LONDON BRANCH

Ship/Port Interface

➔ Following up on the successful Command Seminar held in Bristol in November 2011, the London Branch held a technical meeting on board HQS *Wellington* focussing on information exchange before and after a ship's arrival. Chaired by Peter Hinchliffe FNI (Secretary-General of the International Chamber of Shipping and Nautical Institute Vice-President), the aim of the evening was to ascertain how port entry information exchange can be made more efficient and effective and how best to prepare a bridge team to support the pilot and vice-versa, with a berth to berth passage plan that meets both ship and pilot expectations

Unfortunately Andrew Craig-Bennett (Cosco Maritime (UK) Ltd) was unavailable at the last minute and his presentation was given by Andrew Bell MNI, London Branch programme secretary. He began by commenting that the Master/Pilot relationship has probably changed less than any other relationship in shipping – the idea of taking aboard a person with specialised local knowledge of a port and its approaches certainly goes back to the early Middle Ages.

He highlighted a number of concerns regarding pilotage at present: the increasing pressure from Port State Control on pilots to report ship deficiencies – the initiative in that respect must come from the Pilot, and never ever from PSC – the anomalous state of deep-sea pilotage, and the use (or rather non-use) of pilots through congested areas such as the Dover Straits and Malacca Straits – waters that, were they national waters, would beyond any question be a compulsory pilotage area. Finally, Andrew thought that there ought to be a common standard on pilotage exemptions, which should only be given against examination, in for example, a simulator.

Don Cockroft (Port of London Pilot and Chairman UKMPA), took up the theme of pilot, master and passage planning, noting that the legal position of the pilot in regard to 'conduct of the ship' still depends on national legislation. The pilot passage plan has to be a dynamic document. Don went on to explain the London river passage plan chart for assisting Masters to plan the passage on the Thames, and how pilots use PLA passage plan software with ship's information to plan the passage. After showing some examples of simple and complex planning tools used by some ports around the world, Don concluded by saying that providing up to date, port specific information to a ship prior to arrival can only be a good thing. Regardless of advance information exchanges, the ship is still required to generate its own independent, SOLAS compliant passage plan, and the best place for gaining the shared detailed understanding of the impending pilotage passage is on the bridge – after the pilot has boarded!

David Conway (Marine Marketing Advisor,

UKHO) completed the panel. His presentation focussed on the standardisation of pre/post-arrival information exchange and commercial voyage and port entry information flows.

There is an explicit recognition of the need to build better relationships between all parties to ensure that the job gets done safely and efficiently. This goal can only be achieved by free and transparent sharing of information. Clear and accessible documentation should be available and downloadable prior to arrival – including a Pilot Passage Plan. However, there are a number of stumbling blocks from a ship's perspective. In particular, the requirements for pre arrival information differ from port to port, in terms of content, format and layout. Ideally, information should be delivered to all players as required – prior to port arrival where possible. On board the vessel, this could include the use of a portal integrated with bridge systems where digital communications are possible

Following the presentations, the audience picked up on many of the points raised by the speakers and a lively debate ensued. One particular issue was the position of the pilot boarding place. The optimum place for this should be far enough out from the port to make the most use of passage plan and master/pilot exchange. It was recognised however that the position of the pilot station is usually dictated by practicality. Many in the audience were in favour of compulsory pilotage in international waters, but this is impracticable on several points, not least due to the requirements of UNCLOS and the requirement for free navigation of international waters. The sheer number of vessels would make it impracticable through the Dover Straits, for

instance. Other discussions involved the ship manoeuvrability characteristics – are they useful for pilots/masters? Several sea-going members in the audience thought it adequate on the first few voyages, but the information never seems to be updated when modifications or changes are made to the vessel.

The consensus reached was that it all comes down to communication; that it is vital that everybody has the right information at the right time, and that the Master must be comfortable taking the ship into port. However, the present situation is that ships do not have the right equipment or internet connectivity for this to happen.

The meeting covered a lot of ground but the main outcome of the discussions was the importance of the human factors. The concept is wonderful, but it is difficult in the shipping industry to get a free-flow of information and the industry should develop best practices on how to achieve this.

Harry Gale FNI

New website

The London Branch has updated and redesigned its website. Visit www.nautinstlondon.co.uk for information about upcoming events, presentations from previous meetings, photo galleries, news and more.