



20 December 2023

The Hon Richard Marles MP  
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence  
House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

The Hon Pat Conroy MP  
Minister for Defence Industry and Minister for International Development and the Pacific  
House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

The Hon Matt Keogh MP  
Minister for Defence Personnel  
House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

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CC: *The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP, Minister for Skills and Training*

[Brendan.OConnor.mp@aph.gov.au](mailto:Brendan.OConnor.mp@aph.gov.au)

Dear Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence; Minister for Defence Industry and Minister for Defence Personnel

**Re: Support from Defence/Navy to expedite the training of seafarers to accelerate the supply 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 that 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 Defence Force 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 Albanese 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 have been working collectively, with the Jobs and Skills Council for maritime and maritime training institutions to address these shortages. Minister O'Conner 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 and in particular the Department of Defence has the ability to provide access to government ships to mariners in training to get their on the job experience.

It has been drawn to our attention that Navy non-combat ships operated by commercial ship management and crew supply companies are not funded through their contracts with Defence, including the Defence Marine Support Services contracts, 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 defence marine support service industry has the necessary Australian mariners to efficiently operate Australian defence support 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. Defence/Navy 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 ADF 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 engaged 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 Navy and Defence are a key part of those ongoing discussions.

We look forward to your earliest response.

Sincerely

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

Mark Davis  
Executive Officer  
Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU)



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tara Diamond'.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Angela Gillham'.

Angela Gillham  
CEO  
Maritime Industry Australia Ltd (MIAL)

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

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