THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF SHIPPING AUSTRALIA LIMITED

SHIPPING AUSTRALIA

MID-YEAR 2026

COVER IMAGE
A new age of autonomous shipping

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SHIPPING AUSTRALIA

Our Vision

The first choice for membership of a national shipping industry body promoting the interests of the shipping industry and creating enduring value for our members. An independent voice, trusted by Government and industry bodies for providing quality, expert advice.

Our Mission

To promote and advance the interests of members in shipping policy for a sustainable maritime industry.

Our Values

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Overview

Shipping Australia Limited is a peak shipping industry association with a variety of member lines, shipping agents and maritime-focused businesses that generally provide services to the maritime industry in Australia. Our members are involved with over 80 per cent of Australia's international container and car trade, as well as over 70 per cent of our break bulk, roll-on roll-off and bulk trade. A number of our members are also actively engaged in the provision of coastal cargo services to Australian consignors and consignees. Our members include cruise ship and towage operators. A major focus of SAL is to promote efficient and effective maritime trade for Australia, whilst advancing the interests of ship owners and shipping agents.

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Clinton Evans

Area Oceania Managing Director, Hapag-Lloyd (Australia) Pty Ltd since September 2019.

Clint has 26 years of shipping and logistics experience in South Africa, Middle East (Bahrain,Qatar and Dubai) and India.

Mark Godfrey

Mark has approximately 40 years of experience in the shipping industry. He has worked with MSC around Australia and New Zealand, and has worked through a variety of senior and operations roles. He is now the Managing Director of MSC Australia.

Phillip Holmes

General Manager “K” Line Australia. Phillip has been active in Australia’s international shipping industry for approximately 40 years. He heas a range of operation and management experiences with the container shipping, car carrier and dry bulk trades.

Shane Walden

Shane Walden was the Managing Director of ANL Container Line Pty Ltd.

He resigned from the board in the latter part of the first half of 2026.

Scott Henderson

Managing Director, Gulf Agency Company (Australia) Pty Ltd since 2014. Scott has 27 years of agency experience in Australia, prior to that he served as deck officer in the British merchant navy for seven years.

Kristy Craker

Managing Director & founder, Ship Agency Services from 2011.

She is also a founder, and the Managing Director, of Propel Marine, a marine solutions provider.

Kristy has more than 20 years of experience within shipping and logistics in Australia.

Eric Tjandra

Managing Director, OOCL (Australia) Pty Ltd.

Eric has more than 30 years of shipping industry experience in commercial and management positions in Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and South China before arriving in Australia.

Fleur Walsh

Head of Operations, (Aus-NZ) A.P. Moller-Maersk

Responsible for leading a large multi-country team, executing the operational cycle for various product streams. Over 20 years of experience in the supply chain industry.

Pictured: the Shipping Australia Secretariat. From left: Jim Wilson; Shipping Australia's CEO, Capt Melwyn Noronha; Mehrangiz Shahbakhsh; and Clem Roberts. Photo credit: Scott Henderson.

SAL Staff

Jim Wilson, Policy and Communications Manager; Captain Melwyn Noronha, Chief Executive Officer; Mehrangiz Shahbakhsh, Shipping Analyst and Liaison Officer; Clem Roberts, Company Secretary/Financial Controller.

National steering groups

Policy Council

Border Agencies Steering Group

Container Steering Group

Human Resources Steering Group

Maritime Legal Steering Group

Public Relations Steering Group

Technical Steering Group

Bulk Shipping Group

Liner Shipping Steering Group

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Secretary: Melwyn Noronha

Queensland State Committee

Chair: Ajaz Mir
Secretary: Geoff Dalgliesh

South Australia State Committee

Chair: Paul Paparella
Secretary: Melwyn Noronha

Victoria State Committee

Chair: Sirisha Gunde
Secretary: Charles Masters

Western Australia State Committee

Chair: Kristy Craker
Secretary: Melwyn Noronha

From the Bridge – CEO's view

By Capt. MELWYN NORONHA,
CEO Shipping Australia

Iran has declared, at the time of writing, that the Strait of Hormuz has been closed again. Meanwhile, U.S. CENTCOM (the main U.S. command for the Middle East) is reporting that commercial ship traffic has resumed. The situation is therefore apparently still uncertain. And this shortly after a peace agreement was signed that was supposed to end the conflict and re-open the Strait. Further talks are underway in as this publication goes into production.

As a former professional seafarer, I feel deeply about the human cost of conflict at sea. That's a life made unbearable by violence, injuries and, in the worst cases, death. Families are left behind, mourning their loss.

Seafarers remember how, when it mattered most during and after the COVID period, that wealthy nations denied essential medical care. Now praise is offered from podiums and there are token gestures. Glossy cheques cannot heal the lasting wounds of that neglect.

Turning to the reported text of the agreement, it is notable that Iran appears to have only agreed to use its "best efforts" to guarantee safe passage and not to charge for a period of 60 days. The text of the agreement indicates that Iran intends to charge a fee for passage. The editor of the industry publication, Lloyd's List, has reported that the new Persian Gulf Strait Authority will impose mandatory Iran-approved insurance for all ships using the Strait, and that the country will demand ships use the northern route (i.e. the near-Iran route) with threats of penalties for non-compliance.

There is also an argument, as made by the analysts and editors of Fronts (a geopolitics-focused publication), that marine insurers price insurance by what is well known. What is now well known is that the Strait is very dangerous and so, the argument goes, marine insurance in that area will be priced in accordance with a greater perception of risk.

Before the war, transit through Hormuz was safe, less expensive, and open to all. After the war, transit through Hormuz will be more dangerous, more expensive, and, apparently, subject to the control of one country.

Strategically speaking

It's been many years and considerable public investment in development, and now, or in the near future or perhaps somewhat later, Australia will have a Strategic Fleet. After an unusually long time for re-flagging and also re-modelling the interior, a single container ship will form the Strategic Fleet. Maybe more will join later. While other parties may feel the need to change their position, our position is not changed. The Strategic Fleet is not necessary, and it is unlikely to fulfill its objectives. It is not good policy and it ought to be scrapped.

Port pricing and port productivity

Ongoing data analysis from the World Bank continuously and repeatedly shows that our main container ports are among the worst performing ports in the world.

Australian port defenders repeatedly trot out the same old tired line that the World Bank report doesn't take into account landside performance. But that's just conflating apples with oranges. How many more times must we explain it? At least one more time, evidently. OK, here goes: apples are not oranges. It is wrong to say one should incorporate the elements of the other. Likewise, landside performance is not marineside performance. It is wrong to try and conflate two different kinds of performance. It is wrong to say one should incorporate the elements of the other. Defenders are just trying to confuse matters so as to deflect valid criticism.

Australian marineside port performance is, at best, not good and has, how can we put this… a variety of development areas to address. Similarly, despite being repeatedly marked down by world-leading transport analysts, Australian ports have repeatedly put their prices up and by far, far, more than CPI. Fremantle Port, for example, has increased some of its fees by 295%. And, we must point out, they were previously charging a "port improvement fee". If there were ongoing fees being charged for port improvements, why the enormous fee hikes far in excess of inflation? This is especially problematic given that Fremantle is literally among the worst performing ports in the world, according to World Bank analysis. Shipping Australia believes such poor performance and price hikes are unjustified and unjustifiable. We made similar comments in our submission to the Senate Committee on Productivity, and we called for Federal Governance of the ports sector. We repeat that call today.

Talking of productivity and pricing reviews, some time ago we filed a submission to the review of the Pricing Order which governs the Port of Melbourne. There has yet been no development.

Maritime Single Window

Some time ago now, the nation states of the world mandated, via the International Maritime Organization, that there ought to be a Maritime Single Window. The concept is simple. All government-required information is submitted once in a single portal, reducing time, effort, and costs while eliminating duplication and minimising errors, One portal, no repetition, and far fewer avoidable mistakes.

Maritime Single Windows around the world have demonstrated clear environmental, economic, and operational benefits. Yet despite IMO rules being introduced some time ago, Australia has been slow to act. It is therefore encouraging to see $47.1 million now committed to develop the Australian version of the Maritime Single Window. So, hopefully, we will finally get one.

Pictured: the Maritime Single Window concept. Australia has budgeted over $47 million for developing Australia's Single Maritime Window. Credit: ChatGPT on a Shipping Australia prompt.

Industrial relations

The perennial problem of the port sector (other than pricing and performance, that is) has been remarkably quiet of late, other than the odd stop work meeting. However, that's unlikely to last and there are rumours of a pilotage strike brewing. Meanwhile, Enterprise Bargaining Agreements could become an issue again. Such agreements run in three-year periods, and some agreements are due to expire in 2028. We would expect the risk of large-scale problems to increase in the latter half of next year because industrial relations problems normally start about six months before the expiry of an agreement.

Other matters

There are many other issues before us. A new age is dawning, an Age of Automated… well, everything. In this issue we naturally focus on autonomous shipping.

Meanwhile, Susan Oommen, a Ph.D candidate at the Australian Maritime College, discusses the vexed coastal shipping sector. Here, at Shipping Australia, we are working on a long-running project to produce guidelines that will help ship crews comply with Marine Order 32.

I will conclude here by reporting that we have made numerous submissions throughout the last 12 months, including submissions to government on grain loading, on low-carbon fuels, and the ongoing review of the Ports and Maritime legislation in NSW, among others.

Your Secretariat looks forward to continuing to work on your behalf to advance your interests and those of the nation. The interests of the industry, fast, efficient, value for money cargo transport, are, indeed, the interests of the nation.

Until the next edition of our major publication due out early next year, the Secretariat wishes you Fair Winds and Following Seas.

Pictured: a swimming turtle.
Photo credit Kris-Mikael Krister.

IMO welcomes entry into force of the High Seas Treaty (BBNJ)

Earlier this year, the IMO welcomed into force the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement).

Also known as the "High Seas Treaty", it entered into force on 17 January 2026.

It brings into effect legally-binding rules for the sustainable use and management of marine resources on the High Seas (i.e. those areas beyond national jurisdictions (i.e. over 200 nautical miles from the baseline under UNCLOS).

The BBNJ treaty addresses, among other things:

- the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction;
- marine genetic resources, including questions on benefit-sharing;
- area-based management tools, including marine protected areas;
- environmental impact assessments; and
- capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology.

Welcoming this milestone, IMO Secretary-General Mr. Arsenio Dominguez said:

"The world has demonstrated that countries can come together with a common vision and build a framework to manage the ocean sustainably while ensuring its benefits are shared fairly amongst all humanity. Now we must continue working together to put these rules into action. IMO is ready to support the BBNJ implementation within IMO's sphere of expertise."

Applicability to the ocean shipping industries

Development of area-based management tools, including marine protected areas, could be the area of the BBNJ that most affects the ocean shipping industry.

All human activity, ocean shipping included, inevitably has some impact on the natural world. Among the shipping-related impacts that the industry has and is tackling include such matters as underwater noise, whale strikes and garbage disposal.

One way to control the impacts that shipping may have is to control where ships can and cannot go. The BBNJ which creates a system for creating new, globally-effective, marine parks in the High Seas.

An "Area-based management tool" means a tool setting out a geographically defined area through which one or several sectors or activities are managed with the aim of achieving particular conservation and sustainable use objectives.

Background

An agreement on the text of an international treaty to protect marine life on the high seas was reached in early March 2023 in New York. The UN began work in 2015 for a new international legally-binding treaty under the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.

The high seas are all those parts of the global world-ocean that are beyond all national jurisdiction, which is currently all parts of the ocean that are 200 nautical miles (approx 370 km) from the shore of any country. According to Geoscience Australia, the world's oceans cover about 361 million square kilometres, of which 219 million square kilometres (approx 60%) are the high seas.

Illicit Tobacco National Disruption Group (NDG) Operation Tempest disrupts illicit tobacco networks across two states

National Disruption Group (NDG) Operation Tempest has delivered major results across more than 75 locations in Queensland and South Australia, disrupting criminal networks and enablers. Officers seized approximately 3 million illicit cigarettes, more than $1.5 million in cash, and significant quantities of looseleaf tobacco and vapes during a coordinated week of action. The activity formed part of a multiagency effort targeting the import, storage and distribution chains used by criminal networks to move illicit tobacco through Australia's supply chain. Operation Tempest seeks to strengthen the security, reliability and compliance of Australia's supply chain, on which Signal readers depend.

The operation involved federal and state partners, including the Australian Border Force (ABF), Australian Federal Police, Queensland Police Service, Australian Taxation Office, Therapeutic Goods Administration, Queensland Health, the Queensland State Penalty Enforcement Register, and South Australia Consumer and Business Services. The NDG led the intelligencedriven model, with phase one consolidating information across agencies to identify criminal entities, retail outlets, warehouses and residential addresses suspected of supporting illicit tobacco activity.

Phase two - the highvisibility week of action - saw search activity across shopfronts, commercial premises and residences. In Queensland, officers recovered more than 2.7 million illicit cigarettes, over 266 kg of tobacco, more than 20,800 vapes, and approximately $2.1 million in cash. In South Australia, teams seized more than 368,000 cigarettes, 61.6 kg of tobacco and discovered a concealed underground bunker used to store illicit product. One UK national was arrested and 25 retail outlets were closed across both Queensland and South Australia.

ABF Commander Illicit Tobacco and Vape Enforcement Greg Dowse said the results show the value of combining regulatory and enforcement powers. "Through the Illicit Tobacco NDG, agencies are working sidebyside in ways not previously utilised, leveraging each organisation's powers and capabilities to achieve outcomes that simply weren't possible working in isolation," Commander Dowse said.

AFP Detective Superintendent David Telfer said the illicit tobacco trade is closely tied to serious organised crime, noting its links to violence and national security. "This is not a victimless crime. These networks use intimidation, debt bondage and coercion to protect their interests," DSupt Telfer said.

For the shipping and ports sector, the results highlight ongoing risks within the maritime supply chain. Illicit tobacco predominantly enters Australia concealed in sea cargo containers, relying on port infrastructure and commercial logistics networks to reach midtier distributors and retail outlets.

Phase three of OperationTempest is now underway, with the NDG analysing intelligence gathered during the operation to identify further disruption opportunities and planning further weeks of action around Australia. This may include business closures, licence revocations, visa compliance action and coordinated followon enforcement across the supply chain - part of creating a more hostile environment for criminal networks that exploit Australia's trade and logistics system.

If you have information about illicit tobacco activity or suspicious cargo movements, you can contact the NDG at ndg@abf.gov.au or make an anonymous report through the ABF's Border Watch program at borderwatch.gov.au

Pictured: a car immobilised under the Queensland State Penalties Enforcement Registry (SPER) system. Photo supplied by the Australian Border Force.

A revolutionary turning point in maritime history

The IMO adopts the MASS Code

Graphic: non-mandatory does not mean not-urgent. Delay carries its own risks. Graphic: ChatGPT on a Shipping Australia prompt.

By MEHRANGIZ SHAHBAKHSH, the author of these autonomous shipping articles, a Shipping Australia analyst and a doctoral candidate at the Australian Maritime College. Photo: Ian Ackerman.

Shipping has always changed slowly, until it doesn't.

At certain points, a new development becomes too significant to remain outside the regulatory system.

There are moments in maritime history when the industry shifts in ways that affect not only ships, but the wider system around them. The transition from sail to steam, the move from coal to diesel, and the introduction of electronic navigation, GMDSS and digital systems all changed how ships were operated, how safety was managed, and what skills the maritime workforce needed.

In May 2026, another significant moment arrived.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) adopted the International Code of Safety for Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships, known as the MASS Code. Taking effect from 1 July 2026, this non-mandatory Code establishes the first global safety framework for cargo ships with autonomous or remotely operated functions, including their associated Remote Operations Centres (ROCs).

This is more than a regulatory milestone. It marks the point at which autonomous shipping moves from research, trials, and policy discussion into a recognised reality within the international regulatory system.

A Shift Comparable to the Greatest Transformations in Shipping

For years, autonomous shipping existed in a space of possibility. It was tested in pilot projects, debated in policy circles, explored in research, and discussed as part of the future of shipping.

That phase has now changed.

The adoption of the non-mandatory MASS Code places autonomous and remotely operated shipping within the wider history of major maritime transformations. Like earlier changes, it will affect operations, safety, regulation, training and the way maritime work is organised.

But this transition reaches deeper and carries wider system-wide implications.

Autonomy does not simply introduce new equipment on board. It changes where some decisions may be made, how responsibility may be assigned between humans and software systems, how human judgement works with intelligent systems, and how trust is maintained when some ship functions may be controlled, monitored or supervised from outside the ship.

In that sense, this transition is not only technological. It is structural, operational, regulatory and organisational.

Why This Moment Matters Now

Shipping has always been careful with change, and for good reasons. Safety, reliability, environmental protection and global trade consistency are central to how the maritime industry maintains trust. But caution has never meant refusing to move forward.

The MASS Code provides the industry with something concrete to work with.

It signals that autonomous and remotely operated ships are no longer only hypothetical. They now have a formal place within the international regulatory system. The discussion has moved from whether this may happen one day to how

the industry prepares, tests, assesses, approves and builds confidence before the mandatory framework arrives.

A Decade in the Making, but a Clear Shift in 2026

The adoption of the non-mandatory MASS Code did not come suddenly. It is the result of nearly a decade of structured regulatory work, beginning in 2017 when IMO formally placed Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships (MASS) on its agenda.

From the beginning, the issue was bigger than technology. It raised practical questions about ship operations, remote control, human oversight, training, responsibility, approval processes and the wider maritime system.

That is why the significance of 2026 is not that the technology itself changed overnight, or that the Code was a sudden response to technology trends. What changed is its regulatory status.

That background matters because it gives weight to what has now been adopted. The Code gives autonomous shipping a recognised place in the international regulatory system.

Not Just Another Rulebook

The MASS Code should not be mistaken for a niche technical document relevant only to innovators or technology developers.

Its relevance is much wider because autonomous and remotely operated ships do not operate in isolation. They are part of a broader maritime system involving ports, pilots, regulators, insurers, training providers, seafarers, classification societies and many others.

Different parts of the sector may approach the Code from different practical angles:

- **Ports:** through ship–shore interaction and port entry
- **Pilots:** through vessel behaviour and control in complex waters
- **Regulators:** through approval, oversight and compliance
- **Insurers and legal advisers:** through risk, liability and responsibility
- **Training institutions:** through future competencies and training needs
- **Seafarers and unions:** through changing roles, workload, and responsibility
- **Classification societies and surveyors:** through assurance, verification and certification
- That is why the Code matters beyond the ship itself. It gives each part of the industry a reason to consider how existing arrangements, responsibilities and skills may need to evolve.

Graphic: the IMO adopts the maritime autonomous surface ship code.
Graphic: ChatGPT on a Shipping Australia prompt.

The Importance of the "Non-Mandatory" Phase

The fact that the Code is non-mandatory does not diminish its significance. In many ways, it strengthens it.

For a subject of this complex, the non-mandatory phase should not be understood as a delay. It gives Administrations, industry and other stakeholders time to work with the Code, understand where it fits, where it creates difficulty, and what still needs to be clarified before the mandatory framework is finalised.

The value of this phase is learning before obligations are locked in. However, there is a risk in misreading this moment. Some stakeholders may treat "non-mandatory" as "not urgent". That would be a mistake. Treating the Code as optional or distant would be like ignoring early electronic navigation when it was already clear that it was becoming part of the future of ship operations. A wait-and-see approach may feel safe in our cautious industry, but in this case, it carries its own risk.

The IMO roadmap reinforces this urgency. The Experience-Building Phase framework is expected in December 2026, work on the mandatory Code is planned to begin in 2028, adoption is targeted for 1 July 2030, and entry into force is planned for 1 January 2032.

While the exact timing of the roadmap may change as the work develops, given the complexity of shipping operations, the next stage has already begun. The non-mandatory phase should be treated as a working period, not a waiting period.

A Global Shift with National Implications

As with previous maritime transformations, the impact of autonomous shipping will not be limited to the countries where the technology is developed or where the ships are built.

Many maritime nations may become part of this transition through their ports and their existing roles as flag States, port States or coastal States. Autonomous and remotely operated ships may call at their ports, transit their waters, operate near offshore facilities, interact with VTS systems, or require inspection, emergency response, repair and support.

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Graphic: a new world of autonomous shipping awaits as the IMO adopts a revolutionary new code. Credit: ChatGPT on a Shipping Australia prompt.

Some countries may also host a Remote Operations Centre, or part of the shore-based operational arrangement.

This is why the MASS Code matters beyond technology developers and early adopters. It gives IMO Member States and industry stakeholders time to consider how the Code may work in practice, how it may affect national operations, policy, workforce planning and budget allocation for digital and physical infrastructure, and what issues should be raised before the mandatory framework is finalised.

Autonomous shipping will still depend on common expectations across the international maritime system. It will not work through isolated national approaches alone. Early engagement will help maritime nations test the Code against their own operational realities and contribute to a safe and consistent global framework.

The Practical Question for the Industry

The key question now is not whether autonomous shipping will emerge. It is how each part of the maritime system responds and prepares for it.

For organisations across the sector, the starting point is practical. The questions worth asking now are:

- Where does the MASS Code touch our existing work, operations or responsibilities?
- Which of our current arrangements are still fit for purpose?
- Which may need to change, and how?
- What needs to be clarified before the mandatory framework is finalised?
- What does this mean for workforce planning, training and future skills?
- How might legal responsibility, liability and accountability be affected in our area of work?
- How should cybersecurity, data integrity and access control be managed as maritime operations become more digital and connected?

The answers will differ across the sector, depending on each organisation's role and exposure within the maritime system.

The point is not that every organisation needs to be ready to work with MASS tomorrow. The point is that each part of the sector needs to understand where autonomous or remotely operated functions, and any associated Remote Operations Centres, may affect existing procedures, funding decisions, and strategic planning.

These questions should not be left until autonomous ships become common. By then, the opportunity to shape the framework may be much smaller.

Conclusion: The Beginning of a New Maritime Era

The MASS Code does not mean remotely operated and autonomous ships will suddenly dominate global trade routes. Nor does it resolve the complex issues surrounding safety, liability, cybersecurity, insurance, training, the human element and operational control.

What the Code does is mark a clear shift. Autonomous and remotely operated shipping is no longer only theoretical; it is now part of the future regulatory and operational landscape. Like previous transitions, this moment may only be fully understood in hindsight.

The Code gives industry a starting point.

What happens next depends on how seriously this non-mandatory phase is used.

Commenting on the recent IMO developments Shipping Australia's CEO, Capt. Melwyn Noronha said: "As someone who has spent a career at sea, I can say with certainty, the MASS code isn't the future, it's the present. Those preserving traditional approaches are missing the transformation. The real risk now is not change itself, but failing to move with it"

Final Note

On behalf of Shipping Australia, I would like to congratulate IMO, IMO Member States, and the international shipping and maritime industry on this significant milestone. The adoption of the non-mandatory MASS Code represents an important and encouraging step toward the safe and structured evolution of shipping. We look forward to a practical and constructive Experience-Building Phase as the industry transitions toward the mandatory framework.

For more information, please refer to the following IMO sources:

Maritime Safety Committee (MSC), 98th session, 7-16 June 2017

Maritime Safety Committee (MSC), 99th session 16-25 May 2018

Maritime Safety Committee (MSC), 100th session, 3-7 December 2018

PREVIEW: Maritime Safety Committee - 111th session (MSC 111), 13-22 May 2026 Autonomous shipping


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Inside the MASS Code

Rethinking maritime safety in a distributed world

Graphic: a colossal machine-spirit builds the policy and legal architecture for global autonomous shipping while being overseen by human professionals. Graphic credit: ChatGPT on a Shipping Australia prompt.

If the people, systems and decisions that keep a ship operationally safe are no longer all on board, how does the industry prove that safety is still under control?

As maritime operations move toward autonomous and remotely operated ships, this question becomes central. Before asking when these vessels will become common, the industry needs to understand what happens to safety when control, monitoring, watchkeeping, judgement and emergency response are no longer confined to the ship itself, but shared between the ship, shore, intelligent systems and human operators.

From Onboard Presence to Distributed Responsibility

For generations, maritime safety has been built around human presence at sea. Masters, officers, engineers and watchkeepers were not just positions in a crewing table. They were the people who lived with the conditions and risks, felt the ship, experienced the environment, responded to alarms, made judgement calls and carried responsibility in real time within the same physical space.

The emergence of Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships (MASS) challenges this model. Functions that were once carried out, supervised or controlled on board may now involve Remote Operations Centres (ROCs), software systems, and human operators working from different locations.

This shift makes the safety question more complex. It is no longer only whether the technology works. The harder question is whether safety can still be demonstrated, trusted and approved when the operation itself is no longer centered only on the ship.

Why the MASS Code Matters to Everyone

The MASS Code should not be read only as a regulatory or technical document. Its importance lies in how it connects different parts of maritime operations around the same safety discussion.

Ports, pilots, SAR authorities, policy makers, insurers, lawyers, seafarers, unions, training providers, surveyors, terminal operators and shipping companies will each meet MASS from a different point in the operation. For some, the issue may arise at port entry or in congested waters. For others, it may arise through emergency response, certification, training, liability, surveying or budget planning.

At this stage, the Code does not provide every final answer. It offers a shared framework for addressing these questions in a structured way, rather than relying on existing rules designed for fully crewed ships to cover every new operational arrangement.

What Actually Counts as MASS?

A key clarification in the Code is that enhanced automation alone does not make a ship a MASS.

Modern ships may already have advanced digital systems, automated tools or decision-support technology. But under the MASS Code, the important question is whether autonomous or remotely operated technology augments or replaces functions that would normally be performed by onboard crew involved in conducting or controlling ship functions.

This distinction shifts the focus away from the technology itself and toward the way the ship is operated.

The practical questions become:

where does control sit, what role remains on board, what is handled remotely, what is performed by software, and whether existing IMO instruments are sufficient for that way of operating.

Where and How the Code Applies

The MASS Code applies to cargo ships covered by SOLAS chapter I, including any associated Remote Operations Centre, where the ship has systems or functions that enable autonomous or remote operations and where the Administration considers existing instruments impracticable or insufficient.

It does not apply to cargo high-speed craft, warships, naval auxiliaries or government ships used only on non-commercial services.

Importantly, the Code does not replace SOLAS or the wider IMO framework. It supplements them. Stakeholders should therefore read the MASS Code alongside SOLAS, ISM, ISPS, COLREG, STCW and other relevant instruments, not in isolation.

Graphic: executives and professionals from a range of maritime sectors such as ports, shipping, insurance, pilotage and more will each meet MASS from a different point of view.

A Flexible, Goal-Based Approach

The MASS Code is goal-based, technology-neutral and non-mandatory at this stage, but it has been developed in a way that can support a future transition to mandatory status.

It does not prescribe one fixed technical solution for autonomous or remotely operated functions. Instead, it asks whether the proposed operation can be shown to achieve the required safety, security and environmental protection outcomes under defined conditions.

This is important because technology-neutral does not mean technology without control, and it does not mean promoting one technical solution over another. It means the Code leaves room for different approaches, but any chosen solution still has to be assessed, explained, tested and supported by evidence.

The result is a practical balance. The Code allows innovation, but not without evidence. It aims to enable MASS and conventional ships to operate safely alongside each other, while keeping human oversight, human-system collaboration and clear responsibility within the framework.

Understanding the Code Structure

Part I – Foundations
Part I sets out the purpose, principles, application, structure and definitions of the Code. These definitions matter because they give industry and Administrations a shared language for discussing responsibility, control, safety, security, approval and evidence in MASS operations.

One useful example is the term “agent”. The Code defines an agent as a human or software responsible for performing or supervising control actions. This is important because it shows that control in MASS operations may involve both people and software, not only crew physically on board, and recognises a more distributed operational environment.

Part II – Implementation Backbone
Part II sets out the principles that should be met as part of the MASS approval and certification process. It covers areas such as surveys and certificates, the approval process, risk assessment, operational context, system design, software principles, management of safe operations, maritime security, alert management, manning, training, watchkeeping and maintenance.

The important point is that a MASS operation is not assessed only by looking at the technology. The ship, any associated Remote Operations Centre (ROCs), the Concept of Operations, operational limits, task allocation, people, systems, procedures and records all become part of the approval and certification assessment.

Part III – Operational Functions
Part III deals with specific MASS operations and functions, including navigation, connectivity, remote operations, structure, subdivision, stability and watertight integrity, fire protection, fire detection and fire extinction, search and rescue, carriage of cargoes, anchoring, towing, mooring, and machinery and electrical installations.

This part is also goal-based. It is not a one-size-fits-all checklist. What applies will depend on the mode of operation, the functionality being certified and how the MASS is intended to operate. Chapters should generally be applied in full, unless waived with the agreement of the Administration as part of the approval process.

What This Means for Industry Stakeholders

One of the main takeaways is that the question is no longer simply whether a ship is MASS or not.

The more useful questions are practical: what is the operating mode, how many people are on board, where the master is located, which functions are automated or remotely controlled, and how tasks are divided among onboard crew, shore-based operators, and software systems?

The answers matter because they affect safety, operational arrangements, legal responsibility and the overall structure of the operation. A ship with persons on board and some autonomous or remotely operated functions will not raise the same issues as a ship operated remotely with reduced or no persons on board. A MASS operating in open waters will also raise different questions from one entering pilotage waters, approaching a port or operating in congested waters. Monitoring a function remotely is not the same as controlling it remotely.

Where a Remote Operations Centre is involved, the operation is no longer centred only on the ship. The shore-based part of the operation also needs to be understood, assessed and managed as part of the wider safety arrangement.

Looking Ahead: From Framework to Implementation

The non-mandatory MASS Code provides an important starting point, but the work is not finished.

Discussion will continue through IMO's Experience-Building Phase and through relevant IMO bodies considering training, technical, operational, legal and other related matters.

Even so, industry does not need to wait for every answer to be finalised. Stakeholders can already read the Code against their own responsibilities, identify where future pressure points may arise, and consider what should be raised while the framework is still being developed.

Final Thought

The MASS Code should not be seen only as a technical or operational document. It should also be read as an implementation roadmap for how maritime responsibility, competence and operations may change as autonomous and remote operations develop.

This non-mandatory period gives the industry time to question, prepare and contribute while the framework is still being shaped.

We will be providing further in-depth analysis of the anticipated experience building phase in future articles.

Note

This article is based on the May 2026 version of the non-mandatory MASS Code available at the time of writing. It provides a brief commentary on selected parts of the Code and should not be read as a complete or official interpretation. For full details, readers should refer to the full text of the non-mandatory MASS Code and relevant IMO documents.

Graphic: we may be facing an autonomous shipping, remote operations centre-based industry.
Graphic generated by ChatGPT on a Shipping Australia prompt.

IMO's Autonomous Ship Code Experience-Building Phase (EBP)

Where real work begins

Pictured: the age old debate: Theory vs Experience.
Graphic generated by ChatGPT from a Shipping Australia prompt.

When the IMO adopted the non-mandatory MASS Code in May 2026, it marked a historic moment.

Shipping Australia's CEO, Capt. Melwyn Noronha commented: "let's be honest, adopting the Code is the easy part in the entire process. The real test is whether it works when ships, systems, and people meet real-world conditions".

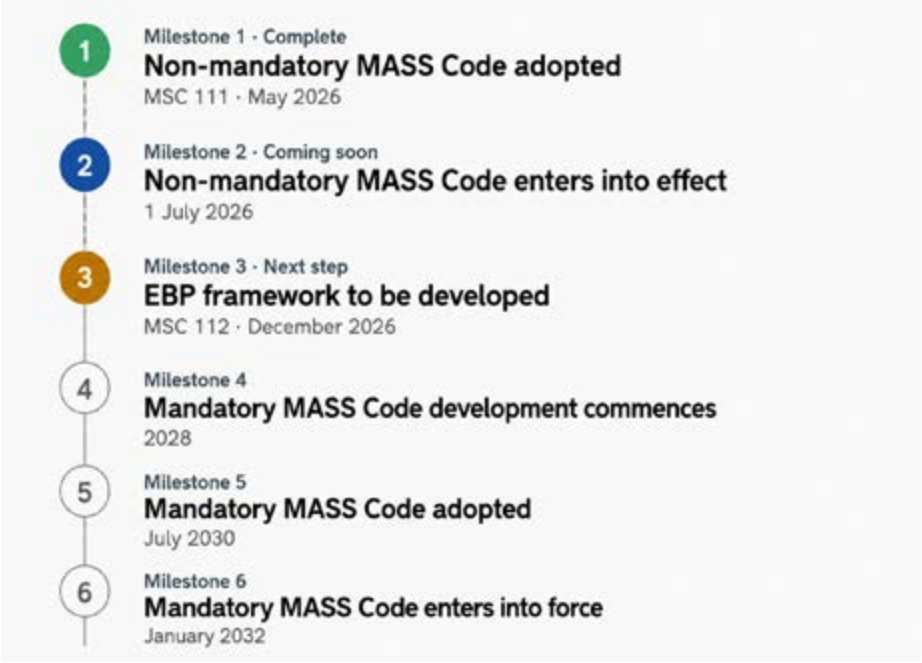
That challenge begins now.

Whether what is written in the Code actually works in practice is a different question, and one that cannot be answered at IMO committee table.

That answer will come from the Experience-Building Phase, which should not be treated as a passive reporting exercise. It is more like a stress test for the non-mandatory MASS Code to show the workability of the Code in a real operational environment.

Why This Matters Now

IMO has established a clear roadmap for the development of the goal-based MASS Code. While the timeline may change as operational complexities emerge, the latest version sets out a clear sequence:



Graphic credit: Claude AI and ChatGPT on Shipping Australia prompts.

So, we are standing at the threshold, the Code exists, but real-world performance is untested.

MSC 112 in December is a critical IMO session. It will discuss the EBP framework, including data collection, evidence types, feedback structure, and other related matters.

Those decisions will shape the mandatory Code that follows and its credibility. If the EBP evidence is incomplete, selective, or disconnected from real operations, the industry risks carrying unresolved issues into the next stage.

The Risk of Getting the Experience-Building Phase Wrong

The risk is not simply that the EBP collects general data or too little information. The greater risk is that the framework is poorly designed, and the evidence comes mainly from narrow, promotional trials in highly controlled environments. That could create a false sense of confidence.

The real test of confidence in MASS will not be routine operation. It will come when something goes wrong with connectivity, handover, remote operator intervention, cyber threats, search and rescue response, or the chain of authority.

Pictured: the spirit of autonomy overlooks a sea of data. The quality of the data will determine success.
Graphic: ChatGPT on Shipping Australia Prompts.

One incident may not invalidate the whole MASS Code, but it could expose weaknesses seriously enough to reduce confidence in the regulatory pathway and slow the move towards a mandatory framework.

What the Experience-Building Phase Really Is

An Experience-Building Phase, or EBP, is not a consultation exercise. It is a structured, evidence-driven process. It is a period in which IMO and Member States learn from practical experience before moving to the next regulatory step. Its purpose is to collect evidence, analyse operational experience, identify what is working, and decide what needs to be changed before a framework becomes mandatory.

IMO has used this approach before, including in connection with the Ballast Water Management Convention and underwater radiated noise.

Why the MASS Experience-Building Phase is Different

The MASS EBP is likely to be more complex and system-wide than earlier examples. Ballast water management and underwater radiated noise are important technical and environmental issues. MASS, however, goes directly to how ships operate and affects the entire maritime ecosystem.

It will involve a wider ship-shore-port ecosystem, including shipowners, crews, remote operators, ports, pilots, VTS, classification societies, technology providers, training institutions, and Administrations.

In some cases, ship operations may be distributed between ship and shore personnel, with intelligent systems and software involved in operational decision-making. This may require shared decision-making, shared responsibilities, and new forms of coordination between humans and systems.

That makes the MASS EBP more than a technical or technological review. It is a test of whether the Code can work across a distributed operational ecosystem.

How the MASS Experience-Building Phase Works

The MASS EBP is expected to be structured around three core workstreams:

- Data collection;
- Data analysis; and
- Code review, including the development of amendments and additions to the Code.

These workstreams will support the development of the EBP framework, reporting template, data repository, and analysis process. The results, together with review by relevant IMO bodies, will then support the development of SOLAS chapter XVI amendments and the mandatory MASS Code.

The key point is that the EBP is not simply about editing the wording of the Code. It is the main opportunity to test whether the Code is workable, practical, and safe in real MASS development, approval, and operation.

What the MASS Experience-Building Phase Must Examine

The IMO has already identified an initial list of EBP topics covering a range of themes. Those topics are important, but when read alongside the Code text, some practical matters deserve closer attention in a more distributed operational environment.

The difficult moments are unlikely to be routine operations. They are more likely to arise when a system fails, conditions change quickly, a handover is needed under pressure, or the chain of authority, intervention pathway, or system behaviour is not clear in practice.

The key areas that must be tested in this phase include the following:

- Shared responsibility and operational handover in practice
- Role-specific training and cross-functional competence
- Joint decision-making
- Joint operational procedures
- Cybersecurity assurance for MASS and Remote Operations Centre systems (scenario-based threat modelling and recovery)
- Software governance and responsibility
- Tiered emergency response arrangements

The EBP should also include clear prioritisation criteria. The Human element should not be treated only as a separate topic, because it cut across MASS design, operation, certification, remote operation, emergency response and ship-port interaction.

What Will Make or Break the MASS Experience-Building Phase: Data Quality

It is critical to make sure the data collected during the EBP explains the operational reason behind each experience, not simply that it occurred. The quality of this data will determine the success of this phase.

The quality of the data collected should include the following:

- **Operational setting:** open water, pilotage waters, port areas, channels, anchorage or berth vicinity
- **Mode of operation and duration:** mode used and time spent in each mode
- **Experience type:** trial, demonstration or commercial service
- **Human arrangement:** crew onboard, remote operators, ROC personnel, master location
- **Responsibility:** whether control was individual, shared, transferred, or unclear
- **External interaction:** pilots, VTS, tugs, terminals, or local port procedures
- **Operational condition:** normal, abnormal, degraded, fallback, or emergency

These details matter because the same MASS function may raise different issues depending on the operational setting. A function that appears effective in open water may create different safety, coordination, or intervention issues when the ship is in congested waters.

What Evidence Matters Most

EBP evidence should not be limited to successful applications or selected cases. Its reliability and neutrality will depend on whether it also captures operational difficulties, including near misses, unsafe states, failed transfers of control, machinery issues, human-machine trust issues, and procedures that did not work well in practice.

The EBP framework should allow both structured data and structured qualitative reporting. Numbers and checkboxes can show what happened, but they may not explain why it happened. Operators and stakeholders should be able to describe in detail what was unclear, what created workload, what affected trust, what made intervention difficult, and what was not workable under real operational conditions.

Final Thought

The industry now has the non-mandatory MASS Code. Commenting further SAL CEO said: "The strength of the mandatory Code will depend on the quality of evidence gathered during the Experience Building Phase. The EBP should challenge the Code to make sure it is genuinely fit for purpose".

First vessel announced for pilot of the Strategic Fleet

The *ANL Kokoda* (IMO 9516765) will be the first vessel in the pilot programme for the Australian Strategic Fleet.

The ship is a 2011-delivered vessel, built by CSSC Huangpu Wenchong Shipbuilding and, at the time of the writing of this article, is reported by French beneficial owner, CMA CGM to be a Malta-flagged and Singapore-operated vessel. The geared ship is classed by Det Norske Veritas and has a nominal TEU capacity of 1,740 TEU, with 300 reefer points. It has a summer deadweight (a measure of total weight bearing capacity) of 23,214 deadweight, and a summer draught of 10.91 metres. The vessel has a length overall of just over 175 m, and a beam of 27.4, and a gross tonnage (a measure of internal volume, not weight) of 18,358 gross tons.

The Hon. Catherine King MP, Australia's Federal Minister for Transport, commented, "this is an incredible chapter in Australia's maritime history with the first vessel being announced in Australia's Strategic Fleet. Recent global events have emphasised the importance of Australia having a resilient domestic maritime sector. The *ANL Kokoda* will provide critical maritime capabilities, including by adding a new tool to be able to respond to disruption events."

A statement from the Minister's office adds that the vessel will be available to Australian Government agencies to requisition in times of need, emergency or crises, such as natural disasters and supply chain disruptions.

As part of the five-year pilot, the vessel will become Australian-flagged and crewed and it is hoped that the programme will help build Australia's sovereign maritime workforce.

Shipping Australia CEO Capt Melwyn Noronha noted the announcement that the *ANL Kokoda* will be the first vessel entered into the Australian maritime strategic fleet.

"We congratulate the CMA CGM group, the Marseille, France-based company for entering a vessel into the fleet and we wish and hope for every success for them in the future in this venture," he said.

In relation to the policy itself, Shipping Australia has a long-standing opposition to the strategic fleet programme generally. This is an opinion we have expressed repeatedly and at length, based on the Australian experience of similar and related programmes in the past that have not had optimal outcomes. Unlike certain other people, we've not changed our position, and we're upfront about that.

Now that the Strategic fleet is here, only time will tell if this particular version of a subsidised national fleet will be optimal in the future.

Graphic: the Australian Red Ensign shaped like the Australian continent. Graphic: ChatGPT on a Shipping Australia prompt.

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Your cargo – online

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Join us on our journey for smarter shipping.

Our Offer – Basic product

Data:

- Real-time cargo monitoring 24/7/365 when in cellular network range
- Temperature set point
- Supply Air temperature
- Return Air temperature
- GPS Location
- Container Track & Trace Events

Features:

- Temperature graph
- Location tracking in map mode
- Data download in table form

Availability:

- Incremental availability starting spring 2020 from selected locations, with more origins being added as the fleet rollout continues

Your Benefit – Basic product

- Full transparency through unfiltered and untampered data
- Your feedback will allow for further development tailored to your needs
- Easy access to your digital cold chain without manual effort before each trip
- Integrated into Hapag-Lloyd Navigator – all relevant information at one glance

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www.hapag-lloyd.com

Hapag-Lloyd

The fuel emergency revealed what really blocks coastal shipping

Australia had every reason to activate coastal shipping in April 2026. The policy response went the other way.

By SUSAN OOMMEN. Ms Oommen has submitted her doctoral thesis at the University of Tasmania (Australian Maritime College) on barriers to shifting road cargoes to sea in Australia. This four-part series draws on her national-level survey and stakeholder data.

Australia had every reason to activate coastal shipping in April 2026. Instead, the Commonwealth cut the Heavy Vehicle Road User Charge to zero and halved the fuel excise. At the exact moment coastal shipping had its strongest economic and resilience case, policy reinforced road's dominance. That response was not an aberration. It was the system working as designed.

Doctoral research at the University of Tasmania, conducted at a national level across multiple stakeholder groups in the Australian freight chain, indicates that the barriers to coastal shipping are not primarily what most people assume. Fleet size, port capacity and customer reluctance are part of the picture, but not the structural core. The dominant barriers are institutional, and they are hierarchical.

Three layers of barrier emerge from the data. At the surface sit the cost asymmetries between road and coastal shipping, visible to everyone but largely symptomatic rather than causal. Beneath them lies operational fragmentation across handover points, explaining the largest share of why modal shift stalls. Underneath both sits a policy architecture that generates and sustains the conditions above it. Operational deficits produce the cost symptoms. The cost symptoms persist because the policy framework permits, and often incentivises, them.

A port authority manager with more than two decades in the sector put it plainly. "Even if savings can be eked out of coastal shipping, I fear stevedores, current commercial ports security and operations rules and laws will consume the savings or end up costing more."

That sentence captures the whole structure. Coastal shipping's comparative advantage exists in the system. The system is built to absorb it.

The fuel emergency made this architecture visible. Rising fuel costs would normally strengthen the case for coastal shipping, with fewer tonne-kilometres of fuel per container moved. Yet the policy response neutralised the price signal before the market could act on it. Road continued to dominate not because it was the better option in that moment, but because the institutional reflex to protect it overrode the alternative.

The data also reveal a perception gap. Stakeholders closest to day-to-day operations, notably rail operators, freight forwarders and international shipping lines, rate barriers consistently highest. Those furthest from operations rate them lowest. The people who run the system see the obstacles most clearly. The people who ultimately decide modal choice often do not.

For Shipping Australia's members, this creates a familiar paradox. What is revenue to a port operator is cost to a shipping line. What appears to be sound, risk-averse policy from one desk looks like unnecessary obstruction from another. No single actor sees the full picture, and no single actor holds all the levers. This goes a long way towards explaining why thirty years of single-domain interventions have produced no meaningful modal shift.

The implication is that coastal shipping cannot be unlocked through marginally better pricing, marketing or ships alone. It can only be unlocked through coordinated action across the supply chain and policy landscape, aligning incentives, smoothing handovers and redesigning rules so that coastal shipping's inherent advantages are not simply absorbed back into the system. How that coordination could be structured is the subject of the next article in this series.

Pictured: a roadside barrier. Adoption of coastal shipping faces several barriers.
Photo: Marek Studzinski via Unsplash.

Coastal shipping coordination is not the problem. Value surrender is.

Stakeholders agree on the coordination mechanisms. The disagreement is over who has to give up what.

Graphic: a representation of data analysis. Strategic patterns have emerged from doctoral research data. Graphic by Deng Xiang via Unsplash.

Everyone agrees on what coastal shipping coordination should look like. So why does it not happen? The doctoral research shows the disagreement is not about what to do, but about who would have to give up what. The first article in this series argued that the barriers to coastal shipping in Australia are institutional rather than operational. The natural follow-on is to ask what the institutional alternative actually looks like.

Two strategic patterns emerged from the data, both endorsed almost uniformly. The first covers collaboration mechanisms, namely building transparent dialogue between operators, developing collaborative pricing models, pooling investment in shared infrastructure and exchanging operational data within appropriate boundaries. The second covers coopetition mechanisms, namely specialisation by area of expertise, formal contracts setting resource-sharing terms, market segmentation and the maintenance of distinct brand identities within shared arrangements.

Stakeholders across the freight chain endorsed every one of these mechanisms. No one is arguing the principles.

More importantly, the mechanisms are not theoretical. Working examples already exist in the Australian system. TGE (now part of Linfox Logistics) integrates freight forwarding with coastal shipping, while StraitLink runs coastal services across Bass Strait. The Australian Rail Track Corporation and the Bass Strait Shipping Alliance, in different ways, demonstrate competitive infrastructure access and coordinated operations under defined terms. Each operates under specific accommodations in Part IIIA or Part X of the Competition and Consumer Act 2010, showing what current law can permit when explicitly designed to. They are not exceptions to the rule. They are evidence of what the rule could permit if it were redesigned.

The structural divide in the data explains why such models remain isolated. Demand-side stakeholders, namely rail operators, freight forwarders, intermodal terminal operators and shipping lines, consistently endorsed these coordination mechanisms. Supply-side stakeholders, namely port authorities, manufacturers and road operators, were more selective, backing mechanisms that preserve their commercial position and resisting those that would redistribute pricing autonomy, infrastructure access or modal decision authority. This is not an information gap. It is a rational response to incentives.

A further constraint operates above all of this. Australian competition law makes coordination between domestic operators commercially risky even to explore, while international ocean carriers have explicit exemptions under Part X of the Competition and Consumer Act 2010 to coordinate on capacity and pricing. The asymmetry is striking. The same coordination is lawful for international carriers and presumptively suspect for the domestic operators who need it most. Detailed discussion of implementing these strategies therefore carries regulatory exposure and, as one senior respondent noted, becomes a non-starter without an appropriate exemption. The chilling effect operates at the strategy-formation stage, not just at implementation.

The implication for Shipping Australia's members is direct. Coastal shipping integration is not waiting on consensus, new strategy or better operators. It is waiting on a regulatory architecture that makes agreed coordination mechanisms commercially viable at scale, rather than confining them to isolated bilateral arrangements. The next article in this series examines why this matters, namely the drivers that make coastal shipping integration worth the institutional effort in the first place.

The case for coastal shipping has already been made. So why is it not winning?

Recognition of coastal shipping's value is comprehensive. Action is not.

Most advocacy for coastal shipping begins by making the case. The first two articles in this series took the opposite approach, examining barriers and coordination mechanisms first. This article returns to the case itself because the doctoral research sets out explicitly what industry readers recognise but rarely see stated plainly. The case for coastal shipping is already widely accepted. Recognition is comprehensive. Action is not.

Three driver patterns emerged from the data. The first is economic, covering reduced road congestion, lower road wear and tear, fewer highway fatalities, and the volume efficiency that sea transport offers over land-based alternatives. The second is strategic, covering export cost reduction, horizontal integration for international liners, the resilience that comes with a functioning coastal network during global trade disruptions, and the latent advantage of an existing port network along the coastline. Stakeholders endorsed every economic and strategic driver across the freight chain. The case is not contested at the level of awareness.

The third driver pattern is environmental, and it is worth naming honestly. The environmental case for coastal shipping was the weakest driver group in the data. The compact port footprint argument was particularly unconvincing to stakeholders, and the broader environmental framing carried less weight than the economic or strategic case. This will not surprise anyone who has tried to shift freight decisions on environmental grounds alone. Freight decisions follow freight logic. The environmental benefit is real, but it is rarely decisive.

The strategic case is where recognition runs deepest. International shipping operators rated horizontal integration and export cost reduction at the maximum, reflecting the clarity that comes from operating in markets where coastal feeder networks already function as commercial infrastructure rather than aspiration. Their recognition matters because they sit at the interface between Australia's freight system and the global one, with direct experience of what a working coastal network looks like elsewhere and what is missing in Australia's current settings.

Pictured: a driver. Drivers of coastal shipping have emerged from the data

The data also revealed a fault line worth dwelling on. The motorways of the sea concept, namely the idea that coastal corridors function as no-cost infrastructure compared to highways, produced the largest single stakeholder divergence in the entire study. Rail operators rated it strongly favourable. Port authorities rated it strongly unfavourable. The gap was wider than any other divergence the research recorded. The people closest to operations recognise the opportunity. The people closest to existing port infrastructure do not. This is not an information gap. It is a positional one.

The pattern across these driver groups matches what the research showed for barriers and strategic patterns. Recognition is widely shared. Implementation is not. The case for coastal shipping wins the argument and loses the decision because the institutional architecture needed to convert recognition into commercial action is missing. The drivers exist. They are not the problem to solve.

The final article in this series brings these threads together by examining the conditions under which coastal shipping can finally be integrated as a complementary mode within Australia's domestic intermodal freight system.

Australia is solving the wrong problem

Coastal shipping is a governance architecture problem, not a contest between modes.

For decades, the conversation about coastal shipping in Australia has been framed as a contest between modes. Road versus sea. Rail versus sea. Which mode wins. Which mode loses. The doctoral research underpinning this series finds that this is not the problem industry needs to solve. The barriers are institutional. The coordination mechanisms are agreed. The drivers are recognised. What is missing is the governance architecture that would let the freight system act on what it already knows.

Pictured: a train vs a ship. The conversation about coastal shipping in Australia has ben framed as a contest between ships and trains. Photo credits: Dan Loran (train), Anil Reddy (ship), via Unsplash.

The April 2026 fuel supply emergency made this visible. At the moment that coastal shipping had its strongest economic and resilience case, policy reflexes protected the incumbent mode rather than the system outcome. The Commonwealth cut the Heavy Vehicle Road User Charge to zero and halved fuel excise, neutralising the price signal before the market could act. That is not a modal competition problem. It is a governance design problem. The system did exactly what its architecture told it to do.

Three conditions emerge from the research as preconditions for change. The first is a shared problem definition. Across the freight chain, stakeholders agree coastal shipping is useful, but they describe different problems when asked what stops it from working. Cost asymmetries. Port rules. Legal risk. Commercial control. Each definition is correct. Integration needs a shared definition of the system problem, not a mode-by-mode list of grievances.

The second condition is aligned decision rights and incentives. The actors who bear the cost of coordination are not always those who capture its benefit. Port authorities, manufacturers and road operators are not resisting change because they misunderstand it. They are responding rationally to incentive structures that reward their current position. Integration requires shifting decision authority and reward so that no single actor has to surrender value unilaterally to make coastal shipping work.

The third condition is a permissive institutional architecture. Rules, contracts and competition settings currently treat structured coordination as exceptional. Each working example in the Australian system, namely TGE/Linfox, StraitLink, the Australian Rail Track Corporation, the Bass Strait Shipping Alliance, required specific regulatory accommodation to function. Integration at scale needs an architecture that treats well-structured coordination as normal system design, not a special case requiring exemption.

Taken together, these conditions describe a different kind of problem than the one Australia has been trying to solve. This is not a technical optimisation problem solvable by better ships, better schedules or sharper marketing. It is a collaboration problem at its core, and a supply chain competitiveness problem in its consequences. Who defines the objective, who can change the rules, who shares the risk and the reward. These are not engineering questions. No single operator, port or government department can answer them alone.

For Shipping Australia's members and the wider industry, three things follow. Reframe the conversation. Start talking about system design and freight architecture rather than road versus sea. Convene early. Use existing forums to build shared problem definitions and pilot governance models before reform is forced by the next disruption. Signal clearly to governments that coastal shipping integration is a governance reform agenda, not a series of subsidy or project decisions.

The question is no longer whether coastal shipping makes sense. The research has settled that. The question is whether Australia is willing to redesign its freight architecture so that collaboration and supply chain competitiveness can prevail. That is the work of the next decade. It begins by naming the problem correctly.

Pictured: Officer Lee Tae Young (inset) was awarded the 2025 IMO Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea. As Officer Young was unavailable for the presented, it was accepted on his behalf. The Award was presented by IMO Secretary General, Arsenio Dominguez.

"A single lapse in vigilance can take a life," says recipient of IMO Bravery Award

Officer Lee Tae Young, a first mate from the Republic of Korea, has been awarded the IMO Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea, in recognition of his heroic actions that saved 12 fellow crew members from the Geum Seong No. 135 when it sunk in November 2024.

He was honoured during a special ceremony recognizing seafarers held in London on 24 November 2025, in the margins of the IMO Assembly taking place from 24 November to 3 December 2025.

IMO Secretary-General Mr. Arsenio Dominguez applauded Mr. Lee "for the extraordinary leadership, courage and selflessness" he displayed, adding that the safety of seafarers remains paramount at IMO.

Ms. Lydia Ferrad of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), which had nominated Mr. Lee, accepted the award on his behalf.

A story of survival and comradeship

In a statement to IMO ahead of the awards, Mr. Lee recounted how he risked life for his crewmates on 8 November 2024, when the fishing vessel Geum Seong No. 135 rapidly listed and capsized:

"In that instant, my body moved instinctively, my actions preceding my thoughts. I acted on the belief, ingrained from my days as a scuba diving instructor, that cool headedness saves lives."

Mr. Lee, who had no prior search and rescue training, immediately jumped into action, throwing two life rings and helping crew members climb to safety in extremely difficult conditions. While some crew members managed to hang on to the propeller – the only part of the vessel that remained above water – others were swept away by strong currents and waves.

"I prioritized my colleagues over my own safety. It wasn't so much a choice I made, but rather a feeling of family, having lived together on the sea. That feeling remains unchanged to this day," he continued.

Out of the 27 crew members on board the vessels, 12 were rescued by Mr. Lee. He was the last to leave the Geum Seong No. 135.

"At every moment I wanted to give up, my family's faces came to mind. And my colleagues before me looked at me with eyes that said, 'I want to live.' That gaze made my body move again," he added.

He was grateful for the award, while stressing that the safety of seafarers is not an individual responsibility, but one that both shipowners and governments must share: "We must never forget that a single lapse in vigilance can take a life."

Certificates of Commendation

- **Captain Flouris Dimitrios and the crew of the tug supply vessel Aigaion Pelagos**, nominated by Greece, for their exceptional bravery, exemplary seamanship and resource management skills in the salvage operation of the M/T Sounion. The Captain and crew successfully averted the catastrophic environmental disaster under adverse safety and security conditions, risking their own lives. The vessel was sailing in the Red Sea carrying about 150,000 metric tons of heavy crude oil and nearly 3,000 metric tons of fuel/bunkers on board, when it was struck by three uncrewed aerial devices and lost engine power. After the crew evacuated, several explosions and fires dispersed on the main deck, causing extensive damage to the vessel. The crew carried out an extensive salvation operation, boarding the abandoned vessel under extreme heat and hazardous conditions, managing to extinguish all the fires and ensure the cargo was stationary. The actions of the Aigaion Pelagos Captain and crew were crucial in preventing an environmental disaster. Captain Dimitrios was at the Awards Ceremony to receive the certificates.
- **The Members of the Special Rescue Team of the Japanese Coast Guard**, nominated by Japan, for their courage and determination during the rescue of the remaining survivor of the Japanese tugboat Shouei-Maru that caught fire and capsized due to a collision with a cargo ship while towing a barge. Divers from the Kobe Coast Guard Office found and rescued the captain of the boat, who unfortunately passed away at the hospital. The Special Rescue Team later arrived at the site of the incident and struck the tugboat with a hammer to check for survivors. When they heard hammering back, the Team dived into the upturned tugboat without hesitation, risking their lives by entering without waiting for safety measures in poor conditions. After half an hour, the crew member was found and brough to safety just before the boat sank. This rescue operation was extremely difficult and carried out at great personal risk to the members of the Special Rescue Team who took part in it to save a life. The certificates were received by Mr. Kento Noda, Leader of the Special Rescue Team, Japan Coast Guard.

Pictured: Captain Flouris Dimitrios and the crew of the tug supply vessel Aigaion Pelagos were commended for their bravery. Captain Dimitrios accepted the Commendation from the IMO Secretary General.

Pictured: Members of the Special Rescue Team of the Japanese Coast Guard were commended for their bravery. Mr. Kento Noda, Leader of the Special Rescue Team, Japan Coast Guard, accepted the Commendation from the IMO Secretary General.

Pictured: Aviation Survival Technician Second Class (AST2) Micheal Diglio, U.S. Coast Guard was commended for his bravery. Technician Diglio accepted the Commendation from the IMO Secretary General.

- **The Captain and crew of the Rescue 901 helicopter of the 103 Squadron, Gander NL&L, Royal Canadian Airforce**, nominated by Canada for their courage, tenacity and technical skill displayed during the rescue of the 20 crew members of the 207-meter-long disabled cargo vessel MBC Baltic III. The helicopter required hand flying due to turbulence from persistent and extreme aircraft altitude, while the vessel violently rocked amidst 18-foot waves and 40-55 knots of wind. Though the ship's deck grew dangerously slippery due to ice and the bridge in complete disarray with scattered debris, the rescue team successfully managed to hoist the whole crew to safety. Major Peter Wright and several crew members received the certificates.
- **Aviation Survival Technician Second Class (AST2) Micheal Diglio, Coast Guard rescue swimmer at the Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater of the United States Coast Guard**, nominated by the United States, for his brave and decisive actions during the rescue of two mariners stranded aboard the disabled sailing vessel Venture amidst the extreme conditions of the tropical storm Debby. After seeing a distress flair in the darkening sky, AST2 Diglio had to rely on the helicopter's senses instead of visual cues during the search. Once the vessel was located, he deployed into the sea under time pressure due to the limited fuel reserves, battling rough currents and torrential rain to intercept the survivors.
  After securing the first survivor amid towering waves and 50-knot winds, he signalled for the hoist whilst keeping the mariner stable during the ascent. He repeated this for this rescue process for the second survivor. AST2 Diglio displayed selflessness and courageous leadership whilst executing a life-threatening rescue operation.
  AST2 Diglio was in London to accept his certificate at the Awards Ceremony.

Letters of Commendation

- **Lieutenant Md. Shoiful Alam and the crew of the Bangladesh Coast Guard Tug Promotto**, nominated by Bangladesh, for demonstrating courage and determination during a fire-fighting operation on the crude oil tanker Banglar Sourabh, successfully averting an oil spill and preventing significant marine environmental damage in poor weather conditions.
- **The Master and the crew of the M/V Maersk Leader**, nominated by Brazil, for rescuing all 20 crew members of the Bram Force, which has caught fire during a night operation with low visibility and a 2.5-meter swell. The crew completed six round trips between vessels to bring them to safety.

- **Captain Todor Ivanov Todorov and the crew of the M/V Eleen Armonia**, nominated by Bulgaria, for rescuing 34 crew members from the burning vessel Hasil Abadi 28, which was not visible on radar, battling the fire at great risk of explosion.
- **Captain Xu Jiamin, Master of the M/V Luo Tong 7002**, nominated by China, for leading a successful rescue of all 17 crew members from the drifting crane ship Yu Hang Qi Zhong 28 during a typhoon, using expert ship-handling skills in complete darkness and 4–5-metre waves.
- **Mr. Li Wenxia, crew member of the of rescue helicopter B-7312**, Beihai No.1 Rescue Flying Service, BeiHai Rescue Bureau, nominated by China, for showing exceptional resolve during the rescue of a fisherman who was holding onto the mast remaining above water of fishing vessel Jileyu 02163.
- **Captain Qiang Li and the crew of the hopper dredger Jun Yang 1**, nominated by China, who towed the powerless Leo Empire away from a reef, preventing a fuel spill and saving all seven crew members from a life-threatening situation and serious environmental incident.
- **Captain Xiao Wei and the crew of the M/V Xin An Ning**, nominated by China, for rescuing three people set adrift at sea after their pneumatic boat lost control and contact for five days without food or water.
- **Captain Zhao Guoqiang and the crew of the M/S Amoy Century**, nominated by China, who responded without hesitation to a distress call and rescued by the M/V ASL Bauhinia, which was on fire with hazardous cargo and 22 crew members and three security guards aboard, despite the danger of the explosion.
- **Captain Kondrate Gvadzabia and the crew of the oil/chemical tanker Owl 5**, nominated by Georgia, for demonstrating exceptional seamanship skills and professionalism by manoeuvring in rough seas and darkness to evacuate a critically ill civilian for helicopter extraction.
- **Mr. Albert Buettner, Mr. Peter Pfeiffer, Mr. Alex Hempel and Mr. Rene Baudisch, the leader and the members of the Towing Assistance Team (TAT), Central Command for Maritime Emergencies (CCME)**, nominated by Germany, for showing great resolve in towing the powerless M/T Eventin, preventing it from grounding and causing major environmental damages from the 100,000 tons of crude oil aboard.
- **Captain Soni Thomas and the crew of the INS Teg, Indian Navy**, nominated by India, displayed outstanding bravery in rescuing nine survivors from the capsized tanker Prestige Falcon during strong winds and limited visibility, though one life was sadly lost.
- **Captain Sabinesh S. Vayath and the crew of the M/V Maersk Yukon**, nominated by Panama, for their vigilance and skill in rescuing two fishermen adrift for four days after their boat's engine broke down, maneuvering the vessel in harsh conditions to bring them to safety.
- **The crew members of the search and rescue vessel BRP Melchora Aquino (MRRV-9702), Philippine Coast Guard**, nominated by the Philippines, demonstrated leadership and courage when rescuing 16 of 17 crew members from the sinking M/T Terranova during a typhoon, preventing a massive fuel spill of 1.4 million litres.
- **Captain Byungsuk Park, Master of the fishing vessel 999 Bumsung, and Captain Hyeongtaek Im, Master of the fishing vessel 621 Yeongsin**, nominated by the Republic of Korea, coordinated the night rescue of 10 fishermen from the capsized 136 Danuri, in conditions of large waves and strong winds.
- **Captain Hyunwoo Park, Master of the fishing vessel New Angel**, nominated by the Republic of Korea, for bravely rescuing 11 passengers, some of whom were drifting at sea with life jackets and close to hypothermic shock, from the flooded and grounded vessel Fighting, rushing to the half sunken vessel to save lives.
- **Captain Atıl Aycan Aksoy, Master of the tug vessel Kurtarma 5**, nominated by Türkiye, who prevented a collision by skilfully pushing the drifting Bunun Ace away from shore and passing boats moored, avoiding disaster.
- **The crew members of the M/T T. Caroline**, nominated by Türkiye, for courageously saving two people from the sinking sailing yacht Delfin and Deniz in rough seas, when helicopter and tug assistance was deemed unfeasible.
- **Lieutenant Robert Turns, Lieutenant Commander Joshua Womboldt, AMT2 Eric Lamy and AST2 Hunter Joseph, crew members of helicopter CG- 6048, Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak, United States Coast Guard**, nominated by the United States, for carrying out a high-risk nighttime rescue beyond operational limits in complete darkness and challenging circumstances to save an unresponsive mariner from the fishing vessel Alaska Victory.

Seafarers' migrant rescues recognized

The bravery, professionalism and compassion demonstrated by crews of merchant vessels in the rescue of migrants at sea around the world was given special recognition, with the captains and crews of 11 different vessels, nominated by China, the United Kingdom, and the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA).

Galaxy Leader

The Secretary-General further recognized the courage of the captain and crew of the cargo vessel Galaxy Leader, who endured more than a year in captivity between November 2023 and January 2025.

"Their ordeal serves as a stark reminder of the many seafarers who, through no fault of their own, have been held hostage or subject to prolonged detention and grave danger at sea amid geopolitical tensions," said Secretary-General Dominguez.

IMO Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea

This annual Award was established by IMO to provide international recognition for those who perform acts of exceptional bravery, displaying outstanding courage in attempting to save life at sea or in attempting to prevent damage to the marine environment.

Australian Maritime College student Ajayraj Thangarajan Sakunthala has won the 2025 Shipping Australia Prize!

Ajayraj, who is studying an MBA in Maritime Management - Maritime Logistics at the Australian Maritime College, was awarded the Shipping Australia-sponsored prize because of his demonstrated excellence and high achievement in his studies. He has received a cash prize and his academic transcript will be updated to show his achievement.

Shipping Australia (SAL) caught up with Ajayraj to congratulate him on his achievement and to find out more.

SAL: Tell me a little bit about yourself. Who are you? What's your background?

AJAYRAJ: I am a seafarer from Kerala, India, with a decade of experience on oil tankers, having last served as a Second Officer. Even though shipping is a vast, global industry, it is surprisingly interconnected. A socio-political, technological, or environmental decision in one part of the world creates an immediate ripple effect across the entire global supply chain. I am drawn to this dynamic nature; it is unpredictable and challenging, but it forces you to stay sharp, adaptable, and professionally competent every single day.

While I valued my time at sea, I eventually felt limited in a purely operational role and knew I could contribute much more on the commercial side of the industry. That drive to make a bigger impact brought me to Tasmania, where I am now pursuing my MBA at the Australian Maritime College.

SAL: Congratulations on winning our Prize! Well-deserved! How do you feel?

AJAYRAJ: I was at home in Launceston with my five-year-old son, trying to brainstorm my research topic for the next semester. When the email came through, I had to read it twice just to believe it. I felt an overwhelming sense of validation.

Leaving a secure, well-paid career as a Second Mate to become a student again was terrifying; I walked away from my 'comfort zone' with no guarantees. Winning this prize proved that the risk was worth the reward. It isn't the finish line, but it is the confirmation I needed to know that espite the uncertainty of starting over, I am on the right path.

Shipping Australia is the voice of the industry, representing the major players who drive our $200 billion trade economy. To be recognized by such a peak body is not just an Honor; it is a powerful endorsement. It signals to future employers that I am successfully bridging the gap between my operational background and the commercial reality of shipping. This award validates my knowledge and adds immense credibility to my profile, putting my name directly in front of the decision-makers I aspire to work with.

SAL: What will you do with your winnings?

AJAYRAJ: I plan to spend it entirely on my wife and son. They left a comfortable life in India to join me here, accepting the financial tightness and uncertainty of student life just to support my dream. Their support allowed me to focus on my studies, so this reward belongs to them as much as it does to me.

SAL: Tell us about the course you're studying

AJAYRAJ: I am studying the MBA in Maritime and Logistics Management at AMC. My journey to this course began while I was still at sea; I completed an Advanced Diploma in Ship Brokering and Chartered Vessel Operations from Lloyds Maritime Institute, achieving a 90% aggregate. That diploma opened my eyes to the financial and commercial logic behind every ship's voyage. I realized that to truly transition from an operational role to a strategic one, I needed the formal education and rigorous training that only a specialized MBA from AMC could provide.

AMC is not just a college; it is a world-class research institution and a member of the International Association of Maritime Universities (IAMU). I chose AMC specifically because the MBA program offers professional accreditation from the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT), which provides immense credibility and networking opportunities.

Australia was the clear choice because it is a global powerhouse in commodities, specifically coal, iron ore, wheat, and LNG. Furthermore, Tasmania is positioning itself at the forefront of the energy transition, with the upcoming Green Methanol exports from Bell Bay. As someone aiming to excel in the energy sector, being in the centre of this innovation is exactly where I need to be.

Tasmania is a hidden gem. Where else in the world can you study at a world-class maritime research institute with expert guidance at your fingertips, and then drive just 30 minutes to find yourself in a world-famous tourist destination? It offers the perfect balance. To unwind, we visit the vibrant beaches, scenic farmlands, and the beautiful parks for my son. My family loves the cool climate and the peaceful lifestyle in Launceston, but above all, the Tasmanian community has been incredibly welcoming to us.

SAL: Why did you decide to study maritime subjects? / Why do you want a maritime career?

AJAYRAJ: After ten years at sea, I often felt that my potential was being underutilized. Seafaring is primarily an execution-based job, you follow orders. I wanted to be in the other side of office who pass those orders. I became fascinated by the dynamic, fast-paced nature of the commercial sector, understanding why a ship goes where it goes and the economics behind it. I decided to quit my sea career to chase this ambition, and receiving this recognition from Shipping Australia confirms to me that I am on the right path.

SAL: What are your future career plans after you finish your course?

AJAYRAJ: Through my studies at AMC, I have become fascinated by the intricacies and dynamic nature of shipping finance and the commercial sector. My specific goal is to establish myself as a Chartering Manager in the energy sector. I know it is a long road to reach that level, but my philosophy is simple: approach it systematically, put in the hard work, and trust that the results will follow.

SAL: What one message or one piece of advice would you give to a person like you but a few years younger than you who is considering a career in the maritime industry or in studying maritime subjects at university? Why would you give that message / advice?

AJAYRAJ: Just start. The shipping industry is so vast that you don't need to find your 'perfect' role on day one. Wherever you start in shipping, your experience is not going to be wasted. You can always realign your path later, be it into operations, supply chain, and procurement, shipping agency, brokering, maritime law, chartering, or port management. The beauty of this field is that it accommodates every skill set.

To those just starting: Don't just chase the money. Understand your strengths first, then choose the sector that makes you excited to wake up every morning.

To seafarers looking to transition ashore like me: It is never too late. You are not starting from zero; your years at sea are a massive asset that the shore side needs. Do not fear the change. Take that first step to upskill yourself, and the industry will open for you.

SAL: What do you do in your spare time? Why?

AJAYRAJ: It varies depending on the time of year. Currently, during the summer semester break, I prioritize spending quality time with my wife and son. However, I am also using this downtime to get a head start on my upcoming research project regarding the Green Methanol supply chain. With Tasmania (Bell Bay) emerging as a key production hub, I am deeply interested in how this fuel will reshape maritime logistics and regulation. I find it exciting to research the 'future' of our industry even when I am off the clock.

Graphic: a sad seafarer stands in front of a stormy sea while a happy seafarer enjoys a sunny day. Both seafarers are sailing on a sea of unanchored data. Graphic credit: ChatGPT, generated from a Shipping Australia prompt.

Seafarers aren't quite as unhappy as you might think

Seafarer happiness may possibly have taken a little bit of a wobble of late, according to the Mission to Seafarers (MtS) Q1 2026 Seafarers' Happiness Index. But an alternative view based on the same data is that seafarer happiness is holding up remarkably well and, indeed, there appears to be an ongoing improvement in happiness.

The MtS report tells a narrative story of deterioration, but its happiness category scores mostly show stability or improvement. Or, to put it another way, MtS's own numbers tell a less gloomy story than its report does.

The ten component scores in the Happiness Index increased in total from 69.95 points in Q1 2025 to 71.87 in Q1 2026. Nine of ten improved from Q1 2025 to Q1 2026. The only year-on-year fall was in Workload Management.

If we add up the net point difference between Q1 2025 and Q1 2026, the result is a positive increase of 1.92 points. That's not a decline. That's a 2.74% improvement in the Mission's own happiness score. The top three major drivers of the increase in seafarer happiness were improvements in Welfare Facilities Ashore, General Happiness, and Connectivity. Improvements in Training & Development also substantially helped to boost happiness.

Overall, then, if the data is accepted, then the figures do not support a simple story of unhappy seafarers. They suggest that reported seafarer happiness has been broadly stable and, on several measures, has mildly improved over time.

Conflict in the Middle East

Q1 2026 was a quarter of two parts, according to the Mission to Seafarers, with seafarer sentiment improving. However, the onset of conflict in the Middle East triggered a "rapid and marked deterioration in seafarer wellbeing". The Mission added that the drop in sentiment before and after the breakout of war is "quite staggering… even for those not in the impact zone, stress, fear and uncertainty becomes almost a new pandemic".

The MtS analysed sentiment inside the quarter and reports that pre-conflict, sentiment stood at 7.35 out of ten and after the conflict started it fell to about 7.01 points.

"The Persian Gulf crisis has become the defining factor in this quarter's results," the MtS argues, with the largest declines in shore leave, welfare, and workload "directly reflect[ing] the operational realities of vessels trapped in a war zone. Crews cannot go ashore, support services are extremely limited, and the stress of working in a conflict zone has intensified workload pressures".

Excluding "Overall Happiness"

The MtS Happiness Index report discusses "Overall Happiness" but does not say how this is derived – it appears to be an average of the component scores. If we were to count it in our analysis below it would distort results through double-counting, so we will disregard "Overall Happiness". However, it appears possible to subject each of

the individual scores for each actual category to analysis. Each category in the MtS report is marked out ten, and, as there are ten categories then there are potentially 100 points per quarter.

General Happiness

The first component category of the Index is "General Happiness" (note: this is different to "Overall Happiness"). The MtS notes that in Q4 2025 the General Happiness score was 7.39 whereas in Q1 2026 it was 7.22. This decline is framed negatively by the MtS with two negative seafarer stories (one of which is highlighted in bold, and green, and is reported separately) to one positive story. The decline is attributed to the cumulative weight of challenges and the MtS concludes that the decline suggests the balance between fulfilment in work and the sacrifice for is shifting unfavourably.

However, in absolute terms the decline is just 0.17 points, which is a decrease of 2.33% on a consecutive quarter-on-quarter basis. That could be within the margin of error for the survey, unfortunately, we don't know what that margin is because the MtS hasn't told us. It could be argued that the quarter-on-quarter result is effectively flat, and no real trend can be discerned. But, without the margin of error data, we can't really tell.

Comparisons are normally made on a like-quarter basis (the quarter this year compared to the same quarter last year) as that eliminates calendar variables such as seasons, seasonal weather, holidays and so on. In the prior corresponding quarter of Q1 2025 it is notable that the General Happiness of seafarers was 6.8 points and the current Q1 2026 figures show an increase of 0.42 points, which is a 6.18% increase. That could be outside the margin of error so it's possible that the General Happiness of seafarers has increased over time. But it could be inside the margin of error for all we know. And we don't know, because the Mission to Seafarers hasn't told us.

If we divide the absolute change in the category "General Happiness" by the total change for all the categories added together (which is 0.42 points divided by 1.92 points) and multiply by 100, we get 21.88%, which means that the improvement in "General Happiness" was the second-most important driver of improved total happiness between Q1 2025 and Q1 2026.

Connectivity

Happiness about Connectivity fell from 7.81 points in the previous quarter to 7.65 in the current quarter, a fall of 0.16 points, and a percentage decline of 2.05%. The MtS do provide a positive seafarer testimony that crew like Connectivity, "[i]t's a big relief for us! Talking to family reminds us of home and loved ones, reducing loneliness and stress. It's a mood booster, giving us energy to keep going and keep dreaming for them," but the MtS quickly shifts into a negative framing of the psychological burden of being digitally, but not physically, present. The MtS also argues that seafarers can feel disadvantaged if it is not present. In another part of the same report at p.7, Connectivity is framed negatively, with the MtS arguing the "drop is significant".

While the language is sharp, without the underlying data it is not possible to calculate if the drop is or is not "significant" from a statistical basis. We would argue that, as Connectivity scored 7.29 points in Q1 2025 and 7.65 points in the most recent quarter, the happiness rating for Connectivity should be regarded as improved.

If we divide the absolute change in the category "Connectivity" by the total change for all the categories added together (which is 0.36 points divided by 1.92 points) and then multiply by 100 we get 18.75%, which means that the improvement in "Connectivity" was the third-most important driver of improved total happiness between Q1 2025 and Q1 2026.

Shore Leave

The happiness score for Shore Leave increased from 6.56 points in the previous 2025 quarter to 6.78 points in the first quarter of 2026. In Q1 2025 it was 6.73 points. Shipping Australia would argue this is either flat or mildly improved. Our communications with government officials have not indicated that shore leave is a markedly bad problem in Australia specifically. The MtS downplayed the improvement in the Shore Leave category and framed it in a diminished way, "the modest improvement", which was then followed by complaints about a lack of access to shore leave and a negative testimonial from a seafarer. The MtS argues that access to shore leave is constrained by operational pressures, port regulations, and terminal design.

Graphic: a seafarer chats to a young family member. Mission to Seafarers data shows that seafarer happiness from "connectivity" increased over the course of a year. Graphic credit: ChatGPT, generated from a Shipping Australia prompt.

Wages

In the previous Q4 2025 quarter, the MtS recorded a wage happiness score of 6.81. In Q1 2026, the Mission reports an improvement to 6.98, a rise of 0.17 points, which is a rise of just under 2%. In the prior corresponding quarter of Q1 2025, it was 6.86 points. Shipping Australia would argue that going from 6.86 points to 6.98 points is probably best regarded as "flat". The Mission notes that seafarers recognise that maritime employment provides income to seafarers that they could not easily match ashore, particularly in developing economies. The MtS also notes that the disparity between seafarer wages and shore-based alternatives in developed countries drives recruitment challenges.

Food Quality; Health and exercise

The two categories "Food Quality" and "Health and Exercise" are presented together by the Mission. Food Quality was 7.29 points in Q4 2025 and rose to 7.31 in Q1 2026, while Health and Exercise was 7.09 points and rose to 7.30 points. If we go back to previous reports, we can see that in the prior corresponding quarter of Q1 2025, Food Quality was 7.12 points and Health and Exercise was 7.22 points. Shipping Australia would suggest this data shows a mild improvement over time both for Food Quality category and also for the Health and Exercise category. The MtS made neutral comments about the importance of nutrition and exercise, but then emphasised health concerns, arguing that there is growing concern about the impact and availability of food and water. This was accompanied both by a negative comment from a seafarer about exercise equipment and a positive comment about food: "Chief cook is extremely performing and sharing his skills in making a mouth watering foods".

Training & Development

This category stood at 6.99 points in the previous quarter and rose just over half a point to 7.52 points, which induced the MtS to comment that a significant improvement in training scores is a positive development. However, it warned that training that "merely" checks boxes is resented. The MtS provided a negative comment from a seafarer, "They will give you training in your working hours. Sometimes in your break time… It means you need to adjust, take it or leave it. It means you don't have a choice". The score reported in Q1 2025 was 7.27 points, so there has been a reported increase in happiness over time.

Interactions

This category reflects the resilience of crew cohesion, which rose from 7.68 points in Q4 2025 to 7.93 points in Q1 2026 and it was the category with the single highest happiness score, reflecting positive shipboard working relationships. Interactions is the category that is said to be a source of satisfaction and a buffer against other challenges. The MtS framed this high scoring happiness category by pairing it with the following negative seafarer story: "2nd engineer put fist in my face and threatened to hit me. Chief engineer tried to give me an unfair disciplinary. Captain kicked me off ship when he found out I was autistic."

Graphic: a seafarer relaxes on a beach for some well-earned shore leave. Seafarer happiness with shore leave improved slightly on a quarter-on-quarter basis, according to Mission to Seafarer data. Graphic credit: ChatGPT, generated from a Shipping Australia prompt.

The "Interactions" score in the prior corresponding quarter in 2025 was 7.87 points out of ten, which would tend to indicate that, even though there may be a dip in any given quarter or a specifically highlighted negative story, the overall trend is that seafarers are largely happy with shipboard interactions.

Workload management

This was the lowest scoring category in Q1 2026 at 6.36 points, down slightly from Q4 2025, and down even from Q1 2025 when a score of 6.45 points was recorded. The MtS said that seafarers describe unsustainable working patterns, inadequate rest, and a pressure to exceed regulatory limits.

Welfare Facilities Ashore

The happiness score for Welfare Facilities Ashore rose from 6.68 points in Q4 2025 to 6.82 in Q1 2026, which was described as a "modest improvement". The MtS noted that some ports offer excellent welfare facilities while others provide little or nothing. It was observed that there is a disparity between ports in developed and developing nations. The Q1 2025 data shows that Welfare Facilities Ashore received a score of 6.34 points, so it appears that there has been steady progress on this front given the 7.57% increase between Q1 2025 and Q1 2026.

If we divide the absolute change in the category "Welfare Facilities Ashore" by the total change for all the categories added together (which is 0.48 points divided by 1.92 points) and multiply by 100, we get 25.00%, which means that the improvement in "Welfare Facilities Ashore" was the most important driver of improved total happiness between Q1 2025 and Q1 2026 for seafarers.

Gloomy or bright?

The data presented by the Mission to Seafarers does not justify a sweeping narrative of deterioration. Serious hardship exists, but the published index scores suggest stability or mild improvement in many areas. A more balanced commentary would be more fair and more accurate in relation to the data as presented by the Mission.

The key question, which we tackle in the next article, is what weight (if any) can we put on the Mission's numbers?

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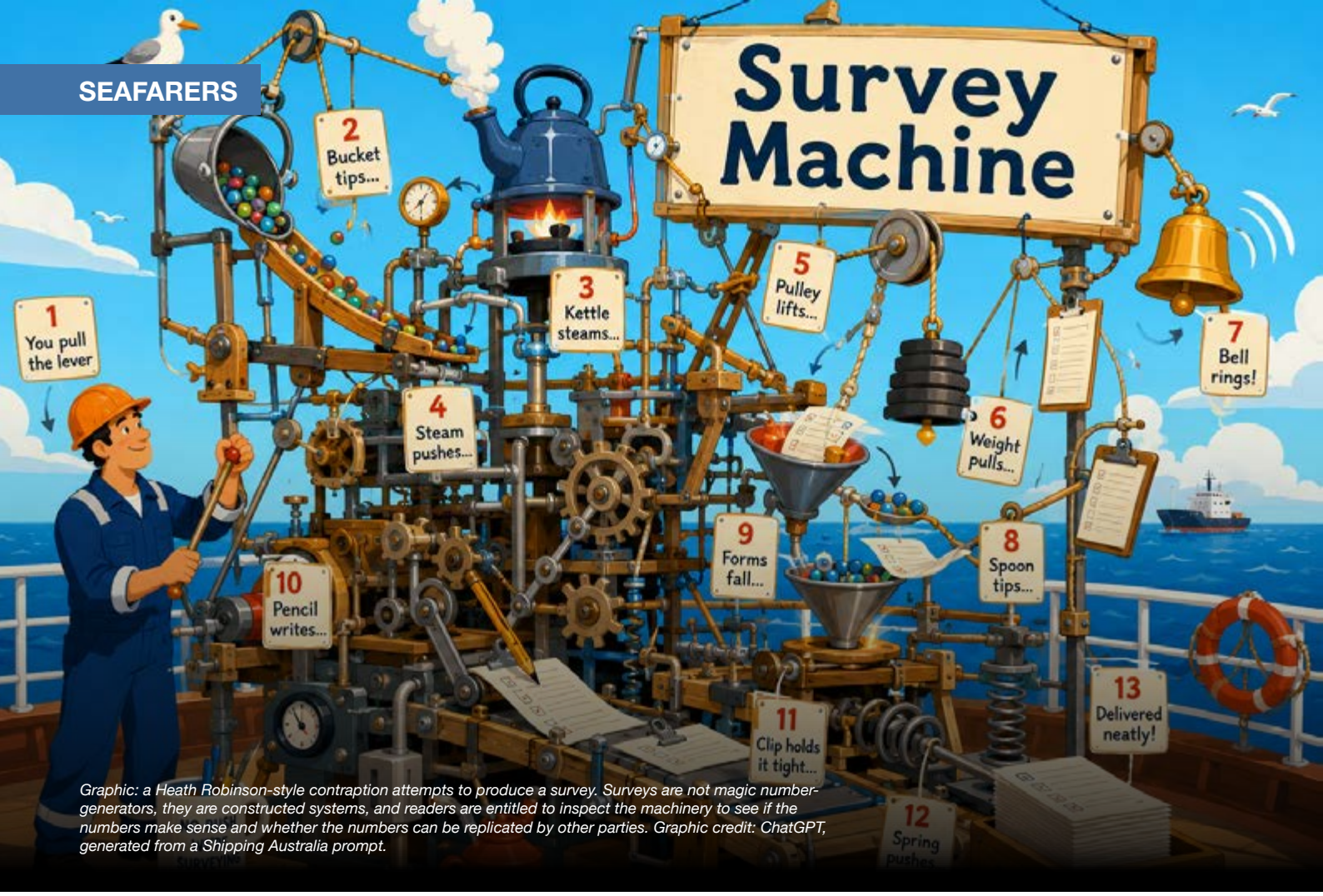

Graphic: a Heath Robinson-style contraption attempts to produce a survey. Surveys are not magic number-generators, they are constructed systems, and readers are entitled to inspect the machinery to see if the numbers make sense and whether the numbers can be replicated by other parties. Graphic credit: ChatGPT, generated from a Shipping Australia prompt.

Missing methodology and unbalanced commentary

Caution is warranted in discussing the results of the Seafarers' Happiness Index or in drawing conclusions.

We looked for a detailed methodology but, if there is one, it's not obvious where it is. We only found a few short statements about methodology, so it is difficult to analyse and evaluate the report appropriately [Editor's note: see the associated Letter to the Editor for the Mission to Seafarer's comments on this point].

It appears that the Mission to Seafarers produces a consecutive quarterly report on seafarer happiness which is based on self-reporting from seafarers serving across vessel types, ranks and regions.

This gives rise to several concerns.

Understanding surveys

Firstly, we need to understand what an opinion survey is and what it does. It enables the survey creator to get an idea of what a given population feels or believes to be true when it is too difficult and too expensive to go and get the opinion of everyone in that population. It is commonly said that the world's population of seafarers is about 1.9 million (the number varies by source). That is a big and dispersed population. It would be too hard and costly to ask every seafarer their opinion every quarter and to verify the results. Survey creators therefore try to survey enough people (which is called a sample) from a specific population, ask them their opinion, and then try to apply those opinions to the population as a whole.

Creating a survey is difficult and the opportunities for error, mistake, and confounding are legion. An opinion survey can produce a set of numbers which gives the impression that what is reported actually is what the surveyed population actually believes. But unless there are extensive and careful controls put in place, it can be misleading.

Biases, confounding variables, and other problems

Firstly, consider self-selection bias. As a group, those who choose to respond might not be representative of the total population. For example, if a survey were to ask which AFL clubs are the best clubs, then no-one ought to be surprised if the Sydney Swans, the Brisbane Lions, and the Collingwood Magpies receive a lot of support when compared with, say, the Gold Coast Suns.

Self-selection surveys risk high responses from highly-motivated respondents which can skew the results. The MtS encourages seafarers to self-select to take the survey via the web, so self-selection bias is a risk.

Sample-composition effects could be an issue. A quick look at the percentages of respondents shows variation each in things such as rank, trip length, age range and so on. Some of these differences are notable e.g. the Q4

2025 report had 32% of respondents in the 35–45-year age range but the Q1 2025 data had 25% of respondents in the same age range. Such a variation in a key variable could skew results away from the truth. It could be that the MtS is statistically controlling for such variations, but we don't know if they do or if they don't.

It would also be helpful if the happiness of the same people were tracked over time, which would help reduce variables and would indicate if those seafarers were getting more unhappy, staying about the same happiness, or becoming happier. But we don't know if that is done or not. Perhaps some seafarers who are temporarily particularly happy or unhappy are motivated to complete the survey in a given quarter, which would skew the results with selection bias. The variability in the composition of the sample suggests that it is a risk. Tracking a fixed cohort of seafarers would strengthen the survey data.

The report is also presented on a consecutive quarter-by-quarter basis, which is helpful for showing short term changes in sentiment. But a quarterly report introduces problems because the environment will change over time according to the calendar e.g. weather, national holidays, trading patterns, and the like, all of which can affect happiness.

The index also does not provide the size of the survey population (i.e. how many people are in the total population being surveyed), the response rate, the sample size, anti-bias measures if any, confidence levels (i.e. how sure the survey maker is that the results are right) or the confidence interval. That latter measure is also called the margin of error, which is the plus or minus value that roughly indicates the accuracy of a survey. If the results are 73% plus or minus 3% (which would be a high level of accuracy) the true result is probably somewhere between 70% to 76% per cent).

There are problems, narratively speaking

It could also be argued that there are concerns about the narrative surrounding the data because the narrative and the selection of the testimonies trend quite negative. Throughout the report there is repeated negative language "a far more significant narrative," a "critical inflection point," "sudden and profound impact", "sharply reflects the stresses", and a "rapid and marked deterioration" and more. Most of the stories from seafarers are negative stories.

Positive developments in the data are often paired with negative language and negative stories. For example, under Training and Development (SHI, Q1, 2026, p.8) it is noted that the score rose from 6.99 out of ten to 7.52, which is followed by a story from a seafarer about being required to do training. That is then followed by a negative narrative pivot to training costs, box-ticking, and training intruding into leave time. It could be argued that the positive data should have suggested a positive narrative. However, it quickly pivoted into negativity.

Connectivity, another higher scoring category is discussed (SHI, Q1, 2026, p.7.Note it is also discussed elsewhere in the same report). Connectivity is generally considered to be a good thing and there are short stories from seafarers that say so. However, there are four paragraphs on this topic on that page, three of which frame Connectivity negatively. There are also two negative stories from seafarers presented alongside negative language … "make it worse", "economic barriers", the "drop is significant", "connection can become a source of anxiety" and so on. There appears to be a repeated pattern of some positive stories, but they are few and under-emphasised, and they are often surrounded by negative framing. Negative stories also outnumber the positive stories.

Credibility conclusion

The MtS Seafarers' Happiness Index would be improved if it gave a detailed explanation in each report of how it tackles the methodological issues. It would also be improved if it presented the narrative with fairness, with less negativity, and in balanced way. For example, it could attempt give an equal number of positive and negative stories from seafarers and a more balanced use of language. As it is, the report that accompanies the Index appears risk-, negativity-, and advocacy focused.

Without sample sizes, margins of error, confidence intervals, or a transparent methodology, the Seafarers Happiness Index should not be treated as hard and robust statistical evidence of worsening seafarer welfare.

Graphic: a pair of unbalanced scales with, on one side, seafarers, ships, and meaningful numbers. Meanwhile, on the other side, noisy, unruly, rhetoric spills out. Graphic credit: ChatGPT, generated from a Shipping Australia prompt.

Letter to the Editor
On the Seafarers' Happiness Index

The Mission to Seafarers writes:

To the Editor:

We read your article of 15 May 2026, "Seafarers aren't quite as unhappy as you might think" and felt it important to respond.

Constructive discussion around welfare data is welcome and necessary. No survey is beyond scrutiny, and we remain committed to ensuring the Seafarers Happiness Index continues to develop with transparency, integrity, and relevance. We have never made the claim that the survey is carried out in a formal, academic setting. Indeed, it is intentionally a snapshot of what seafarers think and feel at a particular place in time.

I found it quite extraordinary that the article should suggest that the lived experiences shared by seafarers should be regarded as less than credible because they are self-reported, or not easily reconciled to the headline averages.

The Seafarers Happiness Index exists precisely because seafarers are people, not simply operational variables within a global supply chain. Fatigue, stress, isolation, fear, burnout and morale are inherently human experiences and are almost always associated with casualties at sea. The only meaningful way to understand these things is to ask seafarers directly and to listen carefully to what they say. We have been doing that through the Index for the past decade, and a number of major companies, including some of those who are members of Shipping Australia, carry out bespoke surveys to benchmark their seafarers against the global survey.

Like many wellbeing indicators, the Happiness Index captures both quantitative scores and qualitative testimony. These are not contradictory. Numerical averages may show broad trends, but the real value is in the personal responses which often reveal the reality of life at sea, the systemic pressures and the difficulties being experienced which numbers alone cannot fully explain.

A workforce can appear broadly resilient, whilst individuals within it continue to experience significant hardship. Organisations like The Mission to Seafarers therefore have a responsibility not only to report averages, but also to ensure that difficulties are not rendered invisible simply because they may not represent the majority view.

I make no apology for giving a platform through which seafarers can speak honestly about life at sea. That includes both the positive experiences, along with the frustration, exhaustion, anxiety and distress which they experience. To amplify reassuring narratives undermines the purpose of the project.

When we ask seafarers how they feel, we are not collecting ornamental sentiment. We are making a promise: that their experiences matter enough to be heard, even when it is inconvenient and complicates the narratives we prefer. Even if many feel happier, those who do not still need a space to speak. Their truth does not erase the positivity of others. It stands beside it.

Kind regards

Ben Bailey

Ben Bailey
Director of Programme
The Mission to Seafarers

[Editor's note: this letter was received in response to our original work, which is still available on our website – search for: "Seafarers aren't quite as unhappy as you might think". The material presented in the first two articles in this special report is that report on the website, but broken up into separate pieces for ease of reading. The articles here have been lightly edited for clarity and readability, but the substantive content is still the same].

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In the South Pacific, shipping and logistics can be more about mental gymnastics. The conditions are often variable, and unpredictable.Quickly adapting to day-to-day change is part of what we have to do. We call it *'flexagility'*.

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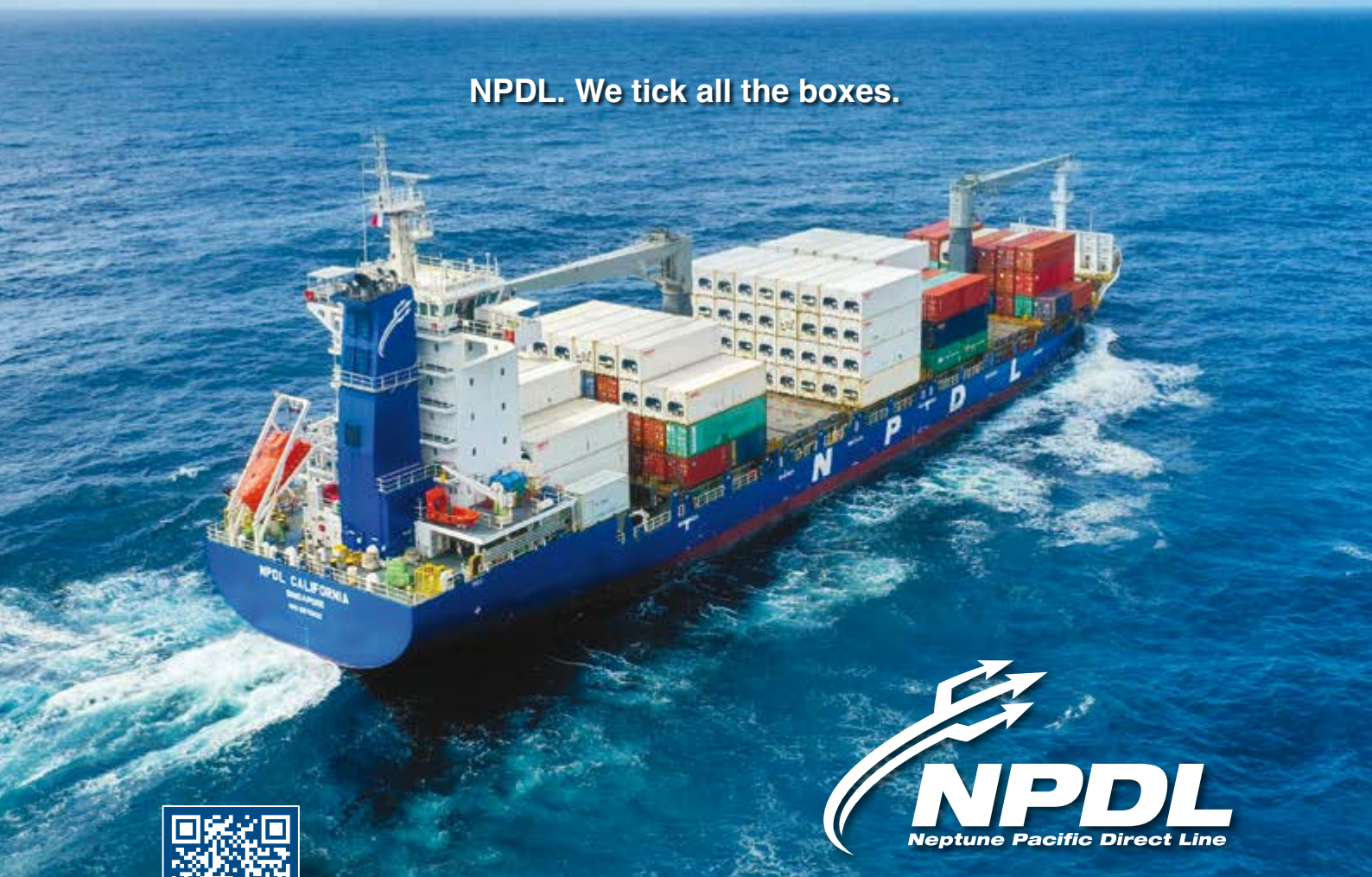

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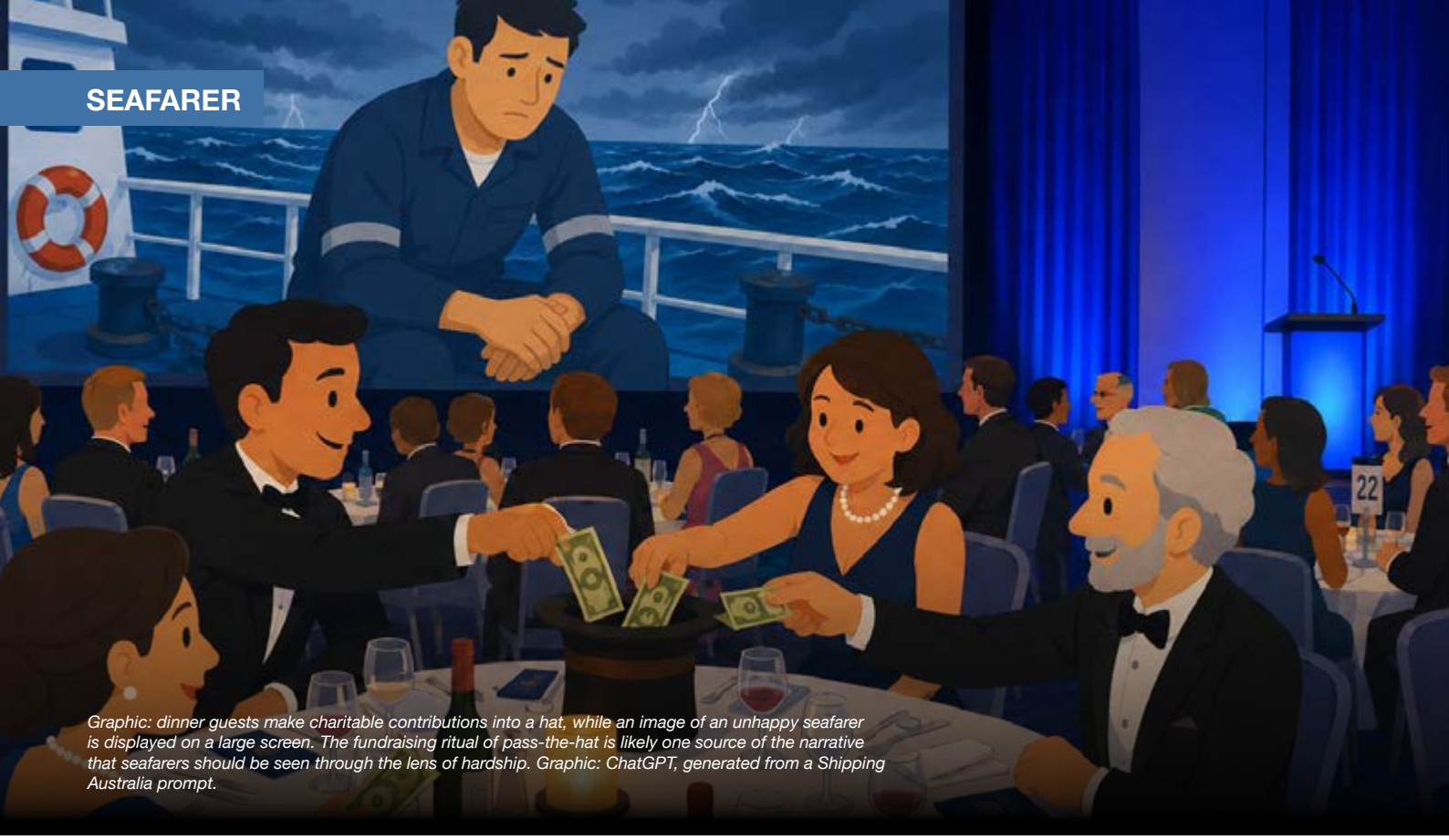

Graphic: dinner guests make charitable contributions into a hat, while an image of an unhappy seafarer is displayed on a large screen. The fundraising ritual of pass-the-hat is likely one source of the narrative that seafarers should be seen through the lens of hardship. Graphic: ChatGPT, generated from a Shipping Australia prompt.

Seafarers are skilled- and reasonably-paid professionals

Now that might be a bit of surprise to many people in the industry who have gotten the image that seafarers generally are living in poverty and are experiencing an ongoing state of hardship. We understand why. There's a narrative that has been developed and is being reinforced.

And like all the very 'best' bits of misleading narrative there is always, of course, a grain of truth.

Seafarers do have a very hard job. They are away from their families, out of their regular culture, and are likely missing all of those everyday comforts that surround them when they're at home. Seafaring necessarily involves familial separation. It is part of the job and has been ever since the first commercial seafarers put to sea thousands of years ago.

Abuse is tragic, wrong, and appears to be rare

And, yes, there are sadly cases where people are mistreated through bullying, or harassment, not being paid wages, or abandonment. Abandonment, unpaid wages, bullying, fatigue, isolation, and distress are serious problems with adverse effects on individual welfare.

These are all examples of abuse. And they ought to be condemned. And we do condemn it. It is wrong. It should not happen. It should be stamped out.

Thankfully, such cases appear to be rare. There were at least 105,000 ships greater than 100 gross tons in 2023, according to the UN Conference on Trade and Development. There are about 1.9 million seafarers in the world, according to the International Chamber of Shipping. Although we freely acknowledge and concede that one badly treated seafarer is one too many, the number of badly treated seafarers is a tiny fraction of the whole population.

Some is not all

When we are talking about a population of about 1.9 million people then it is likely that some seafarers will be very poor. That, unfortunately, is a very tragic and sad fact of life. By way of comparison, consider the U.S.A. which has literally spent trillions of dollars on anti-poverty programmes. Poverty has fallen from about 35% of the population in the early 1950s to about 10.6% in 2024. Millions of Americans are still living in poverty today. Many more hundreds of millions are not. Some Americans live in poverty. The overwhelming majority do not. The existence of poverty within a large population does not prove that the whole population can be accurately characterised as destitute. We must remember to draw a distinction between individual tragic cases and a class-wide categorisation; "some" seafarers are not "all seafarers".

Seafarers, by-and-large, are not destitute. Officers are well-paid and ratings are adequately paid relative to their home economies. We included these comments here because, inevitably, after we publish this article, various parties will accuse us of ignoring the issues of unpaid wages and the like, or attacking seafarers, or charity. For the record, this is not an attack on charity, seafarers, or charitable purposes.

Myth of the destitute sailor

There are a few sources that probably give rise to the widespread myth of the destitute seafarer. One source is likely Hollywood portrayals of seafarers in the days of sail. Another will be the organisations who talk of abandonment, unpaid wages and so on. That, to some degree, is fair and reasonable because they are trying to raise awareness of important social problems that need tackling. Yet another area is

the “whip around” or “pass the hat” that seems to happen at a lot of maritime events (or it used to, back in the days when we all carried actual physical cash) when an event organiser raises money from dinner guests to fund seafarer welfare.

Another source is probably the published ILO rates. Look up seafarer pay rates on the web and you’re highly likely to get the ILO rates, which are a few hundred US dollars a month. That gives the impression that seafarers aren’t well paid. Seafarers are, in reality, paid a lot more than that.

All of this creates a narrative of poverty-stricken seafarers. Maybe it was true in the past. But today? It’s misleading.

Facts: not destitute but reasonably paid

We’ve said it once, we’ll say it again. Merchant seafarers as a whole are not destitute and are in fact reasonably paid. While some of the wages might look low to Australian eyes, they are more reasonably paid than you might realise when you take into account the home cost of living.

Let’s look at Filipino seafarers as they are, by far, the largest contingent of commercial seafarers whether you’re looking at officers, ratings, STCW-qualified, and so on, according to the Seafarer Workforce Report (BIMCO & the International Chamber of Shipping, 2021).

So, how much are Filipino seafarers paid? Sources vary. But we can get a bit of an idea.

We will have a look at PhilippineGo website and we will have a look at a few different ranks. Figures are monthly pay, US dollars.

There’s a whole load more data there too for container ships, ro-ro bulkers and so on and so on. While data sources differ, we can see immediately that ship’s masters are well paid. Able Seafarers are paid considerably less than the Master. Are they destitute?

Cost of living

Well, we need to take into account the cost of living.

Numbeo.com is a website that could well be the world’s largest cost-of-living database and it collects data using a crowdsourcing data collection technique. At the time of writing, it claims to record 9,535,826 prices in 12,463 cities entered by 860,126 contributors.

Rank	Product tanker	Chem tanker	VLCC	LPG / LNG
Master	11,500-12,500	12,000-14,000	8,488-14,067	12,800-15,400
3rd Mate	3,300-3,800	3,500-4,420	3,100-3,800	3,500-4,500
2nd Engineer	8,000-11,062	10,200-11,400	10,400+	9,900-12,300
Able Seafarers	1,450-1950	1,450-2,100	1,450-1950	1,700-2,100
Cook	1,750-2,300	1,875-2,500	1,750-2,300	1,800-2,500

Note: the table above shows pay rates in 2025 U.S. dollars. Source: PhilippineGo.

According to Numbeo, the cost of living in Sydney is 103.2% higher than in Manila (excluding rent) and the cost of living in Melbourne is 97.0% higher than in Manila (excluding rent). Grocery prices in Sydney are 80.4% higher than in Manila; grocery prices in Melbourne are 83.9% higher than in Manila.

An able seafarer earning about USD$1,450 (about 82,000₱ (Philippine pesos)) and living in Manila would need about 195,962.6₱ (A$5,194) if he or she lived in Sydney to maintain the same standard of life. And let’s remember, Manila is probably the most expensive place to live in the Philippines. Not every seafarer hails from there – some will hail from more remote, lower cost, areas. Their wages will buy more.

Commenting upon the discussion, Captain Melwyn Noronha, CEO of Shipping Australia, recalls that: “I came up through the ranks, hailing from my native India, and the rate of pay that I got from working at sea allowed me to live more than comfortably. While I certainly wish for current seafarers to be paid adequately and commensurately with the hardships of the job, we can see that the current perception, which is held by some people, that seafarers do not have an adequate wage is not quite right”.

Graphic: a smiling seafarer with his wages. Seafarers generally should not be thought of in terms of helpless symbols of misery. Seafarers are working professionals with economic agency. Graphic: ChatGPT, generated from a Shipping Australia prompt.

When a ship in distress calls, how should ports respond?

By JOHN THOMSON, TT Club

Ports exist to keep trade moving. Occasionally, they are asked to do something fundamentally different: provide refuge for a ship in distress. Whether the incident involves fire, structural damage, cargo instability or loss of propulsion, these situations are rarely straightforward. They are high-pressure, highly visible, and can become politically charged. For the port, this is a risk decision with potentially long-lasting consequences.

A practical response requires more than an immediate acceptance or refusal. It requires a structured assessment of where the hazard can be managed with the greatest control, and how operational, safety, environmental, and stakeholder impacts will be sustained over time.

Why refuge is not a simple yes or no

A common misconception is that acknowledging a casualty automatically means accepting it. There are international guidelines setting out the expectations on coastal states; some nations have adopted mandatory procedures. However, each situation must be assessed on its own merits, balancing operational capability, safety considerations, and environmental impact.

In reality there are multiple parties that will need to be involved, balancing the risks carefully. Simply refusing entry does not remove the hazard - it can push the problem offshore, where conditions may be less controlled and consequences can escalate. The question to be addressed is therefore not whether to accept the ship, but where the risk is best managed.

This framing supports decision-making that is risk-led rather than reaction-led. It also creates space for all interests, including states, ports and ship to consider all appropriate refuge options that provide control without resulting in unnecessary exposure to the coastal or port environment.

A place of refuge is not always a port

Refuge should not be automatically equated with berthing. In many cases, the safest solution may be an anchorage, sheltered waters, or a managed offshore position. Bringing a casualty directly alongside may introduce new exposures to infrastructure, workforce and nearby communities.

In practice, ‘refuge’ is better understood as a spectrum of options. A ship may be granted refuge in a controlled location that allows stabilisation, assessment, and specialist response, without the additional hazards created by immediate berthing. The correct outcome may therefore be to keep the risk away from the port, rather than bring it inside.

This distinction is especially important where the incident involves ongoing instability, uncertain cargo behaviour, or limited availability of controlled space ashore.

The operational reality, this will not be quick

One of the most consistent misunderstandings is duration. A ship granted refuge is unlikely to stay for only a few days. If a ship is brought into the port environs, it may remain for weeks or months, particularly where cargo discharge, investigation or repair are required.

This may have consequences for berth availability, commercial operations, access and security, and stakeholder expectations. Ports should therefore assume from the outset that this is a long-duration event, not a short stabilisation exercise.

Treating refuge as a long-duration scenario changes the planning baseline. It encourages the decision-makers, including port authorities to consider how the wider port estate will continue operating, how cordons and access routes will be maintained, and how communication will be managed as the situation evolves.

Space, not berth, is often the real constraint

When managing casualty ships, decision-makers often discover that the port’s most valuable asset is not quay length, it is space. Significant areas may be required for damaged or contaminated cargo, waste streams, quarantine or isolation zones, and temporary storage pending inspection or disposal.

Without sufficient controlled space, a ship incident can quickly evolve into a port-wide operational problem. Space constraints can also drive risk decisions, for example, whether cargo can be safely discharged, segregated, monitored, and disposed of, and whether the port can maintain separation from other operations.

This means early assessment should extend beyond where the ship might be positioned, to where consequential materials and activities will be managed and controlled.

Cargo is often the real risk

While initial attention focuses on the ship, it is frequently the cargo that defines the risk profile. Cargoes that

appear benign can become problematic when damaged, heated or exposed to water. Examples described include materials that self-heat or smoulder, contaminated consumer goods, and overweight or structurally compromised containers.

In these situations, cargo behaviour directly drives handling methodology, equipment requirements, and most importantly, the safety of personnel. For ports, this reinforces the value of early cargo-led assessment and of planning for the practical constraints of managing damaged, unstable, or contaminated cargo within a live operating environment.

It also supports a structured approach to isolation and control. Where cargo defines the hazard, it is often the cargo management plan, rather than the berth plan, that determines whether refuge can be provided safely.

Fire changes everything

Fire remains one of the most challenging scenarios for a port to manage. It is complex, unpredictable, and shipboard events inevitably present local landside emergency responders with unfamiliar environments. Where a ship fire is ongoing, particularly in scenarios such as vehicle carriers, the risks are amplified, with heat, toxicity, and potential escalation all relevant.

Accepting such a ship can effectively transfer the hazard from offshore into a populated and infrastructure-dense environment. Ports are understandably hesitant in these scenarios but are urged to collaborate with all interested parties.

Advance engagement between ports and local fire and rescue services is essential to educate on ship-specific hazards, agree response expectations, and rehearse practical constraints including access, water supply, foam capability, cordons, and air monitoring. Preparedness reduces the likelihood that critical limitations are discovered only after a ship is alongside.

What good looks like

Where refuge situations are handled successfully, the difference is rarely luck, it is preparedness. States and ports that perform well typically have clear decision-making frameworks, established relationships with authorities, salvors and insurers, pre-identified refuge options (both alongside and offshore), and experience gained through exercises and scenario planning.

Such a coastal response is not improvising under pressure, it is executing a plan. In practice, that plan helps decision-makers balance competing objectives, maintain control of information, and manage the consequences over time.

Effective preparedness also supports proportionate decision-making. A port does not need to default to acceptance or refusal, it needs the capability to input appropriately to decision-making that mitigates the risks, implements appropriate controls, and maintains the operational discipline required to sustain the response.

Conclusion

Places of refuge are not routine operational matters. They are rare, complex and highly visible events that require clear judgement and decisive leadership. Effective coastal and port response is not a simple yes or no.

The measures of success are assessment of where the risk can be best managed, the application of the controls, coordination, and endurance required to manage the event over time. Ultimately, refuge is not about where a ship may want to go, it is about where the risk can be best managed.

Pictured: a fire safety drill being carried out at a port in Thailand. Photo supplied by the TT Club.

Pictured from left: Phil Holmes, SAL Chair; Dr Marjorie O'Neill, NSW Parliamentary Secretary for Transport and Member of the NSW Legislative Assembly for Coogee; Capt Melwyn Noronha, SAL CEO. Photo by Jim Wilson, Shipping Australia.

NSW Govt is working on freight reforms and pressing issues, Dr O'Neill, tells Shipping Australia guests

Dr Marjorie O'Neill, the NSW Parliamentary Secretary for Transport and the member of the NSW Legislative Assembly for Coogee, told Shipping Australia guests at our luncheon this week that the NSW government is working on reforms to address long-term efficiency while tackling "very pressing" issues.

"The conflict in the Middle East has disrupted global fuel supply and driven up prices, and that's being felt here in NSW," Dr O'Neill told guests, adding that the government acknowledges the contribution of the freight industry during this period of disruption.

Dr O'Neill discussed the Port Botany Landside Improvement Strategy, noting that round two of the consultation was due to start earlier this year but that is now on hold for up to 12 months as stakeholders grapple with supply shocks.

She also discussed the proposed changes to the Ports and Maritime Administration Regulation, which will complete implementation of the new statutory licensing framework for towages, lines handling and some bunkering providers, will replace the existing towage licences issued by the Ports Authority of NSW, and will introduce licensing for lines handling and bunkering.

It will also enable the provision of vessel environmental performance information to port operators to support effective management of environmental performance and risk mitigation strategies in ports. She added that the regulation will also complete the implementation of improvements to ship manifest information and data formats used to support information provision and efficient data sharing between industry and government.

Landside charges

Dr O'Neill also discussed the output from the meeting of the Infrastructure and Transport Minister in August 2025, which endorsed the National Transport Commission to update the National Voluntary Guidelines for stevedore landside charges, including a requirement for price changes to be made annually. She added that the National Transport Commission will work with jurisdictions to include empty container park operators in the guidelines with similar requirements to container stevedores.

"These changes will improve transparency of landside pricing and charging behaviour, helping to maximise freight productivity and improve the efficiency of Australia's container freight supply chains," she told Shipping Australia guests. Ministers also agreed to establish a working group to explore options and recommend next steps in response to findings by the ACCC and the Productivity Commission in respect of stevedore charges.

Freight policy

Dr O'Neill told Shipping Australia guests that a comprehensive Freight Policy Reform Programme is underway to modernise outdated freight settings and to ensure the system can meeting future demand.

Pictured: Mario Fernando, SAL NSW Co-Chair. Photo by Jim Wilson, Shipping Australia.

"The Reform considers the network – including ports, rail, road and intermodal terminals – as one coordinated supply chain with shared responsibility across the NSW Government, the Australian Government and industry. It recognises the need to ensure efficient landside connections to ports to support the productivity of NSW's gateways," she said, adding that Port Botany will play a central role in container movements until the port reaches capacity. However, she added, the reforms recognise the need for diversity and competitiveness more broadly.

Land-use policy is also an issue with Sydney having the "tightest vacancy rate of serviced industrial land of any city globally at 0.2 per cent", she told guests adding that the shortage of land is causing major freight and logistics operators to leave Sydney for areas where suitable land is more available and less expensive. The lack of land is impacting State productivity, she said.

There are eight actions underway relating to ports except for the policy position on the second container port, "which is complete," and the action for stevedores to consider simplifying pricing.

"There is a lot going on, and we are here to work with you to reform port, freight transport, and the planning system [in a way] that boosts productivity and growth," she concluded.

About the event

Shipping Australia held the event at the NSW Parliament House on 19 May 2026. The lunch was led by industry executive Mario Fernando who is the NSW State Committee's Co-Chair, who made the Acknowledgement of Country and who also acknowledged the special guests. The Rev. Un Tay of the Mission to Seafarers led guests in the maritime grace. Shipping Australia Chair, Phillip Holmes, thanked the Minister for her time and contribution, and thanked our sponsors. He also advised guests that our event was intended to be held on the International Day for Women in Maritime on 18 May 2026, however, the venue was not available at the time. Mr Holmes acknowledged the International Day and the contribution of women in the maritime industry. The Lucky Door Prize raffle winners were selected randomly from a bowl by Brenard Van Der Poll of Boluda Towage, one of our event sponsors.

A thank you to our sponsors!

The NSW Shipping Australia State Committee Parliamentary Luncheon simply could not take place without the support of our generous sponsors.

Shipping Australia would like acknowledge the support of:

Boluda Towage – a leading provider of port and offshore towage services

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The MCC Group – an Australian group of companies that provides a wide range of services including marine surveying, general assistance, biosecurity, and vessel loading services to the maritime industry.

Thank you very much, we do appreciate all your support!

Port of Melbourne win Victoria's Phil Kelly OAM golf trophy 2026!

By CHARLES MASTERS, SAL VIC Chair

Deputy Chair for Shipping Australia Victoria Ms Sirisha Gunde officially welcomed the large group set to play at the La Trobe Golf Club. The course was picture perfect, fairways trimmed greens finely shaved with play commencing under perfectly clear skies and no wind. In other words, the 10th Phil Kelly OAM event was carried out in ideal Autumn conditions.

Last year's cup holders Engage Marine fought hard to retain the impressive Phil Kelly OAM trophy, provided by Wallenius Wilhelmsen, however they conceded defeat to the handpicked team from Port of Melbourne, micromanaged by industry stalwart Craig Faulkner!

Runners up Poseidon Pilots gave the Port of Melbourne team a close run for their money. During the presentations Adam Rowlison Engage Marine and Craig Faulkner spoke briefly to Phil Kelly's significant contributions to the shipping industry over several decades.

The Victorian State Committee would like to express its sincere thanks to AAT and Engage Marine for underwriting the event and to One-Stop and Linx as support sponsors. To Port of Melbourne for providing the winners with their well-earned prize, DP World's provision of their "World Tour" golf balls, same as used in their major global events ! Total Maritime Logistics for sponsoring 2 x NTP and longest drive and also to Neptune Pacific for the supply of Fiji Water.

Itochu Corp announces MPA Sg authorisation for ammonia bunkering trials

Tokyo-headquartered general trading company Itochu has announced that the Maritime & Port Authority of Singapore has authorised one of Itochu's subsidiaries to carry out ammonia bunkering trials in Singapore.

The Authorisation was granted following MPA's review of ZETA's submissions, which included comprehensive safety studies, risk assessments, and business plans for ammonia bunkering in Singapore. The ammonia bunkering trials to be conducted under Authorisation will serve to verify the technical readiness, operational protocols, infrastructure, and technologies, to assess and inform the development of safe and environmentally sustainable ammonia bunkering practices in Singapore.

The Authorisation was issued on April 27, 2026, and will become effective on May 15, 2026, for a trial period up to two years subject to MPA's prevailing regulatory framework. It is envisaged that the Authorisation will accelerate Itochu's initiatives to decarbonise international shipping. Specifically, ITOCHU plans to conduct demonstration trials in collaboration with Mitsui O.S.K. Lines, supplying ammonia fuel from an ammonia bunker vessel to dual-fuel capesize bulkers, jointly owned by CMB.TECH of Belgium and MOL, and chartered by MOL, within the port of Singapore during the last quarter of 2027.

Pictured: the MerLion, a symbol of Singapore. Photo credit: Connor Gan.

"These trials will enable Itochu to establish safe and sustainable ship-to-ship bunkering operations using ammonia as marine fuel, with the aim of commercialising the ammonia bunkering business in Singapore and at major maritime hubs worldwide," the company said in a statement.

Back in June 2025, as part of Itochu's integrated project for developing and owning ammonia-fuelled vessels, along with the establishment of a global supply chain for ammonia as marine fuel, Itochu placed an order for the world's first newbuilding ammonia bunker vessel, through Clean Ammonia Bunkering Shipping, a wholly owned subsidiary of Itochu. The vessel is being constructed by Sasaki Shipbuilding, and it will be flagged under the Singapore Registry of Shipping. Delivery is anticipated for September 2027.

Itochu Corp, which dates back to an 1858 founding, is a general trading company. Today it is engaged in Japanese trading, import/export, and overseas trading of various products such as textiles, machinery, metals, minerals, energy, chemicals, food, general products, realty, information and communications technology, and finance, alongside business investment in Japan and overseas.

World box / vehicle fleet to hit 1,200 dual-fuel ships

The World Shipping Council has recently reported that, as of March 2026, the number of dual-fuel container ships and vehicle carriers on the water has reached 440 – which is a 65% year-over-year increase. The body added that the number of dual-fuel vessels on order has also continued to grow, reaching 764 ships. Across the order book, 78% of container ship orders are dual-fuel, 94% of vehicle carrier orders are dual-fuel, and 17% of orders across the rest of the fleet are dual-fuel.

As at the end of March 2026, there were 1,204 dual-fuel container ships and vehicle carriers delivered or on order, representing over $180 billion USD in private investment, according to the World Shipping Council.

"These vessels are long-term investments built with flexibility in mind," said Joe Kramek, WSC President & CEO. "Ships built today will operate for decades, and the ability to operate on different fuel pathways helps reduce risk, strengthen energy security, and support more resilient global supply chains. Continued constructive engagement at the IMO remains essential to provide the global regulatory certainty needed to scale investment in alternative fuels."

Pictured: the new cranes alongside at the wharf. This side-on image reveals just how massive the new cranes really are. Photo supplied by Hutchison Ports Australia.

Pictured: a ZPMC vessel transporting the new cranes berths at Sydney. Photo supplied by Hutchison Ports Sydney.

Giant cranes have arrived

By HUTCHISON PORTS SYDNEY

Hutchison Ports Sydney recently welcomed the arrival of two giant new Quay Cranes to the Port Botany container terminal. Built to service container ships of the future with a capacity of over 15,000 TEU, these two behemoths can load and unload vessels with a beam of 23 shipping containers wide and can stack over nine high containers on deck.

John Willy, CEO of Hutchison Ports Australia said "The two additional quay cranes will extend the capability of the port and position NSW for the future. Shipping Lines on the Australia trade will have more options to deploy larger ships which have greater efficiency and higher economies of scale. The largest container ships currently in service to Australia is around 9,000 TEU capacity. The new Hutchison Ports cranes will be able to handle ships 50% bigger again".

The new cranes were manufactured by ZMPC, the world's biggest quay crane company. Designed specifically for Hutchison Ports in Sydney to meet the environment around the port these structures stretch upwards over 70m in height and able to lift a container 47m in the air above the wharf and onto the decks or down into the cargo hold of a mega size container ship.

These two cranes represent a huge step up for Port Botany.

Pictured: a female logistics worker.
Photo credit: supplied by Maersk.

Asia-Pacific female maritime professionals engage in global training programme

By the INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION

Republic of Korea SMART-C Women Project is empowering women across the Asia-Pacific maritime sector through specialized online training – opening pathways to broader career opportunities and fostering a more balanced and diverse workforce.

In the largest cohort to date, 40 female maritime professionals from Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste & Viet Nam took part in the 2026 sessions (2-6 and 16-20 March). The training was run with specialist consultants and maritime experts from the World Maritime University (WMU) and focused on enhancing professional competencies and leadership skills and reinforcing efforts to promote a more inclusive and equitable maritime industry.

Speaking at the opening session, Ms Louise Proctor, IMO Thematic Lead on Gender Equality in Maritime, said: “Through the SMART-C Women Project, we aim to enhance women’s participation and leadership in a sector undergoing rapid transformation, particularly in the areas of digitalization and decarbonization.” The session featured Ms Rubina Badoy of the Philippines, an alumna of the 2024 SMART-C Women cohort and the first recipient of a WMU scholarship under the programme. Ms Badoy outlined how the project had positively shaped her professional journey, inspiring this year’s participants as they embarked on their training.

The training modules are structured around three core themes: Decarbonization, Digitalization and Gender Empowerment. They covered key topics including alternative energy solutions for the shipping industry, the IMO’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction strategies, and key aspects of maritime digitalization, with particular attention to the Maritime Single Window, cybersecurity, and broader digital transformation initiatives.

The programme addressed gender-related challenges within the maritime sector, including cultural awareness, unconscious bias, and practical strategies to advance women’s leadership and participation.

Selected trainees from the online programme will be invited to attend an in-person training session in the Republic of Korea in October, where they will gain hands-on experience and further enhance the skills necessary for application within their home countries.

The SMART-C Women Project continues to provide a vital platform for women maritime professionals across Asia and the Pacific to enhance their competencies and advance their careers across the sector, through training, education, global networking, and the development of national master plans for women’s empowerment in selected pilot countries.

Shipping Australia and WISTA Australia celebrate IMO International Day for Women in Maritime

Now in its third consecutive year, Shipping Australia Limited (SAL) and WISTA Australia welcomed a sold-out room at the RACV Melbourne City Club on Wednesday, 20 May 2026, to mark the IMO International Day for Women in Maritime.

This year's IMO theme was "From Policy to Practice: Advancing Gender Equality for Maritime Excellence", focusing on embedding gender equality at every level of the maritime industry, both ashore and at sea.

The event opened with a welcome and an Acknowledgement of Country, followed by thanks to SAL, WISTA, and the generous sponsors who made the event possible, including HFW Law Firm as Platinum Sponsor, the MCC Group as Gold Sponsor, and CoastalBridge Agencies as Silver Sponsor.

This year's panel brought together Dr Michelle Grech, Manager of Seafarer Certification Services at the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA); Fleur Walsh, Head of Operations for Australia and New Zealand at A.P. Moller-Maersk; and Ekaterina Khramova, General Manager Timor Leste at ANL and CMA CGM, and 2025 DCN joint winner of the Women in Shipping & Maritime Logistics Award.

Through the panel discussion and opening remarks, guests heard honest and practical reflections on what it means to be a woman in the maritime industry. One of the messages carried throughout the event was that change does not happen through policy alone. The industry needs to move from policy to practice by creating real opportunities, removing barriers, and making sure women are not only given a seat at the table, but are also heard at the table.

The discussion also highlighted the role of male allies and the value of small, practical actions that can make male-dominated rooms more inclusive. The panel reflected on imposter syndrome, confidence, discomfort and growth, highlighting that sometimes capability is already there, but confidence has to catch up. The discussion also noted that uncomfortable moments can become important moments of learning, and that women should not be afraid to take unusual, unconventional and courageous career paths.

The key takeaway from the panel was that moving from policy to practice means turning good intentions into everyday action. The panel closed with a simple but powerful message to back yourself, not wait for change, be part of it, stay curious, and remain open to new perspectives.

A thank you to our sponsors!

An event of this nature simply could not take place without the generous support of our sponsors. Shipping Australia would like to thank:

HFW Law Firm
Platinum sponsor

The MCC Group
Gold sponsor

CoastalBridge Agencies
Silver sponsor

Pictured, from left to right: Mehrangiz Shahbakhsh from Shipping Australia, Fleur Walsh from A.P. Moller-Maersk, Elva (Jing) ZHANG from CMA CGM Group, Sirisha Gunde from Seaway Agencies Pty Ltd, Charles Masters from Shipping Australia, Dr Michelle Grech from the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), and Ekaterina Khramova from ANL & CMA CGM. Photo credit: supplied.

Australian Dr Rosalie Balkin AO awarded prestigious International Maritime Prize by IMO

By the INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION

Pictured: Dr Rosalie Balkin AO receives the prestigious International Maritime Prize from H.E. IMO Secretary General Arsenio Dominguez.

Dr. Rosalie Balkin, Secretary-General of the Comité Maritime International (CMI), has been presented with the prestigious International Maritime Prize.

Dr. Balkin, who was nominated by the Government of Australia, was honoured at the annual IMO Awards Ceremony, held in London on 24 November 2025. The ceremony followed the first day of the 34th session of the IMO Assembly, taking place from 24 November to 3 December 2025.

Handing Dr. Balkin the silver dolphin trophy, IMO Secretary-General Mr. Arsenio Dominguez commended her five-decade career, in which she has broken new ground, including as the first woman to lead the CMI – the world's oldest organization focused on unifying international maritime law – since it was founded in 1897.

He stated: "Dr. Balkin life's work reflects an exceptional combination of excellence, integrity, and a firm commitment to advancing the global maritime community."

Accepting the Prize, Dr. Balkin reflected on her achievements: "May I say how very proud and lucky I feel to have been given the opportunity to participate in the work of IMO and its related organisations. It is indeed a wondrous thing to be so richly rewarded for doing the work I still love to do."

Academic excellence

Dr. Balkin began her legal career in academia and has held various positions in a number of universities, including Wits University (South Africa), Melbourne and New South Wales Universities (Australia) and Cambridge University (United Kingdom).

She has published extensively in public international law and international maritime law and was Academic Coordinator of The IMLI Treatise on Global Ocean Governance, Vol III: IMO and Global Ocean Governance, published by Oxford University Press in 2018. She is also the co-author (with Prof JLR Davis) of The Law of Torts, now in its sixth edition.

Dr. Balkin served twice on the Board of Governors of the World Maritime University (WMU) and currently serves as Ethics Officer to the WMU President, offering advice on ethical matters and settlement of disputes.

IMO role

Dr. Balkin was the first woman appointed the Director of Legal Affairs and External Relations Division at IMO (1998-2013) and later the first female Assistant Secretary-General (2011-2013).

During her tenure at IMO, Dr. Balkin oversaw several landmark diplomatic conferences that led to the adoption of new international conventions on maritime safety, pollution liability, wreck removal, and passenger protection.

Notable conventions adopted while she was in the role include:

- 2001 International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage;
- 2002 Athens Convention on the Carriage of Passengers and their Luggage at Sea;
- 2003 Supplementary Fund Protocol which established the International Oil Pollution Compensation Supplementary Fund;
- 2005 Protocol to the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation;
- 2005 Protocol to the Protocol of 1988 for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Fixed Platforms Located on the Continental Shelf;
- 2007 Nairobi International Convention on the Removal of Wrecks; and
- 2010 International Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea.

Furthermore, as Legal Adviser to the International Oil Pollution Compensation (IOPC) Funds since 2014, she was instrumental in preparing the resolutions for dissolving the 1971 IOPC Fund, which was replaced by the 1992 Fund, strengthening the global compensation regime.

Commitment to Australia's maritime sector

In Australia, Dr. Balkin has served in senior roles across the public service, including as Primary Legal Adviser to the Commonwealth Ombudsman and later as Assistant Secretary in the Attorney-General's Department's Office of International Law. During this time, she led the Australian delegation to the IMO Legal Committee meetings and was elected its Vice Chair in 1993.

From 2018 to 2021, she served on the Board of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), emphasizing her long-standing commitment to the maritime sector. In 2018, she was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia, one of the nation's highest civilian honours, for her distinguished service to maritime law, global shipping standards, and legal education.

Support for seafarers

Dr. Balkin is a founding member of the Advisory Group of Seafarers' Rights International, which advocates for fair treatment and legal protection of seafarers.

International Maritime Prize

The International Maritime Prize is awarded annually by IMO to the individual or organization judged to have made a significant contribution to the work and objectives of the Organization. The Prize is marked by the presentation to the winner of a dolphin sculpture and includes a financial award.

NYK appoints its first female LNG captain

NiMiC Ship Management, an NYK Group ship-management company, has appointed Louise Lin (Lin Yi-chun) as captain of Taitar No. 4., a NiMiC-managed liquefied natural gas (LNG) carrier. This is the first time that a female seafarer has been named as the captain of an LNG carrier within the NYK Group.

Captain Lin commented: “Attaining the rank of captain has long been an aspiration of mine, and now it has become a reality. This achievement is not something I accomplished alone; I am deeply grateful for the unwavering support and encouragement I have received from my family, the company, and seafarers I have sailed with throughout this challenging journey. This moment represents an important milestone for local LNG seafarers and marks encouraging progress for women in the maritime industry. It’s a promising beginning, and I am fully dedicated to continuing the effort to achieve a safer, more supportive, and truly inclusive working environment for everyone who works at sea or works for the sea.”

She began her maritime care with MiMiC as a deck cadet in 2011 and advanced to full-time service as a third officer on an LNG carrier managed by NiMiC in 2015. Since then, she has developed expertise and in various roles, encompassing safe navigation and cargo operations, and management.

Earlier in April this year, the group also announced it had appointed Miki Yano as the Group’s first female chief engineer in its 140 year history. “Chief Engineer Yano commented: “Becoming a chief engineer was a goal for me. Now that I have achieved it, this moment will be a new start. I will continue to work hard to acquire skills and knowledge and aim to become a chief engineer trusted by those around me.”

As at 31 March 2024, the NYK Group (or its subsidiaries including joint venture companies) operated 886 vessels and was active in bulk carriers, container ships, crude tankers, offshore vessels, car carriers, LNG, and multi-purpose vessels among others.

Pictured: Captain Lin Yi-Chun, the master of Taitar No. 4., a NiMiC-managed liquefied natural gas carrier. Photo supplied.

Professor Momoko Kitada receives IMO Gender Equality Award 2026

Pictured: Professor Kitada receives the IMO Gender Equality Award 2026 from His Excellency, IMO Secretary General Arsenio Dominguez.

Japanese maritime academic and former seafarer Professor Momoko Kitada has been awarded the International Maritime Organization's Gender Equality Award 2026.

The award was presented by IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez during a ceremony held at IMO Headquarters in London (18 May) to mark International Day for Women in Maritime.

The recipient of the Gender Equality Award is selected each year by a high-level panel and endorsed by the IMO Council, in recognition of their outstanding contributions to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women in the maritime sector.

The IMO Council endorsed Professor Kitada as the recipient during its 135th session held in London (20-21 November 2025), to receive the award in May 2026, alongside celebrations for the International Day for Women in Maritime (18 May).

At its 135th session endorsed Professor Kitada's award, in recognition of her work to promote diversity, inclusion and equal opportunities in maritime education and professional development. Receiving her award, Professor Kitada recounted her experiences growing up, becoming a seafarer and then pursuing an academic career:

"My working-class mother always recognized indispensable link with education and economic stability – particularly important for women and girls. She pushed me to study hard and be economically independent. Standing here today, I reiterate this encouragement, and encourage all women and girls to invest in education for their personal and professional futures."

She underscored the importance of knowledge and a "true understanding" of gender quality based on active reading, listening and discourse.

Nomination and background

Professor Momoko Kitada, who was nominated for the award by the Government of Japan, is a former seafarer and holds a PhD in Social Science from Cardiff University, United Kingdom. She joined the World Maritime University (WMU) in 2011 and serves as Academic Dean, Full Professor and Head of Maritime Education and Training (MET). She coordinates and teaches in other MSc specializations, including Maritime Energy Management (MEM), as well as the Postgraduate Diploma in Maritime Energy and the Summer Academy on Maritime Decarbonization.

Professor Kitada leads WMU's collaboration efforts with IMO on gender diversity. She is a certified Gender Audit Facilitator and a certified expert in Monitoring and Evaluation as well as Impact Evaluation.

She actively incorporates gender perspectives in her interdisciplinary teaching in maritime subjects, including maritime education and training, maritime energy management, sustainable development, capacity building, digitalization and innovation, and research methodology. She has 20 years of research experience in gender equality in the maritime and ocean sectors.

Professor Kitada focuses on creating pathways for young maritime professionals and to ensuring diversity among the next generation of maritime leaders. Her work has helped raise awareness of structural barriers and identify practical solutions to create a more inclusive sector.

Members of the Gender Equality Award assessment panel noted that Professor Kitada's influence extends far beyond her role at WMU in Malmö, Sweden. The panel highlighted the global impact of her work, with her research, teaching and leadership of WMU's gender and diversity initiatives translating into tangible change in many countries.

IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez applauded her contribution to the industry:

"Professor Momoko takes gender balance from aspirational policy to actual practice. We still have some way to go, but it's people like her, with her quiet determination and decades-long dedication to research, policy development and capacity-building, who will drive the sector's progress in this area."

Her newest publication, Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming in the Maritime Sector, was launched at the event, outlining concrete tools and guidance for improving women's participation in the maritime sector.

Gender Equality Award

The IMO Gender Equality Award was established by IMO to recognize individuals, irrespective of their gender, who have made significant contributions to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women in the maritime sector.

Nominations for the 2026 Award were considered by an Assessment Panel comprising of IMO Secretary-General Mr. Arsenio Dominguez as Chair, along with representatives from IMO Member States who are Members of the IMOGENder Network; Women's International Shipping and Trading Association (WISTA International); Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA); and the Chair of the Sub-Committee on Pollution Prevention and Response (PPR).

Australian ports fare extraordinarily badly in the World Bank container report – again

By JIM WILSON

Major container ports in Australia have once again generally performed extraordinarily badly, according to data released by the World Bank.

Out of approximately 400 ports, worldwide, Australian ports performed as follows:

Worst: Fremantle.
Rank: 366 out of 400.
Performance: -74.4.

Second worst: Port Botany (Sydney).
Rank 351 out of 400.
Performance: -56.0.

Third worst: Brisbane.
Rank 301 out of 400.
Performance: -19.9.

Next: Adelaide.
Rank 297 out of 400.
Performance: -18.2.

Least bad: Melbourne.
Rank 182 out of 400.
Performance: positive 3.9.

Bell Bay and Townsville were also ranked but as they have relatively small container volumes, we have decided not to cover them here.

We note coverage in recent trade media in which advocates for the port sector commented that most of the top-ranked ports are leading export and trans-shipment hubs. And that is, of course, true.

However, with the World Bank report, we can compare Australian ports against more directly comparable, er, comparators and we will see that Australian ports do not compare well. For example, we only need to look at Fremantle and Sydney, which are literally among the worst performing container ports in the world. We can compare them to Melbourne.

Melbourne has very similar socio-economic-cultural-geographic-labour law-industrial relations background to both Fremantle and Sydney, and yet Melbourne is objectively a far superior performer.

When there is that big of a gap between ports within Australia then trying to excuse Australian poor performance on one, or any combination of, those background simply doesn't cut it.

Let's turn to the other big argument, that the World Bank report doesn't capture data on landside investment and efficiencies that ports have made.

Firstly, Melbourne has made lots of investment into its precincts and connectivity too. If the failure to perform was related to investment, then why are the other ports doing so badly relative to Melbourne?

Secondly, we've been here before. We have comprehensively de-bunked the investment argument. The World Bank CPPI report specifically measures time in port on the marine side. It doesn't measure landside performance because its not a landside report. It's a marine side report that measures marine side performance. The World Bank report measures something valuable i.e. marine side performance. If you measure landside performance in addition to marine side performance than you lose that value. There probably is a benefit in measuring landside performance but you would do that in a separate report.

Arguing that the World Bank report on marine side performance should include landside performance is exactly like arguing that apples should be orange because you think that orange is a prettier colour than green. And that argument is just flat out wrong.

The next problem for the port sector is even more serious. If there have been big investments in infrastructure, then why does their performance continue to be so stubbornly bad, year after year after year? If anything, the investment argument should be worrying, not reassuring. It suggests that there is something very seriously wrong in the Australian maritime sector.

Other findings

The World Bank CPPI report made a wide variety of findings.

- Firstly, global port efficiency remains under pressure from geopolitical instability, shipping network disruption, extreme weather events and persistent market volatility.
- Longer vessel turnaround times, often driven by rerouting and congestion, both reflect and exacerbate supply chain fragility.
- Conversely, ports that improve their operational resilience can help dampen disruptions and support more fluid global trade
- East Asian ports continue to perform strongly in the rankings, while the report also highlights promising improvements in ports across Africa, Latin America and South Asia (but not in Australia).

Shipping Australia's comment

The World Bank CPPI report is quite a substantial body of work and requires some time to review and digest. Shipping Australia will review the 2026 edition (which is titled "the Container Port Performance Index 2025"). We intend to publish a substantial write-up in our newsletter and website, as we did with last year's edition.

Pictured: the Persian Gulf at night, as seen from the International Space Station. Photo: NASA.

U.S. and Iran sign peace deal

A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed by the U.S. and the Islamic Republic of Iran, to immediately and to permanently end their conflict. The belligerents have agreed not to undertake, nor initiate, any military operation against each other, to refrain from the threat of force, to respect each other's territorial integrity and to refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs.

Recognising the breakthrough, the leaders of the G7 nations issued a statement welcoming the announcement, adding that they were ready to contribute to its implementation. Commenting on the Strait of Hormuz issue, the G7 leaders added, "We reaffirm that the right of transit passage without restrictions or tolls is the bedrock of international trade. We agree that the multinational, independent, and defensive initiative led by France and the UK can play an important role to facilitate the resumption of maritime traffic in the Strait of Hormuz by protecting merchant vessels, reassuring commercial shipping operators, and supporting verification that all mines are removed".

The IMO Secretary General, Arsenio Dominguez, welcomed with the news of the agreement, adding that the deal is a crucial return to peace, dialogue, multilateralism, the safeguarding of the fundamental principle of freedom of navigation, and toward the restoration of maritime safety for ships and seafarers at the Strait of Hormuz.

International Chamber of Shipping general secretary, Thomas A. Kazakos declared: "This announcement comes as a relief to the 20,000 seafarers who have been caught in the middle of this war. Their safe departure from the region must be a top priority but will take time.

"With around 500 ships needing to pass through the Strait to exit the area this will require coordination. The International Maritime Organization has a crucial role, working alongside industry and states in the region, to ensure this is done as safely and as quickly as possible.

"The fundamental principle of freedom of navigation has been sidelined during the war, and many seafarers have regrettably been injured or lost their lives. As we now hopefully move towards peace, we must see a permanent return to vessels being able to pass through the Strait of Hormuz unimpeded without paying a toll or other clearance mechanism."

Shipping: key terms

From a global shipping perspective, there are several key terms of the deal.

Firstly, the U.S. has agreed to begin, and completely within 30 days, end its naval blockade of Iran. Iran will use its "best efforts" for the safe passage of commercial vessels without charge for 60 days only via Hormuz. Traffic will "immediately start" under the agreement but considering the need to remove technical and military obstacles, and de-mining will be "instated" within 30 days.

Iran will conduct dialogue with the Sultanate of Oman to define the future administration and maritime services in Hormuz in discussion with other Persian Gulf littorals, in line with applicable international law and the sovereign rights of the coastal states of the Strait of Hormuz.

Shipping Australia understands that, although crew changes have been ongoing throughout the conflict, many ships have been put into a maintenance mode (crew numbers are reduced but remain sufficient to maintain appropriate watches, machinery operations are also reduced reduced but kept operative). Accordingly, it will take a least a short amount of time to return vessels that have been trapped in the Persian Gulf back to a fully active mode.

Outbreak of war

Conflict began on 28 February this year when the United States and Israel attacked Iran. U.S. President Trump posted an eight-minute video on his Truth Social platform announcing that the United States had begun major combat operations in Iran, noting Iran's long history of sponsorship of terrorism, and the repression of its own citizens particularly the late 2025 / early 2026 massacres in which tens of thousands of Iranians were killed by the regime. President Trump also cited an ongoing Iranian nuclear development programme.

"For these reasons, the United States military is undertaking a massive and ongoing operation," President Trump said.

The Islamic Republic accused Israel and the U.S. of violating the U.N. Charter by launching an overt act of aggression, "particularly during the holy month of Ramadan and prior to the Iranian holiday of Nowruz", according to a statement from the Islamic Republic News Agency. The news agency which is the official outlet of the Iranian government) added that the attacks took place while Iran and the U.S. were involved in diplomatic efforts. Iran called upon the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, to take immediate action to address the violation of international peace and security. The statement asserted its right to respond under Article 51 of the U.N. Charter and urged all U.N. member states to condemn the attacks.

Immediate effects

U.S. military forces immediately bombed a range of landside targets and destroyed the Iranian Navy. Iran responded with drone attacks against U.S. bases around the region, and also attacked a variety of nearby nations such as the United Arab Emirates.

Several ships were attacked, including chemical and oil carriers, Stena Imperative (IMO 9666077), Sea La Donna (IMO 9380532), and Skylight (IMO 9330020). The conflict would go on to involve at least 46 ship-related incidents by 11 June 2026, according to the International Maritime Organization, with 14 seafarer fatalities. There were also a range of attacks on oil and gas facilities over time.

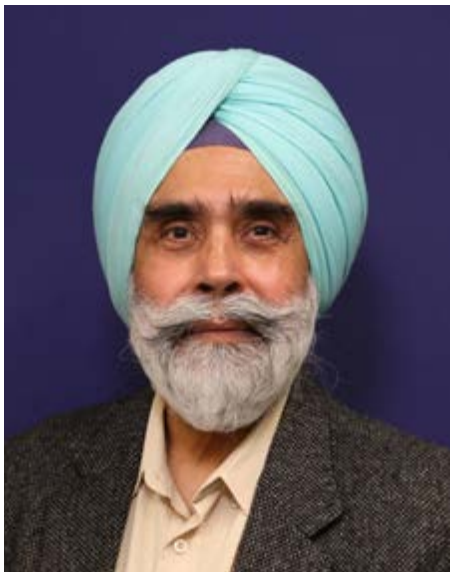
At the time of the outbreak of the conflict, London-based shipbroker firm, Clarksons, had estimated that transits near-immediately reduced by 80%. About 3,200 vessels (all kinds) were inside the Gulf at that time and this included 112 crude tankers (including more than 70 VLCCS, about 8% of the global VLCC fleet), 195 product tankers (4% share of global tonnage), 241 dry bulkers (1% of the global dry bulk fleet), 114 containerships 1%), and 21 Very Large Gas Carriers. Several ships were able to escape from the Persian Gulf from time to time.

Marine insurance industry reaction was significant. Lawyers Stephenson Harwood noted that underwriters engaged in significant premium uplifts for additional war risk premium in excess of 0.3% of the value of the hull per transit. There was also the issuance of notices of cancellation of amendments to existing cover.

Pictured: IMO Secretary General, Arsenio Dominguez.
Photo supplied by the International Maritime Organization.

New board members appointed to AMSA

Dr Carla Boehl and Dr Devinder Grewal have been appointed to the Board of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) for three-year terms.



Pictured: From left to right Dr Carla Boehl and Dr Devinder Grewal. Photo supplied by AMSA.

Dr Carla Boehl is a lecturer and associate for WA School of Mines at Curtin University and is also an experienced Board Director and senior engineering leader with 25 years of experience across ports and rail, utilities and mining. She currently serves as Senior Manager, Global Engineering Operations at Pfizer, where she leads asset care and net zero initiatives across the Asia-Pacific region. Dr Boehl has extensive governance experience, including roles as Board Director at Water Corporation and Flat Rocks Wind Farm. She also previously served as Manager of Asset Strategy and Planning at Fremantle Ports. Dr Boehl holds a PhD in Environment and Water Decision Support Systems.

Dr Devinder Grewal joins after more than a decade of experience as a professor at both the Australian Maritime College and World Maritime University. He is an experienced consultant to the international transport logistics and supply chain industry. His career includes a variety of sectors in the international maritime industry, including operations in bulk, container, crude oil and petro-chemical trades. He was Director Maritime Capability Development, Office of Transport Security, DOTARS, during 2004 when the maritime security regime was implemented. He has held the role of General Manager of Esperance Port in WA and the General Manager Infrastructure for Cashmere Iron Ltd in the resources sector. He is a Master Mariner Class 1 (unlimited). He also holds a Master of Science and a PhD, both from the University of Cardiff in Wales, where he was one of the founding researchers of the Seafarers International Research Centre.

"These appointments create certainty and continuity of skills as AMSA delivers on its mission to ensure the safe operation of vessels, combat marine pollution, and provide lifesaving assistance to people in distress," reads a statement from the office of the Hon. Catherine King MP, the Commonwealth Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. The Minister appoints the AMSA Board.

Daryl Quinlivan AO, an existing board member, has also been elevated to Deputy Chair for the remainder of his term. Daryl has served as a member of the AMSA Board since 2021, having previously served as Secretary of the then Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water. Mr Quinlivan was also Head of Office at the Productivity Commission 2012-2015 and has worked across a range of public policy areas including agriculture and trade, water, communications, transport and infrastructure, and competition policy.

About the AMSA Board

The current Chair of the Board is Captain Jeanine Drummond, who was appointed to the Australian Maritime Safety Authority Board on 2 November 2020 for a three year term, and on 3 July 2023, was appointed as Board Chair for a four year term. Capt Drummond has an extensive background across the maritime industry sectors, at sea, offshore oil and gas, and in the ports sector, both in operations and development, in Australia and internationally. She is an experienced harbour master, master mariner and maritime industry professional.

Kaylene Dale was appointed as AMSA CEO on 1 October 2024 after joining the Australian Customs Service in 2000 and subsequently holding senior leadership roles in the Australian Border Force, the Department of Home Affairs, and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Ms Dale has worked extensively in a regulatory environment. She holds a Master of Public Administration and a Master of Studies in Applied Criminology.

Dean Summers was appointed to the Australian Maritime Safety Authority Board on 3 July 2023, for a 5 year period. He is currently a Board director of Tas Bull Seafarers Foundation and is a former Board member of the Australian Merchant Navy Awards Council. Mr Summers has been the Australian National Coordinator for the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) from 2000 until 2021.

Ms Cha Jordanoski was appointed to the Board in an ex officio capacity on 18 October 2023. She is the First Assistant Secretary / Chief Financial Officer of the Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts. Ms Jordanoski's career spans more than 20 years across the Australian Government, professional services, and commerce.

Ms Kate Hughes was appointed to the Australian Maritime Safety Authority Board on 11 February 2025 for a three-year period. Ms Hughes is a former executive leader of global teams across various sectors. She holds a wide range of qualifications in commerce, applied finance, and occupational health and safety.

Captain Warwick Norman AM was appointed to the Australian Maritime Safety Authority Board on 11 February 2025, for a three-year period. He began his seagoing career with ASP Ship Management, sailing from cadet to master in the tanker fleet. He was the founding CEO of RightShip.

Federal and WA govts give green light on road-port project

Canberra and Perth have signed off on a $1.1 billion road network investment to connect the proposed Westport container terminal and redeveloped bulk terminal to boost long term trade and economic growth.

Australia's federal government will supply $552 million which must be matched by the Western Australia state government.

Funding will deliver the first stage of upgrades to Anketell Road including expanding the road to four lanes between Leath Road and Abercrombie Road, with a grade separation at Rockingham Road. The Australian Government has also committed $350 million towards upgrading the Kwinana Freeway, which will be essential in servicing the proposed Westport precinct.

Eye on machine vision to spot marine mammals

SEA.AI has been awarded a public tender by Spain's Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, to supply AI-powered maritime machine vision systems to support marine research, conservation, and maritime safety.

The company's technology has been designed and developed to fill in what it says are gaps between human lookouts, radar and AIS. The company says artificial intelligence-equipped technologies can detect and recognise ships and large boats, small boats, persons in the water, and other floating obstacles. The company's technologies computes input from low-light and thermal onboard cameras (with detection of temperature differences of up to 0.05 degrees Celsius) to develop a view of the surroundings of a vessel.

The contract, secured in collaboration with SEA.AI's regional partner, TMS Maritime Solutions, includes the delivery of seven SEA.AI systems for deployment across a range of vessels and operational environments.

The initiative will improve the detection and monitoring of marine mammals, particularly whales, while enabling broader evaluation of advanced sensing technologies in real-world conditions.

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