



Amber Thomson in the wheelhouse

A vision for Port Hedland tug crews

Katherine Mahone relates the stories of women forging maritime careers in the tough working environment of Port Hedland

AT THE BEGINNING OF JULY, A POST appeared on an internet page for women who go to sea. The post was looking for a female engineer to join the tug crews in Port Hedland, with a view to having a fully female tug crew: master, engineer and trainee/mate.

I was interested to know if they had managed to achieve this goal and contacted Clare Ellis, who posted the request, to find out more about the women working on the tugs in this area.

HEDLAND TUGS

Clare works for Rivtow Marine, which provides tug services to Port Hedland. Rivtow Marine has 18 tugs under management at Port Hedland, with three crew per shift. The company has three women working on the tugs and three women working shore-side. There is hope that a woman engineer will be joining their ranks shortly.

Rivtow's post and my own experiences in the maritime industry led me to wonder

what was being done to promote maritime careers for those who may not traditionally have sought such a career. How can we learn from the experiences of other industries that seek to promote diversity?

I spoke with Clare Ellis (QHSE coordinator), Annette Prindiville (tug master) and Amber Thomson and Bre Evans (both trainee tug masters) to learn more about how they came to work in maritime.

They, like many women and men, fall into the two common paths to a career in the maritime industries – by accidentally stumbling across it or because they knew about the industry due to a family member working in it, usually their father.

CLAIRE

Clare was never made aware of the job opportunities available in the maritime industry when going through high school and, even after she joined AMSA, it initially wasn't a consideration. Clare studied environmental science and worked in safety for several state and federal departments. It

wasn't until a colleague saw her potential and suggested she consider working for AMSA that Clare became aware of the maritime industry. She has since worked for offshore companies in marine logistics for barge loading, landing craft and the supply and support of offshore and blue water vessels. Clare is currently studying for her Master Class 5 and Marine Engine Driver qualifications.

ANNETTE AND AMBER

Both Annette and Amber had fishermen in their families and spent a lot of time on the water while growing up, but still the knowledge of possible career opportunities in the industry was limited.

Annette started in the marine tourism industry in Victoria and New South Wales and completed short courses to move onto other areas within the industry. She worked as a pilot-launch master and on patrol vessels around Australia and Papua New Guinea. After a few years of submitting her resume for a tug master position,

Clare Ellis

Annette was offered a job as a trainee on Port Hedland tugs. When the management company changed, Annette was given a trainee tug master position and now holds Master Class 4 and Marine Engine Driver Grade 2 qualifications.

Amber was initially encouraged to complete a trade before pursuing a career in the maritime industry. She completed a chef apprenticeship before travelling and working overseas. On her return to Australia, Amber worked on tourist vessels in Tasmania and the Kimberley. It was while working on a charter boat in the Kimberley that Amber decided to follow her dream of working as a master in the industry. Over the next 10 years, she obtained her Master Class 4 and Marine Engineer Driver Grade 2 qualifications and worked on a variety of vessels both inshore and offshore.

Amber is now a partner in a firm that sub-contracts to Rivtow Marine, where she is currently completing training on ASD tugs.

BRE

Bre Evans' father was a scuba diving instructor and regularly took her on his dive trips, giving Bre a great love of the ocean and an interest in being involved in working either on or in the water. She studied marine biology and aquaculture and commenced working as a research officer in the pearling industry. This required Bre to operate small boats to be able to collect data, and led to her obtaining coxswain and Marine Engine



Kirsty Timbury (BHP marine manager), Clare Ellis and Zoe Gill (BHP marine co-ordinator)

Driver Grade 2 qualifications.

While on holiday in the Caribbean, Bre discovered yachting. As she worked on luxury yachts around the world, Bre progressed her qualifications to Master Class 4 and a UK-issued Master (yachts that are less than 3000 GT). Bre has only been training on tugs for about three months but is enjoying learning all aspects of the job - maintaining a lookout, vessel maintenance, safety checks and administrative duties.

All agree that working in the maritime industry has been rewarding and they enjoy being able to work at something they love. The schedules may vary - including day work with on-call duties; and 27 or 28 days on with the same number of days off.

Like every job, there are ups and downs, good and bad days, but each of these maritime professionals believes the time and commitment taken to reach where they are today has been worthwhile.

Unlike other jobs, though, information on opportunities to work in the maritime industry was not readily available. The challenge to us all is to promote the opportunities in the maritime industry. ■

Katherine Mahone decided on a career at sea after enjoying a holiday on a square-rigged sailing ship at the age of 14. She has worked in the UK and Australia, and is currently a vessel-traffic officer at Port Kembla. Katherine is a single parent of a five-year-old who believes she is the boss of the ocean.

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