

Developing an adequate skilled maritime workforce – A Young Professionals Perspective

Submitted by:

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It cannot be stressed enough that world shipping owes much of its prosperity to the availability a strong workforce. The Maritime Industry is currently in the process of major expansions on a global scale and if we are to build coastal capacity in Australia, we need to be aware of global trends which can have an adverse effect on locally made decisions. As a global industry with employees plying their trade worldwide we will have to compete on a global scale for manning against higher paid, better tax incentive providing regimes. The current new building rates, high charter rates and even the widening of the panama canal are indicative of the rise in the importance of shipping. As economic powerhouses such as the BRIC nations fuel trade, the industry will continue to expand and in turn effect Australia's skilled workforce.

There is a realisation globally of the need to address the ever increasing shortage of suitably qualified and experienced people, people who will help replenish and help steer a sustainable course for the Maritime Industry. The diminishing and aging workforce coupled with the conservative nature of the industry requires a radical change in the mindset of current leaders to ensure that as we progress through the 21st century we make substantial improvements to the industry making it attractive to a workforce under the age of 30.

Taking to account personal experience and observations, the general view that I have developed since joining the industry in Australia is the rather large age gap between the experienced and the not so experienced. The current state of the industry in Australia tends to tip the balance of scales in favour of the higher age demographic. The short term benefits to be gained are positive but in the long run the picture is not so rosy. Consideration must also be given to analysing the gender make up of participants in the industry, an industry which is typically seen as male dominated and blue collar.

Further during the inquiry, it is recommended that the committee look not just at the skills shortage at sea, but also on land. If coastal shipping in Australia is to truly prosper, then there is an urgent need to address the shortage of skilled shore based staff. The above views expressed are based on observations I make as a shore based maritime employee. The number of persons entering and remaining within the industry is far too small. There must be planned initiatives by both Government and Industry to address this lack of interest in the maritime industry as a career of choice. Support must be given to organisations such as Young Shipping Australia which I founded last year whose objective is to present a platform in which young professionals within the maritime industry are given the opportunity to collaborate with their peers, learn through education initiatives and promote shipping within the wider community. Employees within the shore based maritime industry in Australia are required to be goal and output oriented, flexible, highly competitive, hard working, with high levels of initiative and able to withstand the unique demands and pressures of a demanding job, all for relatively poor wages. Therefore how is the industry able to attract a sustainable pool of talent when competing against better publicised and higher paying jobs.

Apart from the above there must also be a coordinated national effort to ensure that the link between sea based and shore based careers is strengthened with plans for smooth transition between the two. Sea going personnel must be given the ability to come ashore and to fit into

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the shore based structure of the coastal shipping network as they will provide a valuable insight, especially operational insight that shore based personnel will not have. Sound career paths must further enhance the planning process.

As for us current participants in the industry, the overwhelming challenge is one of sustainability and fundamental to that is getting government and industry to think well outside their customary norms. If the industry is to continue down its current path, we are in for some stormy times, therefore both government and industry are urged to actively work together to find well thought out and creative strategies to address the above issues.

As stated by INTERCARGO *"The quality of the industry ultimately depends on the quality of the people in it. It is increasingly difficult to draw the right calibre of entrants into the industry, both for shipboard and shore jobs. We need to improve the condition and the image of the industry so that those who serve in it can have a safe, rewarding and fulfilling career"*.

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