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THE YEAR ENDS WITH UNFINISHED BUSINESS

As 2007 draws to an end, it's disappointing to note that our manning levels still remain at a critical shortage, particularly in the area of engineers and skippers.

Operators in the ferry and tourist cruise markets are reporting difficulties in hiring good hospitality staff, especially sea-going chefs. Even the Royal New Zealand Navy, the protector of the nation, is facing critical shortages, particularly engineers.

While the Navy has a training programme for new recruits, it will take some years for them to become qualified. In an effort to address the immediate shortfall of good engineers and watchkeeping officers, the Navy has gone to the marketplace to recruit skilled adults from the trades, and in particular it is offering old salts short, fixed-term contracts to return to sea with the Navy to man the new Protector vessels as they come online.

Meanwhile, the problem of manning our coastal vessels remains. One can only hope that during the coming year, similar opportunities will be offered to both skilled staff and new entrants to encourage them to go to sea.

Our industry will need to think smarter to compete with shore-side competition, and offer good working conditions and pay scales.

In the previous issue, I gave the New Zealand Marine Transport Association executive a bit of swish. I am pleased to advise that the new governing committee has responded positively and established a larger ferry operator group. In November they held the first industry seminar and workshop tailored for the larger ferry and tourist vessel operators.

For the next step, the committee wants to set up a charter and workboat section, but for the association to help this important part of our industry, our operators need to contact the MTA.

I can only suggest to the many charterboat and small workboat operators who are not members that if they are committed to their future business opportunities they need to join the MTA, because as a lone voice they will be literally lost in our coastal waters.

There are significant issues ahead, including

- continuing changes with safe ship management
- management of fatigue at sea
- drug and alcohol use and abuse, and
- shared fisheries

Shared fisheries will have a particular impact on charter vessels working within the recreational system. The Minister of Fisheries, Jim Anderton, has clearly indicated that he will be introducing a catch and landing reporting regime on charterboats. We are unsure how this will happen.

We know that the MTA, as the only recognised national organisation, has been

invited to make comments and suggestions, and therefore it is vitally important that small operators are a part of this process.

And then we have depressing noises coming from local coastal Maori who are suggesting further controls on charterboats, including fishing levies, along with boat limits and reduced individual bag limits for anglers.

Is this unfair? Of course it is. Should we ignore it? Given the past track history of Maori successes in fisheries claims, I would suggest that we don't.

On a different tangent, I read that some dirty scumbags have just ripped a heap of medals out of the heart of the Waiouru Military Museum. This act has insulted the memory of many brave servicemen who fought for the freedom we all enjoy. This is not a case of stealing a few shekels to feed the family, so we shouldn't think that it's okay.

New Zealand is too small a country to hide in. Someone must have heard a whisper. My hope is that common decency will prevail and the perpetrators will be brought to justice, or at the very least, the medals will be returned.

As if this little rip-off isn't bad enough, we've got the Japanese heading into our Southern Ocean whale sanctuary to rip a thousand hearts out of this protected area. Not only are they targeting minke whales, but they've also added fin whales and the favourite of them all, our humpback whales.

These animals are the prime tourist attraction for our whale-watching operations in the South Pacific. Without the humpbacks, Tonga's tourism income would halve. And you can bet your last bottle of sake that if they spot the rare white humpback known as Migaloo, the temptation to stick a prickle in him will be too great, because according to some strange Japanese custom, the harpoonist who claims this whale will receive great honour and much kudos.

And yet our government, while it is doing the international talk, is failing to walk the talk. Shouldn't we be protecting our Southern Ocean whale sanctuary which 32 South Pacific countries have recognised from these northern hemisphere invaders?

If the diplomatic approach fails, maybe we should follow the protestors' lead and send a Navy warship or two down there and enforce the sanctuary boundaries.

As the year ends, from the team at *Professional Skipper* magazine we wish you and yours the very best for the festive season, and may the New Year bring new opportunities and the rewards that all seafarers justifiably deserve.

Merry Christmas,

Keith Ingram, Editor