

EXPLANATORY NOTES

Seafarers' Wages Act 2023

Chapter 8

SEAFARERS' WAGES ACT 2023

EXPLANATORY NOTES

What these notes do

- These Explanatory Notes have been prepared by the Department for Transport in order to assist the reader in understanding the Act. They do not form part of the Act and have not been endorsed by Parliament.
- These Explanatory Notes explain what each part of the Act will mean in practice; provide background information on the development of policy; and provide additional information on how the Act will affect existing legislation in this area.
- These Explanatory Notes might best be read alongside the Act. They are not, and are not intended to be, a comprehensive description of the Act.

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Overview of the Act

- 1 The objective of the Seafarers' Wages Act 2023 is to improve remuneration for seafarers with close ties to the UK. The Act is part of the Secretary of State for Transport's nine-point plan¹, announced on Wednesday 30 March 2022.
- 2 The Act applies to services which carry goods or people by ship between a place outside the UK and a place in the UK. The Act requires harbour authorities to ask the operator of a service which enters a UK harbour 120 times or more in a year for a declaration. The declaration is that seafarers on the service who do not qualify for the UK national minimum wage (NMW) are being paid at least an equivalent rate to the UK NMW while working in the UK or its territorial waters. Harbour authorities must impose surcharges when operators fail to provide a declaration or where they operate a service inconsistently with a declaration. Subject to certain exceptions, the Act requires harbour authorities to refuse ships providing a service access to their harbour if they impose a surcharge and it is not paid.

Policy background

Wage Protection for Seafarers

- 3 Prior to this Act, some seafarers (non-qualifying seafarers) who worked on international routes were not in scope of UK NMW legislation, even though they had close ties to the UK by virtue of working on services that regularly call at UK ports.
- 4 As UK-flagged ships and UK-resident seafarers are more likely to fall in scope of UK Minimum Wage legislation, UK-based agents are less cost-competitive and UK flagged ships face a disincentive to employ UK resident seafarers.
- This Act encourages more comparable remuneration for non-qualifying seafarers on services which regularly enter UK harbours and thereby helps to reduce competitive distortion between domestic and international services, and those flagged in the UK and those flagged elsewhere².
- 6 NMW is a legally defined term under the National Minimum Wage Act 1998 (c. 39) (the 1998 Act) and this Act does not amend the 1998 Act to extend legal entitlement of NMW to seafarers. Rather, it encourages operators to pay non-qualifying seafarers no less than an equivalent sum whilst they are working in the UK or its territorial waters. The NMW is from April 2023 £10.42 per hour for those 23 years old and over.

¹ Nine-point plan for seafarers – our commitments to protect seafarers - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

² See Impact Assessment, pg 38 <u>Seafarer Wages Act - Final Stage Impact Assessment (publishing.service.gov.uk)</u>

Legal background

The National Minimum Wage Act 1998

- The NMW was introduced in 1999 by the 1998 Act. The general right to receive the NMW is set out in section 1(1) of the 1998 Act, which provides that a person who qualifies for the NMW shall be remunerated by their employer in respect of their work in any pay reference period at a rate which is not less than the NMW. Section 1(2) of the 1998 Act provides that a worker above the age of the compulsory schooling qualifies for the NMW if they ordinarily work in the UK.
- 8 Section 40 of the 1998 Act provides that, for the purposes of that Act, a person employed to work on board a ship registered in the UK under Part II of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 ("UK flagged ships") shall be treated as ordinarily working in the UK unless their employment is wholly outside the UK or they are not ordinarily resident in the UK.
- 9 Section 42 of the 1998 Act provides a power to apply that Act to "offshore employment". "Offshore employment" is defined as employment for the purpose of activities: in the territorial waters of the UK; connected with exploring the sea-bed or subsoil in the UK sector of the continental shelf; or connected with the exploration or exploitation of a cross-boundary petroleum field. This power is exercised by making an Order in Council and was used to create the National Minimum Wage (Offshore Employment) Order 1999 (S.I. 1999/1128) (the 1999 Order).
- 10 Article 2 of the 1999 Order (amended by the National Minimum Wage (Offshore Employment) (Amendment) Order 2020 (S.I. 2020/779)) deems a person who works or ordinarily works in the territorial waters of the UK or (in connection with certain activities) in the UK sector of the continental shelf to be a person who works or ordinarily works in the UK for the purposes of the 1998 Act (and is therefore entitled to the NMW). The Order applies to individuals regardless of whether they are British subjects and to corporate bodies regardless of whether they are incorporated under UK law. However, the Order has no application to any individual employed for the purposes of activities on a ship exercising the right of innocent passage or the right of transit passage.

The National Minimum Wage Regulations 2015

11 The National Minimum Wage Regulations 2015 (S.I. 2015/621) (the 2015 Regulations) set out the detailed rules for determining whether a worker is paid the NMW. They make provision for the NMW rates, exemptions, what payments count towards NMW pay, how to determine what hours have been worked for NMW purposes, and what NMW records need to be kept.

The Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847

12 Section 33 of the Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847 (c.27) (the 1847 Act), as adopted in the private legislation of harbour authorities (each harbour authority is established under its own enabling Act), provides for the "open port duty". It requires harbours, docks and piers to be open to all persons for the shipping and unshipping of goods and the embarking and landing of passengers, subject to the provisions of the 1847 Act and any subsequent Acts authorising the construction or improvement of a harbour, dock or pier and the payment of applicable rates. The open port duty prohibits harbour authorities from denying access to ports to ships physically capable of using them, but does not prevent them from regulating the terms on which such access is granted.

The Harbours Act 1964 and the Harbours Act (Northern Ireland) 1970

13 The Harbours Act 1964 (c.40) (the 1964 Act) and the Harbours Act (Northern Ireland) 1970 (c. 1) (the 1970 Act) make provision with respect to harbours for England, Wales and Scotland, and Northern Ireland respectively. Section 57 of the 1964 Act and section 38 of the 1970 Act define "harbour" and "harbour authority".

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

14 The United Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to which the UK is a signatory, defines and codifies the standards and principles of international maritime law. Article 17 of UNCLOS provides that, subject to the provisions of the Convention, the ships of all states enjoy the right of innocent passage through the territorial sea.

The Maritime Labour Convention

15 The Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), to which the UK is also a signatory, is an international treaty that sets out the minimum working and living conditions for seafarers.

Territorial extent and application

16 The provisions of the Act extend and apply to the whole of the United Kingdom.

Commentary on provisions of Act

Introductory

Section 1: Services to which this Act applies

17 Section 1 sets out the scope of the Act. The Act applies to a service for the carriage of persons or goods by ship, with or without vehicles, between a place outside the United Kingdom and a place in the United Kingdom. The Act does not apply to a service that is for the purpose of leisure or recreation or to a service provided by a fishing vessel. Section 1(3) provides a power to make regulations for the purpose of determining what is or is not a service. Section 1(4) defines "ship" for the purposes of the Act as including any kind of vessel used in navigation and hovercraft.

Section 2: Non-qualifying seafarers

18 Section 2 sets out who is a non-qualifying seafarer for the purposes of the Act. "Non-qualifying seafarer" means a person who works on a ship providing a service to which the Act applies, whose work on that ship is carried out in relation to the provision of the service and who fails to qualify for the NMW in respect of that work merely because, for the purposes of the 1998 Act, the person does not work, or does not ordinarily work, in the United Kingdom.

National minimum wage equivalence declarations

Section 3: Request for declaration

- 19 Section 3 requires harbour authorities to request that operators of services within the scope of the Act provide them with a national minimum wage equivalence declaration (an equivalence declaration) (see section 4) where they have reasonable grounds to believe that ships providing the service will call at their harbour at least 120 times in a relevant year.
- 20 "Relevant year" is defined in section 3(6) as being a period of 12 months beginning with a date specified in regulations and then each successive period of 12 months.
- 21 This duty is subject to any direction given by the Secretary of State not to request an equivalence declaration.
- 22 The section provides that a harbour authority which does not comply with the duty to request an equivalence declaration commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction in England and Wales to a fine and in Scotland and Northern Ireland to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.
- 23 This section also includes a power for the Secretary of State to make regulations specifying the period within which harbour authorities must request an equivalence declaration, the form of such declarations and the manner and period following a request in which declarations are to be provided.

Section 4: Nature of declaration

24 Section 4 sets out the nature of an equivalence declaration. A declaration provided before the beginning of the relevant year will be to the effect that during the relevant year either there will be no non-qualifying seafarers working on ships providing the service, or non-qualifying seafarers working on ships providing the service will be paid at least the NMW equivalent for their UK work in relation to that service. "UK work" is defined in subsection (10) as being work which is carried out in the UK or its territorial waters. Subsections (3) to (5) make provision to allow equivalence declarations to be provided during and after the relevant year and for declarations to relate to part of a year.

- 25 Subsection (6) provides that the NMW equivalent is an hourly rate set out in regulations. Regulations may make provision for:
 - a. the hourly rate at which a non-qualifying seafarer is remunerated in any period in respect of any work, and
 - b. whether, or the extent to which, a non-qualifying seafarer's work in relation to the service is in the UK or its territorial waters.
- 26 In making such regulations under this section, the Secretary of State must seek to secure that the amount of remuneration received by non-qualifying seafarers within scope of the Act is at least broadly equivalent, having regard to all the circumstances, to the remuneration they would have received had they qualified for the NMW.

Section 5: Offence of operating service inconsistently with declaration

- 27 Section 5 provides for offences where services are operated inconsistently with an equivalence declaration or where declarations are false or misleading insofar as they concern the operation of a service before the declaration was provided.
- 28 Subsections (2)(a) and (3)(a) (read with subsection (1)) provide that the operator of a service commits an offence where it operates a service inconsistently with a declaration from the start of a relevant year or at the time a declaration is provided during a relevant year.
- 29 Subsections (2)(b) and (3)(b) (read with subsection (1)) provide that the operator of a service commits an offence where it starts to operate a service inconsistently with a declaration at any later time during the relevant year (having previously operated the service consistently with the declaration), and fails to notify the harbour authority within four weeks of the fact that the service has started to be so operated and the time when it started to be so operated. Subsection (4) makes it an offence for an operator to provide a declaration which is false or misleading in so far as it concerns the operation of a service for a period in the past.
- 30 A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable on summary conviction to a fine in England and Wales or to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Surcharges

Section 6: Imposition of surcharges: failure to provide declaration in time

- 31 Section 6 applies if a harbour authority requests an equivalence declaration and it is not provided in the form, manner and period prescribed in regulations.
- 32 In these circumstances the section requires the harbour authority to impose surcharges in respect of each occasion when a ship providing the service entered or enters its harbour between the beginning of the relevant year and whichever is the earlier of the end of the relevant year or the operator providing an equivalence declaration. Where an operator provides a declaration with respect to the relevant year such that it is no longer required to pay surcharges, the harbour authority is required in the circumstances in subsection (5) to refund certain surcharges already paid.

Section 7: Imposition of surcharges: in-year declaration that is prospective only

33 Section 7 applies if a harbour authority requests an operator to provide an equivalence declaration and the operator provides a declaration which is prospective only because it cannot demonstrate that it has paid the NMW equivalent for a period of the relevant year in the past. In those circumstances section 7 requires the harbour authority to impose surcharges in respect of each

occasion when a ship providing the service entered its harbour between the beginning of the relevant year and the time the declaration was provided.

Section 8: Imposition of surcharges: operating inconsistently with declaration

- 34 Section 8 requires harbour authorities to impose surcharges where a service is operated inconsistently with an equivalence declaration or where a declaration is false or misleading. It requires a harbour authority to impose surcharges on each occasion that ships providing a service enter its harbour during the relevant year in three scenarios:
 - a. Where an operator notifies an authority that after an equivalence declaration was provided the service has been operated inconsistently with that declaration (subsection (1)(b)(i));
 - b. Where an authority has reasonable grounds to believe that the service has been operated inconsistently with a declaration (subsection (1)(b)(ii));
 - c. Where an authority has reasonable grounds to believe that a declaration is false or misleading in so far as it concerns the operation of a service before it was provided (subsection (4)).
- 35 Pursuant to subsections (3) and (6) the harbour authority must cease imposing surcharges on ships operating the service if it is provided with a fresh equivalence declaration by the operator in respect of the service for the relevant year. However, this section will apply again if the service is operated inconsistently with the new equivalence declaration or if that declaration is false or misleading.

Section 9: Surcharges general

- 36 Section 9 provides that the amount of a surcharge is to be determined by a tariff of surcharges specified in regulations and that a harbour authority's duty to impose a surcharge is subject to any direction given by the Secretary of State not to impose a surcharge.
- 37 Subsection (3) provides that a harbour authority which fails to comply with a duty to impose a surcharge under sections 6, 7 and 8 is guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine in England and Wales or to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- 38 Subsections (4) and (5) provide the power to make regulations setting out the procedural and administrative detail related to the imposition of surcharges.
- 39 Pursuant to subsection (6) a harbour authority may retain a surcharge and apply it for the purposes of shore-based welfare facilities for seafarers.

Section 10: Objections to surcharges

- 40 Section 10 sets out how objections can be made to the imposition or amount of a surcharge and the procedure for considering those objections.
- 41 An interested party (defined in subsection (5)) may make an objection to the imposition of a surcharge by a harbour authority or its amount. An objection to the amount of a surcharge may be made only on the grounds that it is not in accordance with the tariff of surcharges specified in regulations under section 9(1). Objections must be made to the Secretary of State in writing within the period specified in regulations made under subsection (4).
- 42 Where an objection is made the Secretary of State must send a copy of the objection to the harbour authority and publish a notice online with details of the objection and how to make any representations in relation to the objection. If any representations are made the Secretary of State must send copies to the harbour authority and the objector and allow them a reasonable time to comment.

- 43 Once the time for any representations and further comments has expired, the Secretary of State must proceed to consider the objection and any representations made. Following that consideration, the Secretary of State may decide:
 - a. to approve the imposition of the surcharge and its amount,
 - b. to direct the harbour authority to revoke the imposition of the surcharge, or
 - c. to direct the harbour authority to increase or decrease the amount of the surcharge so that it is in accordance with the tariff of surcharges specified in regulations under section 9(1).
- 44 The Secretary of State may also direct a harbour authority to repay any surcharges that appear to be appropriate to be repaid by that result of a decision, for example, if the Secretary of State decides to direct the authority to revoke the imposition of the surcharge, they may also direct that authority to refund any surcharges that have already been paid.
- 45 The Secretary of State must communicate the decision to the harbour authority and the objector, and publish the decision online.
- Where the Secretary of State considers that the substance of an objection has already been, or is being, considered in connection with another objection, they are not required to consider the later objection.

Section 11: Refusal of harbour access for failure to pay surcharge

- 47 Section 11 provides that a harbour authority must refuse access to its harbour if the authority has imposed a surcharge on the operator of a service and the operator has not paid the surcharge in the form, manner and period prescribed in regulations, irrespective of whether an objection has been made under section 10. Failure to comply with this duty is an offence, punishable on summary conviction by a fine in England and Wales, or a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- 48 The duty to refuse access to a harbour is subject to any direction by the Secretary of State not to refuse access. The duty also does not apply in circumstances where a harbour authority has imposed a surcharge but must later refund this surcharge under section 6(5) because the operator subsequently provides a valid equivalence declaration that covers the period for which the surcharge was imposed.
- 49 Subsection (4) provides exceptions where a harbour authority must not refuse access to its harbour:
 - a. in cases of force majeure;
 - b. where there are overriding safety concerns;
 - c. where there is a need to reduce or minimise the risk of pollution;
 - d. where there is a need to rectify deficiencies on the ship.
- 50 Subsection (7) provides for regulations to make provision as to how a harbour authority is to communicate refusal of access. Subsection (8) clarifies that nothing in section 33 of the Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847 prevents refusal of access to a harbour under this section.

Enforcement powers

Section 12: Provision of information by operators

51 Section 12 provides a power for the Secretary of State to give a notice to an operator of a service in scope of the Act, requiring it to provide information, in the manner and within the period specified in the notice, for the purpose of:

- a. establishing whether a service is or any time was being operated consistently with an equivalence declaration provided by the operator, or
- establishing whether an equivalence declaration provided by the operator is false or misleading in so far as it concerns the operation of the service before the declaration was provided.
- 52 This may in particular include information relating to the service and information relating to persons working on ships providing the service and their remuneration.
- 53 There is an exception whereby operators are not required to provide information under this section to the extent that doing so would cause the operator to breach domestic data protection legislation or the data protection laws of any country or territory outside the UK.
- It is an offence for an operator to fail to provide information required in the manner and within the period specified, to provide information that is false or misleading, or to provide information that becomes false or misleading and fail to inform the Secretary of State within four weeks. This offence is punishable on summary conviction by a fine in England and Wales, or a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Section 13: Provision of information by harbour authorities

- 55 Section 13 provides a power for the Secretary of State to give a notice to a harbour authority requiring it to provide information, in the manner and within the period specified in the notice, for the purpose of establishing whether, or to what extent, the authority is complying with its duties under the Act.
- 56 This may in particular include information about:
 - a. the services provided by ships that use the harbour,
 - b. equivalence declarations requested by, or provided to, the harbour authority,
 - c. surcharges imposed or received by the harbour authority, and
 - d. decisions by the harbour authority to refuse or not refuse access to its harbour.
- 57 There is an exception whereby operators are not required to provide information under this section to the extent that doing so would cause the operator to breach domestic data protection legislation.
- 58 A notice may require the information to be provided in a manner, and within a period, specified in the notice.
- 59 It is an offence for an operator to fail to provide information required in the manner and within the period specified, to provide information that is false or misleading, or to provide information that becomes false or misleading and fail to inform the Secretary of State within four weeks. This offence is punishable on summary conviction by a fine in England and Wales, or a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Section 14: Inspections

- 60 Section 14 empowers an inspector appointed by the Secretary of State to board a ship in a harbour in the United Kingdom or enter any premises for the purposes of:
 - a. establishing whether a service is being operated consistently with an equivalence declaration,
 - b. establishing whether an equivalence declaration is false or misleading in so far as it concerns the operation of a service before the declaration was provided,

- c. verifying any information provided under section 12,
- d. establishing whether, or to what extent, a harbour authority is complying with its duties under the Act, or
- e. verifying any information provided by a harbour authority under section 13.
- 61 The powers of inspectors under this section include:
 - a. making such inspection as they consider necessary;
 - b. being accompanied by another person;
 - c. requiring a person to answer questions and sign a statement that their answers are true, at the time of the inspection or subsequently at a time specified by the inspector;
 - d. requiring the production of documents (including requiring provision of information held in electronic form in a legible format);
 - e. requiring a person to provide facilities and assistance to the inspector, where that is in that person's control.
- 62 It is an offence for a person to intentionally obstruct an inspector in the exercise of their powers; to fail without reasonable excuse to comply with a requirement imposed by this section, or to prevent another person from complying with such a requirement; or to make a statement which the person knows is false or misleading, or to recklessly make such a statement, in purported compliance with a requirement imposed under this section. Such an offence is punishable on summary conviction by a fine in England and Wales, or a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Section 15: Prosecution of offences

63 Section 15 provides that in England and Wales and Northern Ireland proceedings relating to offences under the Act may be prosecuted by the Secretary of State. In Scotland, all prosecutions are brought by the Lord Advocate.

Supplementary

Section 16: Directions

- 64 Section 16 provides the Secretary of State the power to give directions to harbour authorities requiring them not to comply with their duties under the Act, or to comply with any of them in a particular way. Directions must be published and may be varied or revoked.
- 65 Failure to comply with a direction under this section is an offence punishable on summary conviction by a fine in England and Wales, or a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Section 17: Regulations

- 66 Section 17 provides that regulations under the Act are to be made by statutory instrument.
- 67 Where regulations are made under the Act, those regulations may make different provision for different cases, including for different descriptions of service to which the Act applies or non-qualifying seafarers. They may also confer a discretion on any person and contain consequential, supplementary, incidental or transitional provision.
- 68 Subsections (3) to (5) make provision about the Parliamentary procedure associated with regulations made under the Act.

General

Section 18: "Harbour" and "harbour authority"

- 69 Section 18 provides definitions of "harbour" and "harbour authority", which align with the definitions in the Harbours Act 1964 for England, Wales and Scotland, and the Harbours Act (Northern Ireland) 1970 for Northern Ireland.
- 70 References in the Act to harbours of a harbour authority are to harbours in respect of which it is the harbour authority. In circumstances where there is more than one harbour authority in respect of a particular harbour, subsection (3) provides a power for regulations to specify which harbour authority is the responsible authority for that harbour, and therefore subject to the powers and duties in the Act.

Section 19: General interpretation

71 Section 19 provides definitions of terms used throughout the Act.

Section 20: Extent, commencement and short title

72 Section 20 sets out the territorial extend of the Act. It also makes provision for the coming into the force of the Act and its short title.

Commencement

73 Section 20(2) provides that any provision so far as conferring a power to make regulations, and sections 1, 2 and 16 to 20 come into force on Royal Assent. All other provisions come into force on a day appointed in regulations, and such regulations may appoint different days for different purposes and contain transitional provision.

Annex A - Hansard References

74 The following table sets out the dates and Hansard references for each stage of the Act's passage through Parliament.

Stage	Date	Hansard Reference
House of Lords		
Introduction	06 July 2022	<u>Vol. 823</u>
Second Reading	20 July 2022	Vol. 823 Col. 1975
Grand Committee	12 October 2022	Vol. 824 Col. 88GC
Report	26 October 2022	Vol. 824 Col. 1500
Third Reading	07 November 2022	Vol. 825 Col. 460
House of Commons		
Introduction	08 November 2022	N/A
Second Reading	19 December 2022	Vol. 725 Col. 65
Public Act Committee	17 January 2023	Vol. XXX Col. 1, 39
Report and Third Reading	07 February 2023	Vol. 727 Col. 800
Lords Consideration of	21 March 2023	Vol. 828 Col. 1670
Commons Amendments		
Royal Assent	23 March 2023	House of Commons Vol. 730 Col. 475
		House of Lords Vol. 828 Col. 1957

Annex B - Progress of Bill Table

75 This Annex shows how each section of the Act was numbered during the passage of the Bill through Parliament.

Section of the Act	Bill as Introduced in the Lords	Bill as amended on Report in the Lords	Bill as introduced in the Commons	Bill as amended in Committee in the Commons	Bill as amended on Report in the Commons
Section 1	Clause 1	Clause 1	Clause 1	Clause 1	Clause 1
Section 2	Clause 2	Clause 2	Clause 2	Clause 2	Clause 2
Section 3	Clause 3	Clause 3	Clause 3	Clause 3	Clause 3
Section 4	Clause 4	Clause 4	Clause 4	Clause 4	Clause 4
Section 5	-	-	-	Clause 5	Clause 5
Section 6	-	-	-	Clause 8	Clause 6
Section 7	-	-	-	Clause 9	Clause 7
Section 8	-	-	-	Clause 10	Clause 8
Section 9	Clause 7	Clause 7	Clause 7	Clause 11	Clause 9
Section 10	Clause 8	Clause 8	Clause 8	Clause 12	Clause 10
Section 11	Clause 9	Clause 9	Clause 9	Clause 13	Clause 11
Section 12	Clause 5	Clause 5	Clause 5	Clause 6	Clause 12
Section 13	-	-	-	-	Clause 13
Section 14	Clause 6	Clause 6	Clause 6	Clause 7	Clause 14
Section 15	Clause 10	Clause 10	Clause 10	Clause 14	Clause 15
Section 16	Clause 11	Clause 11	Clause 11	Clause 15	Clause 15
Section 17	Clause 12	Clause 12	Clause 12	Clause 16	Clause 17
Section 18	Clause 13	Clause 13	Clause 13	Clause 17	Clause 18
Section 19	Clause 14	Clause 14	Clause 14	Clause 18	Clause 19
Section 20	Clause 15	Clause 15	Clause 15	Clause 19	Clause 20

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