

The Queensland Branch of the Nautical Institute held a 'Q and A' style seminar to celebrate World Maritime Day on Thursday, 15 October 2015. The Seminar was held at the premises of Norton Rose Fulbright in Brisbane, and was attended by more than 40 participants from various sectors in the maritime industry, including marine surveyors, serving mariners, marine pilots, maritime lawyers, marine insurers, shippers, and shipping line representatives.

The panel members comprised Ms Teresa Lloyd from Maritime Industry Australia Ltd, Captain John Lloyd from the Australian Maritime College Tasmania (and shortly to take up a position as Chief Operations Officer at the Nautical Institute), and Mr Peter Keyte from the Port of Brisbane Corporation. The seminar was facilitated by Mr Graham Miller of Slingshot Consulting, a former naval aviator.

The theme of the seminar was 'Coastal Trading: Full Ahead or Full Astern?', which is a topical subject in Australia given the introduction of new legislation into the Australian Parliament which will substantially change the regulatory landscape of coastal trading and is widely predicted to destroy what little is left of the Australian flagged coastal fleet (15 vessels).

Mr Ernie van Buuren, partner at Norton Rose Fulbright, opened the seminar with a brief outline of the regulation of coastal trading in Australia, beginning with the 1912 Navigation Act, the reforms in 2012 that were intended to revitalise Australian shipping, and then considering the current bill that is before the Australian Parliament.

The panel members then outlined their views on a range of themes that might be broadly summarised as follows:

- The role of cabotage in promoting a viable domestic shipping industry. Views spanned the broad spectrum of positions from protecting the domestic shipping industry, which is the usual policy position of every developed nation, through to complete de-regulation and opening the coast to foreign vessel competition, as has occurred in New Zealand;
- the comparison with aviation, where cabotage appears uncontroversial and politicians generally provide wholehearted support to protecting the Australian aviation industry;
- the need to 'reset' the wages and conditions of Australian seafarers, as they seem to have developed out of kilter with broader community salary expectations, as well as beyond the international norm for seafarers salaries, even in first world nations;
- the Australian International Shipping Register (AISR) has no vessels on it due to a failure of policy in providing the appropriate fiscal settings to encourage shipowners to register their vessels on the AISR;
- generally, overcoming the ignorance and disinterest of our legislators from all sides of politics to ensure the development of solid bipartisan policy. For there to be a viable coastal shipping industry, the maritime industry needs a broadly supported policy in order to escape the cycle of legislative amendments based upon sectoral interests that has been the norm for the past 40 or 50 years. The problem is of course that there is 'no votes in boats' and that most politicians perceptions of the maritime industry is of a ship grounding incident in the Great Barrier Reef;
- the need for maritime skills in Australia, and where those skills are going to be developed for the future. If Australia is going to have a policy of importing maritime skills into this country, then that policy ought to be explicit and planned for, rather than the ad hoc policy that seems to be in place at present;
- alternative pathways for developing maritime skills were discussed, including the placement of Australian cadets with foreign shipowners, the extent to which that is happening already, and the mechanisms by which that might be better achieved in the future; and

- the maritime industry provides a safe, efficient and cost-effective alternative to road transport in Australia, yet encouraging the switch from road to sea is fraught with risk for shippers because of the shipping service ceases for some reason, then they are captive to road transport, and their costs will increase.

A lively question-and-answer session then ensued, ably facilitated by Mr Miller, and the audience were fully engaged in the conversation.

It is to be hoped that seminars such as this will increase awareness and promote a consistent approach to the issues facing the maritime industry in Australia.

John Kavanagh,

Honorary Secretary, Nautical Institute Queensland Branch