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## WHO WILL BE GUILTY OF THE OIL SPILL?

Just when we thought fuel prices had dipped below a dollar at the pump and our various fuel cards or industry deals were still in place, the maritime industry now faces a double whammy. Unfortunately, it would appear that a number of fuel suppliers are now either pulling out of marine stops or are selling to agencies. Either way, it is the wider industry that will be affected. So what is the problem?

Many marine stops do not meet the new minimum oil company requirement of a million litres a year throughput. Granted, some installations are ageing and may be a future environmental risk, but is closing them the answer? A straw poll around the country revealed a number of marine fuel stops, from a variety of suppliers, have either closed, been handed over to or sold to the local operator or facility owner. The outcome has enabled the local operator to set whatever pump price they like. This could be up to 10c a litre, or more, than the price at the service station up the road. They can also refuse to accept any fuel card, even though that company might still be supplying the pump branded fuel.

This developing trend is of huge interest to affected fishermen, charter and workboat operators as well as ferry companies. Many are now finding that increasing fuel costs are eroding their margins or, they are taking direct action by self-refuelling with fuel purchased up the road. As I write this editorial, I have to advise that the one company not drawn into this gouging market is Gull. While they may be a smaller player in the market and, I believe, do not have a Gull fuel or discount card, their marine fuel stop is a similar price as ashore. I make this comment so as not to tar all companies with the same brush. Of the major suppliers, it would appear ... if the cap fits!

From my observations the developing trend of carting fuel in small 60lt drums or 20lt containers to vessels alongside or in a marina, has got to be of concern to our local authorities, Maritime NZ and all mariners, if only because of the increased risk of an oil pollution spill. How often, in the past, have we seen the industry blamed for every sniff of an oil spill? Heaps! We now have the very suppliers, the wealthy oil companies, walking away

from their own risk and becoming the authors of a far greater and uncontrolled risk of oil pollution. Will, 'it's not us they cried', be enough to mitigate their legal and moral responsibilities to the communities they serve and the wider public good? I suggest not.

Unfortunately our bureaucrats move slowly when faced with the might of the corporate oil giants and in doing so, are condoning the very activities that will invariably end up with prosecutions against the small operator, or local boatie, who gets caught with a small oil spill.

What is the answer? Fuel is fuel and the price should be competitive, at all marine stops, with the service station down the road. Just because the marine stop has no competition, it should not be an excuse to gouge the customer who has little choice. At the end of the day, he does have a choice, a choice many are exercising now by trucking fuel, in a wide range of containers or small tanks, and decanting it through funnels or nozzles with the increasing risk of a spill.

So, can we expect support from our environmental groups or support agencies? Probably not! Mainly because it is far too easy for bureaucrats to procrastinate and say 'we can not be seen to be assisting industry, or anyone for that matter, in gaining an economic benefit', even though the marine environment may be at risk. Far better to prosecute the small offenders, as this will make the agency look like it's doing a great job in the eyes of Government. Yeah right! I apologise to readers if I am starting to sound a tad cynical. It's just so frustrating when, by economic whim, the corporate oil giants can abrogate their responsibilities and drive consumers into an environmental risk situation.

On a brighter note, we the team, are once again proud to bring this issue into your homes and offices, be they floating or land based. We have tried to deliver a diversity of news, views and incidents as well as the latest deliveries in new craft, along with a bit of industry lifestyle tossed in.

Keith Ingram, Editor