

ICONS Meetings in Washington 13-15 September 2000

On 13 September the Commission visited the Liberian International Ship and Corporate Registry in Vienna, Virginia, where they were briefed on the Registry's progress in developing registry services to support quality in shipping. The Registry supported a greater involvement of Flag States in promoting and enforcing standards for shipping and noted the commercial benefits to ship owners that flow from quality shipping and high standard registry services. The lack of adequate port reception facilities was a concern.

The Commission continued public hearings in Washington DC on 14 September, meeting with the US Coastguard, Department of State, unions, maritime consultants and the Dominica Maritime Registry. The meeting discussed recent moves by the USCG to add charterer information to its targeting matrix for port state control, possible rewards and incentives for quality shipping, limitations of the port state control mechanism and the need for more emphasis on ILO requirements and social conditions on board vessels.

Other concerns included the need to address the financing and insurance of shipping, international actions that could be taken to hold Flag States accountable for how they meet their duties as registries, and the impact of expanded liability regimes on standards. There was support for greater transparency of information, including charterer and cargo interests, and raising public awareness of substandard shipping operations.

The Commission also held private discussions with the American Chamber of Shipping. Issues discussed included the need for an international forum where the shipping industry can discuss safety initiatives and role models for best practices can be identified, and establishment of an international, no-blame confidential "near miss" incident reporting system for shipping to help the industry learn from incidents. The Chamber noted cooperative research being undertaken with the US Coast Guard into crew alertness/endurance management and discussed making this research more widely available to the international shipping industry. Concern was expressed about the impact of substandard shipping on market rates for quality shipping.