

INCREASED CHARGES

Dear Sir

I know you are busy as I can never get hold of you. So how you find time to publish the fine magazines we get in the mail I do not know. Best value for money, I can say, even if some of my mates keep trying to steal my copies. Bludgers!

I have a grumble, and on reading your last editorial you managed to highlight a few that the government should address. But don't hold your breath, as you have forgotten that the government is reaping the rewards from increased costs with GST and other charges.

My complaint is now with the ever-increasing berth and wharfage costs being allowed to be charged as part of seabed licensing or coastal occupation charges. I think someone needs to take a good look at all the charges and how they are based.

Is it fair for our local council or the Auckland Regional Council to charge wharfage and marina levies based on local land values when we know these values are going through the roof and are not reasonable to apply to water space.

These authority officials appear to be a law unto themselves and think it's a game. They dream up all sorts of charges, and if you don't like it they say to go to arbitration.

It's great when they are spending my tax money to do so. When will the government make both government and local body officials accountable for their actions? Because until they do so we will continue to see a stream of power-hungry officials making decisions that affect the wider boating public as nothing short of revenue-grabbing.

Are other readers feeling the same, and should we collectively resist?

John Hanson, Auckland

CREDITABLE INFORMATION

Dear Sir

You sail pretty close to the wind at times on behalf of the wider maritime industry. This is just to say we appreciate that you care and have the balls to say and do something about it. All too often when at sea no one is prepared to speak out and challenge authority.

One would have to say that *Professional Skipper* falls short of other magazines in political correctness, but stands head and shoulders above all others when it comes to creditable information, identifying the issues and action. Keep up the good work, because there are few who will say it as it is.

John Hepburn, retired master and cruising

TEDIOUS PAPERWORK

Dear Sir

I am writing to you out of sheer frustration regarding compliance for safe ship management on a 13.4m sportfishing vessel of which I am the master.

As each survey year comes round, more and more requirements are introduced. Some are sensible, but by and large most of these requirements are tick-off-the-box etc on the ever-increasing paper trail.

I find this extremely tedious, as the paper work is taking more time than the actual physical checks themselves and safety drills.

I don't have any gripe with our survey company as they are only administering the government department's requirements. However, perhaps they could advise Maritime New Zealand about some of our difficulties.

I certainly do have concerns with Maritime NZ officials who dream up this paper war for small operators. Have these guys ever operated commercial sportfishing craft? Common sense it appears has disappeared, which tells most inshore operators that these guys know jack shit about what we do.

As small operators we are faced with penalties if the paper trail is not absolutely correct. (Maritime NZ spot checks). And yet these inspectors fail to recognise that as family folk we are not about to do things that will affect our wellbeing and livelihood.

I am now informed that not only are log books, maintenance records and numerous other details required to be filled out, but also that the owner-operator has to self-audit on a regular basis. Come on - what's next!

Watchkeeping logs are a new requirement, so much so that I don't know whether I will have time to use the vessel for her original purpose. Perhaps we should not go to sea. Maybe I should give up this industry and leave it to the bureaucrats.

However, after 25 years of continuous seasonal fishing I am increasingly disappointed as to what is happening to our industry due to over-zealous bureaucrats attempting to justify their position in their government departments. The Resource Management Act is a perfect example of where bureaucracy has gone mad. Is this an example of interdepartmental one-upmanship?

What is required is assistance and simplicity, not over-the-top form-filling with the threat of persecution if we don't quite get it right.

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History demonstrates that our safety track record was second-to-none given the open-water sea miles travelled by our gamefishing vessels of old and yet we were safe. Unfortunately, it appears that we are now branded as unsafe by the ever-increasing rules being applied to us.

This distraction will cause many to lose the plot and make mistakes unnecessarily. Yet the small-boat operators only have to have some sort of plan and log. Why can this not apply to us, as we are still operating in the same waters and have operated logbooks safely for many decades. Someone needs to tell these buggers that every time they dream up a rule to justify their own existence it costs a small charterboat operator money and removes food from their family's table.

Who stands accountable? Not the rule makers, it would seem.

Gary Barnett, Papatoetoe, Auckland

UNLAWFUL CHARTERS

Dear Sir

A person can have a vessel in safe ship management and not be a licensed skipper. Moreover, that person can have the safe ship management certificate with the master section listed as Master: various Local Launch Operators. In other words, he or she can find a person with an LLO (or higher qualification) and, provided the vessel is a nominated vessel on the person's LLO, he or she can operate it.

It gets worse where we have experienced cases where a company owned a commercial vessel and kept it in survey so that it could gain access to prime berthage restricted to commercial operators.

When challenged that they appear not to be a bona fide charter boat, but rather a vessel of convenience, a legal wrangle

followed after checking that a change of ownership was not recorded with the SSM company, and they had not completed the necessary documents.

The vessel owner's lawyer cried foul and advised that the operator had signage in place and had in fact completed five charters using licensed skippers. When informed that the charters the owner had owned up to were in fact unlawful, as he was not legally in SSM, the lawyer went quiet.

The owner then contacted the SSM company, who inspected the boat. The deficiencies, which were numerous, were then listed. The owner, who is an unlicensed skipper, did not have a clue on seamanship or the SSM system. Within 10 days the owner had a valid SSM certificate with the master section listed as Minimum: various Local Launch Operators.

What is the point of the genuine charterboat industry complying with the rules when this guy should have had the book thrown at him? The reason he originally bought a vessel in SSM was to cheat the berthing regulations for the marina in a prime downtown location to jump the queue, because a commercial vessel has preference for a berth.

Several commercial trips were undertaken (as admitted by his lawyer) without a valid survey and SSM certificate. Shouldn't the SSM company have advised Maritime NZ and had the guy dealt with?

Safe ship management is not working and the cracks just get wider. And while Maritime NZ continues to fluster, all they have successfully achieved is to increase industry costs to the genuine charterboat operator. Meanwhile, the rogues continue to get away with flouting the law because Maritime NZ has no teeth.

Douglas Broune, Charterboat master

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