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EDITORIAL

EVEN TODAY THE DOLLAR RULES

As the maritime industry conference season draws to a close, with the last being Aquaculture New Zealand on November 5 and 6, it is interesting to reflect on just where the various sectors are at present.

In the far north the oyster farmers are back in business after a lengthy battle with councils in an effort to ensure that they get a better management control on the public's poo's and wee's department.

Our charter boat industry has knuckled down and, by and large, is coping with the economic down turn, especially with the large drop in tourists. Likewise our passenger ferry fleet reports with some caution commuter numbers being reasonably stable, tourism down and senior citizens taking advantage of the off peak free public transport are up. Meanwhile our hard working workboat fleet just keep beavering away at doing what they must do in every port.

Sadly, the fishing fleet is still in decline as we watch more and more fishing boats retire to be sold cheaply into recreational or charter market or lay languishing in our backwaters waiting to die. The sad part is the loss of the generations of fishing families to our communities as many of our young seafarers opt to come ashore. Why is this? Is the burning question to which the most common response is the lack of availability of quota, the high cost of leasing ACE, coupled with the ever volatile market in fuel prices and poor returns at the markets for fish, our smaller fishing families just can not make ends meet. This, in itself, has a huge impact on the social and economic viability of many of our fishing ports and their supporting infrastructure, something the recent documentary "The Great New Zealand Fishing Scandal" tried to raise.

If you have not seen the DVD, please make the effort as the documentary raises a number of pertinent questions, many of which remain unanswered today. In this issue Oceanlaw covers the legal aspect of the debate and we have reviewed the documentary and have to say the film makes for a compelling argument of the rights to maximise the best economic return for the quota owner versus the social, cultural and economic return for the New Zealand communities. Cheap wages and poor conditions are rife within the foreign charter vessels and they continue to get away with it. How can this be? If we likened it to the horticulture industry ... our orchard owners

must provide housing, wages and working conditions that meet with the New Zealand Department of Labour standards, and yet the FCVs slip under the radar and they are encouraged to do so by the fact its our New Zealand companies who charter them in many cases know that you get what you pay for. Coupled to this is the FCV's ability to use large non-environmentally friendly heavy trawl gear, along with on board processing which denies our shore side factories any ability to use local labour to value add to the product as the catch is invariably transhipped directly to foreign markets for value adding processing offshore.

Worse still, is the low level of observer coverage because of these poor onboard conditions? We have no idea just what or how much non-quota species are disappearing into these factory ships meal plants. What we do know is that they can leave a trail of devastation on the sea floor behind their ships and our foreign crew don't give a shit! For they know, no difference. Many have already destroyed their homeland fisheries and we are hiring them to do the same down under. Yes, it is a moral issue. The New Zealand way of life, and the protection of our natural environment and its people, has been in the forefront of our nation's moral standing since its inception. Our nation lives, stands, and will fall, if we do not preserve our natural resources for and on behalf of our people.

I well remember the strong and compelling arguments for the establishment of New Zealandisation in our deepwater fishery, which was a success story at the time. We caught our fish, added value and our fishermen and factory workers had money in their pockets. Now we see the corporate fish owners, including Maori corporate fish managers saying, the fish is ours, to fish how we like, the rest of New Zealand can go to hell. It's all about profits for the least cost.

Interesting that, in a little over a decade, we have seen the demise of our commercial inshore and deepwater fishery and its people. All because of corporate greed for the almighty dollar and our government chooses to remain silent. This situation is now so serious that it demands a commission of enquiry ...

Keith Ingram, Editor