

Meeting the challenge head on

Diversity is a vital part of providing the maritime industry with human capital; **Jillian Carson-Jackson** makes the case for diversity in the maritime workplace

IN THIS COLUMN WE HAVE BEEN

highlighting the achievements and abilities of amazing women in the maritime industry. In August 2018, I wrote about the challenge of change – now I'd like to focus on how we, as maritime professionals, can meet that challenge head on.

Over the past months we have heard about women at the helm, women as harbour masters, women as pilots and tug masters and crew, and all the evidence shows that embracing diversity in an organisation helps increase not only the human capital, but the overall bottom line. A 2013 Deloitte report found that, when employees think their organisation is committed to and supportive of diversity – and they feel included – their ability to innovate increased by 83%. And, diverse teams have been found to make decisions 60% faster than non-diverse teams. This innovation and decision-making is good for the bottom line, with a McKinsey study from 2012 finding that companies in the US with a diverse executive board showed a 95% higher return. More recent studies are giving similar results, with a 2017 study by Women Ahead making a direct link between diversity and inclusion and employee retention and engagement.

GOOD NEWS, WITH CHALLENGES

So, the research is in and diversity is something we need to strive for to attract, engage and retain employees. This is good news for an industry in Australia that has some, well, challenges. The Australian Industry Standards' Maritime Industry Reference Committee's *Key Findings Discussion Paper 2017* highlights some of those challenges.

While the maritime industry had an estimated annual revenue of more than \$9bn in 2017 and 10% of the world's trade passing through Australian ports, the workforce in Australia is declining, with more than 66% of employers reporting skill shortages. An aging workforce, the operating environment and the

introduction of technology are all cited as factors. What is interesting is that neither diversity nor gender is referenced once within the report.

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

Australia is not alone in facing these challenges. As we enter the realm of maritime autonomous surface ships we will be faced with even more questions, including, "what is the role of the maritime professional in an increasingly autonomous environment?" What can be done?

There is no panacea, but there are activities underway in the maritime world that we should be looking at closely. One of these is the UK Taskforce for Women in Maritime. The task force was established in January 2018 and has had an active year of engagement, bringing leaders from across the maritime sector together, working towards achieving a balanced workforce that not only accepts but promotes and celebrates diversity. Learning from the research that has gone before, the task force indicates that achieving this balance "will, undoubtedly, improve culture, behaviour, outcomes, profitability and productivity". Organisations that we have referenced before in this column are active in the task force, including the Nautical Institute, WISTA and IMarEST.

The task force has developed a pledge that is being taken onboard by both public and private maritime entities: "We are committed to building an employment culture that actively supports and celebrates gender diversity, at all levels, throughout our organisation and our industry."

To date, more than 60 companies and organisations have signed this pledge. The pledge, in itself, is really just the first step. Organisations that sign that pledge will then need to take steps to implement the pledge and report on their progress. The task force is supporting these organisations with toolkits, workshops and mentoring. Toolkit development is well underway, focusing on attracting and retaining



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persons in a diverse workforce as well as increasing diversity in leadership.

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN MARITIME

With a World Maritime Day theme for 2019 of "empowering women in maritime", now is the perfect time to reflect on what we, in Australia, are doing to promote diversity in the maritime industry. What resources can we tap into to address the findings in the Maritime Industry Reference Committee's paper? Where does diversity – including gender diversity – fit within the Australian context?

As we approach the beginning of a new year, perhaps it is also time for a new beginning within the fabric of the Australian maritime industry to develop an Australian diversity in maritime task force. Building on the past experiences and significant effort to promote the maritime industry, and working with our international partners, making a pledge to not only promote, but take concrete actions, to support a fully diverse maritime workforce.

I believe 2019 is the year to meet the challenge of diversity head on. ■

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