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## YES: WE STILL HAVE TO SUFFER FOOLS

Familiarity breed's contempt as the saying goes or complacency, either way it's something that is now creeping back into the maritime industry, be it pleasure or commercial.

The Christmas holiday period presented some good examples of where pleasure boaties disengaged brain and unfortunately, in some cases, with resulting sad loss of life. Why do I mention this? Because it could be much worse. There is a growing number of pleasure boat operators with either a distinct disdain for the rules of the road or are bloody ignorant. They not only take unnecessary risks and put their own lives in danger, they are also putting the lives of others at risk.

A clear example of this is shown by a growing trend for commercial operators to either misreport or underreport incidents at sea. In speaking to one skipper of a fast ferry, his comment was, "it can be a madhouse and even though we have an active flashing amber light, a lot of boaties either don't know or don't care as the number of near misses continues to grow."

Why not report I asked? "Firstly, it happens so quick, it's dark and they're gone or, they come out of nowhere, cut under your bow and disappear with no clear visible identification on the vessel. So what do we report?" He continued. "If I was to report every near miss with a dickhead the company would not only be looking at me sideways but Maritime New Zealand would be giving the company grief. If the boats had numbers on it is quicker and easier to record a number than to try and decipher fancy names, even if you can see it."

This comment is not only echoed by other fast ferry skippers but even our slower barges and fishing vessels with one fishing vessel reporting a near miss with his gear on the surface. When he sounded his horn, the response from our errant boatie was much gesticulating and verbal abuse as he roared off into the sunset.

It is a serious and growing problem and one Maritime New Zealand is unable to address. They remain reluctant to entertain the idea of vessel registration or even compulsory licensing of skippers with the pleasure craft qualifications, Day Skipper or Boatmaster. The argument that you can't save pleasure boaties from themselves does not wash. We have to prevent their stupidity from injuring someone else. The sad part of all this is that

it's not a case of if, only when. We will have another serious accident involving both pleasure and commercial craft and when this happens you can bet your bottom dollar a commercial skipper will be the first one to get a grilling. Meanwhile, reporting on near misses with pleasure idiots is becoming the exception rather than the rule.

Further south someone is still killing our dolphins and it can't be amateur fishers because they are not allowed to go fishing with nets and if they did try to sneak a net into the water to catch a feed, they would be staying close, just in case the Ministry man comes round the corner, or a dolphin for that matter.

Irrespective of who was responsible, it has reinforced the call to have observers on commercial fishing boats which may not be a bad thing. Think about it. If we had 100 percent observer coverage on the fishing fleet and the finger is pointed, they would have the best witness in defence on board, as long as they weren't guilty – in which case they could claim it was those sneaky amateur fishers, who may drop and leave unmarked nets. This is why the amateur sector requested compulsory attendance of all set nets to ensure that their net was not left to ghost fish when lost and because dolphins breathe air at the same rate as you and I. On sighting a dolphin they could quickly recover their 60 metre net and remove it from harm's way while still retaining the ability to catch seafood.

Meanwhile, in our Southern Ocean Marine Mammal Sanctuary, the arrogance of the Japanese continues as they commercially harvest 1000 whales under the guise of science. What a load of old crock!

You would think our environmental lobby groups would be far better to focus their efforts in saving 1000 whales than trying to account for every dolphin on our coast, and in doing so, deny a man the chance to feed his family. We acknowledge the efforts of Sea Shepherd who have remained focussed on the big picture.

Don't forget Auckland's international on water boat show on March 5-8 where we look forward to meeting you on our stand in the big engine court.

Keith Ingram, Editor