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EDITORIAL

## SIMPLICITY WILL BE THE KEY

As we go to press, I am mindful of the recent anniversary of the *Princess Ashika* tragedy on August 5, along with the dreadful loss of 74 lives.

If nothing else, this event is enough to focus one's mind on the safety of our ships at sea. But are we learning the lessons? It's all very well to have a vessel fit for purpose if the crew are not, and that is what appears to be happening now.

The Australian/New Zealand government-funded temporary replacement ferry *Ajang Subuh*, built in 2008 with all the safety gear and aids to navigation, is reported to have run aground twice and is now operating with seriously damaged propellers. And we are letting this happen. It's our taxpayer money, so where are the safety controls and just who is responsible? Or are we happy to let Pacific Islanders' lives be put at risk.

Meanwhile, closer to home, our local maritime industry has tended to focus on Maritime New Zealand's pending changes to our safe ship management, because SSM appears not to have improved safety within the domestic fleet since its introduction. The director of Maritime NZ's statement that we have a mediocre safety record has not been supported by either facts or answers to our question of who are we being measured against.

If we are being measured against our Pacific Island neighbours, I would suggest we would rate very highly. If we are being measured against Australia, once again, taking into consideration that we are an island nation and most of our inshore limits cannot be regarded as inshore in the truest sense of the word, we rate equally highly.

Plus, when one considers the amount of fish caught at sea, the tonnage freighted on our coast and passengers carried, I would argue per head of population – 4.2 million versus over 10 million carried annually – our record is not all that bad.

When trying to do any analysis based on Maritime NZ's obscure figures, I strongly believe Maritime NZ has not taken our general improved culture of reporting into account.

We appreciate Maritime NZ does receive complaints from interested parties who get a bit precious when they see their name or vessel in the accident reports in *Professional Skipper*. This is mainly from those who have failed to report or get caught out.

On the plus side, the industry now has a clear view and accepts that if they have an accident and it is reported, it will appear in the magazine. For this very reason we have seen an increase in reporting of accidents, incidents and mishaps, because operators know if they do not file a report the other party or observers might. Clearly, publishing the summary

accident reports to industry readers has been a good tool to improve reporting as well as providing good lessons in, "There but for the grace of God go I". On the down side, it runs the risk of making our own stats look bad.

Whatever happened to the simple philosophy of ensuring a vessel is fit for the purpose it is being used for and that the master and crew are fit to operate it in the area of operation.

Seriously, our industry is in a state of change, and to add to whether we will have safe ship management or MOSS, the marine operator safety system, in future, Maritime NZ is also reviewing our operational limits and qualifications. Not before time, I might add.

The operational limits and qualifications review Maritime NZ is undertaking is the most significant review of our restricted limits shipping industry since the repeal of the Shipping and Seaman's Act.

We can embrace this opportunity to get rid of the dead wood, but are we brave enough to start with a clean page. I believe we need to.

Let's sit down and start from scratch, look at what our maritime industry needs going forward. Let's look at what we need to ensure our ships and crews are fit for purpose and not what some may need to stay in business.

Most operators have no desire to be unsafe. All they ask for is a safety system that is simple to understand, easy to apply and cost-effective. While the public deserves to have confidence in the safety of the vessel they are about to travel on, the most complex safety system in the world will not attract extra bums on seats or save lives.

We all operate in a competitive, cost-conscious market and the price of compliance should be comparative.

On the day we went to press I was heartened to hear that the MNZ OPs QOL team have been listening to the industries pleas for simplicity.

For the commercial industry, we have yet to see the economic light at the end of the tunnel. For most it's a case of knuckle down, get the best prices for service and get on with business as best we can. Under MOSS, will they still have this freedom of choice?

For many, operating costs and the cost of compliance are now the most significant part of their businesses expenses and the line between survival or going bust is beginning to blur.

The recent demise of Kawau Island ferry service and Rueben's Auckland Water Taxis is an example of more economic tragedies to come.

Keith Ingram, Editor