

SEALIFE PROGRAMME

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THE SEALIFE PROGRAMME

The Sealife Programme is concerned with initiating processes of change within the British Shipping Industry intended to ease the manpower problems that have bedevilled the industry for so many years.

It is not another report-generating research programme, but a positive attempt, directed by Owners, Unions and the Department of Trade on a tripartite basis, to develop successful changes, initially experimentally, in those areas of prime importance, both at sea and in shore organisations.

Seafarers, as well as their representative bodies, become directly involved in these development processes and thus have an important role in determining what changes should be attempted and how they should be tried out. It is believed that it will be mainly from this participation of owners, unions and government and the seafarers themselves that effective new methods or ideas will emerge.

This emphasis on practical trials of new ideas gives the Sealife Programme particular potential. Set up in 1975 under the tripartite control of owners, unions and government with a responsibility to all three parties, the Sealife Programme is concerned with the issues that make up the industry's manpower problem, not with the exclusive solution of any particular party's problems.

The function of the Sealife Programme is to provide the people and the facilities to test and evaluate new ideas and methods, and to develop within the industry means of ensuring that effective new knowledge is widely known and used. Through the Sealife Programme, 'networks' or clubs of interested parties can more easily be created, from which can come solutions which will be of wider significance than merely to that part of the industry in which the new idea has been tried out. From such networks it is hoped will come formulation of any necessary policy and regulatory changes to re-establish seafaring in the U.K. Merchant Navy as a job worth doing, and offering a really attractive career.

In an industry as traditional as Shipping the possibility of radical change can be alarming, although many people agree that "something must be done". The Sealife Programme offers both a means of determining what that "something" should be and a means of seeing if it works.

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The Programme has now got well under way and work is in hand in six major areas.

In the first, detailed investigation of the necessary tasks and skills required aboard today's ships has been carried out in order to relate these to the manning, organisation and training requirements for tomorrow's ships.

Secondly the nature of the work carried out aboard today's ships and its organisation is being examined in the light of the social and technical developments currently practised in industry ashore. New ways of organising and controlling work aboard ship are being tried out by several companies.

Thirdly, other companies are developing ways and means of returning to the ship many of the powers which automation and centralisation have taken away.

In the fourth area initial reviews of the seafarers overall employment/remuneration package have indicated that there are grounds for improvement and rationalisation, and development work will shortly begin in this area.

Similarly, potential has been identified for improvements in the effectiveness of the Recruitment and Selection of all seafarers.

Work is also in progress with owners and with shipyards concerned in the design of ships. This is focussed on ensuring that needs and requirements of the seafarer are more appropriately considered in the design of his 24-hour working and living environment aboard ship.

Each of these project areas concerns itself with a particular issue which contributes to the overall manpower problem facing the industry. The list is not exhaustive, nor is it comprehensive; whenever the industry as a whole, or a part of it, identifies a new issue, a new problem area, the Sealife Programme will be available to act as a means by which the industry itself can, on a collaborative basis, develop solutions.

Sealife will not and indeed cannot solve the manpower problem on its own; that will only be achieved with the co-operation and participation of your company, your representative body and yourselves.