

Reducing the administrative burden

→ The Hong Kong branch were again involved in the biennial China Maritime Exhibition and Seminars, held at the end of February.

A Nautical Institute stand at the exhibition was manned throughout the two day event, and if the exhibition was rather smaller than last time, it attracted a high standard of visitors, so we were able to meet a number of potential new members. We also introduced visitors to the excellent publications available from The Nautical Institute and distributed free copies of the new booklet on Marine Spatial Planning.

The highlight for the branch, though, was undoubtedly the half-day seminar organised on our behalf by Hon. Vice Chairman Vikrant Malhotra. Entitled 'Reducing the administrative burden on the Master and crew', it featured four excellent papers and plenty of time for questions from the floor.

Environmental issues

The first speaker was Mr Wei Gao, Technical Support Manager with DNV/GL, who spoke on shipping environmental issues – key regulations and future outlook. In a wide-ranging paper he covered the world economic outlook and its effect on demand for shipping services, and outlined the likely tightening of regulations up to 2030. He predicted tighter rules on NOx, SOx and greenhouse gas emissions, ballast water and recycling. He also covered a host of new issues such as black carbon, underwater noise and biofouling, and predicted an increasing demand for sustainability, rating schemes, premiums for energy efficiency, new technologies and fuel issues.

Mr Wei described potential new emission control areas (ECAs), and argued that the next ones to be declared will be in the Pearl River Delta and the Turkish Straits. He also claimed there will be increasing calls for monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) of greenhouse gas emissions.

None of this was particularly comforting in terms of reducing the administrative burden. Mr Wei finished by predicting that the situation after 2030 will become 'not good'. It was a sobering paper.

Extent of the problem

The next speaker was Captain Pradeep Chawla FNI, the Managing Director for QHSE and Training at Anglo-Eastern. He began by citing the Danish definition of administrative burden as 'administrative work which, in the opinion of the employee, does not add value



Captain Sanjeev Kumar addresses the issue of excessive paperwork

proportionate to the resources that the person will have to put into the work to comply with specific rules and regulations'. Such work thus affects efficiency and job satisfaction in a negative way.

Captain Chawla pointed out that there are now 18 *mandatory* conventions and codes totalling 6,203 pages which mariners must adhere to. They include 590 administrative requirements. When major ship inspection activities are added to the mix the average mariner now spends 20% of working time on administration, although the figure must be much higher for senior officers. This compares to a figure of only 9% for people in offices ashore.

He asked why the regulations could not be reviewed to eliminate duplication and simplify reporting procedures. As two obvious examples, he suggested the use of a 'white box' recorder connected to the oily water separator, and standardised international port entry forms and procedures.

The present avalanche of paperwork results in less attention being paid to the conduct of the vessel, an unattractive working environment, fatigue, criminalisation, bureaucracy, recruitment challenges, wasted time and wasted money.

To solve these problems, Captain Chawla advocated more cooperation between IMO and the shipping companies, and better coordination and a pooling of resources between classification societies, administrations and vetting companies. He proposed that ships should be issued with a single certificate to show that all other certificates are valid and approved, and that the industry should make more use of digital solutions. Finally, he suggested that there needs to be a standardisation and alignment of the interpretation of national and international rules, and increased manning levels to cope with the burden placed upon our seafarers.

There were no dissenting voices from the floor.

Root causes

Captain Vijay Kumar of Ocean Manager, Inc., discussed the root causes of the administrative burden, and suggested that shipping could learn from the experience of other industries in terms of outsourcing data entry, record keeping, reporting and analysis. He claimed there are potential solutions for the maritime industry which could cut time spent on administration by up to 50%.

Captain Kumar gave some examples of technology-based solutions and took a detailed look at a number of tasks which they can handle. He also pointed out that more than 850 ships worldwide have already implemented some form of digital assistance to ease the burden of administrative tasks.

The mariner's view

The final speaker was Captain Sanjeev Kumar of Wah Kwong, who was recently in command and was asked to present the mariner's view of the situation. He began by pointing out that there are too many people in offices ashore who do not appreciate the size of the administrative burden, particularly regarding quality, management and safety (QMS) documentation and dealing with correspondence from the office.

He pointed out that there are at least 50 books in the ship's library with which mariners are expected to be familiar, roughly 1000 pages of QMS documentation, and at least 300 check lists for safe operations.

Sanjeev was particularly scathing in his criticism of the ISM Code ('just a paperwork exercise'). He claimed senior officers have been reduced to the role of clerks, so vessel supervision is suffering, and in an age where everyone is talking about mentoring there is little time for the support and guidance of junior officers.

He finished with a plea for more user-friendly systems and the placement of an Administrative Officer aboard every ship, and suggested that people ashore should stop confusing ships with 24-hour convenience stores.

Although it was brief, the seminar covered a lot of ground. Delegates were generally in agreement with the speakers, and the overwhelming conclusion was that administration on board has run out of control. Solutions to many of the problems already exist, or could easily be implemented, but this requires bodies such as the IMO to reconnect with the seafarers they are supposed to represent.

Captain Alan Loynd FNI