

GUIDANCE NOTE 05/2026 (REV 1.0)

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD NATIONAL MARITIME CENTER – LAPSE IN APPROPRIATIONS: RECOGNITION OF USCG STCW DISPENSATIONS

To: OWNERS, MANAGERS, OPERATORS AND MASTERS AND CREW OF CAYMAN ISLANDS SHIPS (INCLUDING YACHTS).

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The United States Coast Guard (USCG) National Maritime Center (NMC) has issued guidance confirming that, due to a lapse in appropriations and the resulting reduction in appropriations, the USCG has been unable to process applications for merchant mariner credentials (MMCs) in the normal manner.
- 1.2. To mitigate the impact of the shutdown on mariners serving on international voyages, the USCG has, pursuant to STCW Article VIII, made provision for the granting of dispensations in respect of STCW endorsements held within MMCs that expired on or after 1 January 2026. Approved dispensations are valid until 31 August 2026.
- 1.3. This Guidance Note sets out the position of the Maritime Authority of the Cayman Islands (MACI) and the Cayman Islands Shipping Registry (CISR) in respect of USCG-issued STCW dispensations, and the conditions under which they will be recognised for mariners serving aboard Cayman Islands registered ships.

2. SCOPE AND APPLICABILITY

- 2.1. This Guidance Note applies to:
 - 2.1.1. Owners and managers of Cayman Islands registered ships employing mariners holding USCG-issued MMCs with STCW endorsements; and
 - 2.1.2. Masters and mariners whose USCG MMC STCW endorsements have expired on or after 1 January 2026 and for whom a USCG STCW dispensation has been sought or obtained.
- 2.2. This Guidance Note does not affect the obligations of owners, managers, masters and mariners under any other applicable provisions of the STCW Convention, Cayman Islands legislation, or other MACI requirements.

3. USCG STCW DISPENSATION PROCESS

- 3.1. Pursuant to STCW Article VIII, the USCG may grant dispensations permitting mariners to continue in service on STCW endorsements that expired on or after 1 January 2026. The following conditions must be satisfied before a dispensation may be granted:
 - 3.1.1. A renewal application must have been submitted to the NMC prior to, or during, the period of the alternative funding arrangements.
 - 3.1.2. The mariner's employer must have applied to the USCG for the dispensation on the mariner's behalf.
- 3.2. Requests for dispensation must be submitted by the employer by email to STCWDispensations@uscg.mil with the subject line "STCW Dispensation". The request must include the following information:
 - 3.1.1. Ship name and IMO number;
 - 3.1.2. Ship tonnage;
 - 3.1.3. Mariner's full name and NMC reference number;
 - 3.1.4. Capacity in which the mariner is serving, by reference to STCW regulations;
 - 3.1.5. MMC credential issuance and expiration dates;
 - 3.1.6. Company name and point of contact; and
 - 3.1.7. Valid mariner email address.
- 3.3. STCW dispensations that are approved by the USCG will expire no later than 31 August 2026.

4. RECOGNITION BY THE CAYMAN ISLANDS SHIPPING REGISTRY

- 4.1 The Cayman Islands Shipping Registry will recognise a USCG STCW dispensation granted in accordance with section 3 above as satisfying the STCW certification requirements for the relevant endorsed capacity, for the purposes of service aboard a Cayman Islands registered ship. This recognition is subject to the following conditions:
 - 4.1.1 The dispensation must have been formally issued by the USCG in writing¹.
 - 4.1.2 The mariner must carry at all times whilst serving aboard a Cayman Islands registered ship:
 - i. The original MMC (notwithstanding that the STCW endorsement has expired);
 - ii. The original USCG STCW dispensation letter;
 - iii. A copy of the relevant NMC shutdown bulletin (Update #3, dated 22 April 2026, or any subsequent update) and
 - iv. The corresponding Cayman Islands Endorsement for the expired MMC.

¹ If delays are experienced in receiving the dispensation, the seafarer must retain evidence that they have formally submitted the dispensation request.

- 4.1.3 All documents listed above must be made available for inspection upon request by any MACI surveyor, Port State Control officer, or other duly authorised official.
- 4.1.4 The dispensation may only be relied upon for service in the capacity to which it specifically relates. It does not extend to any other endorsement or capacity.
- 4.1.5 Recognition will cease on 31 August 2026 or upon the issuance of a renewed MMC by the NMC, whichever is the earlier.

4.2 Owners and managers are responsible for ensuring that any mariner serving aboard their vessel under a USCG STCW dispensation meets all other applicable requirements under the STCW Convention and Cayman Islands merchant shipping legislation.

5 STCW MEDICAL CERTIFICATES

- 5.1 In accordance with STCW Regulation I/9, where the STCW expiration date of a medical certificate occurs during a voyage, the certificate remains valid for a further three months from its expiry date. This provision applies regardless of the lapse in appropriations and does not require a separate dispensation.
- 5.2 Owners and managers should ensure that arrangements are made to renew any affected medical certificates at the earliest practicable opportunity, and in any event before the three-month grace period expires.

6 FURTHER INFORMATION

- 6.1 For updates on NMC operating status, interested parties should monitor the NMC website. Queries regarding the dispensation process may be directed to the NMC Customer Service Centre via the NMC online chat system, by email to IASKNMC@uscg.mil, or by telephone on 1-888-IASKNMC (427-5662)
- 6.2 For queries in connection with the application of this Guidance Note to Cayman Islands registered ships, please contact the Maritime Authority of the Cayman Islands at technical@cishipping.com or visit www.cishipping.com
- 6.3 This Guidance Note will be updated or withdrawn as appropriate should the NMC's position change or further relevant guidance be issued. Owners and managers are encouraged to subscribe to CISR updates via the CISR website.

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