

CERTIFICATE OF COMPETENCY: JUXTAPOSING TWO FLAG STATES (NIGERIAN MARITIME ADMINISTRATION AND SAFETY AGENCY (NIMASA) AND GHANA MARITIME AUTHORITY (GMA))

By Edwin Daniel

Introduction

The Maritime Industry is a global industry which represents the human interaction with, and their activities at sea. Although global in approach, it is national and regional in practice meaning every country has an administrative body that drives its maritime activities. At the global level, the maritime activities are overseen by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). In our region, it is overseen by the Maritime Organisation of West and Central Africa (MOWCA). The Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) is in charge of our maritime activities at the national level. Globally, for the purpose of shipping and ship management, the national bodies are known as "The Flag State". The Flag State by definition is the jurisdiction under whose laws a vessel is registered and is deemed the nationality of the vessel.

The Shipping Industry being a major part of the maritime industry involves a lot of resources which include capital and human. However, one of the most important resources if not the most important is the human element also known as Seafarers. Seafarers are **trained** persons employed to work on board a ship for its manning and safe operations at all times. They run the day to day operations and maintenance of the ship as well as cleaning and catering onboard the ship.

Training is a very important aspect of the journey to being a seafarer. The International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW '78/95 as amended), is the regulations of the International Maritime Organization, IMO, which ensures standardized training is given to seafarers. The Manila Convention 2010 of the STCW '78/95, also called "The Manila Amendments", set out the training standard and shipboard competencies that must be met in line with new technological and operational requirements. While there are myriads of certification needed for shipboard manning, one major documentation for ship officers is the Certificate of Competency (COC).

The Certificate of Competency is issued by the flag state to seafarers who qualify under the provision of STCW and have completed the appropriate examinations. It has a validity period of five years after which one is required to revalidate.

NOTE: For this article, We shall concentrate only on the below-listed Certificate of Competency in this order: -

- Class III Certificate of Competency (OOW Deck/Engine)
- Class II Certificate of Competency (Chief Mate/Second Engineer)
- Class I Certificate of Competency (Master/Chief Engineer)

Certificate Analysis:

Class III Certificate of Competency: By regulation, the Class III Certificate of Competency II/1 and II/3 is for Deck Officers, while III/1 is for the Engine Officers. Generally, a class III license holder is an officer in charge of the watch (Deck or Engine) as the case may be. The table below details key aspects of the certification.

| REGULATION | CAPACITY | SEA AREA LIMITATION | TONNAGE LIMITATION | EXPLANATION | REMARK |
|------------|------------|---|------------------------------|--|--------|
| II/1 | OOW (DECK) | UNLIMITED | UNLIMITED | There is no limitation to this certificate. Seafarers with this certificate can serve onboard all ships as an officer in charge of Navigational Watch including foreign going vessels. | |
| II/1 | OOW (DECK) | 1. NCV (Near Coastal voyages) 2. NCV | 1.>3000GT (unlimited)<3000GT | 1. This license limits the seafarer to ships within a specific coast as officer in charge of Navigational Watch. Ship size is unlimited 2. This licence limits holder to ships less 3000GT in size and on specific coast only | |

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| II/3 | OOW (DECK) | NCV | <500GT | This is a licence for non-convention vessels. Holder is limited to a specific coast and on vessels less than 500GT in size. | |
| III/1 | OOW (ENGINE) | UNLIMITED | UNLIMITED | There is no limitation to this certificate. Seafarers with this certificate can serve onboard all ships as an officer in charge of Engine Room Watch including foreign going vessels. | |
| III/1 | OOW (ENGINE) | 1. NCV 2. NCV | 1. >3000KW (Unlimited) 2. <3000KW | 1. This certificate limits the seafarer to ships within a specific coast as an officer in charge of Engine Room Watch. No limit to engine capacity 2. Holders are limited to coast and on vessels less than 3000kw engine capacity. | |

Class II Certificate of Competency: By regulation, the Class II Certificate of Competency II/2 is for Deck Officers while III/2 and III/3 are for Engine Officers. The table below details key aspects of the certification.

| REGULATION | CAPACITY | SEA AREA LIMITATION | TONNAGE LIMITATION | EXPLANATION | REMARK |
|------------|------------|---------------------|--------------------|---|--------|
| II/2 | CHIEF MATE | UNLIMITED | UNLIMITED | There is no limitation to this certificate. | |

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|-------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| | | | | Seafarers with this certificate can serve onboard all ships as a Chief Mate including foreign going vessels. Also, they can serve as a Master onboard all non-convention vessels and NCV vessels less than 3000GT. | |
| II/2 | CHIEF MATE | 1. NCV 2. NCV | 1. >3000GT (Unlimited) 2. <3000GT | 1. This certificate has no tonnage limitation but cannot go for international voyages. Also, they can serve as a Master onboard all non-convention vessels. 2. This limits the holder to vessels less than 3000GT and specific coast. | |
| III/2 | SECOND ENGINEER | UNLIMITED | UNLIMITED | There is no limitation to this certificate. Seafarers with this certificate can serve onboard all ships as a Second Engineer including foreign going vessels. | |
| III/2 | SECOND ENGINEER | NCV | >3000KW (Unlimited) | This certificate limits the seafarer to ships within a specific coast as a second engineer. Vessels can be unlimited in engine capacity. | |

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|-------|-----------------|-----|---------|---|
| III/3 | SECOND ENGINEER | NCV | <3000KW | This certificate limits the seafarer to ships within a specific coast. They can serve as a Second Engineer on ships that are Less Than 3000 Kilowatt engine capacity. |
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Class I Certificate of Competency: By regulation, the class I Certificate of Competency II/2 and II/3 are for Masters while III/2 and III/3 are for Chief Engineers as explained below:

| REGULATION | CAPACITY | SEA AREA LIMITATION | TONNAGE LIMITATION | EXPLANATION | REMARK |
|------------|----------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--------|
| II/2 | MASTER | UNLIMITED | UNLIMITED | There is no limitation to this certificate. Seafarers with this certificate can serve onboard all ships as a Master including foreign going vessels. Seafarers with this certificate are called "Master Mariners". | |
| II/2 | MASTER | 1. NCV 2. NCV | 1. >3000GT (Unlimited) 2. <3000GT | 1. This certificate limits the seafarer as master on ships within a specific coast with no limit on vessel tonnage. 2. Holder is limited to specific coast as master on vessels less than 3000GT | |
| III/3 | MASTER | NCV | <500GT | This certificate limits the seafarer | |

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| | | | | to ships within a specific coast that are less Than 500 Gross Tonnage. | |
| III/2 | CHIEF ENGINEER | UNLIMITED | UNLIMITED | There is no limitation to this certificate. Seafarers with this certificate can serve onboard all ships as a Chief Engineer including foreign going vessels. | |
| III/2 | CHIEF ENGINEER | NCV | >3000KW (Unlimited) | This certificate limits the seafarer to ships within a specific coast. They can serve as a Chief Engineer on ships with Greater Than 3000 Kilowatt engine capacity (unlimited engine capacity). | |
| III/3 | CHIEF ENGINEER | NCV | <3000KW | This certificate limits the seafarer to ships within a specific coast. They can serve as a Chief Engineer on ships that are Less Than 3000 Kilowatt engine capacity. | |

Juxtaposing the Certificate of Competency Issued By NIMASA and GMA:

- In the contest of Class III Certificate of Competency, both flag states, Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) and Ghana Maritime Authority (GMA), are on a par with each other. They both train and issue **Class III Unlimited** Certificate of Competency which is the highest level of Class III COC attainable.

- However, a major dichotomy exists between NIMASA and GMA on the extent of coverage of the Class II Certificate of Competency they both issue. While GMA trains and issue all Class II COC licenses, NIMASA only has capacity to issue Class II Near Coastal Voyage (NCV) Certificate of Competency. The implication is that the Nigerian Class II Certificate of Competency holders are only permitted to work onboard ships within Nigerian territorial waters (around the coastline). This is quite limiting since a large number of Nigerian Seafarers have put in a good number of years in the trade and could functionally compete with their counterparts globally if unrestricted.
- Under Class I Certificate of Competency, the same variation as observed in the contest of Class II exists between the two flag states. GMA trains and issue all Class I Certificate of Competency licenses, but NIMASA in contrast can only issue Class I Near Coastal Voyage (NCV) Certificate of Competency. This, by implication, means that Nigerian seafarers get the short end of the stick as their voyage must be within Nigerian territorial waters and no further.

Suggestions/Recommendations:

It is our collective responsibility as stakeholders within the Nigeria Maritime Industry to come together at this critical time to reposition the industry. However, it is the responsibility of the Flag state to drive the reforms. My suggestions/Recommendations to the flag state are:

- Make deliberate effort to invest in Maritime Education by equipping the Maritime Academy of Nigeria (M.A.N), Oron, and encourage other training institutes to meet global standards.
- Urgently setup a committee headed by a reputable academic and/or a master mariner and other seasoned mariners to develop a training syllabus that meets IMO requirement for Class II and Class I unlimited COC and to be adopted by M.A.N, Oron, and other accredited training institutes.
- Ensure lectures recruited in these maritime training institutions meet the requirements prescribed by the International Maritime Organisation.

- Partner with other flag states to get Nigeria a category “C” seat in the International Maritime Organisation council. Nigerian Flag state needs to be represented where key decisions are taken.
- Make maritime training open to private investors and not only short courses. This should include training for Certificate of Competencies.
- To protect its integrity, modalities should be consciously put in place to checkmate and eliminate the sharp practices associated with the examination and issuance of Nigerian Certificate of Competencies.

Conclusion

It is clear from the foregoing that the Nigerian Flag State, NIMASA, has inadvertently caused several missed opportunities for experienced seafarers of Nigerian descent registered under her flag state. The limitation of the Nigerian issued Class I and Class II Certificate of Competency has restricted our Seafarers to within Nigerian territorial waters while their counterparts in Ghana, Singapore, Australia, etc. are leveraging their licenses to work globally.

At this critical time where every opportunity counts, we encourage NIMASA to approach IMO to regularize her Class I and Class II COC licenses to the comprehensive and competitive category like those issued by GMA, and save our seafarers from this web called “**Near Coastal Voyage**”.

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