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## EDITORIAL

# THE SEASON FOR PIRATES

**W**ould you believe it! As the end of summer nears we have received many reports of pirate activity around our coast.

Some are just well-found pleasure boat owners out to make a buck while the sun shines. Unfortunately many ex-commercial craft still displaying old Maritime Safety Authority numbers are also being used for hire and reward, even though they are out of survey. Even former fishing boats feature, with the most recent example being the *Happy II* working out of Tauranga.

It is reported that in some areas the pirates are busier than the bona fide operators. In saying this, the list of suspect operators is too long to fit on this page. So what do we do about this old and growing problem?

Granted, we are quick to complain in the club or bar. Equally, we are quick to criticise the officers of Maritime New Zealand for their apparent inaction. While not defending some of these officials, it would be fair to say that Maritime NZ has not been able to effectively enforce the Maritime Transport Act 1994 and control the high level of illegal activity we see around the coast. Or is it just perception?

Some say the officials are quick to visit the legitimate operator while ignoring illegal competition just along the pier. Some say the officials are weak and do not like the confrontation of being pirate policemen. Many others are less than complimentary in their accusations when saying that the officials no longer respect the source of confidential information.

In saying this, the industry itself is not without blame and could do more to assist. Yes I know that fears of repercussions are real and, equally, we have one of the hardest working pirates in my patch at Half Moon Bay, yet Maritime NZ appear to be helpless. But is this any reason to let them get away with it?

Because of the purported regular breaches of confidentiality of complaint sources by Maritime NZ staff, and the very real concerns of repercussions on operators who do complain, *Professional Skipper* magazine has decided to be proactive and give the commercial operators an opportunity to voice their complaints in confidence.

After discussions with the New Zealand Marine Transport Association, and after seeking legal advice, we have sponsored the web site [www.pirates.net.nz](http://www.pirates.net.nz) which will give operators the chance to lodge a complaint and dob in a suspected pirate confidentially. This simple site and complaint form will

still require all complainants to give us their name and contact details for our verification purposes. Only the complaint information pertaining to the suspected pirate will be forwarded to Maritime NZ. Once they have investigated the complaint, the outcome will be forwarded to the complainant and posted on the web site. Remember, photographic evidence is good.

If the industry is going to control this problem, we must step up and take responsibility.

Another key issue to hit the media and television in January was an incident involving the fishing charter vessel *Pursuit* and the vessel *Tangaroa* 12 miles off the eastern coast in the Ranfurly trench. While this incident is being investigated it would be improper of us to comment further, except to express concerns with comments from the *Tangaroa's* skipper in the media about tribal fishing grounds. Sorry, this one will not wash.

Already we have the Treaty of Waitangi Settlement Act 1992 and the Customary Fishing Regulations in place. Maori have signed off these two important documents and compensation paid. The outcome of these two pieces of legislation, whether we like it or not, means that for 99 percent of the time, when Maori fish to feed their families they now do so under the amateur fishing regulations, the same as all New Zealanders.

The master of the *Tangaroa* would do well to remember this, and when he is fishing in the company of other vessels there are traditional protocols that have existed for as long as I can remember about how we act and respect each other on the water. It's always worth remembering that the day could come when one requires help a long way off the coast as night falls, and the only help on hand is the fellow operator you have just spent the last few years abusing.

Now, on to nicer things. This issue is our 50th as we approach 10 years of publishing *Professional Skipper*. During this time our past journey makes interesting reading, and I have to say that today we still face some of the problems the industry was faced with a decade ago. On the plus side, our maritime industry remains as dynamic as it is diverse, and as always, it remains a pleasure to be a part of it.

Keith Ingram, Editor