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A TIME TO REFLECT

Okay, we got what we wanted, a change in Government so why is every one so gloomy? Yes, we are seeing a significant downturn in the economy and the recreational boating market remains fickle. Yes, the outgoing Government were being less than honest with the books. But, as the tide turns, this downturn is creating opportunities we have not seen for many years for the commercial industry as many suppliers try to quit stock and the boat building and repair sector sharpen pencils.

As we look around the yards, most who specialise in commercial craft have projects on and more lining up, with the greatest development being alloy craft of all shapes and sizes. Barges, large and small, remain the flavour of the moment as more operators realise the advantages of these fast, no nonsense working craft. In thinking about this growing sector and the ever-increasing use of outboard motors on commercial craft, I struggle to understand why no outboard manufacturer or supplier, has woken up to this developing market for large outboard engines while the recreational market continues to soften. I guess there is a misconception that outboards are not suitable for commercial operators as they don't like petrol. What I do know is that outboards are appearing more and more on the backs of commercial craft and for most owners, the choice is a bit hit and miss because we have not done any real features on the attributes of various engines. Something our readers have asked us to look at in the New Year.

Now on to a more sensitive subject, namely dodgy boat builders of whom we featured two issues ago. Yes, we did a lot of research to enable us to raise the issue factually and yes, we gave a bit of swish to the surveyors and our parent organisation the MIA. Suffice to say, the MIA have taken our comments on board and are reviewing their policies. Maritime New Zealand is reviewing safe ship management and its surveyors over a number of issues. But the greatest response came from our readers, fellow boat builders and industry suppliers who fully acknowledged the magazine for having the guts to have a go and put the problem fairly squarely out in the open for all to see. We can advise that subsequently, Kelvin Travers was judged

bankrupt on September 9, 2008 and further understand that both he and Ernie Travers are working for an Auckland yard finishing off a large yacht for export. Neither we, nor the industry, would deny either of them the right to work to feed their families but one can only hope they are both under proper supervision.

Unfortunately the story, when it went to press, was not complete as many more owners have subsequently contacted us with further problems on previous vessels we were unaware of. Plus, it would appear that these two may not have been alone in the dodgy work area, as we have been advised of problems in some other vessels not associated with them. In saying this, we have to draw the line and while we are happy to hear about other dodgy work, unless we investigate the complaint and survey the vessel, we really cannot pass judgement. When it comes to commercial craft, plan approval, construction surveyors, safe ship management and Maritime New Zealand, all have the responsibility to ensure that a vessel is built in accordance with the rules, its design and is fit for its purpose. In Ocean Law this issue, our legal advisors discuss the issue of "Caveat emptor" or buyer beware.

This aside, and while it was a timely reminder and needed to be raised, I can say with some confidence the commercial boat builders we deal with, all without exception have good premises, excellent trained staff and maintain a professional approach to their clients and industry colleagues at all times, and long may this continue.

One thing about the softening of the economy is that fuel prices have returned to more manageable levels, which is timely at Christmas because hopefully our fishermen, ferry and workboat operators will have something left over to enjoy a bit of Christmas cheer.

On this note from the team here at *Professional Skipper* magazine we take this opportunity to wish you and yours the very best for the new year and hope the jolly old fella in the red suit was kind and generous to you all.

Keith Ingram, Editor