**Seminar report**

**Meeting the challenges for an African Maritime Economy**

**A report from the South Africa Branch Seminar**

A joint two-day seminar held in Cape Town on 4-5th April 2013 by The Nautical Institute, The Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers, the Maritime Law Association of South Africa (SA), the SA Institute of Marine Engineers and Naval Architects and The Society of Master Mariners looked at the way forward for the African maritime economy.

The seminar was, to an extent, a follow up to the successful SA Maritime Industry Conference (SAMIC) convened by the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) in Cape Town last year. Perhaps its most positive aspect was that the broad representation of professional bodies participating allowed reflection not only of where SA needs to go to take full advantage of opportunities waiting for the maritime industry yet to embrace, but also to reflect with some satisfaction on the current state of the industry. The seminar showed that, contrary to the current more pessimistic views expressed about the industry, SA indeed has a vibrant and successful maritime community most of whom are doing their best to build business in the current difficult world economic market.

**Development initiatives**

Keynote speaker Sobantu Tilayi, Chief Operating Officer of SAMSA, stressed the need to partner with industry to keep the development initiative fired up. This is best achieved through projects designed to nurture employment, such as the building of a new tug to replace the ageing *Smit Amandla*. He sees two areas of development: first the provision of training of local seafarers for employment both on SA ships (as a future project) and to supply foreign vessels. And second, grasping all the opportunities offered by South Africa’s geographical and economic position. It is all a question of building capacity.

Particular areas mentioned are the re-introduction of learnerships (apprenticeships) for the trades; encouraging the qualification of support experts such as naval architects and draftsmen; ensuring STCW compliance to ensure the acceptability of our seamen and also of those mariners trained by the navy.

The next speaker, Captain Rob Whitehead,identified three main issues for the future: maritime training and education; maintaining SA's White List IMO status for crewing; and the criminalisation of seafarers. Prof Trevor Jones addressed the tricky subject of cabotage, which had been suggested as one possible key to maritime economic growth. Cabotage may well increase SA seafarer berths, but it could also drive costs up and make the country less competitive. It was clear from the floor that there remains considerable support for the introduction of cabotage.

 Steven Gosling from Nautical Institute HQ in London, gave a presentation on the NI's Generation Y Project - which he loosely defined as applying to those under 40. The reality is that the under-30's and to an extent the under-40's grew up in a world very different from that of most of the delegates present. They are the electronic generation who respond to different stimuli and who need teaching and mentoring in ways distinct from those of a generation ago. To that end, the NI is seeking to involve younger people in all aspects of its work, and to listen to their views. Younger people need the education and mentoring of older players, who in turn need the enthusiasm and energy their elders perhaps lack. But to help each other properly, they need to speak the same ‘language’ - which is not necessarily limited to linguistics. Social media plays a vital role and provides the link between the generations.

**Shipbuilding and repair**

The next speaker was Admiral Kevin Watson, SA Navy. He lamented the fact that the shipbuilding and repair industries in SA were served by only some 10 qualified naval architects, all trained abroad. He suggested that this should be addressed both from the point of view of trying to encourage black naval architects and draftsmen, and from the standpoint of pure shortage. His suggestion was to encourage institutions to develop post graduate programmes, and to stimulate interest early in learners' school careers. Admiral Watson was followed by Keith Mackie, who gave insight into the drydock as an essential cog in the marine industry wheel, and current issues with the lack of drydocks in South Africa.

The immense potential of the ship repair industry, especially in the burgeoning oil and gas sector, was starkly highlighted by Chris Sparg, speaking for The SA Association of Shipbuilders and Repairers. His presentation was brimming with enthusiastic optimism. Mr Sparg gave some exciting figures outlining that we have some 17 000 vessels passing our coasts each year, offering huge potential for the growth of a service and repair industry.

**Education**

Next on the podium was Brian Ingpenwho gave a perspective on education and training of young seafarers. He outlined the criteria for identifying potential scholars to come to maritime studies, and showed some of the success stories. It is a heartening example of the cutting of red tape and the building of something from nothing, with limited means and unlimited enthusiasm and dedication. Mr Ingpen mentioned other initiatives, some driven by SAMSA and the education and transport departments to set up similar schools. He cautioned that teaching maritime studies is costly, and requires specialist professional teachers. Yet he remains passionate about the potential for expanding maritime studies and improving the steady yet still small flow of graduates.

The maritime education theme was taken further by Capt Andy Maclennan, head of the South African Maritime Training Academy (SAMTRA), which serves not only SA interests but the many foreign seamen who come to SAMTRA for simulator training. Again this was recognised as a valuable export initiative, funded as it is largely by foreign donor capital.

The further education theme was continued by Theresa Mareko, a lecturer at the host Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). Her paper gave an insight into the academic structure of higher education in maritime studies in SA, and how it fits in with internationalised South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) grading and STCW standardisation, essential to the international White List recognition of SA qualifications.

Rob Gardner, of the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers (ICS), outlined the considerable successes achieved by the Institute in providing higher education to South Africans in the ship service industry. The extent of the influence of the ICS, especially in KwaZuluNatal, came as a surprise to many in the audience. The ICS's operations extend not only to distance learning by those working in the industry, but also extensively to interventions at high school level.

The final speaker was submariner Malcolm Alexander who left the audience on a high note of enthusiasm and optimism. Mr Alexander administers an education subsidisation scheme, especially for smaller businesses. He outlined successes and challenges and came through with a message as strong as that always projected by SAMSA: we are there to help you.

**Summing up**

Overall, this was a most positive and optimistic seminar. Though it did not make any industry-changing decisions, it re-established lines of communication between industry players. Lack of communication is a problem across the industry, with many sectors of the maritime industry are not fully familiar with what other sectors are doing, and particularly how much they have achieved. In particular, there remains too little communication between government departments (especially central government) and the maritime industry. The notable and commendable exception to government indifference is SAMSA which in its short existence has made huge strides in building industry confidence and in supporting the maritime sector; SAMSA has the trust of the industry and it is considered to deliver on its promises - and more. Of particular importance is the brave initiative of the SA Agulhas training ship, which has had huge spin-offs for the industry.

There remains much interest in the possibility of cabotage, which needs to be fully investigated in the context of the possibility of bringing a limited number of ships back to the SA flag. The proposed Directorate of Maritime Affairs for the African Union could have great potential for growing the maritime industry locally, regionally and on a Pan-African basis. Other forms of non-freight cabotage protection for the local maritime industry, such as imposing local content preconditions on the granting of offshore prospecting and exploitation licences, and fishing licences, should similarly be addressed.

Bureaucratic intransigence, ignorance of the industry and indifference must be educated away, completely. The seamen of today who suffer indignities and obstructions at the hands of indifferent immigration officers enforcing impractical regulations are the ship managers of tomorrow who will then make strategic decisions of where to send their ships for repairs.

The main benefit of the Nautical Institute Seminar was that the various professional bodies representing a very broad spectrum of the maritime industry got together and talked and listened. Therein lies the success of future coordination, stimulation and growth of our industry.

It is to Mr Alexander that the Chair is indebted for what is surely the best summing up of a worthwhile two days: *Our maritime industry has all the bits - we just need the gel to pull it all together.* That gel must come collectively from central and local governments; from NGOs, especially from SAMSA; from the various professional and trade bodies representing the different sectors of the industry; from visionaries and those with experience; and in partnership with the maritime industry and the dedicated men and women who work in it and serve it.

**John Hare**

**Seminar chair**

*Presentations from the seminar can be downloaded from www.nautinst.co.za.*