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EDITORIAL

STCW RAISES A BURNING QUESTION

We have a fair bit happening that will have a serious impact on the way the restricted limits shipping industry will go about its business in future.

On the one hand we have the Ministry of Fisheries introducing catch reporting and registration of all charter boats which take out amateur fishers. Operators who have so far been identified by MFish will have received their application forms to become an “approved” amateur charter vessel operator.

Hello! Does this presume that what most of us have been doing for the past decades is not approved? Seriously, I have to say that on this occasion MFish policy has lost it. The complex forms and amount of personal information being sought is pushing the privacy boundaries for the simple task of seeking operators’ support to provide clients’ catch information.

Needless to say, the charter boat community is up in arms, with many threatening to take their boats out of survey and drift under the radar, taking out their network of established clients as friends. That’s not something we want as an industry.

Add to this the pending changes to safe ship management, with the introduction of MOSS, the maritime operator safety system. From my reading it is intended to straighten up our safety system to what was originally envisaged when SSM was first introduced.

That is, the vessel must be fit for purpose for the role and area it is intended to operate in, and the skipper and/or crew are fit for purpose to operate it. Pretty simple stuff, one would have thought. Let’s hope it remains so.

Coupled to this, we have the Ops-QOL review going on at the same time, in which the inclusion of STCW-95 is causing much consternation among operators, as you will read in this issue. Clearly there is some confusion and I make the following comment in an effort to clarify the debate.

Currently, vessels of any size operating in enclosed waters are not regarded as seagoing. Likewise, all recreational, fishing and naval vessels are exempt, as are vessels under 20m, as these are not deemed to be ships under STCW requirements.

We have around 1500 New Zealand seafarers working offshore who rely on New Zealand maintaining IMO White List status. These seafarers have expressed concerns that the rest of the IMO world may not agree with our proposed classification of the 12 mile territorial limit as “closely adjacent to sheltered waters”.

The solution for the most part is to tweak the vessel exempt size up to 24m, as they will be able to operate anywhere outside of STCW requirements.

At present STCW-95 applies to all seagoing ships above 20m operating in waters beyond enclosed limits. Maritime NZ in its review is trying to resolve this problem by suggesting the 12 mile territorial limit might fit.

Instead of using a prescriptive limit, if we

adopt an approach that vessels under, say, 24m are not classed as ships under IMO STCW requirements, we can set whatever rules we like.

Increasing the domestic vessel size to 24m would remove 98 percent of the New Zealand inshore fleet from IMO scrutiny and not affect our White List status. Operators and Maritime NZ could then decide on the most appropriate certificates and manning levels in our coastal limits.

For example, vessels under 24m were not classified as a ship under the IMO, STCW and the engineering requirements would not be required within our coastal waters. MEC4, while not part of the STCW 95, still requires engineers to accumulate offshore sea time, which requires STCW training. So why is it being prescribed for our vessels?

This will then leave the opportunity for the industry and Maritime NZ to consult and develop suitable qualifications.

Training providers have told me they do not want to see the restricted limits shipping sector having to do any more training than is appropriate for their vessel’s operations.

Sadly, Maritime NZ was noticeably absent at the recent Manila diplomatic conference on the STCW, which adopted a number of key amendments known as STCW-10. The review included seven meetings over five years, with Maritime NZ staff attending the first two before withdrawing. Who was looking after our interests at this important forum?

Yes, there are issues with some of our coastal vessels over 24m, such as the *Awanuia*, the *Anatoki*, the *Pelican* dredger and Black Robin Shipping, which I don’t fully understand. However, as a tanker, the *Awanuia* must comply with STCW, no arguments. Likewise, Black Robin Shipping, which services the Chatham Islands, some 360 miles offshore, should comply. As for the others, maybe they would like to comment.

The real issue facing our industry will be dealing with the increased cost of regulatory and compliance training and our essential courses of less than five weeks (20 credits) for which the government has just withdrawn funding. This means the restricted limits shipping industry will now have to fund most of the training itself, which does not bode well for encouraging young people into our industry.

We face a manning crisis as older hands retire with a lack of fresh faces to take over from them. Poaching staff from other companies is no longer sustainable.

All this makes for interesting times.

Keith Ingram, Editor