

Remember the seafarers

This Focus column was intended to be a celebration of our Annual General Meeting in Hong Kong and a reflection on the success of the one-day conference aligned with this event in June. Readers will see from the full report in next month's *Seaways* that both events were enormously successful, thanks to the great work of the branch.

First, though, I want to offer a message of support to those seafarers caught up in the cross-fire in the Gulf of Oman. These attacks on innocent merchant ships have resulted in pollution from oil tankers that were engaged in peaceful trade, caused serious damage to the vessels involved and necessitated the emergency evacuation and abandonment of the ships.

It is astonishing to me how little attention the world's media gave to the people who were most closely affected by the incidents. No doubt graphic photographs of ships on fire with plumes of smoke grab the headlines, but the real story is of those affected and their valiant efforts to protect the environment while striving to ensure there was no loss of life.

In how many other professions would we see such blatant disregard for the well-being of the people involved? The so-called 'human element'. Those who initiated the attacks showed no regard for the values of our profession and our people. And those who failed to report on the people and the lives affected have served their readers very badly.

We hope that efforts will be made at the highest level internationally to condemn these attacks, prevent their recurrence and ensure that peaceful trading routes can be protected so our mariners can go to work without having to fear for their lives.

Returning to events in Hong Kong, those of us attending the Annual General Meeting were also caught up in politically motivated turmoil. Demonstrations on the streets of Hong Kong prevented us reaching the chosen venue for our meeting. We are thankful that none of our members were hurt while we were there.

The AGM was delayed a little to allow us to reconvene in a safe environment to conduct the business of the meeting. Under the leadership of our President, who

chaired the meeting, we were able to ensure that the appointment of Council Members and Vice Presidents followed due process. I am grateful to the Chair of the Executive Board and our Honorary Treasurer for their reports on our activities in 2018. Thank you too to the members present who helped us complete the formalities. I offer special thanks to those who tried to join the meeting but were unable to do so because of the local disruption. Your efforts are noted and very much appreciated.

I was pleased to welcome to the meeting representatives from the Honourable Company of Master Mariners. It was a great pleasure to see our President, Captain Nick Nash, presented with his Certificate of Chartership. The occasion also marked the expansion of the award of Chartered Master Mariner, making it available to exceptional mariners around the world. This extension illustrates the international nature of the award, which recognises those who have reached the highest levels of their profession and made a significant contribution to our industry.

Before closing I would again like to record my thanks to the Hong Kong Branch. It was clear that the organising committee committed huge amounts of time and energy to preparing for the event and for hosting visitors from around the globe. Part of the success was a wonderful reception hosted by The Nautical Institute and WISTA in which we all managed to learn more about the activities of the other organisation.

Thank you, on behalf of all of our members, for your hard work and dedication. We were delighted that Hong Kong was chosen for the event and with the opportunities that were provided both professionally and informally. 🇭🻜

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