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For Immediate Release

Shipowners, agents and unions pull together for seafarers' welfare

Fifty representatives of ship owners, agents, welfare providers, maritime unions, port authorities and government departments came together in Sydney yesterday to find ways to make a difference to the lives of seafarers.

"If people think that no one cares about seafarers' welfare, just look around this room and you know that isn't true", said Allan Schwartz, General Manager Ship Safety, AMSA and co-organiser of the forum.

The workshop, initially conceived as a joint initiative of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority and Shipping Australia Limited focussing on the role of ships' agents in seafarers' welfare, was expanded in response to demand, to take in the full membership of the Australian Seafarers' Welfare Council.

AMSA set the scene by outlining the positive global impact of the Maritime Labour Convention, particularly, that whilst it has already been ratified by nations controlling 85 per cent of global trade, it also applies to ships flying flags of non-ratified States when they visit coastal States who have ratified. Effectively, it is in force world-wide.

SAL Chairman Ken Fitzpatrick discussed the implied responsibilities on ships' agents arising from the MLC and explored ways that a ship's agent can have a positive impact on seafarers' welfare. "A caring ship's agent can sense when something is not right in a ship but the difficult decision, is what you can do about it", he said. He noted that arranging out of hours dental treatment was a particularly difficult challenge. "It is important that owners, agents, welfare providers and authorities all work together to provide the best outcomes for all," he said.

This message of '*caring and working together*' was the common theme of presentations by the International Transport Federation, Apostleship of the Sea, the Mission to Seafarers and other speakers. Peter Mannion, General Manager Coastal Operations at Rio Tinto, stated that the agent has a mandate to the ship owner or operator, but the MLC opens up the ability to report on items that are not right. A good agent is "an empathetic agent who cares and if you care you can make a difference," he said.

The launch of a new website for the Australian Seafarers' Welfare Council was also announced. The website brings multiple sources of information on the seafarers welfare into the one portal. "It should be the first place to look for information relating to seafarers welfare, whether you are a seafarer, an agent and shipowner or a port" said Allan

Schwartz. "The ASWC is already making a difference in coordinating the efforts of seafarers' welfare services."

The site, which is still being fully developed, is http://www.amsa.gov.au/seafarers_welfare

Editor's note:

For additional information please contact Rod Nairn, Chief Executive Officer on 0449 902 457.

Shipping Australia is a peak national shipping association comprising 34 member shipping lines and shipping agents, that would be involved with over 70 per cent of Australia's container and car trade, over 60 per cent of our break bulk and bulk trades, and significant cruise ship and tug operations.