



Seafarers' wellbeing is at the core of the prospects of the shipping industry

By MICK KINLEY,
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Conditions brought on by the global pandemic have moved the goalposts for the shipping industry.

The long-term impacts on the sector will be unknown for some time, although they are likely to be multi-faceted. The increased demand for shipping services, congestion at ports, uncertainty around the global economy, and the pressure put on seafarers will no doubt have consequences for the industry.

While we may one day see merchant ships without crew on board arriving in our ports, right now ships rely on seafarers to operate them.

We are yet to understand the full ramifications of the pandemic on the workforce. Globally there has been reporting on the phenomena of 'the great resignation' across many professions with people attracted to different lifestyle choices. Will we see the same shift amongst seafarers, of which over 250,000 have, at some time during the pandemic been stranded on ships, forced to stay past contracts, and remote from family and medical assistance?

Without seafarers bringing ships to our ports and those with the skills to safely berth, load and unload them, we in the industry know that the overwhelming majority of Australia's imports and exports would not move. We know what this would do to the Australian economy and living standards, let alone globally.

The International Maritime Organization clearly identified this threat by declaring Seafarers – at the core of shipping's future the focus of World Maritime Day this year. We must continue to prioritise seafarers and provide resources to support them until conditions have improved to a level already in place across other sectors.

The impact of Covid-19 on the welfare and availability of seafarers; shipping's

role in greenhouse gas emissions; and current supply chain issues have cast the shipping industry in the spotlight of mainstream media – a rare event. What will the industry do with this attention? In the decarbonisation domain industry, leaders such as the 'Getting to Zero Coalition' have demonstrated the industry can lead the way in its response to environmental challenges. Will we see similar champions step up as industry leaders in the treatment of seafarers and show future generations that seafaring is a career worth considering?

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) will continue to send strong messages to shipping operators that violate Maritime Labour Convention requirements for the treatment of seafarers by banning ships from our ports.

In 2020, we received 320 complaints; twice as many as in 2019. Upon investigation, we issued 79 deficiencies and detained 16 vessels.

We will also continue our broader work to promote and uphold seafarer welfare, working conditions, gender equality, campaigning for greater reporting on fatalities at sea, and investing in the next generation of seafarers.

Our co-operative relationships with the Australian shipping sector, the International Maritime Organization and other international maritime bodies are essential to achieving these objectives for the benefit of the global maritime sector. I look forward to continued collaboration with our industry partners in 2022. ▲

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