

Statement from the Australasian Marine Pilots Institute (AMPI)

Australian shipping

The Australasian Marine Pilots Institute (AMPI) is the professional representation organisation for Marine Pilots in the Australasian region.

The continuing decline of the Australian Marine industry and its potential impact on Australian Ports and national security is of concern to AMPI. We are however encouraged by the growing support from the Australian Public and some Federal Politicians.

There are over of 300 Marine Pilots employed in Australia providing a service to virtually all commercial ships transiting our ports and the Great Barrier Reef. This ensures maritime safety at the end of the supply chain of the resource industry, which is crucial to the Australia economy.

Pilotage is compulsory in most ports and is governed by State and Federal Legislation. Pilots operate independently of the ship's crew and ensure vessels are managed at the highest standard in high risk environments, to protect life, the environment, infrastructure and impact to our economy.

Pilots are in a unique position to observe all ships that transit Australian ports. The quality of many ships, and training standards of their crew, often does not meet the standards the community would expect of vessels trading around the Australian coast.

Marine Pilots have traditionally been sourced from experienced Master Mariners, serving on Australian ships, who are familiar with our ports, regulations and port services. The subsequent rigorous training required to obtain a pilot's licence for a particular port, builds on this unique experience. The enviable safety record in Australian Ports is testimony of this proven selection and training process.

With a declining maritime industry, the pool of Master Mariners, eligible to apply for pilotage positions is declining and the industry may be forced to consider less qualified candidates for pilot trainee positions.

Master Mariners bring valuable practical knowledge to other roles in the shipping industry such as Harbour Masters, Marine surveying, Stevedoring, Marine teachers, Examiners, Marine lawyers, positions in AMSA, ATSB and with State and Territory Regulators, advisory roles to politicians and strategic development, all of which benefit from mariners with experience at sea in senior positions. These professions will now suffer as a consequence of a declining Australian merchant fleet.

Australian shipping must be supported and a workforce of Australian Ship's Officers should be maintained on Australian ships to ensure a reliable supply of marine expertise to service our shipping industry at the high standard expected by the Australian public.

Unfortunately the reputation of the Australian Seafarers was clouded by industrial activity many decades ago and it seems that some politicians and industry leaders have been preoccupied with retribution and short term gain.

Historically, merchant seamen have served Australia well by exploring, surveying and charting our coastline, seafarers established the first settlements, and a number of our early Governors were Seafarers.

During World War II, 8.5% of Australian Merchant Seamen lost their lives maintaining critical supply routes to our isolated nation, on mostly unarmed merchant vessels. This is almost double the loss of Australians enlisted in the armed forces. The Merchant Navy insignia stands proudly alongside those of the RAN, Army and RAAF at every RSL club in this country in recognition of the sacrifices made during times of conflict.

An Australian shipping fleet is strategically crucial to ensure a secure supply chain of essential goods, in particular refined fuel. In a time of conflict we cannot rely solely on ships owned, operated and manned by foreign countries, to serve in our countries best interest.

It is ironic that while the Federal Government has announced a significant increase in Australia's naval fleet, the fuel to operate these war ships will be refined overseas and brought to Australia on foreign ships.

A fraction of this proposed defence budget should include support for Australian Shipping.

AMPI urges Federal Politicians and industry leaders to listen to professionals at the coal face and consider many long-term economic, strategic, environmental and social benefits of supporting an Australian Merchant Fleet.

The Executive

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