

A chance to celebrate #womeninmaritime

Jillian Carson-Jackson, senior vice-president of the Nautical Institute, writes about the significance for women of the International Maritime Organization secretary-general Kitack Lim's recent visit to Australia

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU

visited the United Nations website on Observances of International Days? I suggest you take a look – there are quite a few amazing days to celebrate. In September alone there are 14 different international days listed. September 21 celebrates the International Day of Peace, the 26 promotes the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons and September 28 encourages Universal Access to Information. September seems to truly be a month of peace, empowerment and new beginnings.

It seems fitting, then, that the last Thursday in September is World Maritime Day. Without shipping, without a healthy maritime environment, life would be very different. Although WMD officially falls on September 26 this year, WMD is often celebrated throughout the year. As you likely already know, the theme of WMD is “Empowering Women in the Maritime Community”.

The celebrations began on January 1 and will continue throughout the year. 2019 is truly a chance to celebrate the amazing diversity in the maritime industry, and empower women in maritime.

IT'S ALL ABOUT EMPOWERMENT

All over the world we are seeing a focus on

the benefit of diversity, including gender diversity, in the maritime environment. Over the months you have had a chance to learn about the astonishingly low percentage of women in the maritime industry, and also to meet some of the incredible women who are making waves.

On July 29, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority welcomed the IMO secretary-general Kitack Lim to Australia, providing an opportunity to showcase the efforts at the international, regional and local level to address the significant gender imbalance in our industry.

The evening event included a series of keynote presentations from IMO, AMSA and inspirational women in the industry. With an opportunity for informal discussions, the evening event was firmly focused on empowering women in maritime.

In opening the event, AMSA CEO Mick Kinley highlighted many issues in supporting diversity in the industry, stressing that it isn't just right for social justice, it is good for business outcomes.

Records show that 57 AMSA STCW certificates have been issued to female masters, with 20 certificates active. Looking at the lower levels, there were only 14 chief mate certificates and 22 deck. This highlights the need to do more to support

those in the system, and also the need to address the decline in seafarers and skill set by encouraging women, and men, into the industry.

Within AMSA itself, Mr. Kinley noted that there had been a 39% increase in female employees since 2014 throughout all areas of AMSA, with women now comprising 22% of senior managers.

THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

Mr Lim arrived in Australia after a tour of the South Pacific states, where he met with the Pacific Women in Maritime organisations. While highlighting the challenges experienced by the region, he conveyed his appreciation to Australia for the strong support they provide in the region, and in the global maritime community.

A particularly memorable comment from his speech noted that the work of the IMO continues to focus on “the wellbeing of the planet and all human kind”. With the rapid developments in the industry, including the radical new trends of digitisation, he highlighted the need to adopt solutions that are effective within the maritime industry, taking the human element into consideration.

The human element includes the support of diversity – and the empowerment of



[l-r] Mick Kinley, AMSA; Teresa Lloyd, MIAL; Kitack Lim, IMO; Alison Cusack, WISTA; and Jeanine Drummond, Port Authority of NSW



[l-r] Meghan Arnott, Jeanine Drummond, Jillian Carson-Jackson and Holly Saunders

women in maritime. Mr Lim expressed amazement at the overwhelming support for the social media campaign around the WMD theme, and the initiatives that are being taken by the member states of the IMO. This includes preparing an IMO resolution to continue the promotion of women in the maritime industry, and the development of a network to co-ordinate the activity, after 2019 when the WMD theme is gone – but not forgotten.

IF YOU CAN'T SEE IT, YOU CAN'T BE IT

Keynote presentations by influential women in the maritime industry - Theresa Lloyd, Alison Cusack and Jeanine Drummond.

The overwhelming feeling from these presentations was “if you can’t see it, you can’t be it”. Representing different aspects of the industry, these three women all highlighted concerns over the slow rate of change, with many women in the industry today continuing to experience the same issues, and tell the same stories, as those experienced decades ago.

Women in a male-dominated environment often feel pressured to fit in, to adapt – yet it is their diverse viewpoints that are critical to support a vibrant maritime industry.

So how can we work to see actual gains? To achieve diversity and empowerment there is a need for strong support at all levels, afloat and ashore. Stressing the positive, yes, but recognising the negative; putting in place opportunities for women within the industry and realising that there will be imperfect progress, but progress none the less. Small steps, such as calling out inappropriate behaviour; recognising and encouraging efforts; thinking consciously about each small effort that we can take, every day, towards gender equality.

This also includes increasing the visibility of women in maritime, through initiatives such as the Nautical Institute South East Australia Branch #womeninmaritime 365 day challenge. With visibility comes responsibility, the need to provide mentoring and networking opportunities, leveraging on the work being done in so many discrete areas of the industry and providing a steady, coordinated approach to improving diversity.

In the words of Ms Drummond, “We need to see a future when there is no longer a female seafarer, there are just seafarers”.

Our challenge is how quickly we can achieve that? ■

THE FEARLESS PURSUIT OF IMPERFECT PROGRESS

■ The fearless pursuit of imperfect progress was the title of Alison Cusack’s address at the event with the UN secretary-general Kitack Lim to celebrate women in maritime.

Ms Cusack, who is national president of WISTA and manages her own law firm, challenged the audience not to fall for the “utopian fallacy that for a solution to work it must address all issues at once and be perfect”.

“Instead, look to how the IMO approaches difficult issues and how they work to change mindsets as our pathway to success,” she says.

She reflected that it took the industry just one year, nine months and six days from the sinking of the *RMS Titanic* to sign the first version of the SOLAS Convention. To conceive it, draft it, discuss it, agree it and sign it.

“Has it stayed the same over the last one hundred and five years? Of course not! It is updated and adapted as and when needed,” Ms Cusack says.

She believes we should be fearless in our pursuit of this “imperfect progress” when it comes to gender equality.

“In the shipping industry we are capable of achieving difficult tasks and having difficult conversations; it’s in our DNA,” she says.

She cited several examples of “difficult things” including cutting a stricken ship in half, putting it onto another ship, sailing it halfway around the world in order to put it together again.

She also suggested that it may have been a difficult conversation for whoever called carmaker Porsche after the fire and sinking of the *Grande America* to let them know that their last production run of the 911 GT2 were in fact not going to make it to destination but rather were lying on the ocean floor.

“Change does not happen in one speech, one evening, one year of a theme, but rather through small consistent effort,” Ms Cusack says.

“The challenge I issue to you all is this: for the next one year, nine months and six days, do one small thing daily towards gender equality, towards that imperfect progress.”

She says this might include asking who isn’t in the room for important conversations and then inviting them or checking who isn’t on the list for a promotion but should be.

“When someone makes an inappropriate comment, don’t let ‘it’s just a joke’ be an excuse,” Ms Cusack says.

“Be brave and ask the women in your office what is one small change you can make to move towards gender equality.”

She suggested at the end of that one year, nine months and six days, we should all report back to her.

