



Meeting the COVID-19 challenge

By SCOTT HENDERSON

The COVID-19 year, 2020 has certainly been a different year for all of us in our own businesses, for Shipping Australia Limited and in our private lives. Shipping Australia started the year developing new ideas to promote the use of the blue highway in support of the Government's latest review of coastal shipping, building the case for an ocean liner shipping block exemption to support efficient consortia operations for international shipping, and arguing against the introduction of a new levy on all containers in Melbourne to subsidise improvements to on-dock rail at two terminals only. By the beginning of March, like the rest of the world, our focus was shifting towards the impacts of COVID-19 on the international shipping sector, and by the end of that month we could really think of nothing else.

This year, I was very pleased to welcome Ocean Network Express (ONE), Hyundai Merchant Marine Australia and Oldendorff Carriers, as new full members. From the feedback I have received, all three are very pleased with their decisions to take up membership. ONE has now matured its operations in Australia, HMM is returning to SAL after a few years break and Oldendorff, one of the largest dry bulk carrier operators in the world, is keen to use SAL's expertise and information to keep abreast of port, State and national regulatory changes, and wants to contribute to the shipping policy debate. The participation of these new companies makes Shipping Australia's influence even stronger.

For Shipping Australia Limited, it has been an exceptionally busy year, an excruciatingly frustrating one, and a year of change. The 'busy' has been in

relation to COVID-19 - keeping members informed of myriad changes to national, State and local policies and regulations that impacted the shipping industry at every change. The 'frustrating' has been the relentless advocacy and engagement with those three levels of governance, in a continuing effort to get reasonable policies adopted and some level of policy alignment between the 'Dis-united States of Australia' (and even individual ports within those States). The 'change' has come in various forms, at the Board level, the staff level and operational aspects introducing new working routines and including virtual meetings for both internal and external engagement.

At the Board level, Adrian Petersen left the Board last December, following his departure from Wilhelmsen Ship Services and was replaced by Henrik Jensen (Maersk). At the end of June, Ken Fitzpatrick (Asiaworld Shipping Services) retired after 14 years, including four as chairman from 2012 to 2016. I would like to especially acknowledge Ken who has been a dedicated advisor and contributor to the operations of SAL, and I draw your attention to his recollections of 50 years in the shipping business published under the title 'Retrospective' in this magazine. The casual vacancy was filled by Captain Sunil Dhowan, Wallenius Wilhelmsen Ocean, a former chairman of SAL's Victorian State Committee, whose experience spans agency, RoRo and terminal operations.

At the SAL staff level our Chief Executive Officer, Rod Nairn, has now implemented the final stage of his retirement plan, which has been in train for a few years now. His preparations included the gradual digital transformation of SAL and a review of SAL staff functions and

roles back in 2019, which ultimately led to the employment of Jim Wilson as Communications and Policy Officer, in February this year. Jim's engagement has enabled the more frequent publication of SAL *Signal*, *LinkedIn* posts and *Twitter* feeds, which has ensured that SAL is more prominent in the wider media, and strengthens our leadership position in public comment on international and national shipping related matters. After an extensive review and selection process the SAL Board decided on the appointment of current Deputy CEO and General Manager Shipping Policy and Technical Services, Captain Melwyn Noronha as the Chief Executive Officer from 1 January 2021. Melwyn has been with SAL since 2015 and has demonstrated his extensive knowledge of the industry, and his ability to liaise and influence at the highest levels. His qualifications through the Australian Maritime College and his experience as a master of bulk carriers certainly add to his credentials.

I would like to thank Rod for his exceptional leadership and dedication to Shipping Australia Limited since he joined the company in January 2013. Rod's ability to quickly identify problems and provide cost-effective and innovative solutions has certainly modernised and strengthened the organisation. He has steered SAL through a challenging period which saw the demise of the Liner Shipping Vessel Discussion Agreements to emerge leaner, stronger, more efficient and more influential in shipping and logistics policy.

SAL has maintained our part-time State secretaries in Queensland and Victoria. In both States COVID-19 restrictions forced the cancellation of our usual

networking events such as golf days, breakfasts and luncheons, and even the Queensland Shipping Industry Ball. In Queensland, State Committee Secretary, Geoff Dalglish and his State Chairman, Michael Travers have kept members engaged and informed through State Committee meetings, using video conferencing, and as the year comes to a close, Geoff has been able to squeeze in a last-minute Christmas lunch event at Events on Oxlade, New Farm.

In Victoria, Charles Masters continues as State Secretary, while Rod Begley has stepped down from Chairman to pursue a career move into stevedoring in Papua New Guinea. We thank Rod for his commendable service over the past two years. The role of State Chairman for Victoria has been ably filled by James Kurz, who previously held the Deputy State Chairman role. Shipping Australia Victoria therefore remains on a solid footing, with attributes of experience and enthusiasm to maintain its momentum.

The New South Wales State Committee continues to be chaired by Bill Rizzi (MSC), and has been expertly supported by New South Wales State Secretary, Melwyn Noronha. Pleasingly, New South Wales was fortunate to hold the only shipping industry State golf day this year, just a few weeks before COVID-19 gathering restrictions came into effect, however since then, most of the other usual networking functions have been curtailed. On the up-side, the famous New South Wales State Committee Christmas lunch was able to go ahead on 4 December, albeit with a 50 per cent reduction in

numbers. We sincerely apologise for the disappointment of those who were unable to be accommodated and do hope that it never happens again. It really was a fantastic event and a great way to break out of the COVID-19 imposed isolation. Many thanks to our major sponsor NSW Ports, to DPWorld for providing the table gifts and a special thanks to AGFS Port Logistics/ AGS World Transport for sponsoring the inimitable Vince Sorrenti, to have the guests laughing until they cried.

With severe restrictions on travel, there has been no face-to-face engagement between our head office staff and our members in South Australia or Western Australia this year. The frenetic pace and high workload in relation to COVID-19 has kept the headquarters staff fully occupied, unfortunately engagement with these States has suffered. In Western Australia, Christy Kraker (Ship Agency Services), is now in her third year as chair, and in South Australia, Paul Paparella (Asiaworld Shipping Services) continues as State chairman and represents on the South Australian Freight Council. It will be important that we restore regular information events with these States, both in person and by video conference over the coming year.

The COVID-19 year has been a challenging year for the shipping industry, but the standout casualty of this pandemic has been the plight of the humble seafarer. Ships' crews have been isolated, and virtually imprisoned on their ships since before the beginning of the pandemic, when media coverage of COVID-19 infections wrongly tarred cargo

vessels with the same brush. Inconsistent and irreconcilable State restrictions, both here and overseas, have meant that ships' crews have been denied shore leave, forced to remain onboard well past their employment contracts, and in many cases refused access to medical and dental services. Ship's agents have taken the brunt of the burden to get approval for seafarer movements, and SAL staff have helped to oil the wheels of the bureaucratic processes when they grind to a halt. Surprisingly, after nine months of COVID-19 threat, with a few notable exceptions, such as Maritime Safety Queensland, there are still few clearly published protocols on how a State or port will deal with a ship with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 on board – most are left languishing at sea for days or weeks while representatives plead with authorities to support the vessel.

As we close out 2020, I am sure we can all agree that we wish 2021 not be quite so demanding. I thank the member volunteer chairmen and committee members for their contribution. I also thank Shipping Australia staff for their dedicated efforts to provide the best possible information to members, and to influence governments at all levels to take the international shipping industry into account when reacting to emergencies and setting policies. Finally, I thank Rod Nairn for his tireless efforts to keep Shipping Australia on an even keel and navigating in safe waters over the past eight years and look forward to our new chapter with Melwyn Noronha at the helm. ▲



Major sponsor NSW Ports CEO, Marika Calfas, addresses guests at the SAL Christmas Lunch