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**Transport and
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17 January 2017

Ms Angel WONG
Subcommittee Secretary
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Ms Wong,

**Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) (General) (Amendment)
Regulation 2016 (L.N. 186)
and Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) (Safety and Survey) (Amendment)
Regulation 2016 (L.N. 187)**

Thank you for your letter of 4 January 2017, enclosing a letter from the Honourable Steven Ho expressing concerns on the captioned regulations. Our reply is set out below.

Requirements for radar and VHF radio operators

The current legislative amendments seek to enhance marine safety by requiring specified Class I vessels to install radar and VHF radio. These vessels must have on board at least one licensed operator who has completed relevant courses and exams to operate the equipment.

We welcome and encourage seafarers wishing to operate Class I vessels to obtain the relevant qualifications for operating radar and VHF radio. In this connection, the Marine Department (MD) has requested training institutions (including Hong Kong Seamen's Union, Harbour Transportation Workers General Union and Maritime Services Training Institute) to provide sufficient radar and VHF radio training courses for seafarers to obtain the relevant qualifications.

Radar exam

The radar exam tests applicants' knowledge about the operation and regulations of the equipment, especially on aspects relating to marine safety. In formulating the exam, we have taken into account the industry's concerns and the need to strike a balance between enhancing marine safety and assisting the trade in fulfilling the relevant requirements. The average passing rate for radar exam of Hong Kong Seamen's Union from late 2014 to 2016 was over 90%, showing that most applicants can cope with the exam.

VHF radio exam

In early 2014, MD and the Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) looked into the trade's concerns about the VHF radio exam. On the premise that the exam can continue to uphold the scope and standard of competence expected, OFCA has simplified the format and content of the exam with effect from November 2014.

To ensure that VHF radio exam reflects seafarers' ability to master the operation of VHF radio, their content must cover the practical workflow and knowledge for operating the equipment. In view of the concern of Legislative Council Members and the trade, we will explore if there is room to further refine the exam. We will also work closely with training institutions to make the training more effective.

Other equipment

We do not have any plan to mandate the installation of other equipment. If the installation of additional equipment is called for in the future, we will consult the trade in good time.

Maritime and Aviation Training Fund

The Government established the \$100 million Maritime and Aviation Training Fund (MATF) in 2014 for use over a period of five financial years from 2014-15 to 2018-19. The fund is well-received by the trade. If necessary, we will seek funding approval from the Legislative Council to continue the operation of MATF at a suitable juncture.

Please contact me at 3509 8161 or joeylam@thb.gov.hk if you require further information. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'JOEY LAM', written in a cursive style.

(Joey LAM)
for Secretary for Transport and Housing

c.c.

Marine Department

(Attn: Mr WH HO, Assistant Director (Special Duties)) (Fax: 2413 1119)