

REFRIGERANT HANDLING LICENCES – CHANGES TO GOVERNMENT RULING

The January 2009 On Watch informed members of the Joint Ministerial Media Release by Ministers Peter Garrett and Anthony Albanese which stated that from 1st March 2009, marine engineers who hold an Engineer Class 1, Engineer Class 2 or Watchkeeper (Engineer) certificate issued by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) would no longer be required to hold a separate refrigerant handling licence issued by the Australian Refrigeration Council. Notwithstanding this, the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) has now stated that the ministerial decision applies only to engineers holding AMSA certificates of competency serving on ships operating under the Navigation Act 1912 not ships operating under State and Territory jurisdiction; engineers on these ships will still be required to hold a maritime RAC licence.

AIMPE then contacted DEWHA stating that this new ruling was contrary to the intent of the Ministers Media Release and the current COAG initiatives on the development of a National Licencing System, including the new AMSA National Maritime Training and Certification System and that engineers holding AMSA marine engineer certificates of competency serving on State and Territory registered ships should not be required to hold a maritime RAC licence. As can be seen above DEWHA did not agree with us; their full reply is as follows:

"Thank you for your email of 9 May 2009 regarding the exemption from holding a Refrigerant Handling Licence that applies to AMSA engineers following the joint announcement by Ministers Garrett and Albanese of 5 December 2008.

The exemption for AMSA engineers is only for their work on AMSA ships. The Minister is satisfied that AMSA runs a rigorous training and assessment scheme such that he can allow them to regulate in this area without compromising the government's environment policy goals. Assessment of the training and qualifications held by other classes of marine engineer and engine driver is continuing as are considerations of the possible regulatory options that may apply to vessels registered by the various states and territories. Until this assessment is complete, no statement can be made on whether the exemption will apply to AMSA qualified engineers working on vessels that are not subject to the Navigation Act 1912.

The department is working with the maritime industry (training organisations, skills councils, regulators and the private sector) to clarify the position as it relates to state and territory registered vessels. The work is being done in close coordination with the National Maritime Safety Council (NMSC) and in harmony with the overarching policy direction of consistent national standards.

The department looks forward to working with AIMPE and all relevant stakeholders in addressing these issues."

We will continue to lobby both DEWHA and AMSA for full recognition of the AMSA marine engineer certificates of competency and for exemptions from the RAC licencing requirements on all Australian ships. Jim Mallows as a member and current chair of the Industry Skills Council Maritime Sector Committee will tackle the issue from both sides. Until then all engineers working on State and Territory ships will need to hold a maritime RAC licence. Engineers requiring these licences can obtain them using the same procedures as before. Members will be kept informed on all future developments.