



# **SUBMISSION TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON SHIPPING**

## **ELIMINATING SUB-STANDARD SHIPPING**

**By**

**The Australian Marine Pilots' Association**

### **1. Overview**

From a pilot's perspective, there has been a fundamental change to the general shipboard environment that has resulted in higher risks during the movement of ships in confined waters. Consequentially, this has placed greater demands on pilots and requires them to perform at higher levels of skill and competence.

The new environment has also heightened the need for pilots to be able to act independently of any commercial interest in their port in order to be able to facilitate the international harmonisation of shipping safety.

### **2. Pilots' responsibility**

Communities around the world elect their governments to protect their interests and maintain or enhance their quality of life.

By facilitating the throughput of cargo, ports are the lifeblood of the community they serve.

Governments are responsible to the communities they serve for ensuring that the ports' infrastructure is protected from the risk of damage, the ports' channels are protected from the risk of blockage (through a marine incident) and that the marine environment is protected from the risk of pollution. The risk in each of these cases comes from ships that traverse the ports waterways.

Governments discharge their responsibility to the communities they serve by licensing appropriately qualified persons to take charge of the ships which wish to traverse the ports waterways. Pilots therefore serve the communities that license them (not, as many believe, the shipowner). In doing so, the interests of the shipowner are also protected.

### **3. The Shipowner**

The traditional shipowner believed, that in order to be in the business of shipping, a well found, properly maintained ship, with a well trained, competent crew was needed. Unfortunately, this type of shipowner is losing prominence.

Today, a growing number of shipowners hide behind myriad offshore shelf companies and farm their ships out to faceless management companies and crewing agencies to run. Hand in hand with their emergence, we have witnessed a dilution of the Master's authority and a reduction in crew numbers. Often now crew are poorly trained and poorly paid and ships not as well maintained.

The standard of the ships which ply the world trade routes has consequently dropped. And when these ships approach our coasts the threat they pose to the marine environment significantly increases. This is compounded by the fact that many port authorities, in order to maximise revenue, allow ships with minimal margins of safety to enter their port – margins of safety that would not have been contemplated years ago.

#### **4. The Seafarer**

Seafaring has become a third world profession. In years gone by most people (from first world countries) went to sea for romance and adventure and a way of life that was comparable, and perhaps better, than life ashore. There was also a certain camaraderie on board and a loyalty which existed between the shipowner and those who sailed his ships.

But today it's a different story. In his quest for profit maximization the shipowner has reduced his manning and has opted for cheap, poorly trained labour from third world countries. There are language and cultural problems as people from various backgrounds are thrown together to live and work in a total institution. This leads to low morale, stress, fatigue and loneliness. It's not an existence to which young men and women growing up in first world countries aspire.

Unfortunately, it's an existence that those living in already poor conditions will choose. Perhaps for them, life on board is better than life ashore. These people can be exploited. They do not have the benefit of quality education and training but they can know enough to sail a ship from A to B.

#### **5. The New Era**

The emergence of this culture has coincided with the decline in the master's authority and his ability to make decisions as the shipowner's representative.

What we are witnessing is the emergence of a new era in seafaring. Ships will, in the foreseeable future, always be needed to carry the world's trade. But they will be manned by third world crews with enough training to enable them to sail the ship across any ocean from point A to point B. The master will no longer make decisions on behalf of his owner. With vast improvements in communications, these will now be made ashore. Once the ship arrives in port, a team of specialists will board and take over the running of the ship's *in-port* business. They will pilot it, load it, discharge it, repair it, maintain it, survey it, store it and then leave it. The ship's crew will then take over and sail the ship to the next port where another team of specialists will once again board and take over.

Pilots will be the first of the *in port* specialists to board the ship when it arrives and the last to disembark when the ship sails.

## 6. The Risks

The growing concern for the environment calls for greater skill on the part of the pilot. The public and the industry are now demanding higher levels of precision in navigation in pilotage waters. And so they should because the risks continue to escalate:

- Economies of scale are pushing up the size of ships. Ships get bigger yet the physical size of ports remains relatively unchanged.
- Escalating building costs and an over supply of tonnage have produced an aging world fleet where breakdowns and mechanical failure are becoming more common.
- Ships manned with poorly trained crews have become the rule rather than the exception.
- Commercial pressures require ships to move in all weathers, in all states of visibility and without delay.

This environment now places a greater onus on the pilot.

Recent studies have identified the weakness in the pilotage system as being the fact that success hinges on the performance of one person (the pilot) alone. The need for a pilot to be supported by a competent bridge team has been highlighted.

In modern shipping therefore, the ship's bridge team plays an important role in the execution of the pilotage. Its performance is fundamental to safe pilotage yet there is little evidence of money being invested to train ship's officers in bridge team procedures.

By failing to make this investment, shipowners are presenting their ships at the pilot boarding ground, ill-equipped to execute the most dangerous part of the voyage - the pilotage.

## 7. The pilots' role in the international harmonisation of shipping safety

The fact that a ship can sail from one port, theoretically, in a seaworthy state and arrive at another port in an unseaworthy state, indicates a failure to respond to or report/communicate the deficiency.

The failure either stems from the master fearing retribution from his owner or incompetence or the turning of a blind eye at the previous port.

Pilots are at the front line and perhaps in the best position to report deficiencies. How zealously they carry out this obligation depends on the commercial pressures that come to bear, either from the port authorities or the ships' owners.

This highlights the need for pilots to be able to act independently and make judgments independently. They need to be able to act in the best interests of, and on behalf of, the community that licenses them, independent from anyone with a commercial interest.

Pilots are in the best position to report and respond to deficiencies. (The response might be a refusal to sail a ship until it reaches a certain level of fitness.) This can be achieved if there is an international effort made (through IMO) to guarantee the pilots' independence. If the effort is

not international, we will always have ships arriving at ports with deficiencies simply because (the pilot at) the previous port did nothing about it.

As independent brokers (completely detached from any commercial interest), pilots can play a key role in eliminating sub-standard shipping.

**Captain Steve Pelecanos**  
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