

# **SEAFARER TRAINING IN SOUTH AFRICA - A PERSPECTIVE-**

**BY**

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DISCLAIMER: PLEASE NOTE THAT THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS PAPER ARE IN NO WAY A COMMENT ON THE STATUS OF TRAINING FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN FISHING INDUSTRY, WHICH IS REGARDED AS A SEPARATE TOPIC.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Training and Skills Development within the South African Maritime Industry is presently characterized by the words 'in crisis'. The enormous challenges facing those tasked with creating and maintaining a well-trained and experienced South African seafarer supply pool is at loggerheads with the country's need for speedy progress with respect to transformation and empowerment.

Efforts to promote maritime career awareness amongst the historically disadvantaged are nullified by the lack of training berths for cadets – a requirement for certification. For all intents and purposes we find ourselves in a "catch 22" situation, with neither government, private industry nor training institutions being able to solve the problems on their own, despite some successful individual endeavors in pursuit of this objective.

Taking a "snapshot" of where our industry currently finds itself, it becomes clear that efforts in isolation, no matter how creative and innovative, are not the permanent solutions that we seek. While some may not view our 'crisis' as a very real problem, given the existence of alternative seafarer supply nations, we urgently require an "all inclusive" South African solution, calling for closer co-operation at all levels in order to achieve a common goal and address all needs as effectively as possible.

## **THE ROLE OF TRAINING INSTITUTIONS –DEFINING THE CHALLENGES**

It is the ongoing dedication and commitment of the personalities working at the established maritime training institutions throughout South Africa who have ensured that the necessary efforts towards facilitating transformation have successfully been made and are having the desired results. One had simply to attend the 2002 awards dinner of the Simonstown School of Maritime Studies to see the exciting outcome of one such effort in the high caliber of students graduating.

Under optimal circumstances, for those graduates pursuing a career at sea, the world would now be their oyster as they proceed to tertiary level training and then on to what the mariners amongst us know to be one of the most exciting careers in the world. But experience tells us that it will take a combination of their tertiary training institution's negotiating and bargaining powers and their own impeccable performance levels to secure a highly sought after cadet training berth.

Whilst all of the training institutions successfully provide basic training, cadet training is subject to berth availability. Berths are not provided for third-party needs, except in limited numbers for SAMSA, the National Port Authority of SA and, by special negotiation, between two parties. Seatime and cadet berths are the main problems facing those involved in the training of candidates: cadets need to complete predetermined lengths of seatime in order to obtain a certificate of competency, but the availability of berths is subject to the needs of individual shipowners, who are for the large part unable to provide these to supernumerary cadets due to the costs involved.

The shortage of training berths has in the past been ascribed to:

- The sale of Safmarine and the loss of a large number of vessels registered on the South African ship's register
- The state of the South African Ship's Register
- Registration of 'South African' vessels on other registers
- The proliferation of new technology resulting in the restructuring of the shipping industry's employment profile
- A "slump" in shipping worldwide
- The crewing of the main shipping companies calling at SA ports being undertaken by their international offices, and these not recruiting from South Africa at present

Existing Seafarer-training institutes fulfil a critical role in promoting maritime career awareness, attracting suitable candidates and providing world-class training. Two institutional educational levels – Secondary and Tertiary – are well established and the relationship between the two complementary.

#### Secondary Level Institutions

Simon's Town, Tisand and New Forest High School's provide maritime education to scholars in grades 10, 11 and 12 and the syllabi is approved as full subjects for the national and provincial senior certificate examination.

The syllabus for the two courses, i.e. Maritime Studies A and Maritime Studies B, was compiled by a committee comprising educationists from the secondary and tertiary sectors, as well as representatives from the maritime industry. Maritime Studies A is designed to enable students to enter the maritime industry ashore and deals with topics such as maritime geography, port services, maritime trade patterns, the structure of the local shipping industry, various aspects of ship operation, the bunker trade, ship broking and maritime ecology. This course has been accredited by the Institute of Chartered Ship Brokers in London. The Maritime Studies B programme is intended for careers at sea and covers seamanship, navigation and various aspects of marine science.

### Tertiary Level Institutions

A proliferation of tertiary training institutions for the Maritime Sector, providing different types and categories of training, are in existence in South Africa. Some would suggest, given economies of scale, that greater coordination in an effort to consolidate resources and ensure consistency in standards is needed. Given the supply and demand challenges that they all face, this may be an important consideration as a way forward is determined.

- The Durban Institute of Technology (a merger between the Natal and ML Sultan Technikons) provides rating training as well as officer training in line with STCW-95 requirements.
- Since 1990, cadet training has been undertaken at the Cape Technikon, in place of the former seafarer college the General Botha. The Department of Maritime Studies at the Cape Technikon provides courses leading to the three-year National Diploma in line with STCW-95 requirements. The problem of finding berths for cadets is also experienced here. As most of the deep-sea shipping companies are providing their own in-house rating training or crewing is managed by their international offices, training by the Technikons are mainly for maritime activities operated locally or off the South African coast, such as salvage, dredging, port marine services, cable laying, anchor handling and marine resource exploration.

The Technikon also provides training for sea survival and recruits are from the aviation, fishing, merchant navy and offshore mining industries, which is a separate cost centre that is entirely self-funded and receives no government subsidy. Courses are offered at both an introductory and an advanced level, are accredited by SAMSA and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and are STCW-95 compliant.

- The Wingfield Technical College is a statutory organisation, established in 1964, which is solely dependent on fee income. The courses offered at the College are accredited by the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA), and some are STCW-compliant. The major part of training is conducted for the fishing industry.

- The National Ports Authority (NPA) Training Academy provides training solely for the NPA's needs in line with STCW-95 requirements. Marine pilots, tug-boat masters, smaller vessel masters and engineers are trained in collaboration with some of the tertiary institutions to obtain certificates of competency in terms of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1951, with reliance on the merchant navy to provide training berths. However, a variety of short courses in cargo handling accredited by the Transnet Training Board is also provided at the Academy.

Training for other port tasks ancillary to shipping is provided by employers at in-house training establishments. This includes training of stevedores, forklift drivers, computer operators, clerks, store-men and others. The Transport Education and Training Authority has already accredited many courses.

In addition, Private Industry supports a number of tertiary training institutions as their own incentives or as support to existing institutions.

## **THE ROLE OF THE PRIVATE INDUSTRY – AN ISSUE OF PARTNERSHIP**

Within the existing South African Maritime community is vested a wealth of maritime knowledge. In order for this valuable asset not to be lost to future seafaring generations, sufficient time, money and effort needs to be spent by private industry in ensuring that the 'crisis' situation that we currently find ourselves in with respect to a lack of cadet training berths and thus insufficient new inflow, is resolved. For this knowledge base to simply pass into retirement without on-passing the experience to the seafarers of our future would be a tragedy,

Shipping companies play a leading role in the maintenance of a maritime knowledge base for South African seafarers. Effective career-pathing and in-house skills development is essential, with the continued employment and promotion of suitable HDI candidates at rating and officer level vital for continued transformation.

With respect to the shortage of cadet training berths, the following issues have been identified as having an impact on the availability of cadet training berths:

- Unicorn Lines, the only shipping company in South Africa with a genuine link to South Africa, not flying the South African flag and training for their own needs if and when required.
- Safmarine, now part of the AP Möller group, investing in SAMTRA and training for their own needs as well as those of third parties, without it being clear what provision would be made for training berths for officer training and what the cost would be.
- SMIT Marine providing limited training berths due to the size of operations, while the nature of operations impose a time limit on training for officer certificates.

Role players in the South African Maritime industry have a history of good support for training initiatives and have achieved excellent results over the years. Their commitment to facilitating a consistent supply of South African seafarers to our Maritime Industry and other maritime nations, is not in question.

In 1995, the then Safmarine, in its endeavour to contribute to the government's reconstruction and development programme (RDP), as well as the development of skills and job opportunities, launched a rigorous career awareness campaign to attract African youths and students to careers at sea. As a result the Maritime Studies Department was inaugurated at Simon's Town High where 90 students from the designated groups have been sponsored for a three-year programme in grades 10-12.

The Unicorn Training Centre was established in 1970, specifically for the training of Unicorn employees. Subsequently, the centre opened its doors to other companies for rating training in line with the STCW-95 requirements. Recently they have trained for National Ports Authority and Namport, but in view of the oversupply of cadets they tend to provide only for their own supply and provide training berths for their own needs.

The AP Møller group of Denmark, which owns Maersk and Safmarine, is investing in a maritime training academy in South Africa called the South African Maritime Training Academy (SAMTRA) to be situated on the grounds of Simon's Town High School. Computerised ships' engine and navigation room simulation equipment will be sourced from the Danish Maritime Institute to train for the navy and the merchant marine, harbour craft and fishing industries.

The academy's training facilities will also be accessible to seafarers from other maritime nations in southern Africa and further afield. SAMTRA has been registered in South Africa as a section 21-company (an association not for gain).

Previously, Safmarine has provided training berths for students from the Durban Institute of Technology, the Cape Town Technikon, SAMSA's marine surveyors and the National Port Authority's pilots and tug masters. They have also presented deep-sea navigational courses for the SA Navy, as well as training for Namibia's Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources coastal patrol fleet, De Beers Marine which is mainly located in Namibia and some other African countries. These opportunities will obviously still be available if the cost of providing the training is covered.

SAMTRA also provides training in anchor handling, and employment opportunities for 60 seafarers have been created in the Maersk fleet.

SMIT Marine presents a SAMSA accredited 4 year Cadet Training Programme. During this time, cadets follow a structured training programme which includes tertiary, practical, statutory and experiential (on-the-job) training. Training berths are provided but, due to the nature of the business, the number of berths for qualified officers is limited by the number of vessels and the nature of operations.

Whilst opinions as to the viability of a “Cadet Ship’ differ within the industry, this project – spearheaded by Concord Maritime Academy with funding from European Investors and Concord Maritime Limited in London – is being progressed. If successful, this endeavour would substantially reduce the impact of the cadet training berth crisis by providing a consistent supply of berths, effectively improving the through-flow of those achieving full qualifications.

In the UK the requirement to register for tonnage tax is to create a number of berths for training, but not necessarily to fill the berths. This issue is at present being debated for change. As a result berths are available internationally. This should be investigated as a possibility for the placement of South African seafarers in the meantime, especially with companies like P&O Nedlloyd that operate under the UK scheme and areas trading regularly to and from South Africa. This may offer an immediate short-term solution to the problem of the shortage of berth training.

### **THE ROLE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT – FACILITATING THE CREATION OF CADET TRAINING BERTHS**

It is the responsibility of the South African government through the Department of Transport to assist in fulfilling the maritime industry’s desire to facilitate transformation, promote equality and develop from “infancy” the careers of historically disadvantaged seafarers. The government is the only body that has the necessary power and leverage required to introduce legislation and facilitate the required change and is able to put these important issues onto the agenda of international trade visits and to introduce the subsidization of training berths as an enticement to new business partners plying their trade across the oceans. In fact, it has been suggested that this issue should, through an active lobby from industry, become a ‘National Priority’ – a status that would ensure that it was officially regarded as an active priority by the Department of Transport.

The South African government can financially support seafarer training in various ways. Provision is made in the Skills Development Levies Act for such possibilities and where needed, TETA can further support such initiatives. The South African Maritime Safety Authority has also made public its commitment to supporting training institutions to a greater degree so as to further bolster existing structures with a history of success in producing suitable candidates rather than create new ones in an effort to achieve the same objectives. Lessons learnt from the failure of the SAMSA Cadet Scheme can be utilized to ensure that public-private co-operation, as well as support for existing seafarer training institutes, is optimized to achieve the same objectives.

TETA is currently heading up a project committee, including representatives from SAMSA, SMIT, Maersk, Cape Technikon, Natal Institute of Technology, University of Stellenbosch, to look at a long-term strategy to address this problem.

One of the suggestions from industry has been that TETA's pool of funds could be better utilised to financially contribute to the cost of berth training for cadets. The funds could be applied to either the student/cadet or to the shipping company who provides the berth as a training provider.

Specific guidelines need to be developed for these bursaries, as in the case of the SMarT system in the UK. The SMarT system was introduced in 2001 by the United Kingdom. This support contributes towards expenses incurred in connection with the training of merchant navy officers and ratings on training programmes (on-board and on-shore) and have been approved by the Merchant Navy Training Boards and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

SMarT makes provision for the following categories of training:

- SMarT 1: Trainees following a programme of training leading to a maritime and Coastguard Agency first certificate of competency as a deck, engineering or dual officer.
- SMarT 2: Junior officers following a programme of shore-based training, leading to a second certificate of competency as a deck, engineering or dual officer.
- SMarT 3: Ratings following programmes of shore-based training to develop their skills.
- SMarT 5: New entrants and other supernumerary ratings following apprenticeship and other courses of more than 52 weeks in length.

SMarT 4, which lapsed in July 2002, provided for the update training of existing officers to meet the new requirements of STCW-95.

Since the introduction of the SMarT scheme, officer-trainee recruitment has been stabilised, although research undertaken in the UK has shown that three times as many new entrants are needed to meet the future needs of the shipping industry and related on-shore activities. The need for training has further been intensified by including it in the tonnage tax (where profits from qualifying shipping activities are calculated on the net tonnage of the vessel employed). That means that a company participating in the tonnage tax regime has to meet a minimum training obligation to train one EU-cadet for each fifteen (15) officer posts in existence on the vessels operated by the company. The funding covers 50% of the training costs.

The aim is to take care of:

- the continuing shortfall in officer recruitment
- the falling proportion of cadets continuing to second certificate training
- the high drop-out rate during officer training
- the above-average age profile amongst the current UK officer population
- the low number of ratings progressing to officer qualifications
- the increasing demand for highly skilled ratings, and
- the declining opportunities for unskilled ratings.

The scheme proves to have created between 400 and 500 training berths per year. P&O Nedlloyd, which also calls regularly at SA ports, is part of the scheme and provides berths to UK cadets.

If applied within the South African context, the SMarT guidelines could prioritise bursaries for the historically disadvantaged and could focus on meeting the goals of the broader socio-economic environment. TETA could also stipulate more carefully the requirements for training providers, maybe only for practical training, while a tertiary educator could still provide the theoretical training.

The government could also contribute to the pool of funds available for seafarer training in pursuance of job creation and to develop South Africa as a maritime country. The National Department of Transport has pursued a ships' register more conducive to foreign investment. This register did however not materialise due to other priorities at the time and progress will be keenly monitored in 2003.

One of the conditions required is that South Africa, in line with the majority of shipping countries worldwide, should introduce the so-called tonnage tax (a tax based on the tonnage employed and not income earned). In the Netherlands, this tax was introduced without the requirement to fly the Dutch flag, but on condition that the company should have a genuine link to the country and that either the management or the flag should be that of the Netherlands. The tonnage tax could therefore be introduced in South Africa without the immediate requirement of changing the SA Ships' Register. A condition for a company to register for the tonnage tax could be to fill a certain number of training berths on board their vessels, like in the UK. Supernumerary cadets will be prepared for employment firstly by South African registered vessels and then by other vessels.

## **ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP – TOWARDS CLOSER CO-OPERATION**

In September of 2002, the National Department of Transport coordinated the first celebration in South Africa of 'World Maritime Day' – an International Maritime Organisation (IMO) initiative. In developing one of the themes for the day's celebrations - 'The Promotion of Maritime Awareness' – those on the organizing committee who included a wide spectrum of representatives from government, private industry and training institutes, had the opportunity to address in open forum some of the challenges standing in the way of efforts towards promoting the industry as a viable career option.

It was noted that whilst individual companies were "doing their own thing" and were dedicating time and money towards attracting HDI candidates and supporting and initiating training efforts, co-ordination at National Level was urgently needed to, firstly, ensure that decision-makers in government were aware of the crisis and the manner in which it was impeding transformation progress and, secondly, to ensure that this issue was talked about less and acted on more.

In addition, the shortage of Officers in the industry on a global level was discussed within the context of high national unemployment levels and the long-term ability of South Africa to become a leading seafarer supply nation.

In presenting this paper, we tell those of you in the know nothing new: the 'crisis' outlined has been in existence for a number of years. In an effort to assist this industry in achieving its objectives in the short term and its transformation objectives in the long term, the government needs to put this issue and its possible solutions onto a National Agenda without delay.

If one analyses the success that has been achieved thus far in attracting, training and employing individuals not previously active in this industry, despite the shortage of cadet berths, one can imagine the far reaching potential that this industry has to become a true reflection of our country's maritime potential.

## CONCLUSIONS

In defining the current status of Seafarer Training and examining the 'crisis' at hand, the role that private industry, training institutions and government can play in ensuring that workable solutions are found has been outlined. In taking a "snapshot" of where our industry currently finds itself with respect to training, despite the crisis that the dearth of training berths presents, we have a positive view of private industry and training institutions working together for the most part in ensuring that the transformation that both they and the government desires is effected. There is no lack of suitable HDI candidates, simply a practical inability to enable them to fully obtain their qualifications, for which a solution most urgently be found.

Through the initiation of various financial schemes and with the assistance and co-operation of TETA, the National Department of Transport, shipping companies and training and education institutions, cadet training must be feasibly and viably promoted. A new tax dispensation is needed for South African shipping companies that should be used as an incentive to fill training berths for cadets.

TETA is in the process of defining a long-term strategy to address the 'crisis' in the industry. This is being done in collaboration with relevant government authorities, private industry and tertiary training institutions.

The South African Maritime Industry will overcome this "crisis" through genuine co-operation at all levels. Those who work in the Industry are committed to ensuring that its future and the wealth of maritime knowledge that it currently holds are preserved. It has been suggested that the quest for a quintessential solution to this crisis needs to be put above individual interests. I call on those present here today to commit to doing just that and trust that several of the issues touched on will be carried forward as conference resolutions with the wholehearted support of interested parties at private industry and Government level.

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