

Ship safe

Report released into the inquiry into the

Australian Maritime Safety Authority Annual Report 1996–97.

Today Mr Paul Neville MP, committee Chair, announced the committee's findings and 14 recommendations on ship safety.

Mr Neville said:

Shipping provides a commercial lifeline between Australia and its trading partners. It is vital that this mode of transport be operated safely. Otherwise, human lives, the marine environment and cargo will be endangered.

In listening to people with a range of perspectives on the shipping industry, the committee was struck by the challenge of developing and maintaining a *culture of safety*, rather than prescribing more rules that may be evaded by a few unscrupulous players. It is clear that Australia has played an important role, thus far, in developing such a culture of safety but there is still a major task ahead.

Many flag states, port states, classification societies, operators, charterers and other parties insist on high standards and act in a responsible manner. Others appear to adopt an approach which seeks to maximise short term returns, even at the expense of lives, cargoes, the marine environment and their own reputations.

This inquiry built on the findings of the earlier reports on *Ships of Shame*. Improvements appear to have been made primarily in the first four focus areas of the inquiry—quality of ships, operational issues, port state control, and crew training and competency. The committee is concerned that the fifth focus area, crew welfare, may have declined.

Members of the committee are appalled by the callous treatment of some seafarers. We heard reports of physical, mental and sexual abuse, as well as financial exploitation and inadequate accommodation. There should be no tolerance of such a culture of fear and intimidation.

The abuse and neglect of seafarers constitute both a violation of human rights and a serious risk factor for ship safety. While these are partly commercially driven, they ultimately derive from a fundamental lack of respect for human life, and are facilitated by a legal framework that can allow perpetrators to hide behind corporate veils or slip through jurisdictional cracks.

Further, Mr Neville said:

Attention should be paid to a ship as a social system as well as a means of transport and a workplace. Without this, the prospect of a global culture of safe shipping is remote. To this end, the committee recommends that the tragic incident involving the *MV Glory Cape* be further explored, that Australia ratify International Labor Organization Convention 147 and that the Commonwealth provide interim assistance for seafarers' welfare organisations.

Other findings include the following issues.

Flag states remain a potentially weak link in the chain of maritime responsibility. The committee supports the efforts of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in seeking to make flag states more accountable for the ships they register.

In view of the substantial commercial benefit to be gained by some from operating substandard ships, the committee recommends that AMSA should investigate the effectiveness of a port state control scheme that would provide a commercial incentive for ships to be operated responsibly.

The committee was shocked at the hours of duty required of some seafarers and regards the impact of fatigue as a serious safety risk. For example, the committee was told that a person who has been awake for between 18 and 24 hours has a similar level of performance to a person with a blood alcohol level of 0.05. The committee was also told of seafarers using amphetamines in order to stay awake. The committee recommends that fatigue levels be monitored and addressed by both AMSA and IMO and that the Commonwealth consider ratifying International Labor Organization Convention 180.

The committee notes the commitment to safer shipping demonstrated by many industry participants and urges these responsible players to maintain the pressure on substandard operators. Australia can be justly proud of AMSA's conscientious port state control program as well as its active involvement at IMO.

Under the **terms of reference** the committee inquired into, and reported on, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority *Annual Report 1996–97*. In conducting its inquiry, the committee's emphasis was on ship safety under five focus areas—quality of ships, operational issues, port state control, crew training and competency and crew welfare.

The committee received 33 submissions and supplementary submissions. It held a public forum in Sydney on 14 July 1998 in which 23 participants joined Members of the committee to examine ship safety issues. The committee thanks all those who so generously assisted the committee in its inquiry.

Copies of the report are available from Government Info Shop

Copies have been sent to each organisation which made a submission and to each witness who participated in the public forum.