What kind of risks to human rights issues are there in the maritime environment?

Businesses can abuse human rights in a number of ways, be it in the maritime environment, this can include:

- Forced labour and slavery. This occurs when a person has been trafficked into a crewing position without any contractual agreement and the protections that come with it.
- Another way these abuses can occur is through poor or inhumane working conditions, such as dismantling vessels under hazardous conditions, poor pay or physical abuse.

What are the associated commercial risks when human rights abuses occur?

If a business is abusing the human rights of its employees, there are a multitude of risks. These include:

- The closing of the work premises, legal fines, unnecessary costs and finally, can damage the reputation of the business; this can have the biggest impact on revenue and brand value.

What are some of the benefits of implementing the Guiding Principles?

Implementing the Guiding Principles into a business will help attract investments and improve reputation. It can reduce costs arising from fewer adverse human rights impacts and improve supply chain risk management.

1. Do we understand what the Guiding Principles are and why their integration and implementation will benefit our business?
2. Do we have the relevant professional expertise to advise our senior management team and Board correctly?
3. Do we have a policy commitment to implementing the Guiding Principles?
4. Do we have a set of core corporate principles and values that uphold the Guiding Principles and specifically the second pillar of ‘Respect’ as a matter of agreed company policy?
5. Do we have internal implementing guidelines across the business for the Guiding Principles and reflecting core values of transparency, accountability and effective remedy?
6. Do we have a developed internal compliance system to educate about, pro-actively identify and limit any potential human rights abuses?
7. Do we have a reporting mechanism and system for the publication of ‘lessons identified’ and ‘lessons learned’ which can be shared both internally and externally?
8. Do we have an implementation policy for awareness about, and the correct use of Human Rights Impact Assessments?
9. Do we integrate HRIAs in to all our commercial contracts as part of our standard terms and conditions for new and existing business within our supply chain?
10. Do we have an established policy and process to effectively assess human rights impacts, for example through Human Rights Due Diligence procedures, including company risk assessments, HRIAs or integrated assessments?
11. Do we have employees trained in human rights and what they mean for the business, our delivery and our market function?
12. Do we have a company stakeholder engagement plan and are both internal and external stakeholders consulted on our human rights policies and procedures?
13. Do we have an operational level and effective independently reviewed grievance mechanism in place where our employees and other affected stakeholders can lodge grievances?
14. Do we have independent and qualified external assessors to undertake periodic reviews and health checks of our Guiding Principles implementation reporting to the senior management team and Board?

Here are 14 key questions that should be asked within your business.