

Lloyd's List

69-77 Paul Street, London EC2A 4LQ
editorial@lloydslist.com

Bulkers need the best

SOME people might have thought that bulk carriers, which had an unfortunate reputation as death traps some years ago, had put this shadow firmly astern of them. This is, after all, no longer the poor relation of oceanic shipping, with decent rates having been established for some time, and a veneer of quality established over a rough and ready sector.

There is money in the business, and no excuse for the minimum maintenance regime which disfigured it in the past. Which is why there must be some dismay at the regular Intercargo review of performance, and the fact that there are still some areas found wanting. Perhaps this is not surprising, as at times of peak activity there is a tendency to gloss over deficiencies and keep the cargo moving and the ships on the berth.

It is clear that there is a continuing responsibility to guard against the sort of practices that saw such execution among bulk carrier seafarers some years ago. With ships that are running flat out, and terminals desperate to shift cargo, there is the temptation to pressurise masters on loading rates, or imaginatively to alter the cargo plan to suit the man driving the belt.

For a period it seemed that the message was getting through; that ships were rather more fragile than they looked and the structure and hull stresses were areas of relevance to people other than those on the ship. Now we hear that the demand for coal and iron ore, and the long queues of ships waiting in roadsteads off bulk ports, is putting pressure on performance. Maintenance requires ships to be taken out of service, if this work is being done properly. There is a limited amount which can be done during a ballast passage, almost nothing when the ship is being loaded. It is also worth mentioning the fact that ships are working harder than ever, ballast pumps working overtime as the tanks are washed through, as is other ship machinery.

Inevitably there will be a price that must be paid for a reduction in maintenance, which cannot be put off for ever. It is also something, perhaps, for port and flag state control to be aware of, along with the classification societies which hold so many of the keys to the technical condition of ships and their structural integrity.

Elder statesmen

THERE is, we are told, a serious problem emerging with the retirement en masse of so many senior industry figures. They leave behind them a gap that cannot immediately be filled by people who just don't have their experience.

So it is interesting to see the launch in Bremen last week of The Marine Senior Expert Network Foundation, a group of enormously experienced shipping people able to offer technical advice on a vast range of subjects. More than 30 senior experts have been assembled in northern Europe, Scandinavia, South America, Turkey and the Middle East. Their emphasis will be on quality shipping, towards which they will hopefully contribute.

Chairman Hans de Goeij, who will be well known from his work heading up the Bureau Green Award scheme in Rotterdam is behind this initiative, inaugurated precisely to address the shortage of high quality technical expertise, which is undoubtedly beginning to bite. A central secretariat will direct the experts to where their expertise is required.

It is not the first time that marine industry people have grouped together to promote their particular skills. But it could be significant at this particular moment in time, when so many experienced people are disappearing from the industry, which paradoxically needs them more than ever.

The sad truth about spills



IT WAS October, so it must be Ostend, with a grey sea washing on the white sands of West Flanders, and the rain falling in stair-roads. The huge art-deco Thermane Palace, built when the health-giving properties of sea air and salt-water bathing constituted the holistic medicine of that era, looked a bit sad, as all seaside hotels do when the season has gone. A few herring gulls, which are pretty weather-proof in most circumstances, flew lazily along the tideline, keeping a beady eye on proceedings on the empty beach.

These feathered friends were certainly not unobserved, as the hotel in Ostend was tenanted last week by the 4th Sea Alarm Conference, which brought not far short of a hundred people together to consider oiled wildlife, response, planning and co-operation.

It was organised by the Sea Alarm Foundation, an admirable organisation which began in 1999 to address the hugely fragmented groups of immensely well-intentioned people who would spring into action, when wildlife was oiled at sea.

It always seems something of a miracle that whenever oil is spilled as a result of marine accident, or deliberate and criminal pollution, there are people who will come forward to help rescue the affected wildlife. It is a function of their humanity, although it is entirely understandable that such charitable efforts tend to be confined to those areas where people are not struggling to feed themselves.

But being volunteers, they need direction, co-ordination, training and management, if they are not to do more harm than good, because there are clearly correct ways of dealing with wildlife in mortal peril from spilled oil.

Just as best practice has emerged from decades of experience of professionals dealing with pollution incidents, the same needs to be encouraged among the huge number of volunteer wildlife rescuers.

Communication is the key and the Sea Alarm Foundation aims to encourage strategic alliances between those who actually participate in oiled wildlife rescue and the non-governmental organisations, industry and governments, which constitute the professional responders and preparedness planners.

It brings people together, linking a network of wildlife response experts worldwide, who have the experience, and others who have both expertise in related fields and the resources. Among these patched into the Sea Alarm systems are oil spill responders, ship-owning organisations, marine insurers, salvors, government organisations, the European Commission, national authorities, along with animal welfare and conservation groups.

It promotes best practice, serves as a conduit to share information, with communication, preparedness and response its three watchwords. Along with the International Alliance of Oiled Wildlife Responders, which is their own specific network, Sea Alarm is the link with a wider world, employing an excellent website and regular newsletters.

Its periodic conferences are held as part of this laudable process of information sharing.

I have to say that in common with many of us in the industry, I subscribed to the view that there was a lot less oil being spilled these days. We can take our children and dogs onto the beach without getting them covered in tar. We have all seen those graphs issued by expert observers, which show a steep decline and perhaps permit ourselves a little pride in this progress.

I have to say that I felt rather less complacent lis-



tening to Kees Camphuysen of the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research give a keynote address on oil pollution and sensitive bird populations in Europe, in which he emphasised that there was a very good reason for concern.

As the author of a recent research report on Chronic Oil Pollution in Europe, published by the International Fund for Animal Welfare, he was in no doubt that this remains a very live issue.

Chronic oil pollution is that which doesn't hit the headlines, a more or less continuous stream of oil into the sea, mostly deliberate discharges of oily wastes which are dumped by ships when those aboard think nobody is looking.

I read the report as I trundled home from Ostend on the train and it made me very uncomfortable indeed, indicating as it does the gulf that evidently exists between what people say they do, and what actually happens.

The fact is that it doesn't take a *Braer* or *Sea Empress*, *Exxon Valdez* or *Torrey Canyon* to cause mayhem among the wildlife. A slight miscalculation by the salvors working on the wreck of the *Tricolor* saw a bunker tank holed and 170 tonnes spilled into the sea. A modest enough amount, it might be thought, but it was January and tens of thousands of migrating birds were wintering off the Belgian banks.

So that small quantity of oil, in the wrong place and at the wrong time caused the most frightful execution to the wildlife. Mr Camphuysen is quite emphatic about this.

"It is a misconception that large spills cause greater environmental damage than small spills: what matters are when and where the release happens and the type of oil that is spilled," he says.

But it is the deliberate pollution that is the most worrying feature. At this Sea Alarm meeting there were no nose-ringed green activists foaming away about irresponsible industry. It was calm, level-headed stuff, but the message was quite clear: there are still a large number of oil spills and shipping has something to do with it.

There were maps shown of oil spills detected by aerial surveillance and there was a very uncomfortable correlation with the shipping routes around Europe, the Baltic, Mediterranean and Black Sea.

At times like this us shipping folk start desperately to think up excuses for this reprehensible behaviour. Perhaps it was the wake which showed up in the photograph. What about all the fishing boats that operate in these areas — how often do they employ shore reception facilities to take their oily slops and bilge-water? But even if only a half, or a quarter of these incidents were caused deliberately by merchant vessels, it is still pretty disgraceful.

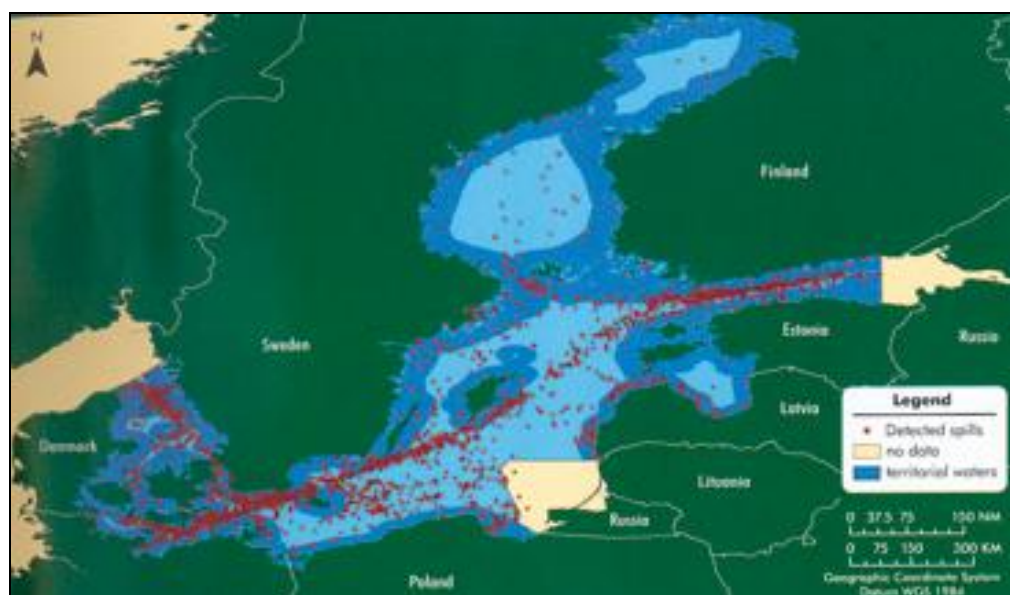
And we all know why it is done — and one the following excuses attached.

"The separator is bloody useless; too slow and can't cope with the emulsions caused by a mixture of wastes and detergents."

"The port we are heading for has no reception facilities at a price my tight fisted owner will willingly pay for."

"The charterer will be screaming blue murder if we have a full slop tank on arrival at the load port."

Someone else believes that his budget will be eroded if a tank wagon has to be summoned to take



Spills in the Baltic: 2695 were detected between 1998 and 2004.



An aerial view of Ostend in September 2003 showing the impact of the oil that leaked from *Tricolor*, which sank in December 2002.

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away the slops, or disapproving and career-threatening questions asked about costs.

On an on the excuses go.

"It's only a little bit of light oil".

"My contract only lasts for the trip, and I need another".

But there are no real excuses and it is a message that ought to come from the very top that this behaviour, which has nothing to do with accidents, cannot be tolerated.

We have raged on about the European Union criminalising accidental oil pollution, but this is deliberate, criminal behaviour that deserves a lot more of the industry's energies to combat.

And this, for goodness sake, is the 21st century — why can we not design ships that make it virtually impossible to pump slops over the side? Why can we not incentivise slop collection, or police its use? Why can we not declare a port without facilities unsafe, as we would if it had silted up? Why can we not come down hard on rogue charterers for their unreasonable demands for owners to do things that are antisocial and encourage illegality?

The IFAW report goes in big on the need for some specific pollution training for seafarers, but it is only the excellent Hellenic, Turkish, Australian and Cyprus Marine Environment Protection Associations which have grasped this nettle.

Specific elements in the maritime colleges' courses dealing with pollution and its effects are recommended.

Seafarers do not naturally play fast and loose with the environment and represent the generality of societal views. They could do with a little encouragement, less preaching and threats, but some training, too, would go down well.

Mr Camphuysen is a hugely interesting speaker, who stresses the need for more research into sea bird populations. Data deficiency was a fact of life, even in many European areas. Birds, he infers, seem to operate counter to man's logic.

During the 1960s-1980s, when uncontrolled fishing in European waters had devastated stocks, birds thrived, largely because all the bigger fish, which ate the smaller fish eaten by birds, had been caught!

But there seemed no doubt that any oil spills constituted a major threat to them when they were in their wintering areas, where winter mortality could double during an oil spill. Interestingly, he suggested that resources to counter the effects of spills should be supplemented in these particularly vulnerable areas, employing risk-based methodology.

There was a fascinating debate on the rehabilita-



Oil spills clearly follow shipping routes.

tion of oiled birds, and whether it was worthwhile in the long term, if such intervention only put off death by a few weeks or months.

Wasn't it kinder just to put them down? It was measured, clinical argument, which seemed to conclude that rapid intervention and the right treatment to lightly oiled birds could be very successful. But once again, all depends on the right facilities, proper training, the best possible procedures for the species in hazard.

In Ostend, not least because of the execution to wildlife after the *Tricolor* spill, the government of West Flanders has highly developed contingency plans which include a strong element for wildlife rescue. Now a sophisticated and permanent wildlife rescue and response centre is under construction and will be in operation next year. We heard of equally comprehensive facilities in California.

Progress with Sea Alarm has also seen the organisation linking up with the oil industry's professional responders OSRL/EARL, which has in concert with

Sea Alarm seen the development of air portable kits for wildlife rescue and rehabilitation which can be flown out to spills virtually anywhere in the world.

For all the abuse they get from industry haters, the oil companies try hard to be responsible and it would be good to see this attitude, which manifests itself in financial support for Sea Alarm replicated rather more around the maritime industry.

Interesting too that salvors are also strong supporters, with Smit Salvage's Hans de Rooij, president of the International Salvage Union, closely involved as a vice-chairman. Ian White, who most will recall as the former director of the International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation, is similarly employed in his retirement, bringing with him all his huge experience of oil spills.

Roelf de Boer, the chairman of Sea Alarm, describes the links between the organisation and the oil industry which has seen the latter as major contributors as "highly unusual", but it is clear that it has been critical in enabling it to become the "robust and successful" organisation he says Sea Alarm is today.

Clearly the energies and enthusiasm of its secretariat Hugo Nijkamp also assist in another of its important missions in persuading governments to take it all seriously.

Paul Breyne, the governor of West Flanders reminded us that the *Tricolor* incident showed beyond doubt that birds matter, with hundreds of volunteers coming forward and the newspapers full of the rescue attempts for weeks.

So perhaps there is a political dimension too, in that governments of coastal states need to become more specifically engaged with the risks, contingency planning and response to oil spills that may decimate bird populations.

The day saw interventions from Intertanko, from ITOPE, OSRL/EARL, the European Maritime Safety Agency and the London P&I Club.

Later that week, there would be specialist sessions on scientific aspects co-operation and capacity building, suggestions for model voluntary rescue services. There was an associated exhibition on one day, which would demonstrate bird washing machinery, emergency response equipment, and a mobile emergency surgery room.

All demonstrating best practice, all part of the communication of ideas around the world.

I suppose, putting it rather crudely, that Sea Alarm might be seen as something of a 'tool chest' or a key to best practice; even a route to obtain decent training and advice on resources, or planning and response.

A bird killing oil spill is very much a local affair, galvanising the best efforts of local people who inevitably will come rushing forward to help. But as Roelf de Boer pointed out, response plans are worth nothing without training and skills.

But with the right training, resources and skills, the kindly volunteers become a useful force for good, who can work constructively alongside the forces deployed, cleaning up the mess and salvaging the wreckage.

Well-meaning amateurs, thus prepared, become an effective emergency service, acting on behalf of the creatures least able to help themselves.

Sea Alarm Foundation is located at Rue de Cypres 7 B10 1000 Brussels, Belgium + 00 32 22 78 87 44 email nijkamp@sea-alarm.org; www.sea-alarm.org
Chronic Oil Pollution in Europe - A status Report by Kees Camphuysen of the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research. www.ifaw.org

Demise of a name with a famous pedigree

TOO often it seems, this newspaper is found publishing the last rites of some famous British shipping name that has been taken over, or closed down, or sold off to the highest bidder, writes Michael Grey.

Christian Salvesen, which these days likes to be thought of as a 'logistics' company with its smart trucks and freezer sheds, and which will soon end up in the hands of Europe's biggest trucker, deserves a few paragraphs of an epitaph.

Salvesen's of Leith, did things in shipping which other shipping companies would not even think about.

They were a hard-case Leith shipping company, operating in the general cargo trades to Northern Europe and the Northern Isles.

They were whalers and among the greatest exponents of southern industrial whaling, wintering their catchers in Leith Harbour, South Georgia, along with a volunteer crew of West Highlandmen and Shetlanders to look after them and stop the snow capsizing the little ships.

They were ingenuity on stilts, pioneering the factory and the freezer trawler, with their famous *Fairtry* copied slavishly in their hundreds by the Soviets and their satellite ship-builders.

They operated with submersibles and were early exponents of offshore drillships as the oil industry moved away from coast.

They even operated jack-up rigs until a recession in shipping coincided with a serious downturn in the oil industry which forced out those without the deepest pockets.

They stayed with shipping until it was no longer fashionable, running coastal coal carriers. But then Salvesen came ashore, into curious avenues like housebuilding and cold stores and freezer trucks, which, I suppose, will see them in their new incarnation under new owners.

But there will be some old chaps in Stornoway, and Lerwick, and the west coast of Norway — from where the harpoon gunners hailed — and perhaps in the parts of Leith which the developers have not gentrified who will shake their heads sadly at the (probable) demise of another famous Scottish name.

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