

The Secretary,
Inquiry into Coastal Shipping Policy and Regulation
House Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and
Local Government.

The Navy League apologises for not having made a submission earlier. Unfortunately the relevant personnel were absent at the time submissions were due. It would be appreciated if this short general paper could be considered by the Committee despite its late presentation. You will note that the paper covers overseas trading vessels since it is felt that these considerations are relevant to the whole question of developing the Australian Merchant Marine.

The Navy league of Australia is an Australia-wide, non-profit, volunteer organisation whose principal objectives include:

Keeping before the Australian people the fact that we are a maritime nation and that a strong navy and a sound maritime industry are indispensable elements of our national well-being and vital to the freedom of Australia.

Promoting defence self reliance by actively supporting manufacturing, shipping and transport industries.

Promoting, sponsoring, and encouraging the interest of Australian youth in the sea and sea-services and in practical sea-training measures.

The League was formed in 1900 and later organised and ran what is now known as the Australian Navy Cadets (now run by the RAN)

For many years the League has pressed for the re-building of Australian merchant shipping. Much has been written in recent times about the state of the nation's infrastructure. While the effects of transport bottlenecks in and to our ports have been well publicised one area which has been almost completely ignored is the circumstances of Australian owned shipping.

The Committee is no doubt well aware of many of the factors involved, but the League would like to make the following points:

* For many decades there were major problems in merchant ships and in our ports. But times have changed. Crews in Australian owned vessels are now down to the average in OECD countries. Our ports are much improved in efficiency. There is comparatively little industrial unrest.

* Australia's international trade has grown rapidly. Our imports and exports by sea (over 99% of the total weight) are now of the order of 600 million tonnes per year. 500 million tonnes of which is exports. Although Australia is among the top 20 trading nations in the world very little is carried in Australian ships. The major benefits of this huge transport task go to others.

*Today there are few Australian ships involved in the interstate coastal trade. Foreign vessels Foreign vessels take a significant proportion of the available trade.

* We are one of the few countries to be blessed with almost direct connections by sea between all our major centres of industry, yet this form of interstate transport is now little used.

*Meanwhile our roads and railways are strained. The costs to upgrade both these forms of transport, while essential, are huge. An increase in interstate shipping would ease the pressure on our roads and railways.

* Sea routes require no maintenance and negligible update costs for navigation. There are infrastructure costs, as there are for all transport modes, but maritime infrastructure has in any case to be provided for international shipping.

*An increase in Australian shipping should lead to an increase in local ship repair, ship management, ship provisioning, services such as insurance and possibly ship building.

* A healthy merchant marine is required to produce skilled mariners to staff our many pilot and port services especially in Australia's approximately 70 ports.

* In the event of a major war Australian controlled shipping would be needed to support the Defence Force and to ensure essential supplies reach Australia.

* Australia has an excellent Maritime College, innovative naval architects who lead the world in some forms of ship design and some fine shipyards.

* The time is ripe for the issue of Australian shipping to be addressed by government. In considering the steps that need be taken all factors, taxation, crewing, port infrastructure and regulatory arrangements should be included.

* We have the example of several small countries with high standards of living, for example, Norway, Denmark and Sweden, which maintain great merchant fleets. The United Kingdom government has also taken steps which have resulted in an increase in their merchant fleet. Some of the successful measures introduced by these countries could well be of value to Australia.