



CIRCULAR NO.5-2023/MARITIME SAFETY

15 SEPTEMBER 2023

This Circular serves to provide regular information on maritime safety.

The Solomon Islands Maritime Authority (SIMA) Act 2018, the Shipping Act 1998 as amended, and their subsidiary laws prescribe obligations, rights, and standards for all registered vessels on any voyage and in any waters, and to every vessel(s) in the Solomon Islands waters to any vessel on which Solomon Islands seafarers are employed.

FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF SHIPPING OPERATIONS AND SAFETY

RADIOCOMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT ON BOARD SOLOMON ISLANDS REGISTERED VESSELS

The Shipping (Non-Convention Vessel Safety) Regulations 2006 section 102(1) requires: *“Unless expressly specified by chapter IV of SOLAS 74 in relation to the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) shall be carried by vessels of more than 300 gross tonnage and 24m and above”ⁱ*. For all other vessels, section 107 applies, and the required equipment are listed in a table consistent with the GMDSS areas proclaimed in the sea areas for which the vessel is certificated. In Solomon Islands, the area covered by VHF is very limited therefore all vessels must be fitted with radiocommunication equipment consistent with area A2.

SIMA reported to its Advisory Committee and technical working group that most of the vessels have dysfunctional or inoperative radiocommunication equipment, most of the vessels are not fitted with upgraded radiocommunication equipment compliant to GMDSS requirements and Digital Selective Call (DSC) system, most of the vessels need routine and regular maintenance of their radiocommunication equipment, and most of the vessels fails to report their position as required by the Regulations.



In this context, SIMA is now requesting vessels to be inspected by an appointed radiocommunication technician, to upgrade their radiocommunication equipment compliant to GMDSS and DSC prioritizing vessels of more than 500 gross tonnage and vessels carrying passengers.

DID YOU KNOW?

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR LOADING A VESSEL?

On 1 August 2023 in the evening, GULATATA'E 1 departed Honiara port for Southeast Malaita via Afio port. GULATATA'E 1 is a landing craft with a capacity of 334 passengers. The vessel departed Honiara with cargo on the cargo deck and more than 200 passengers. The vessel was not overloaded and had been inspected by SIMA just before departure.

On 2 August in the morning, the vessel passed Nudha Island and altered her course to Afio. As often in this area, the sea condition was tougher reducing the vessel's speed to 4 knots, the vessel heading headwind and waves hitting from 45° starboard. It is at that time that waves started to flood the cargo deck over the bulwark causing the unlash cargo of building materials to move and block the freeing ports preventing from seawater to discharge overboard. The accumulation of weight due to the soaked cargo, seawater on deck and water still in the vessel's ballast tanks caused a dangerous list on starboard which could have provoked the capsizing of the vessel and the loss of 200+ persons, cargo and vessel. The vessel was recovered from that situation when the master decided to throw the cargo overboard and alter the vessel courseⁱⁱ.



Director SIMA decided to cause a Preliminary Investigation under the Shipping Act 1998 as amended that identified the primary causes as the accumulation of seawater on the open deck due to freeing ports blocked by cargo loaded on deck, not lashed and shifting in bad weather. There are contributing factors to consider: i) the 300 bags of cements which are sensitive to water were not protected from seawater and were soaked by water increasing non-calculated weight; and ii) there was no proper supervision and verification of the loading and ballasting of the vessel ensuring proper stowage and lashing of deck cargo.

Before a vessel departs from the port, there are verifications that must be made by the crew to ensure the vessel can safely undertake the voyage. All openings must be closed, freeing ports free, cargo must be loaded as per design and a loading plan, the vessel with full supplies, cargo and passengers must even keel and load line visible. A vessel loaded in these conditions is safe and can sail in whatever weather conditions she will encounter during the voyage.

The Preliminary Investigation provided the Director with the following recommendations that will be implemented by SIMA:

1. Vessels to have on board a loading plan approved by SIMA that would include:
 - a. stowage and lashing of cargo as per design,
 - b. identification of persons responsible for loading, supervision and checking of cargo,
 - c. evidence of supervision and checks of cargo loading, stowage and lashing in shipboard records (logbooks, predeparture checklist, etc.),
 - d. protection of cargo from weather and sea conditions, and
 - e. Master to check for weather information before sailing.
2. Strengthen the Special (pre-departure) Inspections with more detailed verifications of presence of an approved loading plan, evidence of loading supervision and check, and appropriate stowage, lashing and protection of cargo.

CONTACT & INFORMATION

All shipowners/operators are encouraged to provide feedback on this circular to the SIMA's Department of Shipping Operations and Safety to improve the safety of all at sea, clean seas, and vibrant maritime industry in the Solomon Islands.

Subsidiary laws (regulations and maritime orders) prescribe standards that apply to all vessels creating the same level-playing field in the Solomon Islands. These laws can be found at: <https://www.sima.gov.sb/acts-regulations/>.

For anything related to maritime safety, please contact Jonah Mitau, Manager of Shipping Operations and Safety at jonah.mitau@sim.gov.sb or visit SIMA's website at: <https://www.sima.gov.sb/>.

ⁱ Photo credit: [JMSE | Free Full-Text | GMDSS Equipment Usage: Seafarers' Experience \(mdpi.com\)](#)

ⁱⁱ Photo credit: [Liam MC Leon - LC Gulatatae kosap sink... safety first no... | Facebook](#)