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Media Release: Immediate release

SAL delighted imprisoned seafarers have been released on bail

'Shipping Australia joins the world shipping industry in welcoming the Korean Supreme Court's recent decision to grant bail and release from prison, two merchant foreign ship officers' Llew Russell, CEO of SAL said today.

'The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and the International Shipping Federation (ISF) lodged a letter of support for bail with the Court.

'The "Hebei Spirit" was at anchor when she was rammed by a barge that had broken free and yet the captain and first mate of the anchored vessel had somehow ended up in gaol. This is hard to comprehend.

'Not only does this appear on the surface to be a serious miscarriage of justice but it provides a further disincentive to follow a career at sea.' Mr Russell said.

The two officers were gaoled on 10 December last year at an appeal court hearing for not doing enough to prevent a massive oil spill after their anchored vessel was holed by a drifting crane barge owned by Samsung Henry Industries.

Mr Russell pointed out that this legal decision has fuelled the world shipping industry's deep concern about the criminalisation of seafarers who engage in the transport of around 90% of world trade.

While enjoying good co-operation from the Korean maritime administration and the Korea Shipowners' Association, ICS and ISF fully appreciated the independence of the Korean judiciary from the government. Based on the facts of the case, ICS and ISF were hopeful that the Supreme Court will now make the correct decision when it rules on the seafarers' appeal, in order that they are spared from further imprisonment and allowed to return to their families in India.

ICS/ISF also acknowledged that due process, under Korean law, is being followed, and that every effort is being made by the Korean authorities to

adhere to the international principles enshrined in the IMO/ILO Guidelines on the Fair Treatment of Seafarers in the Event of a Maritime Accident. The decision to release the ship's officers from prison is fully consistent with these Guidelines, adopted in 2006, which ICS and ISF helped to negotiate with governments at the International Maritime Organisation and the International Labour Organisation.

With the officers now released on bail, the world shipping industry looks forward to a similarly positive outcome of the hearing of the appeal before the Supreme Court.

For further information:

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