



MEDIA RELEASE

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Seafarer shortage pushes national resilience to the brink

A critical shortage of seafarers threatens Australia's energy security, national defence and supply chain resilience requiring an urgent overhaul of maritime skills and training, according to a new report.

Commissioned by energy exploration and production company INPEX and supported by the Australian Resources & Energy Employer Association (AREEA) and leading maritime organisations – Maritime Industry Australia Limited (MIAL), the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers (AIMPE), the Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU) and the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) – the [Maritime Workforce Position Paper](#) reveals:

- A major shortage of seafarers with the internationally-recognised qualifications required to service strategically significant Australian maritime assets.
- An ageing current workforce in desperate need of regeneration.
- A major funding shortfall for maritime skills training to meet the jobs' gap.

These factors were identified as long ago as the 2013 Australian Maritime Workforce Development Strategy – which was delivered by the current Prime Minister as the then responsible Minister for Infrastructure and Transport.

INPEX Australia Senior Vice President Corporate Bill Townsend said Australia's pool of seafarers declined by 23 per cent over the last year.

"We're now seeing the demand for seafarers outstripping supply in circumstances approaching a flashpoint. This is a result of limited action in the past decade to ensure the training and crewing sustainability of the Australian shipping fleet," Mr Townsend said.

Globally, the industry is predicting a need for up to 89,510 additional officers by 2026, a challenge magnified by the pandemic.

Mr Townsend said the shortfall had a direct impact on the capacity of the maritime workforce to meet the expansion and maintenance of Australia's offshore oil and gas sector.

"And as Australia's energy mix continues to diversify, there will be a severe shortage of maritime professionals to support offshore windfarms and to carry out important decommissioning work," he said.



The report identifies poor training pathways as central to the nation's inability to develop the maritime workforce needed – with myriad barriers and disincentives stymying education and skills' development, such as high costs and a lack of access to berths to undertake the mandatory sea time.

It calls for a whole-of-government response and funding package from the Commonwealth to address proven pinch points in maritime education, training and retention; streamlining the complexity of current pathways and assisting with heavy costs stifling the pipeline of ratings, engineers and officers.

The [*Maritime Workforce Position Paper*](#) recommends four immediate actions to rectify current maritime workforce shortages, with two further recommendations over the next 3-5 years to ensure national resilience is not compromised.

1. **IMMEDIATE ACTION:** Secure funding for retention, training and education in maritime workforce roles. Reduce or subsidise RTO fees, provide workforce support program.
2. **IMMEDIATE ACTION:** Launch a targeted recruitment campaign to inspire and attract people with transferable skills into areas of maritime workforce demand.
3. **IMMEDIATE ACTION:** Expand the talent pool by making existing STEM and technical vocation incentive programs available to people studying maritime qualifications.
4. **IMMEDIATE ACTION:** Make seagoing berths available on all vessels controlled under Government and Government-related contracts.
5. **3-5 YEAR ACTION:** Standardise education, training and career pathways through establishing a national maritime training coalition with appropriate geographic distribution that facilitates effective maritime workforce development outcomes.
6. **3-5 YEAR ACTION:** Invest in technology and instructors to support optimisation of skills acquisition, development, and deployment for the maritime sector.

**Quotes attributable to Australian Resources & Energy Employer Association (AREEA)
Deputy CEO Tara Diamond:**

“We’re facing an environment where the commercial maritime industry is experiencing a chronic workforce shortage, and demand for seafarers through the strategic fleet initiative, oil and gas decommissioning and the development of offshore wind projects will only increase.

“The Australian Government can and should be part of the solution.

“Without such a response, the recently announced overhaul of the navy’s surface combatant fleet, including 11 additional new multipurpose frigates, will inject further strain.”



Quotes attributable to Maritime Industry Australia Limited (MIAL) CEO Angela Gillham:

“Seafarer training is high cost, takes time, and the limited number of available vessels of sufficient size means that the maritime training task of the nation falls on the shoulders of very few.

“The Government’s strategic fleet policy will double the training opportunities in the long term, but to meet short term demand, we need focused effort now.

“Other maritime nations that value their sovereign maritime skills base have robust public/private maritime training and skills development support mechanisms. It is time for a wholesale re-imagining of maritime training in Australia and there is no time to waste.”

Quotes attributable to Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers (AIMPE) Federal Secretary Martin Byrne:

“Marine Engineers are vital to the operation of the ships that carry Australia’s commercial cargoes and the offshore vessels which have helped develop Australia’s oil and gas industry.

“Australia needs home grown Marine Engineers to ensure our self-reliance – to develop offshore energy sources of the future, to continue to provide emergency response capacity in times of crisis, to patrol our Economic Exclusion Zone (EEZ), and contribute to regional peace and security.”

Quotes attributable to Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU) Executive Officer Jarrod Moran:

Australia has a proud maritime tradition. Our maritime history has seen us protect our citizens, protect our coast and protect our sovereignty. Australia needs Australian seafarers to crew Australian ships, safely navigate our important ports, link us with the world in times of need and ultimately take on the leadership roles in our ports and harbours.

“This report sets out clearly that investing and reinvesting in vital maritime skills now will set us up to be rewarded with a future Australia that has kept its maritime independence.”

Quotes attributable to Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) National Secretary Paddy Crumlin:

“Maritime skills are integral to an island nation such as Australia, with its vast resources and maritime infrastructure.

“This report highlights the critical areas required for Australia to become an important maritime hub for the region and to support many initiatives and government policies, from offshore decommissioning through to offshore renewable energy and, importantly, the Strategic Fleet to support Australia's sovereign capability.

“Australia cannot risk reliance on overseas maritime skills in an increasingly polarised and unstable geopolitical environment. We must immediately address the current and future maritime skills gap identified by industry in this report.”



Additional information

Download the [Maritime Workforce Position Paper here](#).

The *Maritime Workforce Position Paper* will be launched today at Pier 35 Bar & Grill, Port Melbourne, at 10:30am.

The event will feature an address from (Commonwealth) Minister for Skills and Training the Hon. Brendan O'Connor MP; an address from Victorian Minister for Ports and Freight the Hon. Melissa Horne MP; and an industry-union panel discussion.

ALL MEDIA WELCOME.

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