



SEALIFE PROGRAMME



SEALIFE BULLETIN NO. 3

April 1977

THE SEALIFE PROGRAMME

Sealife was launched as a joint initiative by the employers, unions and Department of Trade in March 1975. The common objective is:

"To examine ways in which life at sea in the U.K. shipping industry can be made more attractive to the U.K. seafarer from which the effective use of manpower can be developed".

A tripartite Steering Group was established and developed a programme of investigation and experiment in the following areas:

- Tasks and skills at sea
- Shipboard organisation
- Shore/ship relationships
- Employment and reward practices
- Recruitment and selection practices
- The ship design process

They represent the main topics on which we report in this Bulletin.

SEALIFE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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R. C. Seaton, Marconi International Marine Ltd.

D. Seaman, Merchant Navy and Airline Officers' Association

P. Sharpe, Sealife Programme

P. W. R. Smith, Panocean-Anco

SEALIFE PROGRAMME TEAM

Chief Executive:

Peter Sharpe

Members:

Laidon Alexander

Michael Allen

John Cain

Malcolm Hatfield

Valerie Kennedy-Browne

Colin McDonald

Malcolm Smith

Ian Wigston

Secretariat:

Lisa Harth

Anne Dale

1. SEALIFE IN 1976

The main features of the year have been:

- completing and presenting to the Steering Group initial reports on recruitment and employment policies in relation to the manpower problem;
- expanding participation by shipping companies in the Programme;
- launching the first experimental work on ships;
- securing support for Sealife's continuation and improvements in its machinery.

The Bulletin summarises the work done:

- industry-wide (Section 2)
- in specific sections of the industry (Section 3)
- within companies and on ships (Section 4)

2. INDUSTRY-WIDE WORK

Recruitment, Selection and Induction Practices

The first part of a study was completed by Captain Michael Brackenridge and presented to the Steering Group in July. It identified a number of possibilities for improving the supply and retention of seafarers by changes in the entry process. The Steering Group passed this report to Sealife Council, which has agreed that a sufficient case for changes has been made. A joint Working Party under J. O. H. Dawson's Chairmanship is to be set up to develop implementation proposals. The report is available on request, at £15 per copy.

Employment Package (Feasibility Study)

An investigation was carried out to find out what work would be needed to identify and recommend improvements in the industry's employment practices. A team from Glasgow University, under the leadership of Professor L. C. Hunter made the study. A first draft of their proposals was reviewed by the Steering Group in July 1976. A programme of work* has now been drawn up and is being discussed with interested parties.

*Concentrating initially on the role of the MNE.

Seafarers' Attitudes

A study was carried out by Michael Barry and Malcolm Smith, aimed at putting together the considerable data available on seafarers' attitudes to their work and employment in different nations. The main report has been drafted, but work remains to be done in condensing this for distribution within the industry. It is hoped to complete it by mid-1977.

MNE Ratings' Attitudes

Colin McDonald conducted a short pilot interview in November with a group of MNE ratings from the London Pool to learn of their attitudes to the problems of seafaring and of their employment. The results are under review to see whether a bigger interview programme would be useful. It is clear there are many important blank areas in our knowledge about pool ratings, despite past investigations and attitude surveys.

3. INDUSTRY SECTOR WORK IN 1976

Flensburg System

Validation of the German shipping industry's Flensburg data on shipboard tasks and skills was successfully concluded for U.K. deep-sea ship-types in 1975. The outcome of this study is reported in Report No. 1 Project 1, October 1975 by Michael Denmark. (Sealife Programme, £15).

Corresponding checks of German data against U.K. data for short-sea and coastal vessels have shown that the Flensburg data was drawn from a very narrow range of tonnage. Thus it cannot be applied to the wide range of vessels in this section of the industry. (Report 2, Project 1, January 1976 by Ian Wigston). (Sealife Programme £5).

What this means is:

—We have a great deal of data on tasks and skill requirements on the main classes of foreign-going ships, and a fast flexible system for testing the effects of work and organisation changes on the basic jobs and training of those on board.

—Similar data is not available for short-sea and coastal ships. If needed it would have to be separately collected.

The Flensburg data and analysis system is available to support experimental work on ships. It will indicate the alternative forms of work organisation and allocation most likely to be successful in the future, and will then be useful in redesigning jobs and defining new training requirements.

SEALIFE COUNCIL

Chairman:

P. I. Walters, Director
B.P. Tanker Co. Ltd.

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Department of Trade

Sir Frederic Bolton, Chairman
Bolton Steam Shipping Co. Ltd.

R. F. Denholm, Managing Director,
Denholm Ship Management

L. F. Edmondson, Executive Council Member
Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers

W. F. Hunt, Head of Fleet Personnel Division
P & O Steamship Co. Ltd

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Radio & Electronic Officers' Union

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N. S. Rae, Manager—Transportation
Esso Petroleum Co. Ltd.

J. Slater, General Secretary
National Union of Seamen

W. B. Slater, Director
Cunard Steam-Ship Co. Ltd.

G. J. Stafford, Managing Director
Stephenson Clark Shipping

Non-members:

Chairman, Sealife Executive Committee
Director (Manpower, Industrial Relations & Training), GCBS
Chief Executive, Sealife Programme

GCBS has guaranteed funds for Sealife's continuation to the end of 1979. Mr. P. W. R. Smith of Panocean-Anco has retired from the Chairmanship of the Steering Group and Mr. J. O. H. Dawson of Hunting Group has taken his place as Chairman on the new Executive Committee. The members of both the Council and the Executive Committee are listed at the end of this Bulletin.

6. CONCLUSION

The reason for Sealife is the seafaring manpower problem. In the end the Programme must be measured by the extent to which it relieves, and is seen to relieve, this problem. There are many contributory factors, and to deal with the most difficult may take 5 to 10 years. Sealife represents the start of processes which will have to continue for many years if it is to succeed.

A great deal of understanding has now been acquired about many aspects of the manpower problem, and some conclusions about how to ease it are in the process of being tested.

1. We believe the principle of continuity on the ship is fundamental to improving working and community life aboard.
2. In relation to many shore organisations there is a need to let the ship have more authority, to help those on board assume and exercise it and to talk 'across' to the ship rather than down to it.
3. At industry level there is a need to move to more flexible recruitment and selection policies, to create a better range of career opportunities for all seafarers, and to reduce current differences of opportunity and status by building bridges between the different seafaring groups.
4. The design of the ship is very near the top of most seafarers' lists of problems. It does have something to do with men's attitudes towards staying at sea, and yet it is generally seen as of much lower importance by shore management.

With the new Council and Executive Committee, Sealife now has recognition and access at the policy-making levels of the industry. Through these tripartite bodies, official protection for radical experimental changes can be obtained.

Under the new arrangements Sealife staff become formally independent of the three main interest groups. They work for the Council and will no longer be employed by GCBS.

We would like to hear from those who have an active interest, or who are already working in their own organisations or ships in any of the areas described above.

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Short Sea and Coastal Section— Improving Supply of Home Trade Mates

Exploratory discussions are being held by Peter Sharpe and Malcolm Hatfield with Short Sea and Coastal owners to establish the feasibility of a joint project to:

- establish a recognised and separate training and career path for ratings to provide sufficient home trade mates for short sea operators;
- develop the principle, put forward in the Sealife Report on Recruitment, Selection and Induction, of building a positive connection between the career ladders of ratings and officers.

Ship Design Process

Work in this area has been done by Malcolm Hatfield and John Cain. Its objective is 'to develop ways which ensure that new ships are built in such a way as to meet better the social, operational and safety needs of seafarers'. The need to improve ship design for the seafarer seems to be widely accepted.

There are indications that design decisions are moving from the owner to shipbuilders and that a greater proportion of new ships are being built in series. The need for this project is underlined by this trend, as shipyard design tends to concentrate on meeting the builder's requirements at the expense of owners and seafarers.

A new approach to the process of design, in which Dalgliesh's management talked through design principles with their sea staff and members of the Sealife team, enabled a modified accommodation arrangement to be successfully demonstrated and incorporated in the drawings.

A pamphlet has been prepared putting forward an outline of such new approaches to the ship design process. Response from owners and builders has been good, and the next step will be to stage a number of workshops to develop more effective ways of solving the design problem.

During the year, through the Ship Marine Technology Requirements Board, Sealife was successful in securing 50% DOI funding for this project for its first year.

As a major source of discontent bearing on seafarers' willingness to stay in their profession, the design of the ship presents Sealife with one of its most difficult attitude-changing challenges.

Shipboard Systems

Ian Wigston is surveying the several proprietary ship maintenance systems available so that Sealife can give guidance to companies thinking of changing their maintenance planning and control methods.

Management Content of the Jobs of Ship's Staff

This work, known as the Plymouth Project, is covered by a contract between MNTB and Plymouth Polytechnic. During the year 6 investigatory voyages were made by Jennefer Tobin. The data acquired is now being compiled. Discussions between the MNTB and Plymouth are in progress about the report which is due to be published in the Autumn of 1977.

4. WORK AT COMPANY AND SHIP LEVEL

Our work in companies is concerned with the relationship between the shore organisation and the ship's staff, and with the quality of working and social life on board. The work in shipping offices usually forms part of a longer term plan for improvements in shipboard organisation. Changes related to the management or control of ships may start ashore or afloat, but inevitably have effects in both places.

Changes originating ashore generally imply wide effects throughout the fleet concerned and seem to offer better prospects of diffusion of change. However, they impinge directly on the centre of the shipping organisation and require careful preparation and development. In contrast, changes initiated on the ship get to the action stage more quickly but are prone to lack of support from the shore office. On the other hand an over-protected shipboard experiment can easily 'immunise' the rest of the fleet, and result in little worthwhile change.

Both types of work, ashore and afloat, will be relevant to Sealife's overall aims to the extent to which they demonstrate:

- What types of change can improve the allegiance of the seafarer to his profession.
- How such changes can be made.
- What, if any, supporting changes in central manpower policies and regulations are indicated.

It is still too early to apply these tests to the work described below. It may be a further year before useful conclusions can be drawn.

Such projects are also 'coal-faces' where real attitude changes can be generated. Their importance as a means of shifting the priorities and opinions of influential people in all sectors of the industry is crucial. Building up networks of people who can build on each other's experiments is an important function of the Sealife Programme.

Problems

- a) Getting some stability of personnel on board involves overcoming both the habits of shore personnel staff and the dislike of many seafarers for yo-yo relieving.
- b) The freedom of action made available to the ship for the purposes of the experiment is generally set too narrowly by shore management. The ship has to be helped to get enough 'elbow room'.
- c) Masters acting as project leaders need discretion and time to select and get the people they want with them in the venture. The importance of this is easily under-rated by shore staff, and this can make it very difficult to assemble and maintain the team.
- d) There has to be commitment to full and frank exchanges between ship and shore about progress and problems. There is often hidden resistance to this idea among middle management ashore and on board, caused by fears of criticism.
- e) It is difficult to get adequate involvement from junior officers. This may indicate that they feel cut off in a kind of 'no-mans-land' until they can get promotion.
- f) The need to shelter the experiment is easily accepted logically. Conviction comes less readily however, and has to stand the test of day-to-day pressures ashore being aggravated by having a 'special' ship in the fleet. Without involvement and conviction on the part of shore management, unions and institutions, the sheltering is too successful in the opposite direction. That is, there is little impact, or learning ashore, from the experience on the ship.

5. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

In July proposals for Sealife's future programme were put to the General Policy Committee (GPC) of GCBS. Support was sought for a further three years to the end of 1979 and an annual rate of expenditure of £200,000 was suggested, with an extra £50,000 in 1977 representing funds underspent in 1976. The proposals were accepted in principle but a special committee was set up to review the methods and management of the Programme.

Agreement has now been reached about the changes in machinery for directing Sealife. They are:

- The establishment of a new tripartite policy-making body called the Sealife Council.
- The re-naming of the Steering Group as the Sealife Executive Committee.
- The setting up of tripartite arrangements for holding and administering funds for Sealife, for raising and administering other funds where appropriate, and for employing all Sealife staff.

Malcolm Smith, Harry Gudim, Colin McDonald, Michael Allen and Laidon Alexander have all been involved in shipboard work.

It is too early to set out the detailed experiences in Denholms and Bibbys. Both experiments are concerned to improve the working and communal life of all on board. The story is incomplete and will be dealt with later in separate reports.

Lessons

For the moment the lessons which have been learned and problems met so far are as follows:

- a) Intensively 'thinking through' the purpose and effects of the experiment with senior shore management is vital. An over-hasty start on shipboard work is hazardous for all concerned.
- b) Those associated with, or involved in, the project should be so on a stable basis. Changes in key figures, either on board or ashore, particularly in the early stages, are disruptive.
- c) Whether particular individuals are selected for involvement in project work, or not selected at all, in practice most include or exclude themselves on the basis of their own inclinations. The project ships can start either with hand-picked crews or with unselected crews, but they appear to end up as a self-selecting body in both cases.
- d) Close consultation with the ship about both the means and ends of the project is vital—and difficult to achieve satisfactorily. Printed information is worse than useless. A great deal of discussion is inevitable and essential.
- e) However sound the plans may be, or appear to be, and however painstakingly they are explained aboard or ashore, they are likely to be misunderstood and disbelieved. Well-established attitudes cause strong opposition to any initiative aboard. For either officers or ratings to accept that there could be "something in it for me" may take many months.
- f) All parties in the experiments have to learn how to learn. In the early stages of this type of work we must expect to proceed from one success or mistake to the next. The vital element is persistence and a willingness to keep building on experience.
- g) The part played by the 'third party' (in these cases a Sealife staff member) is very important. The problem is to help with difficult changes without appearing to take sides or to manipulate, or alternatively being unconcerned and remote. Working within a company with an industry-wide brief is a new and demanding role and we are still learning how best to fulfill it.

4.1 Shore Based Work

Sealife has been or is involved in projects of different kinds in the shore organisations of the following companies:

- Panocean-Anco
- B.P. Tankers
- Reardon Smith
- North Sea Ferries
- Whitco Marine Services
- Royal Fleet Auxiliary
- British Rail

Panocean-Anco

The early phases of this work were reported in December 1975. (Project 3, Report 1, by Laidon Alexander, Sealife Programme £10). Since then the merger between Panocean and Anco has taken place and considerably affected the plans and progress of building up the Fleet Teams. Despite the constraints imposed by the merger and market conditions the company has built up a core of committed managers under the Fleet Director who have survived a very difficult period of change. With some team-building help from Valerie Kennedy-Browne Panocean-Anco should soon be in a position to implement its plan to move considerable managerial authority to its ships.

B.P. Tankers

Sealife work with B.P. Tankers began in September 1975 and was reported by Malcolm Smith to the Steering Group in May 1976. Shore seminars with most grades of sea staff were held over the period September 1975 to February 1976 to formulate proposals for change. The views and proposals of the sea staff were relayed to members of shore management.

From this six major propositions below emerged. As sound ideas produced by experienced seafarers they indicate the general forms of change, in deep sea tankers at least, seen as necessary to hold men in the profession.

1. Greater responsibility for work planning for the complement in general, and for ratings in particular.
2. Positive development of on-board training in all jobs.
3. Joint setting of performance standards by management and senior officers.
4. The creation of a single centre of accountability and command open to any discipline.
5. More effective on-board consultation to share information and resolve grievances.

6. Reducing the anomalies between the rewards for officers and ratings.

B.P. therefore provided some very valuable early evidence, confirmed by later experience, about the general directions change might need to take.

Reardon Smith

Sealife has played the part of part-time advisor. The purpose has been to help Reardon Smith give their senior ship's officers more cost authority and responsibility. A senior master, brought ashore to lead this project, worked in Sealife for a period and attended a course on Managing Change. Progress is likely to take time, but it is hoped to build momentum by enabling Reardon Smith to compare notes with other companies engaged in similar changes. Laidon Alexander is the contact.

North Sea Ferries

After contacts early in 1976, North Sea Ferries' senior management expressed a desire to vest more control of the ships affairs in their ferry masters.

Interviews with the masters confirmed that they would welcome more authority but indicated possible middle management difficulties ashore. Ship/shore meetings were held with help from Michael Allen and Valerie Kennedy-Browne and these produced agreement to develop plans to bring about devolution. The stage has been reached where ship team-building meetings are being held to work out detailed objectives and how to approach them.

Whitco Marine Services

Whitco sought Sealife's help in getting commitment from their shore staff to the idea of self-contained fleet teams ashore, and to plans to increase the authority of the ship.

Extensive interviews with operations staff led to a team-building weekend run by Sealife. This was successful and highlighted the work needed in support areas before finalising plans.

Separately, an experimental ship project has been proposed to and agreed by the Sealife Executive Committee.

As a relative newcomer to the British shipping scene with few internal vested interests, Whitco could become a significant company in the Sealife Programme because there is strong commitment to the objectives of the Programme by top management. Laidon Alexander has been responsible for the work to date.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary

Royal Fleet Auxiliary has had difficulty in maintaining its complement of junior officers. Discussions with shore managers and sea staff led to the idea that R.F.A. should examine which shipboard tasks could be assigned to selected senior ratings and that established ratings with the potential be given the training to qualify as 2nd mates. Sealife has also indicated that R.F.A. might consider modifying their recruitment policy and select ratings with the intention of training them for qualification within the new certificate structure. First reaction to these ideas has been positive. It is now planned to talk with union representatives about launching an experimental programme for improving the opportunities and training of R.F.A. ratings. Ian Wigston is the co-ordinator.

British Rail (Ferries)

Michael Allen and Colin McDonald have made some initial fact-finding trips on B.R. vessels and these were followed by a meeting with the B.R. Port and Liaison Committees at Dover in October to suggest further investigatory work. This was agreed in November 1976 and a programme of 50 structured interviews on board B.R. ferries has been completed. Its results have been given to B.R. management and the Port and Liaison Committees and the possibility of mounting a project is under study.

4.2 Ship Based Work

Two companies are currently involved with Sealife in experimental shipboard projects. These are:

—Denholm Ship Management (Arctic Troll)

—Bibby Line (Dart Atlantic)

An exploratory voyage on the Harrisons (Clyde) vessel Avon Forest was made in November with a view to mounting an experiment aboard, but it seems unlikely that this will proceed.

In late 1975/early 1976 two fact-finding voyages were made on Stag Line vessels, again, at the time, with later shipboard organisational development work in mind. However, the company's management found itself facing trading and planning problems during most of the year which had to receive first priority, and it was agreed to postpone any immediate programme of work at sea.

As mentioned above, a proposal is being developed for a shipboard project in Whitco.