



**Australian Government**

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**Seafarers Safety, Rehabilitation  
and Compensation Authority**

**Seacare  
Conference 2006**

**Keynote Address:  
Mick Doleman  
Maritime Union of Australia**

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## KEYNOTE ADDRESS: MICK DOLEMAN MARITIME UNION OF AUSTRALIA (MUA)

**Chairperson's Introduction** - Last but not least is our third keynote speaker, Mick Doleman. Mick is Assistant National Secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia; he became a Seafarer in 1971 and has worked in several areas of the maritime industry including Bluewater, Offshore, Towage and Dredging Sectors. He went to work for the MUA in 1984 and is a Monitor with the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) on the IMO, and he's been a very valued Member, or Deputy Member, of the Seacare Authority since 1999. We can always rely on Mick for a strong opinion and have no doubt we will hear some strong views today, so would you join with me in welcoming Mick our third keynote speaker.

**Mick Doleman** - Thanks very much Chair. The subject matter is Safety in the Global Environment. I pondered on this subject matter and gave it some thought about what it really meant. In some respects it could be a contradiction in terms, if you understand the global environment from my perspective. I think it is a contradiction in terms from a seafaring perspective. I don't think there'd be anybody in this room who would disagree that we are in a globalised environment and almost every facet of our life has some connection with the global economy and global issues that we deal with. Now taking that onboard you'd also agree that shipping was the first ever business in the world to be globalised. It was the first global business and not long after that it became the first business to be deregulated. In many respects, we saw the advent of sub-standard ships, Flags of Convenience vessels, tax havens established, lack of accountability for those vessels and the treatment of their crew. That, in my mind is the international environment or the globalised environment in a shipping context to which we apply the word safety. So taking that onboard what are or what is the globalised environment for Australian shipping, or shipping that we have to compete with, and in particular with reference to the issue of OH&S. There are a couple of real examples I want to give you of the benchmark that we have to compete with in terms of the globalised environment and these are true stories and they can be checked.

In April this year a 24 year old AB was decapitated by a mooring line that snapped while the vessel was alongside. It was a tragic, tragic loss but to add to that tragedy the shipping company was reluctant to pay any, any payment whatsoever, to that young lad's mother. Where was the government intervention in that respect? Where was the regulatory environment in that respect? It failed. It wasn't there. It was the union movement and the ITF in particular that got a US\$75,000 payment for that tragic loss.

A little bit closer to home, a 19 year old Australian Beauty Therapist onboard the *Carnival Triumph*, a cruise vessel operating out of Miami, working for tips only, severed her achilles tendon in the door as it slammed on it. The employer landed her ashore in a motel with \$300 and said "Do your best". 19 years of age. Where was the government and regulatory authorities to do anything for her? It wasn't there. Again it was the movement and the ITF that came to the rescue and supported her and got her back to Australia and got medical treatment to fix her leg.

Eighteen months ago a trainee engineer off a FOC vessel, the *CSCL Keylang* lost three fingers in an engineering accident onboard his vessel. The company didn't want to pay any compensation, so again the ITF has intervened to try and get some fair treatment, medical treatment and compensation. We are still arguing the case for that person. My question again – where is the government, where are the regulatory authorities, where are the humanitarian considerations or whatever it may be to look after that engineer?

Sixteen months ago, two PNG seafarers on the *Kirabuddy Chief* were ordered to secure mooring lines in atrocious weather. One was washed over the side and never found and the other sustained enormous head injuries and the company is refusing to pay. Rhetorical question again – where was the government, where was the regulatory authority to look after the human element of this shipping incident? Not there and they are still not being paid compensation for the death of one seafarer or compensation for the seafarer who's badly injured.

It won't happen here, I hear you say. Well global business as we've agreed or I've contested is, will and does look at what the global benchmarks are, and for those who have been in this industry for a while and were around during the micro-economic reform, and David Parmeter was one, Geoff Wood another I see in the room, and of course Martin Byrne, will recall the enormous work that was done in a tripartite approach between the Government, the Unions and the Employers to modernise our industry and to benchmark it. The benchmark in those days in the 80's was OECD, and quite a reasonable benchmark which all parties agreed. If I asked David now and others in this room it would not be OECD and I know it's not OECD for discussions. Where is it? I suggested that those examples are becoming the benchmark for Australian shipping viz-a-viz Australian safety potentially into the future. Again you say it mighten happen. Well I've already described what will happen, what potentially could happen with the insatiable economy of China and India as they become major dominating powers in a global economy. What sort of influence will they have on the new benchmarks in the global environment? Who would like to be a miner in China? The most dangerous job in the world. China is the emerging market and emerging operator in LNG vessels. They want to buy equity in every business they hold. What pressures will they bring to bear on our sector, our areas? I don't hold the view quite frankly that regulation as it stands globally and in Australia works to the point that it should.

I don't believe in self-regulation, which is basically what we have, where it is a reactive not a proactive arrangement, where investigations do take place after the injury, after the death or whatever. If you go back and look in history it's a tragic truism that quantum leaps in safety have generally come on the heels of some major disaster, described in many respect from Duncan's contributions. So I'm not a great advocate of self-regulation. Regulation needs good government, and unfortunately in this global environment it's in sparingly quantities, in particular in this country, or a strong union movement viz-a-viz the ITF as I've just described to ensure that proper regulations apply. Now understand this, and I'm sure you do, if you're a Filipino seafarer in a labour supply pool of 200,000 more, and you've got a choice of starving or feeding your family it is not much of a choice when a bad ugly ship owner gives you an offer of employment on a shitty ship, shitty wages, and the possibility of never coming home. They make those decisions every day.

Now the Chairman said jokingly with me earlier before we started, "why don't you say something controversial - like all ship owners are bastards". Well not all ship owners are bastards, but there are enough bastards out there to make good ship owners bastards, and that's the reality of it. To deny that the economic pressures in a free market system do not come to bear on good operators is to deny life itself, because economies, and the market driven economy that we operate in, need to satisfy stockholders and shareholders demands, the need to protect the company from takeovers and all that. It is a savage world out there, and I've travelled the world pretty extensively myself and I must have been to some different places than others because I've seen some pretty appalling shipping out there. I see it in Singapore just up the road, where seafarers are expected to go to work for US\$35 to US\$40 a day to feed their family in the Philippines or elsewhere. Now there is an acute shortage of Officers and they may have made more of a demand on the treatment for, or better treatment for themselves for the supply and demand, but it's certainly isn't the case for ratings.

So what does that all mean for us in Australia? Well I personally believe that Australian shipping is under enormous economic pressure from the global environment, hence the fact that we hardly have any international ships left now, and the fact that there is enormous pressure even on our coastal trade from foreign intervention. So my view is that if we are to protect Australian shipping, protect more importantly Australian shipping in respect to OH&S, there needs to be, the ship owners need to have, a balanced approach to shipping regards to costs and to care for their workers and the credibility and the respectability of their company. They have to balance that and it's a difficult issue as I've described earlier with the pressures. In our own environment with the opting in and opting out that now can occur in issues of OH&S and Workers' Compensation the same temptations for flagging out in the world shipping fleet will now be put to bear on the Australian ship owners in respects to their application of OH&S and Seafarers Comp. That will be an important question for my Union, the AIMPE and the AMOU in respect to the application of suitable, decent workers' compensation system so that we don't

see the examples that I've described, real examples applying to Australian seafarers in the Australian context. Thank you very much.

## KEYNOTE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**Geoff Gronow** – Questions or comments please?  
Any questions or comments for the other speakers for Duncan and David?

Question asked in background – not heard on recording

**Duncan Telfer** – We have two full-time lecturers, and we'll have a series of classrooms and there will be a standard maritime simulator but we'll also have an add-on specific to the oil industry, which simulates the anchor handling. It allows us to show people. If we employ a Master off a Bluewater ship, you can't send them straight out to an oil rig, and expect them to do anchors, so we can put them through the simulator first. They'll still go out with an experienced Master eventually but it gives them some very good grounding in the contingencies for things that are going to go wrong.

**Martin Byrne** - Can I ask David and Duncan as representatives of international operators to reflect on Mick's comments by bringing the conference up-to-date with comparative safety outcomes in their overseas operations as compared to their Australian operations?

**David Parmeter** – Could I take the opportunity to make a couple of general comments and I'll go to the particular issue you raised. In 2005 I was at Teekay's Annual Management Conference in Whistler in British Columbia. There was a presentation where we were shown an interview with a leading figure from one of the major oil companies. He was talking about what they look for, what that oil company looked for in a shipping provider and this person said the first thing we look at is safety. Before we do anything else we will look at your safety record and his comment was, if you are looking after your people you must be doing something right. I just used that as an illustration of the overarching importance of safety to the success of the business.

To go then to the particular issue that you raised Martin, this is a very relevant topic. Teekay being a global operation is constantly comparing performance of its different fleets. We had a situation where in 2004 and in 2005, performance of the Australian fleet was by any standard unsatisfactory and lagged behind the other fleets in Teekay's business. We are now looking at statistics for 2006 where the fleet in Australia is leading the rest of the business and that's comparing ourselves, not with just the international fleet, but with comparable national flag operations in Spain and in Norway. Now that is a very gratifying situation for us to be in. It reflects an enormous amount of work done by our sea staff, who first and foremost must get that acknowledgement for that success and secondly, a huge effort by the team ashore. I won't name individuals involved but they know who they are, who

have driven a real turnaround in our approach and our performance in OH&S. To answer your question, we compare constantly and touch wood for 2006, we're leading the rest of the company.

**Geoff Gronow** – Do you have any further comments?

**Duncan Telfer** – Yes I think that Mick was talking about shitty bastard owners, so he wasn't obviously talking about me. But seriously to answer your question, my points were kind of repetitive in what I was saying, is that our standards in Australia are the same as anywhere else. We're operating central operations in Douala in the Cameroon, Dubai and Singapore and Perth in Australia and we've got a number of Satellite Offices which report back to these four core offices around the world. As it happens our designated person ashore is actually based in our Perth Office in Australia, so he's got that global responsibility for the ISM Code. The statistics that we have coming back as a very mature database now, we've got 15 years of data, and we've managed to keep our own statistics below the industry norm for lost time incidents and the comparisons between whether it's in West Africa, Middle East, South East Asia or Australia are very comparable. There is no trend that we could turn around and say "Yeah it's not been done as well elsewhere". I think the point is that the commonality of training is improving with STCW. The days of buying a ticket in Panama for 200 cigarettes are long gone in a world unless people are properly trained.

**Geoff Gronow** – Any other questions or comments?

Well that being the case it takes it conveniently to morning tea in accordance with the timetable.

Would you join with me please in thanking our three keynote speakers, David, Duncan and Mick.

Thank you.