



SEMAPHORE

Newsletter of the Maritime Law

Association of Australia and New Zealand



NZ Branch Report

Reflections on Isolation

Kia ora, I sat here penning this article on a Sunday afternoon, bathed in sunshine in my makeshift home office. I was looking out over a calm sea thinking “wow, how life has changed for all of us since I last prepared a New Zealand Branch report in March 2020”.

For three months I have lived and worked in relative isolation here in paradise in the beautiful Queen Charlotte Sounds (Marlborough), watching all day, everyday swans, gulls, ducks, kingfishers, seals, stingrays – right in front of my eyes – as I worked away on my computer. Just myself, Dinz and Pip the Pug for company!

For me, COVID-19 has been somewhat of a blessing – a time to breathe, reflect, take stock and appreciate what lies before me.

However, for many it has been a challenging time – especially for our brothers and sisters in Australia to whom we send our thoughts and support.

One issue currently facing New Zealand’s maritime community is how we look after seafarers and keep our deep-water fishing vessels operating. We have foreign fisherman who have been working here on double tours of duty as replacement crews have not been allowed to enter the country. The New Zealand Government has been slow to support the fishing industry and allow such replacements. The potential for vessels to be laid up is real – affecting the economy of an important primary industry. Movie crews, however, are allowed in!!! I will keep you posted on this issue.

It has also been a time where a bunch of non-IT-savy lawyers have been forced to jump into the unknown and change how we deliver content to our members. In less than two months of COVID-19 Lockdown, the New Zealand Branch literally went from postponing our branch conference – thinking possibly that was us for this year – to holding two very-successful Zoom webinars and getting excited about the next online seminars. Great work from the committee on this front has positioned us well.

The resilience and innovative Kiwi “No 8 Wire” ability to adapt in times of crises never ceases to amaze me.

Branch Activity

In April, after only a week’s notice, Paul David presented MLLANZ’s first-ever Zoom webinar, on the topic of trading our way out of COVID-19. That presentation also included discussion on force majeure. A total of 50 members attended – including judges and some members whom we had not seen for some time. That paper is set out in the May edition of *Semaphore* and a big thanks to him for being the first to test the new system!

Then, just two weeks later, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) trade and economics deputy secretary Vangelis Vitalis presented our second Zoom seminar. Over 50 attendees learned about the work the Ministry has been advancing around global supply chains.

This provided an exposé into the live work taking place, as Mr Vitalis and MFAT secured planes and access to other countries for New Zealand to enable the wheels of commerce for essential goods to

continue. It was fascinating to get an insight into the interactions between countries and companies in order to secure medical supplies and drugs as the pandemic escalated.

The New Zealand Branch has also prepared and reported back to the Federal Board in response to the CMI questionnaire which focused on COVID-19 and whether the courts were still operating, the judicial sale of ships, flag registry operation and whether there were any exemptions to flag administration over the pandemic period.

It was then fantastic, a month ago, to attend the Western Australia Branch's webinar. MLAANZ has come a long way in four months. Just when we were struggling in the early part of the year to determine how we might deliver more and better content to members, COVID-19 has come along and smack-bang-zoom – we are doing it! The challenge now is for us to continue the great work begun out of the necessity of a worldwide pandemic and grab the bull by the horns to keep smashing it out of the park!

We are about to have our next branch meeting and I look forward to reporting back soon on our conference and upcoming Zoom seminars.

Nga mihi

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