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MARINE CIRCULAR 02/2026

Fraudulent Documentation in Maritime Matters

1. This Circular is issued to alert all shipowners, operators, masters, seafarers, agents, surveyors, recognised organisations, and maritime service providers of recent incidents involving the submission of fraudulent documentation to the Virgin Islands Shipping and Maritime Authority (the “**Authority**”), including:
 - a. Fraudulent passports submitted for maritime applications;
 - b. Fraudulent certificates purportedly issued or recognised by the Authority; and
 - c. Fraudulent Boatmaster Licences presented in support of vessel operations or certification.
 2. This Circular reiterates the Authority’s zero-tolerance policy with respect to submission of fraudulent documentation.
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Background

3. The Authority has identified multiple instances where documents submitted for regulatory purposes were subsequently confirmed to be fraudulent or invalid following verification checks. In some cases, the documents falsely purported to have been issued or endorsed by the Authority.
4. These documents were detected as being fraudulent through established compliance and verification controls and were not accepted. No registration, certification, endorsement, or approval was issued on the basis of the fraudulent submissions.

Legal and Regulatory Framework

5. The submission or use of fraudulent documentation undermines the statutory framework governing maritime administration in the British Virgin Islands and may constitute a breach of the Merchant Shipping Act, 2001 (as amended), which regulates vessel registration, safety certification, and seafarer competency documentation.

Document Verification Requirements

6. Stakeholders must ensure that:
 - a. All passports, licences, and maritime certificates submitted are authentic, current, and verifiable through official channels of the issuing authority;
 - b. Where QR Codes or electronic verification features are provided, these must successfully verify against official records; and
 - c. The appearance of official logos, stamps, signatures, or formatting does not of itself confirm authenticity.
7. Any uncertainty regarding the validity of a document must be resolved with the Authority before reliance or submission.

Risks and Implications

8. The use of fraudulent documentation poses serious risks, including:
 - a. Safety risks, where unqualified or improperly identified individuals operate vessels;
 - b. Regulatory and legal risks, where vessels operate without valid certification; and
 - c. Reputational risks, which may affect the standing and credibility of the BVI as a reputable maritime jurisdiction.

Enforcement and Consequences

9. The Authority will adopt a robust and proportionate enforcement approach in respect of fraudulent documentation. Depending on the circumstances, actions may include:
 - a. Rejection of applications and refusal of services;
 - b. Suspension or termination of dealings with individuals or agents involved;
 - c. Administrative enforcement measures and penalties under applicable legislation; and
 - d. Referral of matters to relevant competent authorities for investigation and potential criminal prosecution.
10. The submission or use of false documentation will be treated as a serious compliance breach.

Stakeholder Responsibilities

11. All maritime stakeholders are expected to:
 - a. Exercise appropriate due diligence when preparing and submitting documents;
 - b. Ensure that only genuine and verifiable documentation is presented to the Authority; and
 - c. Promptly report any suspected fraudulent or altered documents to the Authority.

Reporting and Contact

12. Suspected fraudulent or altered documentation or related concerns should be reported immediately through the Authority's official contact channels published on the Authority's website.

Conclusion

13. The Authority remains committed to safeguarding the integrity, safety, and international reputation of the BVI's maritime registry. This Circular is issued to promote awareness, deterrence, and compliance across the maritime sector.
 14. Failure to comply with the requirements outlined in this Circular may result in enforcement action which may include criminal prosecution by the competent authorities.
 15. This Circular takes effect immediately upon issuance.
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Mr. John Samuel

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For more information, please contact the Authority.