



SEMAPHORE

Newsletter of the Maritime Law

Association of Australia and New Zealand



“Ships Don’t Leave Skid Marks” Delivered at Forensic Science Seminar

University of Rhode Island (URI) Marine Affairs Professor Emeritus Dennis Nixon revisited some of the forensic highlights of his 48-year maritime attorney career at the recent [URI Forensic Science Seminar Series](#).

In his presentation titled “Ships Don’t Leave Skid Marks” – for which lecture notes can be read [here](#) and the full video presentation can be viewed [here](#) – Professor Nixon notes the marine environment poses its “own set of unique challenges” for forensic analysis.

“Unlike incidents ashore, preservation of evidence is far more difficult at sea – and sometimes impossible,” he says.

“Ships don’t leave skid marks, although the advent of automated identification systems does make it possible to electronically recreate a casualty.”

Having assisted in the prosecution of both major oil spill cases in recent history in Rhode Island – the World Prodigy in 1989 and North Cape in 1996 – Professor Nixon emphasises that the acquisition and preservation of evidence was critical in the resolution of both.

He notes that another major issue at sea is the cost of recovering evidence.

A member of the Maritime Law Association of the United States and the Rhode Island Bar, Professor Nixon was the legal advisor for the University National Oceanographic Laboratory System and provided advice to the United States academic research vessel fleet for three decades.

While serving as director of the Rhode Island Sea Grant Program from 2013 to 2020, he led a multi-million-dollar research and education programme devoted to using scientific knowledge to improve the management of Rhode Island’s coastal waters. Prior to that, he was associate dean at URI’s Graduate School of Oceanography, responsible for the administration of the 200-plus-acre campus and pier, and research vessel Endeavor.

Professor Nixon has served as a faculty member at URI for over 40 years, teaching courses in marine and coastal law. He has lectured on marine law in 27 states and 26 countries on six continents, and is the author of the casebook *Marine and Coastal Law*.



University of Rhode Island (URI) Marine Affairs Professor Emeritus Dennis Nixon

December 2023

