



REPUBLIC OF VANUATU
OFFICE OF THE
MARITIME ADMINISTRATOR
VANUATU INTERNATIONAL SHIPPING REGISTRY

Circular #027

Mandatory STCW Endorsements and On Board Availability of Valid, Verifiable Certificates (Electronic or Original) – Vanuatu Flagged Seagoing Ships

Date: January 19, 2026

From: Office of the Maritime Administrator, Vanuatu International Shipping Registry

To: Recognized Organizations, Shipowners, Operators, Masters, Agents, and All Concerned

1. Purpose

This Circular is issued to remove any ambiguity and confirm that:

1. STCW endorsements (attesting recognition) are mandatory for Vanuatu-flagged seagoing ships where STCW requires them; and
2. All required certificates must be available on board for immediate inspection in a valid and verifiable form, whether electronic (e-signed / QR-verifiable) or original hard copy, depending on the document type and issuing authority.

This Circular is intended to strengthen compliance and reduce risk of Port State Control (PSC) deficiencies, delays, and detention, including in the Paris MoU region.

2. Legal basis

This Circular is issued pursuant to the powers of the Maritime Administrator under the Vanuatu Maritime Act [CAP 131], and Vanuatu's obligations under applicable international instruments, including the STCW Convention, as amended, and the STCW Code.

3. Scope and applicability

This Circular applies to:

- **All Vanuatu-flagged seagoing ships** registered with VISR; and
- **All Masters, officers, radio operators, and other seafarers** serving in capacities requiring certification under STCW.

For avoidance of doubt:

- Domestic exemptions or thresholds in national legislation (e.g., tonnage-based or inter-island operation provisions) do not waive STCW requirements where STCW applies to the vessel, its trade, and its personnel—particularly when calling at foreign ports.



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4. Key requirement – STCW endorsements are mandatory (where applicable)

Where a Master, officer, or radio operator serving on a Vanuatu-flagged seagoing ship holds a Certificate of Competency (CoC) or other STCW certificate issued by another STCW Party that requires recognition by Vanuatu:

- The seafarer must hold a valid Vanuatu endorsement attesting recognition issued by the Maritime Administrator in accordance with STCW requirements.

No endorsement = non-compliance, unless the individual's role is outside STCW requirements or the vessel is within an international convention exemption described in Section 8.

5. On-board availability of documents for inspection (electronic or original)

Owners, managers, and Masters must ensure that all required certificates and documents are available on board for immediate inspection at any time, including during PSC inspections.

Documents may be carried/displayed as follows:

A) VISR-issued documents (including endorsements)

VISR-issued endorsements and certificates may be held electronically, provided they are:

- e-signed and verifiable (e.g., via QR code / verification reference); and
- accessible on board at all times, including when internet access is unavailable.

Mandatory practice:

- The vessel must keep an offline stored copy of the e-certificate(s) on board (e.g., on the ship's computer and one backup device).
- A printed copy is strongly recommended as a contingency.

B) Certificates issued by other Administrations / third parties (foreign CoCs, medicals, training certificates)

These must be available in the format required by the issuing authority and accepted for verification by PSC. In practice:

- If the issuing Administration provides an official e-certificate with verifiable features, it may be carried electronically;
- If the issuing Administration issues paper originals, the vessel should carry the original on board (or certified copies where permitted by that Administration).

Important: The vessel must be able to demonstrate authenticity immediately. "It's in an email ashore" is not an acceptable PSC response.



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6. Minimum checklist (as applicable to vessel/crew)

Owners/managers/Masters must ensure the following are available on board in valid and verifiable form (as applicable):

- STCW CoCs / CoPs for the capacity served;
- Required STCW training certificates (e.g., BST, advanced fire, survival craft, security, medical, etc., as applicable);
- Vanuatu endorsements attesting recognition (where required);
- Medical fitness certificates (as applicable);
- Safe Manning / Minimum Safe Manning document (as applicable); and
- Any other statutory documentation applicable to the vessel's type and trade.

7. Transitional / processing situations

Where an endorsement application has been submitted and is under processing, the Maritime Administrator may, in exceptional circumstances and at the Administration's discretion, issue temporary written confirmation or an interim authorization/receipt.

If such temporary confirmation is issued:

- it must be carried on board; and
- it does not replace the requirement to obtain the final endorsement promptly.

8. Exemptions (international convention-based only)

This Circular does not apply where STCW or other applicable international conventions expressly do not apply, including (as applicable):

- Warships and State vessels engaged only in governmental non-commercial service;
- Fishing vessels (to the extent STCW does not apply—note: other instruments may apply, including STCW-F where implemented);
- Pleasure yachts not engaged in trade;
- Wooden ships of primitive build; and
- Vessels operating exclusively in sheltered waters/port areas or inland waters where STCW does not apply.

Owners/managers remain responsible for compliance with any alternative national requirements applicable to such vessels and their personnel.



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9. Compliance expectations and PSC risk

All owners, managers, Masters, and crewing agents must treat this Circular as a compliance priority.

Non-compliance exposes the vessel to:

- PSC deficiencies,
- delay,
- increased inspection targeting, and
- possible detention, particularly in the Paris MoU region.

10. Severe penalties for non-compliance

The Maritime Administrator will apply a strict enforcement posture. Severe administrative penalties may be imposed for non-compliance, including (as appropriate):

- Substantial monetary fines;
- Refusal to issue, renew, or validate endorsements and/or related documentation;
- Suspension or withdrawal of endorsements;
- Restrictions on registry services and/or vessel status; and
- Escalation to further enforcement action where non-compliance is repeated, deliberate, or causes reputational harm to the Vanuatu flag.

11. Effective date and supersession

This Circular is effective immediately upon issuance.

It supersedes any prior guidance to the extent inconsistent with this Circular.



Saade Makhlouf
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