



May 27, 2026

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

On behalf of the Seafarers' International Union of Canada (SIU Canada), I write to you today to draw your attention to an urgent matter regarding a consultation being undertaken by the Government of Canada, facilitated by Transport Canada. The consultation, *Strengthening One Canadian Economy through trade and transportation*, opened on May 8th, 2026, and requests that stakeholders provide input on a number of proposals put forward in the corresponding discussion paper.

I would like to draw your attention specifically to a proposal found in the section entitled *Reduce Red Tape and Streamline Regulations* in which the Government has casually proposed to consider legislative change that directly attacks Canada's domestic shipping sector and Canadian mariners:

“Providing targeted flexibility during emergencies, including allowing foreign vessels to temporarily operate without a coasting trade licence to support critical supply chains.”

If implemented through legislative change, this proposal would permit foreign registered vessels to undertake cabotage activities in Canada without the requirement to first obtain a coasting trade licence. We note that the terms “targeted flexibility”; “emergencies”; “support”; and “critical supply chains” are all undefined terms included in this proposal that could be open to a wide interpretation.

This proposal is a direct attack on the Canadian domestic maritime industry. As you are aware, all activities related to coasting trade in Canada are reserved for Canadian-flagged vessels, predominantly employing Canadian and permanent resident seafarers. Under our current regulations, a foreign registered vessel may already be imported for use in coasting trade for a period of up to one year upon successful application to the Canadian Transportation Agency. **Under the existing system, there is already a “fast track” and “emergency” process by which a foreign vessel can be imported for use in coasting trade in as short of period as 2 days should there be no objection or offer of a suitable alternative ship from a Canadian shipowner.** Put simply, the proposal to waive the requirement to obtain a coasting trade licence is entirely unnecessary and appears to be designed to prevent Canadian operators from being able to object to the importation of a foreign vessel. There is no evidence that the current system has prevented foreign-flagged vessels from being imported during “emergencies” ... “to support critical supply chains”.

Apart from the above, there are a multitude of additional reasons for which this proposal is entirely unfounded and illogical. In our Prime Minister's own words when he spoke at Davos earlier in 2026: “A country that cannot feed itself, fuel itself, or defend itself has few options. When the rules no longer protect you, you must protect yourself.” Cabotage assures this protection and helps ensure that a Canadian fleet remains in existence in order to secure the necessary resiliency to address supply chain issues, so we remain self-reliant in any crises.

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This proposal is a complete contradiction of this government's supposed priority of ensuring that Canada remains a self-sufficient country, that we remain a sovereign nation and that we retain autonomy over our supply chains, including in our ability to move both goods and people on nationally owned and operated ships, crewed by a qualified domestic maritime workforce.

What FOC flag state does this government believe will come to our aid in a crisis? What nationality seafarers will put themselves at risk to ensure our supply chains remain intact? Which foreign Company will agree to provide reliable service at a fair price?

The reality is that almost every other nation of the world is moving in the opposite direction. While our government is considering opening our cabotage to foreign operators, the rest of the world is implementing the lessons learned from the pandemic and recent wars – **we must be self-sufficient in the face of a crisis.**

- In Australia, the government is moving through the first phase of establishing the Australian Strategic fleet. This privately-owned fleet would provide the government with dedicated Australian-flagged vessels that could be called upon to assist in an emergency situation. This comes after previous governments eliminated Australian-flagged shipping by gutting cabotage laws in that Country. As the domestic maritime skillset was put at risk of being eliminated, these vessels also provide an opportunity to train Australian seafarers and ensure a capable marine workforce is retained without reliance on foreign crew or vessels.
- In Norway, the government approved a Norwegian wage and working conditions Bill in Parliament in June 2025 to level the playing field and require foreign flag operators to comply with local wage and working conditions – all in an effort to promote the Norwegian national maritime industry by building domestic fleet and workforce capacity.
- In Brazil, the government reversed a decision by the previous Administration to open cabotage to foreign vessels and implemented new legislation to require the majority of all crews to be Brazilian nationals. Additionally, the government is strengthening the use of Brazilian-flagged vessels in the oil and gas sector through the state-owned Petrobras corporation, where they previously chartered in hundreds of foreign vessels annually.
- NATO and allied nations are currently focusing on the ability to address tonnage and workforce needs in times of conflict, addressing the issue of “sea blindness” or the neglect of consideration for the importance of waterborne transportation capability in a conflict – this is grounded in the promotion of cabotage and the need for national maritime policies to promote and develop civilian mariners and sealift capabilities to augment forces' capabilities in times of need.

UK-based Seafarers' Rights International (SRI) recently updated their 2018 *Cabotage Laws of the World* publication and the data proves both that cabotage is the norm, not the exception and that cabotage regulations are not static, they are growing around the world. In 2018, SRI's report revealed that 91 UN member states around the world had cabotage regulations, or roughly 80% of the world's coastlines. To our point, following the lessons learned from the pandemic and recent wars, the 2025 report revealed that this had now grown to 105 countries, and this growth trend has continued since the release of that report.

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The only place where cabotage is currently under attack is in the United States, where the Trump Administration has taken aim at the *Jones Act* and implemented multiple waivers of the *Act* to permit foreign carriers to move fuel and oil products between American ports in an attempt to lower consumer prices due to the war impacting the Persian Gulf. This has not had any significant impact on decreasing fuel prices in the U.S. There appears to be actors in the maritime industry who are attempting to use the same logic to undermine the Canadian marine industry. We have no lessons to be learned from the current U.S. administration.

Those efforts to weaken the industry must fail and we must be united in our call for the Government to drop this proposal. As the Union representing the majority of Canadian seafarers from Coast to Coast to Coast, we have a vested interest in protecting this industry and ensuring that Canadian vessels continue to operate in a fair market where competition is between Canadian operators and consumers, not FOC vessels operating at the absolute lowest standards, exploiting a non-national workforce of marginalized international seafarers. Our members have shown up in every crisis or conflict, from World War II and onwards through to the most recent pandemic, and they will continue to do so despite these ongoing attacks from the government to insinuate that our seafarers, and our Canadian shipping companies, are unable to rise to meet such an occasion.

While it is inevitable that industry stakeholders will have varying opinions on other parts of this consultation, this is an opportunity for unity on a common issue – promoting the Canadian maritime industry and Canadian mariners.

I hope that you will take this opportunity to defend our collective Canadian maritime industry and write to Transport Canada during this consultation period to express your position that they must drop this illogical and contradictory proposal. Let's stand together in the face of this challenge.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish to discuss this issue further.

Kind regards,

Chris Given

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Chair, ITF Cabotage Task Force
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The Discussion document for this consultation can be found [here](#).

Submissions can be sent to TC.engagement.TC@tc.gc.ca with a current deadline of June 7, 2026.