature, a risk-mitigating service. The provision of pilotage is the result of a thorough assessment of navigational, environmental, and operational risks, with the primary objective of enhancing the safety of navigation, protecting life, property, and the marine environment, and ensuring the continuity and efficiency of maritime trade.

Maritime pilot organizations are staffed by professionals who operate daily at the interface between ship, waterway, port infrastructure, and traffic management. Through their direct operational experience, maritime pilots have long recognized that the safety and reliability of pilotage services depend not only on individual expertise, but equally on how pilot organizations organize and support training, competence development, operational processes, medical fitness, and learning from incidents and errors.

The International Standard for Maritime Pilot Organizations (ISPO Code) has been developed by maritime pilots, for maritime pilot organizations. It originates from within the profession itself and reflects the collective experience and safety culture of pilots operating in diverse navigational environments worldwide.

ISPO is built by pilots, for pilots, with the purpose of strengthening the safety of navigation through well-managed, high-quality pilotage services.

The safety level achieved in maritime navigation within ports is directly influenced by the quality of the pilotage service. A structured and systematic approach to managing education and training, competence development, operational support, fatigue and medical fitness, and the management of incidents and near misses contributes to reliable service delivery and continuous improvement. The better these supporting processes are organized, monitored, and improved, the more robust and resilient the pilotage service becomes.

The ISPO Code provides a transparent, globally applicable management system framework that supports pilot organizations in documenting, managing, and improving the processes that underpin pilotage operations. Unlike generic management system standards designed for broad application across industries, the ISPO Code is specifically tailored to the professional, operational, and safety-critical characteristics of maritime pilotage, while remaining adaptable to local circumstances and organizational needs.

The Code is not intended to replace or supersede applicable national / international legislation, regulatory pilotage systems, or established professional practices. Nor is it intended to assess, control, or interfere with the manner in which duly authorized pilots exercise their professional judgement on board vessels. The execution of pilotage assignments remains the responsibility of the pilot, exercised in accordance with professional standards, experience, and local conditions.

The purpose of the ISPO management system is to support and enhance the management of organizational and operational processes surrounding pilotage activities. It provides a framework to foster consistency, communication, collegiality, and learning within pilot organizations, and to promote continual improvement in the management of those processes. The Code is not intended as a disciplinary or compliance enforcement tool, as such use would be incompatible with the principles of effective learning and improvement.

The ISPO Code is based on widely accepted management system principles, including a process-based approach, risk awareness, defined responsibilities, documented procedures, and evaluation through monitoring, measurement, and internal review. Particular emphasis is placed on elements essential to professional pilotage, including training and competence management, operational support, medical fitness, and the systematic handling of incidents, nonconformities, and improvement actions.

Certification of conformity to the ISPO Code by an independent external certification body provides objective confirmation that the management system has been assessed against the requirements of the Code. This supports transparency and provides assurance that the organization has implemented a structured approach to managing quality and safety, without detracting from professional autonomy or responsibility.

Implementation and maintenance of the ISPO management system may contribute to:

- continual improvement of service quality and organizational effectiveness;
- enhanced safety of navigation and protection of life, property, and the environment;
- systematic identification, assessment, and management of operational risks;
- effective learning from incidents, errors, and near misses;
- consistent management of training, competence, and medical fitness;
- alignment of organizational processes with defined objectives and stakeholder expectations.

The ISPO Code is intended to function as the primary management system framework within a pilot organization, with quality, training, and safety as its core elements. It is designed as an open and flexible structure, enabling customization to local circumstances and integration with other management systems or internal standards where appropriate.

Responsibility for the maintenance, interpretation, and further development of the ISPO Code rests with the International Users Group (IUG), representing pilot organizations committed to professional pilotage, continuous improvement, and the safety of navigation.