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EDITORIAL

JUST WHEN WILL COMMONSENSE PREVAIL?

In following the sad saga of the *Princess Ashika*, as more evidence is revealed, the past events now being unveiled are moving from the sublime to the ridiculous. And yet, I can see parallels with what is happening here when reviewing our own safe ship management system

First, a quick update from Tonga. The Royal Commission has now heard that apart from a cursory glance, there was no due diligence process or formal pre-purchase surveys and no inspections of the ship either alongside or on a slip as one would expect. The director of marine now admits to signing certificates for unseaworthy vessels and Mr Joneses now shares responsibility for the sinking of the ferry. The questions; has there been any corruption, or improper payments or negligence of duties, are only now being revealed. Or was it just total incompetence and possibly the island way? I have said it before, ships go to the Pacific Islands to die and until we can turn around this mindset and ensure that we have standards that ensure vessels are fit for purpose to work the Pacific Islands, the sad demise of the *Princess Ashika* will not be the last.

So let's take a look at what's happening closer to home in regards our inshore and coastal fleet of small commercial craft. Here we have the opposite with an over regulated safe ship management system and qualifications standards. A system that one could be forgiven for not thinking that it has evolved over time, by the hands of people who had nothing better to do, than to justify their own existence by creating more rules for an already over burdened inshore shipping industry. Then we had others who added their bit to the pot to ensure ongoing commercial viability, by insisting on the need for new qualifications and higher standards and systems. To add insult to injury we now have a system where we have a checker, checking up on the checker and its associated doubling up on costs.

I do not want my comments to reflect solely on the training and safe ship management providers because they too, have become so over regulated. It would be fair to say that even they are struggling with trying to deliver a satisfactory outcome for clients within the current rules structure. Is it not past time that some of our key rules effecting qualifications, manning and safety inspections of vessels be given a good shake to drop out the crap? It's really quite simple, all we need is for the vessel to be fit for the purpose it is being used for and the operator or skipper to be fit for purpose to operate this vessel in its area of operation.

It's not rocket science! How we ever got into a situation of where young people must now pay up to \$2500 to get the basic qualifications for a \$15 an hour job, I do not know. Coupled to this, we have developed a situation of two standards. One being the new Coastguard Skipper qualifications, which hold limited commercial application outside of Coastguard, but, are recognised overseas as being suitable to command a commercial or hire vessel and the MNZ approved commercial skippers qualifications which are not recognized. Plus, you can get a student loan to study the Coastguard qualifications, but sadly, you do not qualify for the MNZ inshore and coastal qualifications. Is this just a case of bureaucracy gone wrong or has someone just stuffed up? Or, is there an ulterior motive?

This is something the director of Maritime New Zealand is now well aware of and is trying to address during the current Ops-Qual review, of which the first report and consultation document is due for release at the MTA seminar on March 10, this year. Hopefully the director and her team have listened to the growing concerns and taken onboard the simple philosophies of 'fit for purpose' or even better the 'KISS' (Keep it simple stupid) principle and applied this to their review. Either way all will be revealed shortly and then we will have the opportunity to make informed comment.

Just so as they are not forgotten, the Ministry of Fisheries is about to release their new charter boat registration and catch reporting system for consultation, once again at the MTA seminar. The Minister has clearly stated that he will have charter boat catch reporting introduced by October 1, this year. We understand that all charter boats will be required to register as part of profiling the industry and if you are one of those who do not fish then you will be required to file a nil return. In implementing charter boat reporting the Minister, Phil Heatley, has stated that the system will not be onerous or a cost burden on the charter boat fraternity. He says he needs better information on recreational catches and this is one source that must be used.

To be a voice heard, I strongly recommend that, in their own interests, all skippers of charter boats, big and small, become financial members of the NZMTA.

Keith Ingram, Editor