

(As delivered)

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Keynote address by Efthimios E. Mitropoulos

“Global Challenges”

Secretary-General, International Maritime Organization

Chair of the AMSA Board, Mr. Leo Zussino; AMSA Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Graham Peachey; industry leaders and participants; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure, once again, to be visiting your beautiful and unique in many respects country – or should I say continent? – and, especially, to be meeting anew with so many friends on the occasion of the 2009 National Shipping Conference.

I am honoured to be asked to deliver the Conference's keynote address on 'Global Challenges,' and am heartened to see that the Australian shipping industry and the Australian Government continue to be actively addressing the international challenges facing the industry. I am always impressed by the Australian shipping industry – how it punches well above its weight internationally, as well as leading the way with innovative technology, such as under-keel management systems and other initiatives, which you will be discussing today and tomorrow. Two days ago, I was in Monte Carlo delivering the keynote address at the opening ceremony of the Extraordinary Conference of the International Hydrographic Organization, during which your Hydrographer received IHO's Award for Achievements – a well deserved accolade. And, while with you today, I look forward to hearing more on the Australian perspective in relation to important national and international trends, developments and challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Several of those, who have already addressed you, have spoken about global and regional challenges. The world financial crisis has been touched on and we all know that no country or sector of the economy or industry is immune to this kind of 'flu' sweeping all major maritime nations. However, the economic challenges facing global industries and markets – and, therefore, all of us – are not the only challenges. As I will outline some of them in a short while, what I want to emphasize now is that we do not have any option other than continue to work together to face the challenges and make progress on all fronts – in other words, not allow the economic crisis to divert us from achieving our long-term global goals, while also acknowledging that the crisis does add a significant degree of difficulty to our task.

Addressing an audience such as yours, I know you know that, at IMO, we are, at present, heavily engaged in the fight to **protect and preserve our environment** – both marine and atmospheric. Having, last year, achieved a breakthrough in our efforts to reduce air pollution from ships, we are now pursuing, with vigour and undiminished determination, the limitation and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from shipping operations. Indeed, the theme for

this year's World Maritime Day, “**Climate change - a challenge for IMO too!**”, reflects our full commitment to that goal.

At this point, I would like to acknowledge your country's contribution to IMO's work in this area. Australia was a valued member on the Steering Committee for the 2000 study on greenhouse gas emissions from ships and also provided a financial contribution – for which the international community is grateful. I am also extremely pleased to note that Australia's and IMO's position on this issue is as one. Reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from ships must be pursued through multilateral action, developed and agreed at IMO.

IMO's work on this hugely important subject stems from the genuine concerns for the environment of our Member States and the industry organizations that help us make balanced decisions in the pursuit of our objectives. We are now working towards the development of a robust regime that will regulate shipping at the global level and contribute to the slowing down of climate change in a manner commensurate with the maritime community's degree of care, concern and sensitivity about the environment. The July session of the MEPC will be decisive in sealing the measure of IMO's contribution to the December Conference of parties to the UNFCCC in Copenhagen. We are determined to succeed. And, of course, I would not conclude my reference to Australia's contribution to marine environmental issues without paying tribute to AUSMEPA and the good job of its members.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As well as playing its part in addressing such global concerns, international shipping also has issues entirely of its own to face in the months and years ahead.

Since 2005, I have been speaking, on various occasions, about my serious concern regarding the **current and anticipated global shortage of seafarers, especially officers**, which has already reached significant proportions and, on the basis of authoritative studies, is destined to worsen in the future – unless drastic and persistent measures are taken urgently.

A 2008 report, issued by Drewry Shipping Consultants, assessed the shortfall of officers worldwide to be some 34,000, against a requirement of 498,000. Based on fleet growth projections and assuming officer supply continues to increase at current levels, the same report has predicted that, by 2012, the officer shortfall will have risen to 83,900.

A career at sea is not without its challenges. Lengthy absences from home, difficulties regarding shore leave, fatigue and increasing incidents of attacks from pirates are just some of the difficulties facing seafarers. However, many of us here today have had the pleasure and privilege of spending some part of our career at sea and can attest to the wonderful opportunities and excitement it offers. But unfortunately, these are often under-promoted.

That was one of the reasons why, last year, we launched the ‘**Go to sea!**’ campaign, as a co-operative effort among IMO, the International Labour Organization, the ‘Round Table’ industry organizations and the International Transport Workers’ Federation to increase the recruitment of seafarers. It publicizes the indisputable benefits and advantages of seafaring as a first-class career option for young men and women, and also calls on Governments and industry to address measures that have a negative impact on the maritime workforce.

For example, the trend to criminalize seafarers in some States and the denial of shore leave to foreign crews in some ports have an unwelcome impact on efforts to recruit young people and to retain highly skilled seafarers. I am pleased that, recently, some countries have taken positive steps to address these issues and I commend continued efforts in this regard.

For the ‘Go to sea!’ campaign to succeed, Governments and industry need actively to promote the attractions of a career at sea. If the global pool of competent, properly qualified, certified and efficient seafarers is to meet the predicted demand, then seafaring must be seen as a viable career choice for people of the right calibre.

Australia has responded well to the challenge. The website of the Australian Shipowners Association, **Careers at Sea**, is an excellent example. I also commend the recent efforts of Australia’s maritime pilots to expand and improve their professional training regime in order to attract more seafarers to their ranks.

And I am particularly pleased that the Australian Government is also taking practical and positive steps. The so-called ‘**Tinny to Tanker**’ or ‘T2T’ approach currently being developed by AMSA, with the aim of streamlining a career path for seafarers between the near-coastal and deep-sea trades, directly supports the ‘Go to sea!’ initiative. I understand the new proposed certificates will make entry to international seafaring more attainable by a broader range of seafarers – for example, those currently working in sectors such as near coastal, the Navy, customs, fishing and super yachts, all of which are potential sources of quality seafarers.

These new certificates will offer an excellent opportunity for new entrants and existing Australian seafarers to participate in an industry that provides a limitless career path and ever-expanding opportunities, if they so choose. As you can see, this is a particular passion of mine, and I am grateful for all your efforts in supporting this truly vital campaign.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This leads me to a closely related issue which, as a former seafarer, is dear to my heart. We cannot seek to persuade young people to be part of our industry if we cannot assure them that their basic human rights and decent working conditions are guaranteed. It is of critical importance that the **International Labour Organization’s Maritime Labour Convention** is ratified and enters into force as soon as possible.

That is why I was very pleased to hear that there is considerable support in Australia for her to become party to the Convention – including from seafarers’ unions, employers and the Australian Government. I note the work underway to progress towards ratification of the Convention and I urge all parties to work towards this goal as quickly as possible.

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In moving on to the next issue I would like to touch upon, my passion turns to dismay – but also determination – to address what is perhaps the gravest menace facing seafarers and shipping today.

In 2008, more than 600 seafarers were captured and held hostage by pirates off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden, 43 ships were hijacked and there were more than 115 direct

attacks on, or suspicious approaches to, other ships. Humanitarian aid to Somalia and other international trade through the Gulf of Aden have been significantly obstructed.

The worrying situation, as per last week's figures, was that 13 ships were in the hands of pirates with 194 seafarers being held hostage for ransom, thus making a 385% increase in attacks since the beginning of 2009, when compared to the same period last year.

The problem of modern piracy, particularly that off the Somali coast, is difficult and complex. Because the perpetrators of these unlawful acts behave with complete disrespect for civil society, unashamedly provoking the rule of law, there is a need for Governments and industry alike to take all necessary measures to eradicate this blight.

There have been several significant developments to address this modern scourge. On 16 December 2008, the United Nations Security Council, first approached on the issue by IMO, adopted resolution 1851 to introduce new provisions regarding information sharing and capacity building to facilitate the arrest and subsequent prosecution of suspected pirates and armed robbers. However, the fact remains that, in the absence of adequate national laws, their arrest and prosecution remain extremely difficult, in spite of some recent successful interceptions, leading to their capture and subsequent arrest. IMO is currently undertaking a review of the legal situation with the aim of contributing further to the anti-piracy strategy of the Organization.

Also in the context of Security Council resolution 1851 and at the initiative of the United States, a Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia was established earlier in the year. It held its inaugural meeting in New York in January, with the IMO Secretariat actively participating in its work and that of the working groups it established. One month later, we played host to two of its working groups – on military and operational coordination, including information sharing, and on self-awareness within the shipping industry – which provided an opportunity to our Members and organizations associated with IMO to participate in their proceedings.

Furthermore, following IMO Assembly resolution A.1002, we organized a high-level meeting in Djibouti, at the end of January, which succeeded in adopting a Code of Conduct to assist countries in the region to build capacity to prevent, deter and suppress acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships in the western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden.

While many entities have stepped in, all with commendable efforts and initiatives to bring about substantive results in the campaign to eradicate the piracy problem off Somalia, it should not be forgotten that the initiative to address the issue stems from IMO. It was IMO that identified the magnitude of the problem; assessed the seriousness of its nature; generated work to eliminate or reduce it; brought it to the attention of the United Nations; sensitized entities in a position to tackle it head on; worked together with others to coordinate a common approach to its solution; triggered action at various fora and levels; and succeeded in prompting a positive response from various sources. And, while it would be fair to say that much has been achieved so far, there is much more to be done if we are to succeed in our common objective.

Let me take this opportunity, on behalf of everyone in the maritime community, to express deep appreciation for the tireless efforts of the Combined Maritime Force, the European Union Naval Force, NATO and the navies of many countries from various regions, which have joined forces to combat the pirates. I would particularly like to acknowledge the

assistance recently provided by the Australian Navy to merchant ships under attack in the Gulf of Aden, most notably when the HMAS 'Sydney' and the HMAS 'Ballarat' responded to distress calls from two merchant ships under attack from pirates deterring them and then escorting the ships safely from the region. And only last Friday, the in-session Maritime Safety Committee of IMO received, with appreciation, the news that Australia was making available a frigate and an AP-3C maritime patrol aircraft to assist in the protection of shipping off the Horn of Africa. Thank you, Australia and good luck to the units you are dispatching to the region!

These efforts notwithstanding, it seems unlikely that piracy will be eradicated until favourable political and security developments in Somalia itself facilitate a resolution to the problem offshore. IMO has, nevertheless, put in place elements for, and is committed to, a long-term strategy that protects shipping, humanitarian aid as well as global economic trade. We will persist in our resolve.

On a more positive note, you will be as pleased as I am at the successful conclusion of the Conference IMO convened in Hong Kong, China, last month, which adopted, **by consensus**, an **international Convention for the safe and environmentally sound recycling of ships**. The goal of the Convention is to ensure that recycled ships do not pose any unnecessary risk to human health and safety or to the environment – both from ship-based and on-shore facilities.

The Asia-Pacific region leads the world in **shipowning, ship building, ship manning and ship recycling** and its Member States are esteemed Members of IMO. I am pleased to see that you are also advancing the work of IMO through regional initiatives, such as the convening by AMSA of a meeting of the Asia-Pacific Heads of Maritime Safety Agencies here in Sydney, earlier this week. I am very pleased to see the focus on technical assistance, training and capacity-building to help countries in your region meet international safety standards and practices. I applaud you for your leadership role in this respect and look forward to working closely with you in facilitating these activities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

No presentation from IMO's Secretary-General to a meeting in Australia, such as this, would be complete without reference to the Fremantle Conference of 1998, which saw IMO's efforts to put in place a **Global SAR Plan** coming to a successful completion – indeed, I am grateful for this opportunity to bring you up to date with some recent and welcome developments in the implementation of the decisions it reached.

Following the Fremantle Conference and that held in Florence in 2000, work started in earnest to establish appropriate SAR facilities off the coast of Africa. A regional approach was agreed to take the matter forward and the African countries bordering the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, anti-clockwise from Morocco to Somalia, as well as the nearby Atlantic and Indian Ocean Island States, were invited to establish, with IMO's assistance, five regional centres and 26 sub-centres to cover their entire coastline areas for SAR coordination purposes.

The commissioning of the first African regional MRCC, in Mombasa, Kenya, took place in May 2006, and was followed by Cape Town, South Africa, in January 2007 and Lagos, Nigeria, in May 2008. This year, it has been my pleasure to commission the fourth regional

MRCC, in Monrovia, Liberia, as well as two sub-centres, in Tanzania and the Seychelles. I am also pleased to say that plans for the fifth, and final, African regional MRCC, in Morocco, are now also well advanced.

I have no doubt that this network of regional MRCCs and their associated sub-centres will vastly improve the capability of the region to effectively coordinate operations for the search and rescue of people in distress at sea – and will do a great deal to bring the vision of those far-sighted delegates to Fremantle, more than a decade ago, to reality.

And so to conclude: this year is a very hectic working year for IMO – as, indeed, they always seem to be!

We expect to make significant progress with the comprehensive review of the STCW Convention and Code we initiated in 2006, with a view to updated texts being submitted for adoption at another conference, which we will convene in Manila in June 2010.

Later this month, the IMO Council will consider proposals for the further development of the **Voluntary IMO Member State Audit Scheme**. As a result of the ongoing work of our Maritime Safety Committee, back in London, the system for **long-range identification and tracking of ships** should also come to fruition, as will the **goal-based standards concept**, bringing a paradigm shift in the way we will develop regulations in the future.

In addition to continuing full-speed on these and other major initiatives, in November we will also host our 168 Member States at a meeting of the IMO Assembly, which will be invited to sanction the work of the Organization over the past two years and adopt several important resolutions to enhance the safety of ships and persons at sea, the protection of the environment, both marine and atmospheric and the facilitation of international maritime traffic.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Australia has had a long and proud association with IMO and with the international shipping industry in general. Although a relatively small nation by population, it can sit proudly among world leaders in the maritime community and in the pursuit of greater safety, security and environmental protection.

It has been my great pleasure to address you on the occasion of this NATSHIP conference; may I thank the organizers for the opportunity to do so, and wish them, and you all, a lively, interesting and fruitful discussion.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you.

3038 words – 24.9 minutes – 10 June 2009