CERS Satisfaction Survey Report

In April 2018, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency issued a Satisfaction Survey designed to garner feedback about the Consolidated European Reporting System (CERS) and its associated processes. This report looks at the responses received and offers some solutions and suggestions based on the industry feedback.

Background

The survey was released in two sections of 10 questions each. One was regarding the CERS system and guidance, one was about the Workbook and upload process. Given that there was some crossover in the surveys and many general comments received, this report will not go through each question individually, but look at the feedback in a logical order and group relevant responses together.

CERS System interface

54% of respondents said they found the CERS interface easy to navigate, with only 10% stating that it was difficult, which is a promising response. A few said that it was cluttered with too much information required. Unfortunately, the amount of information we collect is dictated to us by legislation and what is required to be sent onwards to SafeSeaNet, so we have little opportunity to change this. We ourselves don't ask for anything more than is required.

One respondent said it would be better if you could hide completed voyages, so you were only looking at the vessels yet to leave port. This can be achieved using a filter, and then saving it and setting it to default. Select the Advanced Search option and add a filter for 'ATD is empty'. Then on the right-hand side of the search bar, select the layout button and 'save current layout as new layout'. This should mean that once an ATD is entered for a voyage, it disappears from view.

CERS Workbook

Most of the feedback we received was about the Workbook. We asked whether it was easy to complete, and the response was quite an equal split. In addition, only 30% of

respondents said it was clear how to resolve errors when they occur, and 59% of respondents said errors occur often. With that in mind, we've listed some of the comments below with our responses;

- <u>When changing the Workbook, provide a long lead-in time</u>; as we're aiming to release the next version of the Workbook in the summer, we'll look to do user testing where we can and give plenty of notice. We do also allow one previous version of the Workbook, so when we introduce V1.3, V1.2.2 will still be accepted for a period of time to give chance for users to switch.
- <u>Workbook needs a trouble shooting page</u>; this is a great idea and we plan to replace the 'Reporting Requirements' page of the Workbook with one that lists common errors and fixes.
- <u>Errors should be better highlighted</u>; we have looked into literally highlighting the fields where the error occurs, but this would involve more formulas within the Workbook that would increase the size and would also be difficult to get 100% accurate for all fields. We do believe that for most errors, the validation bar at the top of the tab gives enough of a clue as to where the error is, but we're also going to look at some of the wording and see if we can make it clearer.
- <u>Trouble completing all 10 previous ports</u>; re-typing them in order is quite onerous and copying and pasting can lead to external links if done incorrectly so we appreciate this is an issue. The Workbook is enabled so that the ports can be listed in any order, so you don't need to 'move them all up a row'. As long as they have the correct dates, this will save time in entering this information.
- <u>Sections say 'valid' but still get errors on upload</u>; we appreciate this is frustrating. The validations in the Workbook are not as restrictive as the system, in order to keep the file size of the Workbook low and to allow the Workbook to be used on low-end systems. So, for instance, when entering dates in the last 10 port calls, any valid date will be accepted. Only when it is uploaded to the system does CERS do a common-sense check of the dates, to make sure the departure isn't before the arrival. Fields not highlighted yellow aren't mandatory for CERS but may still be required by the port.
- <u>ISSC Expiry date is often not accepted;</u> This was a glitch in the current version of the Workbook and will be fixed in the new version. Sorry it has taken so long!
- <u>Errors with certain Locodes on Hazmat pages;</u> This was another minor glitch and will also be rectified in the new version.
- <u>Summary Tab not being set to include, leading to missing information;</u> This was a common complaint. The new version of the Workbook will have all sections set to include by default, and we're also looking at having some kind of warning flag to let users know when no sections are set to include.

- Issues with Port Specific tab; There were comments regarding Port Specific tabs and how this makes the form not suitable for UK wide use. To be clear, a port specific tab can be added to a normal Workbook without issue, so you shouldn't ever have to complete two different Workbooks. A Workbook with a Port Specific tab should be able to be submitted to a different port without causing any upload problems.
- Standard format for Workbook; different comments stated that it would be good to have a European wide Workbook and also that it would be effective to have it combined with the FAL forms, to avoid having both CERS and the NSW to report to. On that first point, there are discussions at a European level looking at spreadsheet use, but with each Member State having their own ideas, it is unlikely at this stage we would ever see an EU wide Workbook. For the latter point, the MCA has had discussions with DfT about combining CERS and the NSW, but it is still work in progress.

Guidance and Support

There were a few questions in each survey that asked about the level of support provided for the system, knowledge of where to find the guidance, and whether it was useful. Generally the response was positive, with 76% of respondents feeling there was enough support, and only 10% saying it was difficult to access support. However, while 67% of respondents were aware of the guidance on www.gov.uk, 57% said it was not helpful.

To reiterate our support e-mail addresses; cers3@mcga.gov.uk is monitored by the Maritime Surveillance Team during working hours. We're a small team, but we'll try to respond asap to your queries. cers@mcga.gov.uk is available for out of hours queries as it is monitored by our Coastguard teams at Aberdeen and Holyhead. For queries of a purely technical nature, cers@ibboost.com is also available.

The CERS Team are also happy to take phone calls if the matter is more urgent (again during office hours).

60% of respondents said they found CERSANs helpful. These are the guidance notes that we circulate on current issues relating to CERS. They are also published here: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/consolidated-european-reporting-system-advice-notes

Also available online is the latest version of the Workbook, along with the associated M-Notices. We will be working on adding more, better, guidance to the site this year, to try and improve its usefulness to CERS users: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-provide-mandatory-vessel-reporting-information-to-the-mca

General Queries

Some other feedback that came from respondents is addressed here;

- A request for inclusion of Irish ports; this isn't possible as Ireland is a separate EU member state and has its own CERS equivalent system.
- All government bodies having access to the system to avoid reporting to more than one; this is possible, but it may not stop them requiring separate reports. Border Force, for instance, have access to CERS, but still require additional submissions.
- Some requests for user guides/troubleshooting guides; these are available already. The User Manual is great for anyone needing to know the basics of the system. There is a best practice guide on the gov.uk website, as noted in CERSAN 4, that describes the common issues in completing the Workbook: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consolidated-european-reporting-system-advice-notes-cersans
- The POB acronym is confused with 'Pilot Onboard'; we'll look into replacing the POB text with 'Persons Onboard' in both the Workbook and System Interface.
- For those few respondents who said that this is a waste of time and resources; we're assuming you refer to the reporting process itself, which we have no control over. It is mandated by regulation, so if the UK were to stop reporting it would be subject to large fines. Not to mention the information collected is useful from both a safety and security perspective. We try and make the process as efficient as possible with CERS and the Workbook and we're always open to suggestions on how to improve.

CERS Team

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