Insight Ningbo

Seafarers' Pay Problems Find an Answer in Ningbo

By Zhao Yu



Ningbo Zhoushan Port. [Photo provided to *Ningbo Times*]

"On a single contract I save close to $100," said Zuo Xingang, a seafarer who has spent more than 20 years on international routes, 12 of them as captain.

His wages used to be sent by Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC) out of Cyprus to China, and an intermediary bank took an $11 fee off every payment. The sum was small, but over an eight- or nine-month contract it added up to a real loss. "It always bothered me," he said.

On October 30, Zuo and 25 other seafarers were issued a new Bank of Ningbo payroll card tailor made for them—one that handles both renminbi and foreign currency.

Ningbo maritime authorities brought shipping companies, banks and foreign-exchange bodies together to close a gap that had long dogged the way the industry pays its crews, so that wages now arrive in full and nothing is lost along the way.

Hidden Losses, a Long-Standing Gap

For an ordinary seafarer, a dozen or so dollars a month looks like loose change, but over time it becomes a serious dent in income. Zuo points out that with more than 20 crew members on a single vessel, the loss mounts quickly by the month and by the year. Cross-border payroll used to mean cumbersome paperwork and a long chain of handlers, with no dedicated channel or financial service built for seafarers. Quiet deductions were hard to avoid, and no one had come up with a systematic fix.

In August, MSC Ship Management (Ningbo) Co., Ltd. used the Ningbo Maritime Safety Administration's maritime finance service platform to open a direct line to banks and go straight at the problem.

With backing from the State Administration of Foreign Exchange's efforts to make remitting pay for staff working abroad easier, the bank designed a bespoke arrangement: bulk review instead of case-by-case paperwork, an unbroken cross-border transfer chain, and no intermediary handling fees at all.

The bank also sets aside a separate currency- conversion allowance based on payroll, so the money does not eat into a seafarer's annual personal quota. Crew can transfer funds, convert currency and check balances over the ship's internet connection.

"What this is worth goes well beyond the money seafarers save. It makes crew pay transparent, steady and predictable, and it gives big shipping companies a better handle on managing compensation," said Qian Yingjie, director of the crew management division at the Ningbo Maritime Safety Administration.

Setting Terms, Settling Disputes

The seafarer payroll card is the latest upgrade in Ningbo's push to strengthen protection for crews, and another answer to the problems they face day to day.

In 2025, the Ningbo Maritime Safety Administration, working with human resources and social security departments, issued a model labor contract for seafarers, setting standard terms at the outset and heading off disputes. Through local service stations, the city handled dozens of labor disputes at sea over the course of the year and recovered millions of yuan in wages owed to seafarers.

In July, Ningbo opened its first one- stop center for waterborne disputes, pooling resources from several departments so that mediation, arbitration and judicial confirmation can run end to end, making it simpler and faster for crews to press a claim.

Earlier measures mostly tackled employment disputes and help that came after the fact. Cross-border payroll deductions, by contrast, sit in a technical gap where finance, foreign exchange and shipping meet—an old problem the industry had never solved.

"The joint launch of the dedicated payroll card fills the last financial piece of the seafarer protection puzzle," Qian said.

Quality of Support Is the Real Draw

MSC's increasing presence in Ningbo is no accident. In July 2025 it set up its first ship management company in China, in Beilun, and in June 2026 it officially opened the MSC China Crew Recruitment and Placement Center.

"MSC has put core operations such as Chinese crew dispatch, ship management and recruitment in Ningbo not only because of the city's strong position as a port hub, but because it recognizes how systematic and finely built Ningbo's seafarer service ecosystem is," said a manager at MSC Ship Management (Ningbo) Co., Ltd.

With seafarer supply tightening worldwide, shipping competition is no longer only about vessels and routes—it is also a contest over keeping crews and building service systems.

"For crews far out at sea, wages that arrive in full, easy currency conversion and backup on shore are concrete things that decide whether they feel they belong to the job," said an official with the crew management division of the Ningbo Maritime Safety Administration.

For the industry, Ningbo's experiment has clear demonstration value.

According to Zhao Dan, who heads the logistics management department at Ningbo University's Faculty of Maritime and Transportation, the hardest part of protecting seafarers is rarely a shortage of rules—it is a shortage of coordination across institutions and government departments. Ningbo's innovation fills exactly those gaps in the industry's institutional framework.

To successfully compete for maritime talent, the key lies in steadily cutting friction on the job and avoidable occupational losses. Pay that arrives intact and service that works are core soft power for a city trying to keep maritime talent.

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Ningbo Pictorial Seals Feature in Tokyo Trial Anniversary Exhibition at UN Headquarters

By Lu Xinyan

From October 26 to 30, local time, a photo exhibition titled *Justice and Peace for All Humanity: Photo Exhibition Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Opening of the Tokyo Trial* was held at United Nations headquarters in New York.

A collection of pictorial seals from Ningbo was featured in the exhibition, using the art of traditional Chinese seal carving to tell an important chapter of history to an international audience. The event also marked the first time that a large collection of historical photographs and archival documents related to the Tokyo Trials had been displayed at UN headquarters. Together, the materials shed light on the trials and their historical significance, underscoring the importance of preserving historical facts and upholding justice.

Working with the renowned Xiling Seal Engravers' Society, the organizers invited leading seal carvers to create 15 pictorial seals. The works draw on the Tokyo Trials, international rule of law and the postwar international order, conveying themes of peace, justice and the rule of law. Motifs such as scales of justice, gavels, chains, and case files provide a visual language that can be understood across cultures.

The seal *Scales* uses the familiar image of a balance to represent judicial fairness. *Tokyo 80: Eternal Justice* combines the architecture of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East with a gavel, evoking the solemn atmosphere of the courtroom. Another work, *Honoring the Potsdam Declaration*, brings together an image of an old document scroll and an olive branch to reflect the commitment to the postwar international order.

Safeguarding Peace, created by Ruan Jie, a Ningbo-based seal carver who leads the pictorial seal initiative, expresses a shared hope for peace. "The dove at the center is surrounded by a ring of clasped hands, forming a ribbon that connects people around the world," Ruan said. "I hope this pictorial seal can transcend language barriers and convey our shared commitment to remembering the Tokyo Trials and working together to safeguard peace."

Rare Salamander Inspires Ningbo's Young Environmental Guardians

By Jin Lu

A rare salamander has become an unlikely teacher to thousands of children in Ningbo and has now carried the city's conservation effort onto an international stage.

The "Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" Environmental Protection Foundation, based in the city's Beilun district, told that story at the 2026 United Nations China Youth Environment Forum on October 28 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. It was the only civil-society group from Zhejiang on the program.

The foundation's education work centers on the Chinhai spiny newt, a species under national protection whose wild population once dropped below 300. Despite its home in Beilun, an industrial port area, the animal has held on—and become a gateway for local children into biodiversity and environmental protection.

"We asked whether we could build a lesson around the Chinhai spiny newt," said Liu Junqiao, head of the foundation. "Children may learn the theory of climate change and biodiversity from textbooks, but they know little about the wildlife around them."

The foundation has designed a course "Protect the Chinhai spiny newt", and runs field trips led by researchers along with study programs that pair local schools with schools in Qinghai and Jiangsu.

So far the course has reached more than 4,700 young people directly.



The 2026 United Nations China Youth Environment Forum. [Photo provided to *Ningbo Times*]

Chief Adviser: Zhao Qingchuan
Proofreader: Jin Yuhan

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