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A TIME TO FOCUS ON THE IMPORTANT ISSUES

As we go to press, we read of the tragic loss of a Royal New Zealand Navy seaman who lost his life in a freak accident involving the launching of a seaboat at sea from *HMNZS Canterbury*.

While it is inappropriate to speculate as to what went wrong, these details will emerge from the Navy's court of inquiry, and any following investigation review by Maritime New Zealand or the Transport Accident Investigation Commission.

I think we have it on good authority that the Navy will pull out all the stops to determine the nature and cause of the accident to ensure that we all learn lessons from it.

What I will say is this unfortunate accident should in no way reflect on the *Canterbury* or her ship's company, as she has been purpose-built for her role as a tactical support ship, and her crew is currently undergoing extensive training at sea.

The launching of seaboats at sea is always inherently dangerous and a calculated risk. Every opportunity must be taken to train the sailors involved in this activity, because she is required to launch the seaboat in rough or Southern Ocean conditions, where boarding parties are required as part of her fisheries protection role. It's part of their job in protecting our coast.

Equally, the seaboats might be called upon to transfer or rescue injured sailors from yachts dismasted in a storm, or any manner of small-craft emergencies at sea. We expect the Navy to be able to do its job and rescue these people.

Conversely, in the merchant or commercial world, it is rare to launch at sea a rescue boat in open ocean conditions unless there is a dire emergency. We all know by past experience when we have had the tragic sinking of ships that up to half their rescue craft may become inoperable or damaged during launching.

Essentially, I am suggesting to the lower deck lawyers and scuttlebutt merchants that they do not jump to conclusions. We know the boat rope broke at a critical time: it was an accident. The court of inquiry will determine why it broke and the events that followed. So let's not start castigating the ship or her crew with troubled rumours.

We don't wish to be the bearer of bad tidings, but unfortunately it's often difficult to remain positive as the inshore maritime industry continues to struggle. However, positive we must remain.

I refer to page 70 of this issue, which clearly outlines the real risks of the restricted limits shipping industry losing its political voice in the form of the New Zealand Marine Transport Association.

For too long now the association has struggled with insufficient funds to represent

not only its members, principally the larger-paying members in the major ferry tourist vessel operators, but also there has been a growing absence of support from the social, tourist and recreational charterboat fleet.

Granted, many of these operators are what are affectionately known as "romantics", or good, part-time operators who run a very tidy operation and do fewer than 100 days a year.

Then there are the free-loaders, who just arrive, trim their costs, undercut prices to attract business and generally leave a trail of devastation behind them. And finally there are the recognised full-time operators who run efficient and respected charter businesses. The problem is that nobody wants to pay for industry representation. Everyone is quick to complain, and I can foresee that unless these operators do something about it they will be next complaining about losing their political voice and lobby organisation. Now is the time to decide.

In moving around the traps, it is heartening to hear that our recognised and respected boatbuilding yards are busy, with many new vessels due to be launched this summer.

Already we have seen the latest commercial cray boats from the deep south. From Tauranga comes the latest in luxury charterboats. Wanganui will soon launch Auckland's new police boat, the *Deodar III*. And there are more to come, from ferries to diving boats, trawlers to tugs.

Meanwhile, the Navy is awaiting delivery of the first of the new inshore and offshore patrol boats. So there is good stuff happening out there. It is not all doom and gloom.

But let's not forget that we need to be able to man these new vessels with qualified and trained crew. Sadly, this is another area where we are currently failing. If our industry is going to continue to rebuild to meet the demands of the future, we need to encourage young people to step aboard and be part of our industry.

To do this, instead of looking at the many Third World countries offering seafarers by the dozen, with questionable qualifications, let's focus closer to home and support our marine-oriented youth organisations at the early beginning, such as Sea Scouts, Young Mariners, Sea Cadets, the Spirit of Adventure, and Coastguard Education. Unless we start investing in the youth of today for our future, we won't have a future.

In this issue we are proud to continue to bring the latest news and views from within our industry, and it's not all bad.

Keith Ingram, Editor