



SEMAPHORE

Newsletter of the Maritime Law

Association of Australia and New Zealand



NZ Branch Report

On behalf of its members, the New Zealand Branch committee extends its best wishes for a safe and happy holiday period to our friends and colleagues in Australia (and beyond).

The end of every year brings a period of reflection and anticipation for the year ahead, but that seems more pronounced this year than most. Looking back to the first edition of *Semaphore* in early March this year, our branch chair Hamish Fletcher, was highlighting the committee's recent planning meeting and the energy for the year ahead. At that time, having already hosted a visit from Richard Turner of the International Union of Marine Insurance, the committee was fully geared up for its annual branch conference, set to take place in Wellington at the end of March – blissfully unaware of what was to unfold.

I can vividly remember being away in the South Island, scrolling through the ever-increasing reports on the spread of COVID-19, and the dawning realisation that New Zealand would not be left untouched by the pandemic. The committee made the decision to postpone the branch conference and ten days later, on March 25, New Zealand went into its first national lockdown. The version of us that existed in January 2020 would struggle to envisage this new normal and how we now speak fluently of lockdowns, alert levels, community transmission, managed isolation, contact tracing and Zoom meetings.

The availability of Zoom did bring tremendous opportunities. Quite aside from the fact that it was legitimately okay to wear pyjamas under your desk and shoes were optional for work, these online platforms opened up the potential for a vast new audience, unlimited by geography at a time when we were all geographically restricted.

In the special COVID-19 edition in May, Hamish outlined the work that had been done to move the New Zealand Branch of MLAANZ online. Paul David QC had gamely volunteered to be the first to test our ability to drive this new virtual technology, before we unleashed it on the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade who spoke to members on the trade implications from COVID-19 and the Government response.

Later, many members from New Zealand took the opportunity to join the webinars organised by our Australian friends and we thank in particular the Western Australian and Victorian branches for their superb presentations. Once the barriers of borders became lost, the availability to access online presentations became limited only by time zones with offerings from other international maritime organisations including the International Maritime Organization and Singapore Port Authority. The New Zealand Branch is looking forward to working with our Australian friends to continue to develop and co-ordinate online content for our members.

As good as the online option is, there is something inherently human about social connectedness and in-person events. After the lowering of alert levels in New Zealand and for the most part the lifting of restrictions on movement and social gatherings, the committee was looking forward to resurrecting the branch conference in Wellington in October. Initially the prospect of the conference going ahead looked positive and was well supported by our members. Alas, we were thwarted again when Auckland suddenly and unexpectedly re-entered lockdown Level 3 in mid-August. At the risk of tempting fate, the committee hopes it will be third time lucky for 2021, so watch this space!

Many of you will recall Hamish Fletcher's last update, advising on the New Zealand membership's farewell to Captain Barry Thompson, who passed away in late September aged 92 years of age. Happily, members were able to gather in Auckland late in October to celebrate Captain Thompson's life and to remember his contribution to the association.

The year has ended with a combined Christmas Maritime Association dinner and the New Zealand Branch will shortly hold its AGM for the end of the calendar year. The New Zealand Branch committee warmly thanks its members for their support during this year and looks forward to a time where we can again enjoy the company of our colleagues, including those beyond our borders.

In the meantime, it is timely to also remember the ongoing struggles faced by seafarers during COVID-19. While the world stood still, shipping could not. As the maintenance of trade and the global supply chains has been essential during the pandemic, seafarers have borne the cost, with difficulties affecting crew change, repatriation and even access to shore leave. The physical and mental toll is significant, yet largely invisible to the general public.

Fittingly, the world maritime theme for 2021 is "Seafarers; at the core of shipping's future". It will be important for us to monitor these issues and be part of a chorus of voices that promotes the visibility of, and solutions for, the industry and its seafarers.

Stacey Fraser
Secretary, MLAANZ New Zealand Branch Committee
+64 9 307 2003
stacey.fraser@mcelroys.co.nz

December 2020

