



International Commission on Shipping

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MEDIA RELEASE

Green Groups Have A Role To Play In Shipping Inquiry

The International Commission on Shipping (ICONS) believes Australia's environmental and green groups could make a valuable contribution to the ICONS inquiry into the world's merchant shipping industry.

ICONS Chairman, former Federal Minister for Transport, The Hon. Peter Morris, issued the invitation today, just days before ICONS begins investigations in Sydney on standards in the Australian shipping industry.

The Sydney investigations are part of a world-first inquiry in which ICONS has been established to develop an international shipping code that improves safety and environmental compliance standards.

Mr Morris believes environmental groups have an important role to play in the inquiry.

"This is especially important for Australian environmentalists because of the nation's vulnerability to disasters created by sub-standard shipping operators," Mr Morris said.

"Australia has 36,000km of coastline and a fragile marine environment with unique features such as the Great Barrier Reef which will remain threatened as long as irresponsible fleet operators are allowed to operate across the world's waterways.

"The International Commission on Shipping provides an opportunity to bring together groups who share the belief that safety and environmental compliance standards in the shipping industry must be improved.

"We don't just want these people to be vocal when a shipping disaster occurs; we want them to contribute to a process that aims to improve international shipping standards and we would welcome their submissions to our Sydney inquiry."

ICONS was established last year by the International Transport Workers Federation to investigate ways to improve the safety of merchant shipping across the world's waterways.

The Sydney inquiry, which begins on Monday, July 24, is the first in a series of worldwide investigations that will take in India, Singapore, the Philippines, China, Hong Kong and Japan.

ICONS will present its report to the APEC International Shipping Safety Symposium in Sydney during March 2001.

"The European Commission on Shipping has labelled sub-standard shipping as the greatest potential threat to Europe's marine environment," Mr Morris said.

"Europe suffered one of its worst shipping disasters last December, when the *Erika* broke up and sank off the French Coast, spoiling over 400km of coastline with 15,000 tonnes of fuel oil."

"Pressure from importers and exporters to reduce freight costs has led to avoidance of crucial safety maintenance and the employment of less and less competent crew."

For further information contact:

The Hon. Peter Morris - ICONS Chairman
Tel: 02 4920 8310 or Mobile: 0418 835566
E mail: pfmorris@icons.org.au
Internet: www.icons.org.au