TANKER OWNER'S AND OPERATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Robin Grajios
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Developing environmental awareness by society and, in particular, the recognition of the vulnerability and fragility of the GBR, has created the need to critically assess the safety of the reef from pollution. Communities living adjacent to and on the reef, whether tourism organisations, state, national or international environmental groups and most recently, legislative concerns evolving from the World Heritage Listing, are all intent on ensuring the protection and preservation of one of the world's greatest natural wonders.

The length of the reef, stretching from the Torres Strait in the north, down to the Tropic of Capricorn, an overall distance of approximately 1100 nautical miles, provides a level of protection from the elements for coastal and island communities, as well as ensuring a safe all-year round passage for ships of all types trading along the eastern seaboard.

The developing environmental awareness mentioned earlier is now looking for any obvious sources that may pose a threat to the reef area to the point where reaction to potential or perceived sources of threat has at time become quite emotive, as well as aggressive, with calls for the exclusion of any of these identified sources from the reef area.

Threats are seen as emanating from such widely varying sources as:

1. Runoff in rivers of agricultural fertilisers, etc
2. Discharge of sewage from shore based location, irrespective of the degree of treatment
3. Tourists walking on or swimming in the reef area
4. Tourist vessels - both commercial and private
5. Waste generated on and by tourist islands
6. Commercial shipping.

It is the last of these, the perceived threat from commercial shipping, on which we now make comment.

The current fleet of modern Australian flag vessels provides the reef area with a transport mode that is safe and environmentally clean. Australian tankers provide an essential service to Queensland reef ports and have supplied them with tens of millions of tonnes of refined petroleum product over the last twenty years without incident.

This is not to say we in any way take pollution lightly. Quite the opposite. The protection of our environment is an essential priority in the Australian shipping industry, which is involved in a number of areas of pollution prevention and control. These are:

- safety and pollution prevention practices on Australian vessels and moves to adopt an International Safety Management Code being developed by the International Maritime Organisation,
- the recent adoption by Australian shipping of a charter of practice,
- drug and alcohol controls on board vessels,
- contingency plans on board vessels , and
- the National Plan to Combat Oil Pollution

Safety and Environment Protection Management

In response to increasing concern over ship casualties, marine pollution and the very significant role of the human factor in such incidents, the International Maritime

Organisation is developing an International Safety Management Code which is intended to become an industry standard throughout the world.

The Code will encompass management systems requiring:

- a safety and environment protection policy;
- instructions and procedures to ensure safe operation of ships and protection of the environment in compliance with relevant international and flag State Legislation;
- defined levels of authority and lines of communication between, and amongst, shore and shipboard personnel;
- procedures for reporting accidents and non-conformities with the provisions of this Code;
- procedures to prepare for and respond to emergency situations; and
- procedures for internal audits and management reviews.

Most, if not all of these requirements are common features of management on Australian ships.

In our submission to the Morris Inquiry into Ship Safety, we informed the Inquiry that Australian shipowners and operators were developing a code of safety. It is intended that such a code will conform with the code being developed within IMO and thus establish international recognition of safety and environment protection standards onboard Australian ships.

An Australian shipping Charter of Practice was adopted by the industry in December 1992.

Drug and Alcohol Controls

Australian shipping now has comprehensive guidelines governing drug abuse and alcohol consumption ranging from "dry' ships to ships on which there are strict rules regarding blood alcohol levels, bar hours and liquor stores.

These guidelines are complemented by stiffer penalties under the Navigation Act for behaviour under the influences of alcohol or other drugs leading to damage to property, injury to other persons, or the performance of his or her duties is impaired.

In this context, the risk of pollution from carelessness arising from seafarers under the influence of alcohol has been largely eliminated.

Contingency Plans

Australian ships have on board contingency plans for action following an oil spill, no matter how small. In addition, Australian vessels are subject to regulations for the prevention of pollution in accord with the IMO Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL 1973/78).

IMO has developed amendments to MARPOL to lay down guidelines for emergency plans in the event of a spill. The primary purpose is to set in motion the necessary actions to stop or minimise a discharge and mitigate its effects. Australian shipowners fully support these developments as they support steps and plans already in place on Australian vessels.

Involvement in the National Plan to Combat Oil Pollution

The Australian maritime industry through ANMA and the oil industry through the Australian Institute of Petroleum (AIP) have taken an active and constructive role in the Review of the National Plan undertaken by the Commonwealth and the States.

The oil industry in Australia has established the Australian Marine Oil Spill Centre which holds stockpiles of equipment and materials to contain and clean up marine oil spills. The Centre also has the ability to enter into agreements to access stockpiles in Singapore and other overseas centres in the event of very large spills. The aim of the National Plan is to set in place procedures for containing and removing spills utilising such resources as have been made available.

The above involvement in safety and pollution quality management, at both national and international levels, reflects a commitment by the Australian oil industry and Australian shipowners in minimising and eliminating whenever possible the risks to our environment from all shipping movements, whether Australian or foreign ships.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS*

Robin Grajios's presentation

Question
There's a lot of talk in the US now about putting equipment on ships to combat pollution; do you have any comment?

Answer
Yes, I think it's a complete waste of money and a complete waste of resources. As it's been said in this room so many times this morning, once an accident has occurred, the ship's crew can do more constructive things than trying to launch bits and pieces of gadgetry to try and control the situation.

Question
When you look at our operational experience with the one major spill in the Torres Strait in 1970 with the *Oceanic Grandeur*, we had flat calm conditions for 10 days, and certainly if you had equipment on board, the spill could have been avoided. Rather we had to wait 3 days to get out one little pump out of TI. It was a very slow response, because there wasn't equipment available in the area at the time, but it would be faster now. However, in good situations, if you had equipment on the boat, one could imagine it could be employed, although not in horrific conditions as in the Shetlands. Accidents may take place in conditions which aren't always so bad.

Answer
I'll note what you say, but I would suggest every piece of equipment that you put on a ship has got to be maintained otherwise it's going to be useless.

Question
Peter Small showed us a slide this morning that had that red track, that essentially took this oil tanker all along a lee shore for a couple of thousand miles, and it seems to me that the same problem occurred in the Shetland Islands recently where the chap had obviously picked the incorrect route and there have been other examples. Have you got any comment on what one can do to combat that sort of thing?

Answer
I think the answer is that traditionally flag states, administrations and ship owners have adopted a position that the ship master is responsible for the safe navigation of the vessel, and having said that, they have given him a free hand in terms of the way in which he has gone about taking the ship from point A to point B, taking into consideration his training and experience. If you are going to get into the business of routeing ships, from a charterer or a ship owner's perspective then I believe you have to be very explicit in terms of the route that you state that the master is to follow and that it mustn't be ambiguous.

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* Note: This text is not a verbatim record of the questions and answers. To assist with comprehension, the Editor has deleted some text and made modifications to highlight key points. Speakers are not identified.