

London

Manning for the UK's maritime future

The skills base needed to supply the shipping industry ashore in the UK is rapidly dwindling, and the London Branch November technical meeting on board HQS *Wellington* debated the manning needs for the UK maritime industry.

Chaired by Andrew Craig-Bennett, Deputy General Manager of COSCO Maritime (UK) Ltd, the speaker panel comprised Mark Brownrigg, Director-General of the Chamber of Shipping, Paul Moloney, Assistant Secretary General of Nautilus International and Doug Barrow, Chief Executive, Maritime London.

Mark Brownrigg opened, recalling where we have come from over the past decade and noting that opportunities facing the UK for shipping and for seafaring are now better. He talked of challenges in competition we face, complicated by our business being conducted in an international context. We must meet our standards on professional training and conditions on board ships for seafarers; and human factors are crucial and critical to shipping operations.

The need to be competitive on cost is self evident in a global industry, he continued, and we need to share the cost burden with others – seafaring is only a part of a career, and it is important that UK fleet economics match those of the rest of the world. Mark highlighted one other major theme – the poor image and profile of the industry, because of our invisibility and the public's lack of understanding of how shipping works.

Paul Moloney asked if there are enough seafarers being trained to meet the needs of the UK maritime

sector, and how can we encourage more young people. Shortages are not good for long term sustainable employment and we should recognise that the industry requires seafarers with the highest skills. The UK and some EU countries must compete on being better, not cheaper. Paul identified four measures he believed would help to shift the balance from cost towards quality: the Equality Act; the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006; an EU manning directive; and the EU certificate of excellence.

Doug Barrow focused on the implications for Maritime London of manning requirements. London is a global centre for maritime excellence, the cornerstone of which is the wide range of skills available to provide a one-stop shop capability. We need to maintain and protect these skills if we are to maintain our status. Doug said that we need to understand expectations of shipping and services before we consider manning; he was very much aware of the need for jobs ashore requiring previous seafaring experience. Doug reiterated a point made earlier, that part of the long-term solution is to encourage ship operators to accept the concept that seafaring may only be part of an individual's career plan.

We must identify the level of qualification and education employers require for seafarers who wish to come ashore. The requirements for the insurance industry are different from those qualifications needed to become lawyers or marine journalists for example. Doug concluded by saying there is a significant way to go in modernising the image of seafaring and a need to promote maritime services as a valuable career choice.

Following the presentations, the debate was opened to the audience and many gave their views on the state of the UK maritime industry. Rebuilding of loyalty is crucial to rebuilding the manpower of the UK merchant fleet, but it is difficult for individual seafarers to show loyalty today. We have to create an environment where industry is valued by ourselves, young people and their mentors.

The discussion then centred on the negative image of shipping and seafaring that is perceived by the public. Occasionally there are some positive stories in the media, but usually we are shown as

irresponsible polluters and criminals. We are so understated as an industry that we need a campaign in the public media to get young people to understand what a variety of options there are in a career in the shipping industry.

Conclusions

We should continue the important advances that have been made in training; keep the climate for shipping and employment of seafarers in the UK competitive; work together with government, employers and unions and talk the industry up, not down. We need to invest in training and safety otherwise we will lose out to those who have no long-term vision and lose our maritime skills and our maritime heritage. We have at least taken some steps towards identifying the issues, proposed some solutions and we have a responsibility to take the actions forward to ensure the future of maritime UK.

Harry Gale FNI



London Branch speaker panel, l-r, Doug Barrow, Mark Brownrigg, Andrew Craig-Bennett and Paul Moloney