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Letters to the Editor should be signed and carry the writer's full name and address.

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COLLECTIVE COSTS ADD TO INDUSTRY WORRIES

March 6 to 9 heralds the 10th Auckland International Boat Show on Auckland's Viaduct Harbour. This year, to mark the tenth anniversary, the organisers have extended the exhibition space and on-water display areas to ensure that visitors will be able to enjoy easy access and good viewing of the exhibits and the latest vessels afloat.

The show will be of interest to commercial operators, including owners, skippers and engineers, especially with the wide range of new electronics and new hull protection paints being exhibited. And of course the Te Wero Island is pavilion two is once again the home of the big engines and *Professional Skipper* magazine. So please make a point of dropping in for a chat.

Much has happened for the wider maritime industry over the holiday period that operators need to be aware of. The Ministry of Fisheries is holding a round of meetings aimed at those in the charterboat sector who participate in the recreational fishing scene, be it bottom-bouncing, fishing for snapper, deepwater hapuku, or the gamefish species like marlin, tuna and kingfish.

The ministry is looking to introduce a charterboat catch and landing reporting regime in an effort to obtain a quantifiable handle on the recreational catch. The cost of this is expected to be borne by the industry.

It is important that all charterboat skippers participate in these meetings and make contact with Phil Kirk at MFish Nelson. The dumb part is that the ministry is trying to run these meetings in late February and early March, the peak of the charterboat season.

I do not expect that there will be a good response because of the workloads, and the charterboat community will have to be relied on to voice its strong concerns directly to MFish and to this magazine.

But MFish is not alone in poor consultations. Maritime New Zealand is learning fast about the benefits of sending out consultation letters at Christmas and expecting a positive response by late January or early February. When will these bureaucrats learn that the best time for talks in the maritime industry is during their off-season.

In Maritime NZ's case, it's about dollars, and how they intend to increase the marine safety charges in an effort to raise some \$1 million to \$2.2 million from the inshore sector. In many cases this will mean an increase of \$1000 or so for a small operator, up to \$100,000 for the larger ferry companies.

Unfortunately, while this magazine and the Marine Transport Association tried to negotiate an extension of time until the end of March, this did not suit Maritime NZ's policy programme.

Please read the MTA column and the letters from the director of Maritime New Zealand in this issue for a full explanation.

The cost increases continue, with many operators now complaining about a new charge being applied by the safe ship management companies. It's called a membership, and coincidentally, the fee equals approximately the amount that Maritime NZ tried to save small operators by not requiring them to have annual inspections.

SSM manager Arthur Jobard of Maritime NZ has stated that there only need to be two-year and four-year out-of-water inspections along with a safety audit, and these could coincidentally happen in those same years.

In response to a question by operators about the legality of the new membership charges, Jobard replied, "It's not a Maritime NZ rule and if you are not happy, don't pay."

And there's more. Some of our district councils are now applying registration and commercial fees to operate in their areas. This is over and above the traditional wharf charges.

The sad part is that as these creeping collective costs increase, coupled with the high cost of fuel and other marine services, a lot of small operators who were just financially viable are now finding that their small business, be it full or part-time, is becoming a liability. The risk is that we will see them fall by the wayside as recognised commercial operators, only for them to continue their activities covertly as pirates.

Maritime NZ clearly has little ability to effect compliance on our existing pirate operators. We know that Maritime NZ is short of money, and having more illegal operators will only exacerbate the problem of pirates, while reducing the revenue pool available to Maritime NZ. In these challenging times, the director of Maritime NZ, Catherine Taylor, has given her commitment to investigate the problems. She does not have an easy task.

In the meantime, one of the first cost savings it appears that small operators implemented was to resign from the New Zealand Marine Transport Association. The very organisation with the voice to fight their battles is struggling to fight the fire at all levels of the industry, and needs both your membership for its mandate and fees to fund its work on your behalf.

Clearly, the future is in our hands. Are we being so unsafe to warrant these increased costs at all levels, or are the local authorities and government bureaucracy becoming top heavy and inefficient, and expecting us to pay the price. I will leave it to you to decide.

Keith Ingram, Editor