



Shaping up for the future

By MICK KINLEY,
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This year has seen an unprecedented shift in our community as a result of COVID-19. The pandemic has brought monumental challenges, but it has also been an opportunity for AMSA to prepare for a future where unknowns are the norm and effective regulation is more flexible and responsive.

While the future heralds ongoing environmental and technological changes, the events caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the importance of looking after the people at the heart of our industry—the seafarers maintaining global trade and delivering the vital goods and supplies that we all need.

This important role has unfortunately come at great personal cost to the seafarers. Longer periods at sea, difficulties undertaking shore leave,

mandatory quarantine and separation from their friends and families, has taken a toll.

The vulnerability of our seafarers is a timely reminder of the importance of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC). During the past six months, AMSA has monitored the level of compliance and intervened to support seafarer repatriation during a time of international border closures. But while flexibility on the part of regulators was necessary when the COVID-19 pandemic began, keeping seafarers on board ships for longer than 11 months is not sustainable.

Since June, AMSA has received 149 MLC complaints, issued 227 deficiencies and detained 11 ships, five of which were in response to excessive seafarer service periods.

As this year draws to a close, there has been sufficient time for ship operators to adjust to the new COVID-19 world and to develop effective strategies

for seafarer repatriation and crew changes. From 28 February 2021, operators will once again be required to meet international requirements and seafarers will return to being on board for no longer than 11 continuous months. For our part, we are committed to keep working with operators that make every effort to look after their seafarers.

Ironically, some Australian seafarers have faced the possibility of not being able to get back out to sea due to complications around ticket renewal because of difficulty meeting renewal requirements under COVID-19 restrictions. AMSA addressed this by extending some AMSA-issued certificates, which is one of a number of measures implemented to assist industry overcome governance issues caused by the pandemic, and to keep seafarers working.

We appreciate that some sectors of the domestic commercial vessel

sector have also been significantly impacted by the pandemic, and we continue to work with all tiers of government and industry to provide support where possible.

While we focus on returning to business as usual in a post COVID-19 world, our long-term strategic goals remain high on our agenda.

As a safety authority, our policies, regulations and capabilities must be able to accommodate unknowns and offer flexibility, while also supporting a safe, environmentally responsible maritime sector. It is also imperative that regulations remain relevant and practical for industry to implement. Consulting closely with industry is an important part of this process.

Unfortunately, serious incidents remain all too common in the maritime industry and safety and environmental protection continue to be key areas of focus.

This year, we implemented the National Compliance Plan 2020-2021, outlining our inspection focus areas over the coming year, and our approach to non-compliance. It is my hope that providing a transparent overview of what we will be looking for in our inspection campaigns,

will help the wider industry to ensure their operations are compliant with the law, thereby contributing to safer, cleaner seas.

In addition to investigating all Maritime Labour Convention complaints, the plan also commits to targeting a range of safety priorities through Port State and Flag State control and inspection of domestic commercial vessels around Australia. These priorities, which broadly cover vessel seaworthiness and operational safety, address many of the causes our incident data reveals as contributing factors to environmental and safety incidents.

We will continue to focus our interventions on high-risk and low-compliance operations, while supporting our regulated community with timely, relevant and accurate information that enables them to voluntarily meet their obligations.

Our relationships with international and domestic stakeholders—from the International Maritime Organization through to all tiers of Australian government, regional bodies, industry associations, domestic operators and seafarers—are also vital in developing a

culture that values and manages safety.

As AMSA nears its 30 year anniversary, we look back on a proud history of service and contribution to shipping safety, provision of aids to navigation, pollution response, search and rescue, and more recently, domestic commercial vessel safety.

Over the years we have responded to countless incidents—from oil spills, lost containers, search and rescue incidents, not to mention the search for MH370 and a whole raft of other important events—in collaboration with our colleagues, industry partners, and in some cases, everyday Australians.

As we look to the future, we consider ourselves fortunate to have strong connections. These ties, along with all the work we are undertaking to position AMSA for the future, puts us in a strong position to deliver effective regulation and response capability, in an environment of continual disruption. For the shipping industry, disruption is coming in many forms, but the global community is more willing than ever to question the social license to keep doing things the same way, if those ways harm people or the environment. ▲



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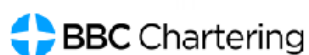


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