



23 December 2023

Minister for Home Affairs
The Hon Clare O'Neil
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: Clare.ONeil.MP@aph.gov.au

Dear Minister,

Re: Support from Home Affairs/Australian Border Force for training of seafarers

Our organisations represent the key national maritime industry organisations that are responsible for supplying vessels and crew and for managing workforce issues on vessels. These vessels provide services to a wide range of critical Australian industries such as commercial shipping, defence support services offshore oil and gas, offshore wind energy production, resources, manufacturing, construction, agriculture and marine tourism.

As you are no doubt aware, Australia's commercial maritime industry plays a crucial role in supporting Australia's national security and defence imperatives, with many operators providing critical specialist services to optimise the use of Australian Government owned marine assets. Skilled mariners are critical to the operation of Navy support vessels, the Australian Border Force and other government vessels without which our security and trade interests in the region would be vulnerable.

The Labor Government, through its commitment to a strategic fleet and its responses to the strategic fleet taskforce report, has recognised that:

1. There is a critical shortage of qualified seafarers with the internationally recognised qualifications required to service strategically significant Australian maritime assets;
2. The current workforce is aging and in desperate need of regeneration
3. Australian government owned and supported vessels are key to restarting the pipeline of maritime skills.

We note that the Strategic Fleet Taskforce Report included at Recommendation 15(d) (Ships operated by government agencies): "*The Taskforce recommends the Government increase the use of non-Defence government owned vessels to respond to disasters and other disruption situations and ensure that government vessels contribute to training outcomes*". (underlining added). This recommendation was agreed in the Government response paper issued 8th November 2023.

We have been working collectively, with the Jobs and Skills Council for maritime and maritime training institutions to address these shortages. Minister O'Connor is also aware of the critical shortage of mariners with internationally recognised qualifications and we have, in parallel, been providing advice to his office about the work industry has done in more detail. The training of mariners to this standard



requires both academic study and on the job training on board working vessels. The Australian Government including the Department of Home Affairs/ Australian Border Force (ABF) has the ability to provide access to government ships for mariners in training to get their on-the-job experience.

It has been drawn to our attention that ABF vessels operated by commercial ship management and crew supply companies are not funded through their contracts with ABF to provide training for seafarer deck and engineer officer cadets and trainee ratings, and accordingly, not all available berths on those ships are being utilised for the mandatory sea time necessary for seafarers to gain Certificates (licences) to work in the industry.

The training of these people is critical to ensure that the ABF has the necessary Australian mariners to efficiently operate Australian border protection assets. In an environment where the commercial maritime industry is experiencing an acute shortage, and demand for seafarers through the strategic fleet initiative, significant decommissioning projects in the offshore and the development of offshore wind projects will only increase, the Australian Government should be part of the workforce solution we are working towards.

As an immediate action, we would request that:

1. ABF vary existing contracts to require contractors to make available berths (cabins) for the purposes of training additional seafarers beyond its immediate workforce needs.
2. Consider the terms on which the ABF could sponsor and engage cadets/trainees for its own workforce needs directly.
3. Attribute a funding stream as part of its contractual arrangements for civilian contractors to engage cadets and trainees to ensure the Government contributes to a workforce from which it heavily draws upon.

Longer term, we continue to work together as an industry to find solutions to our current acute shortage with a view to implementing longer term measures to ensure the pipeline for skilled mariners is sustainable, and we consider ABF and your portfolio of Home Affairs as a key part of ongoing solutions.

We look forward to your earliest response.

Sincerely

Angela Gillham
CEO
Maritime Industry Australia Ltd (MIAL)

Tara Diamond
Deputy CEO
Australian Resources and Energy Employer Association (AREEA)



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin Byrne'.

Martin Byrne
Federal Secretary
Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers (AIMPE)

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mark Davis'.

Mark Davis
Executive Officer
Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jamie Newlyn'.

Jamie Newlyn
Assistant National Secretary
Maritime Union of Australia (MUA)

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