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EDITORIAL

TOUGH TIMES REQUIRE A POSITIVE OUTLOOK

All too often I am conscious that the message in many of my editorials brings doom and gloom. This frustrates the hell out of me, but it's hard to remain positive when the industry faces so many problems.

So let's start on a positive note. The last Anniversary weekend saw the inaugural tugboat race on Auckland's Waitemata Harbour. This event was attended by some 25 working and retired tow vessels, and all of their skippers took the opportunity to demonstrate raw power, speed and agility, not only on the course but also in the gathering areas, where Jimmy Thompson's tugs were frequently locked in battle in a knuckle-up demonstration of pure pushing power.

It was an opportunity for this quiet sector of our workboat industry to show off and provide boaties and spectators with an excellent opportunity to see so many workboats in one place at one time.

The success of this event saw the release of a DVD, and a request by the Auckland Anniversary Regatta committee for the industry to repeat this event next year, on January 28.

On behalf of the tugboat organising committee, I give a heads-up, and ask industry participants who wish to take part to register their interest with this magazine as soon as they can.

September 10 and 11 will see the New Zealand Marine Transport Association hold its annual conference in the Bay of Islands. The programme is extensive, and will give participants the opportunity to discuss the many issues the restricted limits shipping sector of our industry currently faces.

It will be an ideal time for small operators to gather, listen to the debate and have their say. See page 74 for more details.

Around the country we have seen a growth in marine reserves and coastal national parks where the Department of Conservation is now targeting the maritime industry for payment of high concession fees to operate to these destinations, or even the prospect of visiting marine reserves.

Recent departmental information has revealed that while DoC is seeking to increase the number of marine protected areas in keeping with the government's biodiversity strategy, by its own acknowledgement it does not have sufficient funds to manage these MPAs. As such, it will be seeking to recover more revenue from the commercial industry via concessions, access levies and passenger landing levies.

So, instead of marine reserves becoming an opportunity they will be a liability, as they won't create business, and we will see lost opportunities, as many of these closed areas become environmental no-go areas and future havens for poachers.

But first, let's look at the state of the fleet and our crew training. Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of the NZMTA and training organisations, we have seen a slow take-up of registrations of new entrants in the certificated deckhand training. This is of concern, because the whole idea of the CDH is to provide an entry level for school-leavers seeking a career within our industry. But it's not happening.

Some schools are promoting the opportunity,

while career advisors are often nonplussed, responding with a frequent comment, "The industry is not glamorous enough." Young people have sporting interests and do not want to work weekends, and the pay is not good.

Our manning levels have deteriorated to such an extent that companies can no longer poach from other operators. No-one is training staff and we are having problems manning our vessels. The Inshore Launchmaster qualification is bordering on collapse. The training providers advise me that the number of ILM training programmes this year is 25 percent what it was three years ago. This certificate is the workhorse of our industry, and yet we pay peanuts to the masters holding the inshore qualifications. They are operating high-speed ferries and specialised work vessels for less than \$25 per hour.

Builders are getting \$50 per hour, sparkies and plumbers much more, and even a labourer or hammer hand can earn \$25 per hour in the construction industry and be home each night.

This in turn is going to create serious problems for operators of New Zealand Offshore Master vessels in the future, as we have very few following this career path. Be they workboats, charterboats, passenger ferries or tourist vessels, the problem stretches across the board.

Even the fishing industry is suffering. We have lost the sparkle, and the ability to attract young people. The glamour has gone, and in many cases it is has been replaced with the prospect of working on ageing and tired vessels, with long hours, weekends, poor working conditions and a hostile environment.

It's not going to get any better unless we do something about it. And this will cost. Improved working conditions, better pay, more modern vessels and equipment are necessary if the industry is to remain a serious contender in supporting the New Zealand community in this island nation.

The one glimmer of hope was the recent screening of the television documentary *Antarctic Encounters*, which focussed on a recent voyage to the Ross Sea by the *San Aspiring* to target Patagonian toothfish.

Sanfords can be proud of this ship, her crew and their fishing practices. The documentary highlighted the best the industry can offer. Young people are talking about the opportunity to walk on ice in the Southern Ocean. The *San Aspiring* is modern, her equipment is excellent, and she has given our industry the best breath of fresh air it has had for some time.

We need to make the most of these opportunities to promote ourselves, our ships, what we do and how we do it well in the media and the public eye. All too often we spend money to catch fish or attract passengers for the least possible cost. Clearly this approach is not working. It is time for the industry to reappraise its priorities and get our ships in order.

Keith Ingram, Editor