

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESSES

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Chairman

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

So far the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP) has been spared from oil spills of the scale that we have witnessed elsewhere and which have attracted considerable media attention. However, the reality is that a large spill is inevitable if we do not act to minimise risks.

This is a sobering thought to begin this meeting, but it needs to be said because the GBR is a very special and valuable asset and the transport of oil and other toxic substances in or near the Reef seems unavoidable.

The GBRMP is recognised as one of the world's most important natural environments.

This was recognised in a tangible way by Australians in 1975 when the Commonwealth Parliament passed legislation to create an Authority, with extraordinary powers, to plan and manage what was and still is the world's largest Marine Protected Area.

This importance was recognised by the rest of the world in 1981 when the Great Barrier Reef region was inscribed on the World Heritage List and reinforced in 1990 when the International Maritime Organisation designated the GBR, in their terminology, as the world's first and so far only *Particularly Sensitive Area*.

The GBRMP is also one of Australia's most important economic regions.

It supports a domestic and international tourism industry and a commercial fishing industry that together contribute more than \$1000 million to our economy each year and employ thousands of Australians.

The Commonwealth and Queensland Governments have invested significant resources in managing the Reef and industry has large investments, all of which must be protected.

Spills of oil or other hazardous substances, whether the result of accident or ship operation, threaten the natural qualities of the Reef and therefore put at risk these investments, jobs and revenue.

We do have a contingency plan called *Reefplan*, and compulsory pilotage requirements which are commendable and of a high standard compared to other parts of Australia, however, the reality is that they have a limited capacity to prevent or clean-up spills. As most of you know, *Reefplan* would have trouble coping with a spill of 1,000 tonnes, and even then only under benign conditions, and having a pilot on board a vessel is no guarantee that accidents will not happen.

Australians have a very high expectation that the Reef will be protected.

As custodian of the Reef, the Marine Park Authority has an obligation to prevent spills, to clean them up if they occur and to minimise any environmental damage. It also has an obligation to set a standard at least equal to any where else in the world. As a consequence we must always be searching for ways to improve the way we do things and to adopt new technology as it becomes available.

We can improve *Reefplan*, which will assist in cleaning-up and minimising environmental damage. This is happening.

But it is also important and probably more cost effective in the longer term to focus on prevention. We now read and hear often about new developments in ships, design, construction and operation that will reduce the risk of accidents; there are calls from the public for government to exclude ships from the Reef, to extend or toughen compulsory pilotage requirements. However, by ourselves, we are not in a position to identify all these developments and ideas and perhaps of greatest importance, we cannot determine whether they are sensible.

AMSA has expertise and a responsibility for ship safety in Australia, and I am very pleased that they are working with us on this problem. However, both agencies recognise that there is considerable expertise in the shipping industry which we should tap. That is why you are here. Governments and their agencies are not the source of all knowledge and the successful implementation of rules and standards by government requires all those who have knowledge, or might be affected, to work together. We always apply this consultative and co-operative model in managing the Marine Park.

What do we want from this meeting?

Our ultimate aim is to advise the Government on what action, it might take to reduce further the risks of spills in the GBR Region. AMSA and the Marine Park Authority believe this will take some time and many organisations will have to be consulted. This meeting is an important step. As you were advised in our invitations, we want your ideas and views that we can take away with the aim of developing and applying practical measures to reduce both the risks of spills and their consequences. This comprises a part of our comprehensive program to ensure protection of the Reef.

I am looking forward to our discussions - I am sure they will be stimulating - but I will end on a note of caution which I am sure we in this room understand completely: it is not possible to reduce the risk of accident and spills to zero. Even if all vessels carrying fuels or other hazardous substances - including fishing and tourist vessels - were banned from the Reef (which is not a realistic solution), there would still be a risk from those vessels travelling outside the Marine Park. There are no quick or magic solutions.

PAUL MCGRATH

Chief Executive

Australian Maritime Safety Authority

Ladies and gentleman, I welcome you to this meeting which will focus on marine safety and environmental issues in the Great Barrier Reef area. It is being held in response to the increased public and government sensitivity to matters concerning the threat of marine pollution in the great barrier reef. You are all aware of the recent overseas pollution incidents and the public and government reaction to those issues. Our aim is to reduce to the lowest practical level the risk of a shipping disaster and, hence, a pollution incident in the Great Barrier Reef.

This meeting provides an excellent opportunity for the various professionals associated with the protection of the Reef and with maritime transport to discuss and exchange ideas and to re-focus their attention on maritime safety issues with special emphasis on pollution prevention.

The Australian Government and AMSA's commitment to the protection of the maritime environment has never been stronger. This commitment is evidenced by:

- The recently published House of Representatives report entitled "Ships of Shame".
- The recently completed review of the national plan to combat pollution of the sea by oil which in June will be placed before the Australian Transport Advisory Council Ministers for acceptance and endorsement.
- The focusing of activities on port state control with the re-allocation of resources to more adequately address the deficiencies of visiting foreign flag ships.
- AMSA's full support of IMO initiatives for the construction of double hull tankers or their equivalent and the increased severity of surveys of existing tankers due to come into force in July this year as an amendment to the MARPOL convention.
- The active role AMSA plays in the certification issues of Australian and foreign flag ships to ensure that;
 - . the requirements of international conventions and codes are met
 - . the crews are adequately trained, and
 - . those ships are safely manned.

Shipping in the Torres Strait and the Great Barrier Reef plays a vital role for the well being of the Australian economy and way of life. AMSA believes that both activities can, with proper management and co-operation, co-exist in an environmentally friendly way. In this regard AMSA looks to other parties to assist in the management process. The Australian Hydrographic Service, the pilotage services, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, industry and all levels of government make substantial and positive contributions to safety and pollution prevention with in the reef.

In closing, I wish you all a most successful and fruitful two days of discussions and I will look forward to reading the report of this meeting.