

Submission by the

AUSTRALIAN MARITIME COLLEGE

to the

**SENATE EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION
REFERENCE COMMITTEE**

Introduction

The Australian Maritime College (AMC) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the inquiry into Current and Future Skills needs. The AMC conducts education, training and consultancy for maritime and maritime related industries both within Australia and overseas. This submission in particular will discuss issues relating to the Shipping and related industries and to the Fisheries Catchment and the related Seafood Processing industry.

Future Skills Requirements

Shipping and Related Industries. As identified in a study conducted by Thompson Clarke Shipping Pty Ltd (1) there is critical shortage of officers, both Deck and Engineering, developing within Australia. While the Australian Shipping industry has declined over recent years, leading to an increase in overseas flagged ships on the Australian coast there has been little apparent understanding of the flow-on effects in skills training needs created by the decline in Cadet Training undertaken by Australian companies.

Deck and Marine Engineering Officers, to the level of Class 1, trained under the existing system also provide the base from which personnel required as marine surveyors, pilots, port state control inspectors, port and terminal management and supervisors as well as dry dock supervision are selected. Flow-on effects of the shortages of Deck and Engineer officers and skilled deckhands could be felt in the offshore oil and gas industry, tourist industry and the fishing industry. The shortage of marine engineers can impact on industries as diverse as hospitals, hotels and cold storage facilities. To meet current needs it has been argued (Thompson Clarke) that Australia would need to train up 216 personnel a year. Current figures are less than 40 of which very few (as low as 15) are actually employed on Australian deep-sea vessels. The overall situation will be exacerbated further by the fact that Seafarers are a rapidly ageing population.

Advice provided to AMC is that the current situation in this sector reflects that evident in the United Kingdom (UK) in the 1980s. The UK is currently subsidising training of Deck and Engineer Cadets to a level of 90% and still importing labour.

It should be noted that there is no shortage of Australians wishing to go to sea. The main difficulty is providing an incentive to the shipping industry to take on 'trainees' and provide the sea service so vital for them to obtain their Certificate of Competency.

Fisheries Catching and Seafood Processing. At present there is an increasing need for skilled personnel in the industry. Much of the sector is characterised by employment of casual and non-award personnel. If the industry is to reach its potential then a skilled workforce is required on both the fishing vessels and within the processing sector. Many of the skills needed relate to the enhanced use of technology, knowledge of environmental issues and an understanding of applicable standards and legislation.

Impact of Current Policies and Programs

Current policy as it relates to the Shipping industry has led to shortages in supply being filled by overseas carriers. This is reflected in the fact that international carriers sponsor a number of AMC cadets. While this situation may meet policy outcomes for the shipping industry, the flow-on effects reflected above (ie providing skilled staff to undertake other maritime functions) do not seem to have been considered. There are no apparent government policies or programs being developed to provide a remedy to this particular issue

It is acknowledged that the New Apprenticeship scheme offers substantial incentives to employers to encourage them to up-skill their employee base by employing trainees under trainee-ships. In the Shipping industry this has had negligible impact as regulatory requirements have negated the use of this type of trainee-ship. In the Fisheries industry the same situation is apparent but for different reasons. Much of the industry is characterised by part-time or casual employees or, in the case of deck hands, employees not employed under an award. Therefore many of those needing up-skilling are not eligible for the training and employers cannot access the incentive schemes. In addition the complexity of the User Pays schemes is a disincentive to small employers accessing the programs.

Industry Strategies

Industry strategies would appear to address problems from a cost-effective perspective. The downstream issues such as providing a source of skilled workers for other tasks in the future are not an area of concern in many instances, as they tend to relate to associated industries rather than directly to the primary skill area. This situation is understandable but indicates that a cross-sectorial approach to skills needs and training may need greater emphasis.

Job Network

The AMC has little involvement with the Job network and is unable to comment on its effectiveness.

Future Strategies

The current situation is leading to a need to import labour, particularly in the shipping related industries. To overcome this situation a more cross-sectorial approach needs to be

taken. From the development of databases, to the development of policies and the implementation of programs, an industry specific approach does not appear to meet the complexity of current employment requirements or linkages. Until such a process exists downstream skills needs, as outlined above, will not be met unless specific training is established for those employment categories.

There is also a growing need to raise the overall education base of all employees at all levels. Unless this occurs, a flow on effect will be that generic skills needs such as literacy skills, information literacy, occupational health and safety, environmental training are likely to be adversely impacted.

The scarcity of skills in the Shipping and related industries is also reflected in a scarcity of Australian born teaching and instructional staff at AMC. It is noteworthy that less than 50% of AMC's academic staff are Australian born. This has resulted in the need to recruit overseas staff due to their non availability in the domestic market. This shortage is reflected across the industry and a program to redress the situation is vital in the short term.

Consultation Arrangements

Current consultative arrangements appear to be varied. Organisations vary from ITABs to industry councils and regional economic development committees. AMC has found that direct liaison has been required to effectively meet specific industry training needs. In some cases AMC finds itself involved in such coordination activities due to its national brief and relatively high profile in the industries it primarily serves.

A more coordinated, cross-sectorial approach is required if holistic solutions are to be found to many current skill shortages. Too often the approaches taken reflect governmental, jurisdictional or industry based boundaries leading to cumbersome outcomes. This is particularly evident for a training provider delivering training in different states and territories, as is the case for AMC.

References:

- (1) Thompson Clarke Shipping Pty Ltd, "The Availability of Professional Maritime Skills in Australia to Provide Vessel Survey Services", a paper presented to the Australian Institute of Marine Surveyors 2002 Conference, dated 25 July 2002.

