

International Commission on Shipping

Prestige?? When Will Europe Learn??

Europe had been on notice since the 12th December 1999 that cargo owners chasing cheap shipping rates would ensure a repeat of the tanker ERIKA disaster unless cargo owners were forced to carry responsibility for the damage ships carrying their cargoes may cause, Commission Chairman Peter Morris said today.

He said the chase for cheaper and cheaper rates by cargo owners without regard for the risks they created meant that the introduction of newer, safer and more modern ships was delayed by the continuing use of aged ships.

At 26 years the Prestige was an antique tanker that by its longevity carried inherent risks that demanded special attention and seacare. The only good feature about its loss was that no seafarers had died in the environmental disaster.

The Prestige was a classic creature of the arcane world of shipping. Owned in one country by a single ship company registered in another country, wearing the flag of another country, surveyed in a fourth country, carrying the cargo of a fifth country with interests that appeared linked to a sixth country.

There is a level of unavoidable costs that must be incurred to provide safe, efficient transport services and those costs are built into the final unit cost of a product, however small they may be.

Sea cargo owners, like users of other forms of surface transport, must become publicly accountable for their choice of transport and responsible for any damage caused by the ships they use. There is no case today for cargo owners to plead ignorance of the condition of the ships they use, especially in the oil trade Mr Morris said.

Mr Morris said that in its report, *Ships, Slaves and Competition*, the Commission had strongly backed the drive for full transparency in shipping and the urgent need for fair competition in shipping. Quality ship operators and their organisations speaking out for safe, quality shipping deserved support.

“Much of the work to make shipping safer over the past three years appears to have been futile when antique tankers clothed in secrecy carrying large cargoes of offensive fuel oil can drive through the heavily trafficked and sensitive seaways of Europe.”

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