



**AUSTRALIAN MARITIME OFFICERS UNION**

ABN 56 181 230 800

Senate Environment and Communications References  
Committee

**Inquiry into oil or gas production in the  
Great Australian Bight**

Submission of the

**Australian Maritime Officers Union**

17 October 2015

## **Summary:**

- Australian seafarers consider themselves the custodians of Australia's maritime environment.
- Australia is dependent on shipping with 99 per cent of international trade volumes transported by ship and Australian ports managing 10 per cent of the world's sea trade.
- It takes more than ten years of training and sea service to become a qualified Master Mariner.
- Maritime qualifications gained at sea transfer directly to vital onshore maritime jobs.
- Current arrangements allow an uncapped number of foreign seafarers to work in Australia on temporary visas while almost 200 Australian seafarers are unemployed.
- Without access to sea-time, Australian seafarers will not be able to qualify for the necessary maritime qualifications which are vital in our local maritime industry.
- The Senate Committee should recommend that Australians should be given preference to work on oil and gas projects in the Great Australian Bight in all circumstances and that the Government rigorously enforces this preference.

1. The Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee Inquiry into oil or gas production in the Great Australian Bight
2. The AMOU represents the professional and workplace interests of members including: Masters and Officers in the 'bluewater' and 'offshore oil and gas' maritime sectors, Marine Pilots, Tug Masters, Bunkering, Dredging Industry, Stevedoring Supervisors, Ferries Crew, Port Services, Vessel Traffic Services/Port Control, Marine Tourism together with Professional/Administration/ Supervisory/Technical staff of Port Corporations and Marine Authorities.
3. Our union is one of three unions registered under the provisions of the *Fair Work Act 2009* to represent the industrial interests of maritime workers.
4. We note the environmental concerns that have been raised in association with oil or gas production in the Great Australian Bight. As the Senate Committee can appreciate, our members spend the majority of their worktime off Australia's coastline. Our members are viewed as custodians of our maritime environment and value the maritime shibboleth of safe and secure passage in Australia's waters.
5. This submission will concentrate on the industrial interests of our members working in the Great Australian Bight if it determined that oil and gas production in this area is permitted to proceed.
6. The Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development has identified that, *' . . . Australia is heavily dependent on shipping, with 99 per cent of international trade volumes transported by ship and Australian ports managing 10 per cent of the world's sea trade.'*<sup>1</sup>
7. The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) reports that 74% of Australia's international trade by value is transported by ship<sup>2</sup>.
8. As the world's largest island nation Australia will always be dependent the maritime industry for the transport of goods.

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<sup>1</sup> Approaches to Regulating Coastal Shipping in Australia, Options Paper, April 2014, Australian Government

<sup>2</sup> Corporate Plan 2016-20, Australian Maritime Safety Authority, Australian Government

9. Those that go to sea are enamoured by their industry. They view a vibrant and robust industry as vital to Australia's national interest and want to make sure that into the future young Australia's with a similar love of the sea have opportunities to work in the local setting.
10. It takes more than ten years of training and sea service to become a qualified Master Mariner (see Appendix 1). Additionally seafarers must be able to pass physical assessment and have good eyesight. Medicals are required every five years.
11. The intimate knowledge of the industry seafarers gain through the years of extensive training they undertake makes them sought after candidates for many on-shore jobs in the maritime industry. Indeed many positions require maritime qualifications as a precondition for employment e.g. harbour master or coastal pilot.
12. The role of coastal pilot is essential to the operation of Australia's shipping industry. AMSA describes the role of a coastal pilot as:

*' . . . to advise on the safe navigation of a vessel, and to be a **steward of the marine environment** (our bolding).*

*This means that the coastal marine pilot must:*

- *identify and manage risks to avoid a grounding or collision to protect the ship and marine environment;*
- *provide detailed passage planning, local knowledge, leadership to the bridge team, and liaison with shore authorities and VTS;*
- *provide independent judgement and advice to the ship's master, who remains in command of the vessel;*
- *monitor their own personal health and safety, including managing fatigue:*  
*and*
- *provide mentoring and training to new coastal pilots.'*<sup>3</sup>

AMSA makes it plain that a pilot must have local knowledge and mentor and train new pilots.

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<sup>3</sup> See: [ASMA How to Become a pilot](#)

Under AMSA criteria, trainee pilots must have certain Certificates of Competency, a Certificate of Medical Fitness, have undertaken a trainee pilot induction approved training course and have at least 36 months of qualifying sea service as master, navigating officer in charge of a watch or pilot on vessels of at least 500 gross tonnes.

13. Further teaching staff at maritime educational facilities are generally seafarers themselves with associated maritime qualifications.
14. At 30 June 2016, date of most recent information, there were 21 Ships Masters and 97 Deck Officers on Temporary Work (Skilled) (subclass 457) visas in Australia (118 total).<sup>4</sup>
15. Today, 17 October 2016, the AMOU was aware of 196 unemployed members of the Union - skilled, trained and experienced Australian Masters and Deck Officers waiting for work.
16. Following a decision of the Government in 2013 Ships Masters and Ships Officers are not subject to Labour Market Testing when an employer is seeking to engage 457 visa holders.
17. We are constantly contacted by members, and non-members, who recently gained their qualifications who cannot secure any work. They often add that the majority of those they studied with are in similar positions.
18. Our older members fear for their industry. They see the short term opportunism of multinational companies exploiting our natural resources or facilitating the 99% of Australia's trade volumes through shipping without providing opportunities for young Australian workers as a national disgrace in our never ending pursuit of lower costs and greater shareholder returns.
19. Our younger members who have pursued careers in this special vocation fear they will never be afforded the opportunities given to previous generations of seafarers because of a perverse use of temporary work visas where suitability qualified locals are willing and able to perform the jobs.

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<sup>4</sup> See: [www.data.gov.au](http://www.data.gov.au) accessed 10 October 2016

20. Our union fears that there will be a scarcity of Australians able to fill the many seafaring associated onshore jobs such as harbour masters, pilots, vessel traffic officers and lecturers at the maritime training facilities.
21. The contrast between the Federal Government's stated desire on one hand to have a skilled Australian maritime workforce and on the other hand the Federal Government's willingness to grant 457 visas for workers in our maritime industry, could not be more stark.
22. The Australian Senate recently rejected the *Shipping Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2015 (the Bill)*. The Second Reading Speech of this rejected legislation included the following:

*'Australia needs people with maritime skills and experience to be tug crews, harbourmasters and pilots and to fill other jobs in the industry where firsthand knowledge of how things are done on board is essential. That is why the government has included measures to ensure ships trading predominantly in Australia have Australians undertaking the key skilled positions on board.'*<sup>5</sup>

23. The attitude of some employers on the need for Australian content in the Australian shipping industry is best summed up by Australian Shipping Consultants Pty Ltd in their Submission to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Provisions of the Shipping Legislation Amendment Bill 2015:

*'[It is] unlikely that Australia would find itself unable to fill the demand for the numerous land and port based positions requiring professional and experienced mariners – they would just be sourced more widely, including from the many international applicants attracted to life and work in Australia.'*<sup>6</sup>

24. This position is, of course, in directly opposed to the stated Government position above whereby *'ships trading predominantly in Australia have Australians undertaking the key skilled positions on board.'*

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<sup>5</sup> W Truss, 'Second reading speech: Shipping Legislation Amendment Bill 2015', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 25 June 2015, p. 7576

<sup>6</sup> Australian Shipping Consultants Pty Ltd, Submission to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Provisions of the Shipping Legislation Amendment Bill 2015, Submission 17, p. 6.

25. Diamond Offshore General Company has been contracted by BP Developments Australia Pty Ltd to drill two oil and gas exploration wells in the Great Australian Bight.
26. The wells will be drilled using a dynamically positioned semi-submersible mobile offshore drilling unit (MODU) – ‘*Ocean GreatWhite*’.
27. The AMOU understands that the bridge team for the ‘*Ocean GreatWhite*’ will comprise of 12 mariners working 2 swings on the vessel (Master, Chief Mate, 2 Senior Dynamic Positioning Offices and 2 Junior Dynamic Positioning Offices).
28. Only 2 of these positions will be filled by Australians, the remaining deck officer positions will be filled by workers on 457 visas.
29. We would expect that at the end of their swing the 457 visa holders would be helicoptered to the international airport at Adelaide and then flown home, never setting foot on the Australian mainland.
30. The AMOU requested information from Diamond Offshore on the nationalities and Australian work rights of the ‘*Ocean GreatWhite*’ bridge team. The response from Diamond drilling was that they had, ‘. . . *manned the Ocean GreatWhite with an experienced crew and in accordance with the regulatory and legislative requirements under which we are required to operate.*’
31. Unemployed AMOU members have the skills and experience to undertake the work on the ‘*Ocean GreatWhite*’.
32. Together with BP Developments Australia, 3 other energy companies have permits to conduct exploratory drilling in the Great Australian Bight – Murphy Oil, Chevron and Karoon Gas, which potentially offers many years of work if projects move to a production phase.
33. If Australian jobs are filled by 457 visa holders on the initial Great Australian Bight drilling project we fear that Australians will never be employed in these waters.

34. It is the policy position of the AMOU that to protect local Deck Officer jobs and to protect the integrity of our local maritime industry:
- The replacement of local workers by 457 visa workers should be prohibited;
  - Ship's Master and Ship's Officer should be removed from the 457 Visa Skilled Occupations List and Consolidated Skilled Occupations List;
  - Genuine labour market testing should apply to all situations where employers are seeking to engage 457 visa holders;
  - If after genuine attempts by employers to find suitably qualified Australians to fill vacant Ships Master and Deck Officer positions, the AMOU should be involved in process to identify suitable candidates; and,
  - Following this process if no suitable Australia Deck Officers are available foreign specialists may be engaged on a temporary basis with a stated maximum period of employment. An Australian seafarer must also be employed alongside foreign labour so that specialist skills can be passed on to local workers.
35. We submit that the Senate Committee should recommend that Australians should be given preference to work on oil and gas projects in the Great Australian Bight in all circumstances and that the Government rigorously enforces this preference.



APPENDIX 1

### TIMEFRAME FROM NEW ENTRANT TO MASTER

