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## ACCIDENTS AT SEA: COMPENSATION INCREASE SET FOR PASSENGERS

People hopping on a ferry to do their Christmas shopping could soon have greater redress if they are injured in an accident at sea.

Compensation for accidents at sea is governed by the international Athens Convention, which severely limits the amount of compensation which can be claimed in a shipping disaster caused by negligence, such as the *Herald of Free Enterprise* incident.

But agreement has now been reached among Convention signatories to increase the amount of money available for compensation for injuries - a move which has been welcomed by the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL).

“After years of wrangling with the insurance industry and other nations, the UK Government has been able finally to persuade the International Maritime Organization (IMO) that compensation limits must be increased from the paltry £37,000 currently available to around £337,000,” said Frances McCarthy, former APIL president and consultee in the negotiations.

“This is still by no means enough to fully compensate someone who suffers a catastrophic injury on a ship and is wheelchair-bound for life,” said Frances. “But it does, at least, make it easier for most injuries to be dealt with properly.

“In future years, when people are planning ferry hops to the continent for the annual Christmas booze cruise, they can be confident that - should another appalling incident like the *Herald* happen - most people will at least be fully compensated for their injuries,” she said.

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“What is crucial now is that the Government wastes no time in doing all it can to implement the higher limits,” she went on. “It deserves a great deal of credit for pushing things this far, but there is still some way to go if UK passengers are to be fully protected.”

The higher limit is backed with elements of compulsory insurance and direct action against the insurer, to help ensure funds are in place to meet compensation claims, and to protect

injured people from having to go through the tortuous and lengthy process of trying to work out who is liable for making payments.

And insurers who have claimed the package is “unworkable” have been heavily criticised by McCarthy, who branded them “alarmist and obstructive”.

“Throughout this whole process, the same insurers who have been paid millions in premiums over the years have griped that this package would be unaffordable,” she said. “Yet no real, unbiased evidence to support this claim has ever been made available.

“While claiming they can’t possibly afford these changes, the insurers neglect the fact that there are, thankfully, very few accidents and they therefore have very few compensation payments to make. We believe this makes it even more important that proper compensation is available when incidents do happen.

“It is now time for insurers to knuckle down and get to grips with a system which puts passengers before profits.” - ends -

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