

## LOCAL VESSELS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

### Use of Electronic Certificates for Local Vessels

#### **Purpose**

This paper seeks members' views on the amendment of the Shipping and Port Control Ordinance (Cap. 313), Merchant Shipping (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Ordinance (Cap. 413) and Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) Ordinance (Cap. 548) and their subsidiary legislation, to facilitate the use of Electronic Certificates (E-Certificates) for local vessels as an alternative to its corresponding paper form.

#### **Background**

2. In support of the Chief Executive's 2022 Policy Address, the Marine Department (MD) plans to enhance its services by implementing E-Certification for all local vessels, commencing from around mid-year of 2024. This move will bring the MD's certification practice in line with international standards, increase certificate security, streamline operations, and enhance convenience for holders of the E-Certificates.

#### **Details of the Proposal**

##### *Rollout time*

3. Starting from around mid-year of 2024, MD will issue all certificates, permits, and licenses for local vessels and local crew in electronic form. These E-Certificates serve as digital equivalents to traditional paper certificates and will be in PDF format.

### *Features of E-Certificates*

4. E-Certificates will contain the same pertinent information as their paper counterparts, complemented by advanced digital security features. These features, including unique tracking number, QR code, digital signature, and verification instructions, will enhance the overall security of these documents.

5. One of the most notable benefits of this transition to E-Certificates is the expedited delivery process. Physical collection or return is eliminated, thereby streamlining the administrative process and reducing delays.

6. Furthermore, the adoption of E-Certificates mitigates risks associated with document loss or damage, thus providing additional protections for certificate holders. By ensuring better data integrity and security, E-Certificates offer a more efficient, secure, and environmentally friendly alternative to paper certificates.

### *Authenticity of E-Certificate*

7. The traditional paper certificate signatures will be replaced with a digital signature which is displayed as a blue strip located at the top of the certificate when an E-Certificate is opened with Adobe Reader, or a "Blue Ribbon". The presence of a "Blue Ribbon" emblem signifies that the certificate has been officially issued by MD and serves as a key indicator of the certificate's legitimacy and authenticity.

8. The validity of the E-Certificates can be verified by scanning the embedded QR code or manually entering the certificate name and unique tracking number on the MD's dedicated website.

### *Application for E-Certificate*

9. New applicants do not need to purposely make an application for E-Certificate separately and existing paper certificates will still be accepted until they expire. Existing paper certificates will be gradually replaced by E-Certificates during regular renewal or replacement of certificates.

10. Depending on the specific type of certificate, upon successful completion of application, MD will either send the E-Certificate in PDF format directly to the applicant or provide the option for the applicant to download the certificate directly from the MD website.

*Existing certificates that do not have a predefined expiration date*

11. Such certificate holders may apply for the issuance of an E-Certificate within a designated timeframe. No additional fees will be incurred for issuance of E-Certificate within the transitional period.

*Printing of paper copy of E-Certificate*

12. Applicants who apply for E-Certificates in person, may request MD to provide one paper copy of the E-Certificate at the time of application, free of additional charge. Any requests for printing of paper copy of E-Certificates afterwards will be charged.

**Amendments of Legislation**

13. Legislation amendment is needed to permit the issuance and operation of E-Certificates as an alternative while retaining the current regulatory regime pertaining to paper certificates. The amendment will insert new provisions to enable the issuance, endorsement, suspension/restoration of validity, withdrawal, cancellation, and display of certificates electronically. The amendment will also empower the Director of Marine to recognize the electronic cancellation/revocation of E-Certificates as equivalent to the physical surrender of cancelled/revoked paper certificates.

**Consultation**

14. Members' comments on the proposal are sought. Please forward your comments to the Secretary of LVAC not later than 28 December 2023.

**Marine Department  
December 2023**