

The IMO's theme this year is 'better shipping for a better future'.

Since my appointment to the Senate in March I have identified the maritime industry as an area of transport that I am eager to make a difference in.

Since our early navigation heritage, the shipping industry has played an indispensable role in our nation's development and prosperity. The tyranny of distance affects everyone, and as the demand for shipping increases, so too its importance to Australia's security and economy.

Modern Australia was built on shipping and it's curious to note there are only thirteen registered ships involved with the coastal trade - one more than came in the first fleet.

I understand that Prime Minister Billy Hughes had a strong hand in the early development of an Australian shipping industry. pushing back against the British domination of the trade in the local market. Later, the Australian National Line became the flag bearer for Australian shipping until it was privatised in 1999.

While I'm not a supporter of public ownership of business-like operations by government, like shipping, I think there's strategic value in Australia possessing a greater investment in a merchant fleet to protect our trading status. It's also in my view, the great blue highway, a piece of under utilised infrastructure that could reduce the pressure on land based routes.

While the maritime industry may not sit at the forefront of most people's minds, its value to our livelihood can hardly be understated. With 99% of our international trade conducted by sea, 400,000 Australian jobs, 45,000 in the shipping industry, and 10 billion tons of commodities carried across waters globally each year the importance of shipping is self-evident.

Our focus though is for better shipping into the future. This invites us to consider the challenges facing shipping today. Some of these challenges in the Australian context include the impact of recent 'greener shipping' regulations by the IMO. It's my understanding that the regulations have caused some disquiet with ship owners and operators. And while I do not pretend to be across the issues yet, I do offer you and your colleagues my time and my advocacy of your interests in our nation's parliament.

I also have concerns about restrictive industrial practices in the maritime sector and intend to develop a better understanding on how these might be addressed.

Now, it may not surprise many that as a Liberal I am cautious by any proposal to increase red tape, especially where the potential to introduce uncertainty and risk into an industry as important as maritime shipping can adversely impact our national interest and international competitiveness.

This doesn't necessarily mean more law as much as it means getting the law right. And with challenges facing the industry beyond that of merely environmental concerns, such as demand for greater technological proficiency, introduction of artificial intelligence, smarter shipping, new trade routes and cyber security concerns - our lawmakers need to work closely with the maritime and shipping industry to promote your interests and the welfare of all Australians.

Concerning too are those commercially-adverse regulations set by international bodies, such as the IMO, that have applicability under Australian law and affect our shippers. In keeping with this year's theme, it is imperative that we have strong advocates in our Parliament to ensure that as a nation we are guaranteeing a better future for Australian shipping on the international front.

So, while I celebrate with you the 70th anniversary of the Convention, I also offer my ear to the concerns of your industry, and my voice to your interests- so that talking about better shipping for a better future moves from a theme to a guarantee.

THANK YOU

