

Melbourne Branch

The Log
The Monthly Newsletter of the Melbourne Branch of
The Company of Master Mariners of Australia Limited

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NEXT MEETING

Mail Exchange Hotel

Thurs 25th February 2021 @ 1800 hrs

Speaker Capt Leon Gilby

Qualifications For todays Masters

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Hon. Sec., Alexandra Evered
Email alex@baysideshipping.com
Tel 03 5424 1224

From the Branch Master

It seems likely that the coronavirus will continue to impact on COMMA activities this year. Our intention was to resume monthly meetings at the end of February and that the March meeting would be the Branch AGM and that the Federal AGM would be held in Melbourne in April.

At present the Mail Exchange Hotel is not getting enough customers to warrant opening the kitchen on Wednesday nights so we have had to change our meetings to Thursday Night.

The Federal Court will hold a telephone conference on Friday 26th February to discuss arrangements for the AGM. The Directors would prefer a face to face meeting but this will depend on the level of risk of being caught in quarantine if there is an outbreak of the virus. If there are further outbreaks of the virus in Melbourne we can hold our monthly meetings by Zoom but when we did that last year the meetings were poorly attended even though we had good speakers.

The path that I, and many of our members, followed to obtain a Certificate of Competency as Master of a Foreign Going Steamship was very different to what is followed today to obtain a Master Class 1 Certificate. It's not just the name of the certificate that has changed, everything from the sea time requirements, the syllabus, and the examination system are all different. Our speaker this month is Captain Leon Gilby who has been involved in preparing candidates for the Master and Mates oral examinations. He will speak about the syllabus, the mandatory courses involved and the renewal and revalidation requirements. It should be of great interest particularly to our older members.

I am sad to report that Captain Dick Francis has resigned from COMMA and OSSA. Recently he has had a few medical issues that have made attending night time meetings difficult. We wish Dick all the best for the future.

The Modern Sextant

Nick Bonser a senior advisor nautical and hydrography with AMSA has won the International Harbour Masters Association “Pitching” competition for his entry “The Modern Sextant”.

As part of the IHMA congress the competition was for young maritime professionals to “Pitch” ideas for improved operations to industry leaders.

The modern digital sextant would have an inbuilt almanac, chronometer and all the formulas required to calculate the vessels latitude and longitude allowing the sextant to continually track the altitude and bearing of multiple celestial bodies using an artificial horizon.

The modern sextant would not replace satellite navigation but would provide a self-sufficient navigation system that does not require external assistance.

I remember that 50 years ago (before Nick Bonser was born) the Japanese Company Tamaya produced a navigation calculator that contained the almanac and did all the calculations for sight reduction as well as great circle, composite sailing, times of twilight and meridian passage etc.

Nick had an inventive idea that will never be put into practice while the Tamaya Navigation Calculator is still in production today.

Membership Applications

The following applications for membership have been received

James BOND Ordinary Queensland Branch

Second Officer on Pacific Aria (Carnival Cruises)

Aaron KAVANAGH Ordinary Melbourne Branch

Master on Skandi Singapore

Peter GRAY Ordinary WA Branch

Chief Mate Relief Master on MMA Rover

Cherag DARUWALLA Ordinary WA Branch

Pilot/Loading Master Chevron

Melbourne Maritime Heritage Precinct and Mission to Seafarers Project Feasibility Study

The City of Melbourne is interested in establishing a maritime heritage precinct and one of the suggested sites is the area occupied by the Mission to Seafarers building, the proposed Seafarers Rest Park, the Riverlee Project and the old wharf cargo shed. As part of this proposal the City of Melbourne would purchase the Mission to Seafarers building which is currently owned by the state. They may wish to use it as a maritime museum.

The City of Melbourne have appointed Biruu Pty Ltd to conduct a feasibility study into the project and stakeholders including COMMA were invited to make submissions. In our submission we explained that as a seafarer's organisation our concern was that the Mission to Seafarers would continue to operate and hopefully out of the building it has used for over 100 years.

The basis of our submission was that Australia as a signatory to the Maritime Labour Convention shall in accordance with Regulation 4.4 promote the development of welfare facilities to provide seafarers access to adequate welfare facilities and services, shore based facilities including cultural, recreational and information facilities and services. The Australian Seafarers Welfare Council of which the Mission to Seafarers is a member, administer the provision of seafarers welfare services on a port, region and national level. In Melbourne these services are provided by the Mission and Stella Maris.

We pointed out that with the MTS there is an opportunity to preserve a living part of our maritime heritage and that the MTS building without the Mission operating within it becomes just another old building that used to be of significance. We believe that the MTS building deserves better and hope that the future use of the building can accommodate the aspirations of both the City of Melbourne and the Mission to Seafarers. Our submission will be included in the draft report of feedback to the council.

The Effect of COVID-19 on Seafarers

On the 10th December 2020 AMSA held a Webinar on the topic “Understanding the effects of COVID-19 on seafarers.” The webinar was chaired by Dr Michelle Grech the manager vessel operations at AMSA.

The first presentation was the result of an online survey conducted by academics from universities in Australia Sweden and UK during July/September 2020. The survey was on seafarers on international commercial vessels and found that crew changes and shore leave were the main issues of concern. Other issues identified were difficulties in getting supplies, higher workloads, extended contracts and uncertainty about the future.

The effect of these issues were displayed in anxiety, depression and exhaustion due to sleeping problems. Those surveyed were split 50/50 on whether they were getting enough support from their companies.

This was followed by Dr. Helen Deveax who reported on a questionnaire of 216 British seafarers. Those who had permanent contracts were reasonably happy but many without permanent contracts were out of work. A major issue for British Seafarers was the income tax implications particularly for those in the cruise industry who were stood down and so did not qualify for the tax exemptions for being out of the country under the seafarer’s earnings deductions scheme. This had serious financial implications for many seafarers.

Dr Ana Sliskovic from the University of Zadar in Croatia reported on a survey of 752 international seafarers in early 2020. The study found that prolonged periods on board or at home waiting for a ship can cause adverse social, mental, physical and economic wellbeing for seafarers. The issues were consistent with those identified in other studies.

The final presenter was Christine Field the CEO of Hunterlink Australia which provides year round mental health support for seafarers in Australia. She reported a 50% increase in enquiries and a 20% increase in potential suicides. The issues presenting were anger, anxiety, depression grief and suicide.

The major causes were isolation, uncertainty about contract extensions, problems with crew changes, constantly changing regulations and loss of hope.

She said there needs to be increased communication of available services, greater awareness in the maritime industry of mental health and greater access to information.

During a final summary it was felt that while some companies were proactive and did welfare checks on ship's crews this was often not the case. There was also a call to end the stigma associated with mental health and to treat it like any other illness.

Seafarers' Happiness Index

The issues raised in the AMSA Webinar have been confirmed by the latest Seafarers Happiness Index from the Mission to Seafarers.

Responses reveal a real sense of resignation and antipathy due to heavy workloads, extended contracts, stress and uncertainty.

One year into the pandemic many seafarers are losing faith, becoming cynical and expect things to get worse.

The survey drew negative responses about travel and quarantine measures that have resulted in substandard, frustrating and degrading treatment.

The impact of the crew change crisis is being acutely felt and the effect on morale and mental health was evident.

Many seafarers reported long hours and altered paperwork to cover up hours of work violations.

The lack of shore leave and limited Wi-Fi were the major concerns early in 2020 but the latest report shows some ship owners are trying to improve the quality of life on-board by providing better satellite internet access, better food and spending more on crew welfare.