

**MASTER MARINERS ASSOCIATION OF TASMANIA ANNUAL DINNER  
REMARKS BY  
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA  
MOTOR YACHT CLUB OF TASMANIA, LINDISFARNE  
SATURDAY 1 JULY 2023**

Good evening. I thank you for your invitation to join you all for this annual dinner of the Master Mariners Association of Tasmania. It is a great pleasure for us to be with you.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their enduring culture and continued connection to land, sea and waters.

In preparing this address, I have enjoyed learning about your Association and about merchant vessels.

Initially, your Association included Seagoing Ship's Masters, Harbour Masters, Pilots, retired Ship's Masters and shipping company executives, with an associate membership formed for people connected with the industry and with maritime operations in Tasmania.<sup>1</sup> Over recent years, serving and retired members of the Royal Australian Navy have been included as members, in recognition of the close working relationship between the RAN and the Merchant Navy.

The aim of your Association was to advise governments on matters nautical and was on the advisory committee regarding the establishment of the Australian Maritime College in the early 1970s.

I have learned that the term 'Merchant Navy' refers to a nation's commercial shipping and crews. The service and capability represented by our Merchant Navy often remains unnoticed yet plays a vital role in the prosperity and security of our nation. Merchant vessels are often referred to as the

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<sup>1</sup> Email Henry Finnis to David Hughes 8 June 2023.

backbone of international trade. They represent the cornerstone of our maritime heritage and are a crucial part of our national economy.

The Merchant Navy, as a service, has a low profile with no compulsory wearing of uniforms, no street parades or ceremony to attract attention. Merchant ships come and go from ports quietly, carrying raw materials of trade and manufactured goods across the world. Even in times of conflict, when the Merchant Navy is indispensable, it retains a low profile.

In the past, our Merchant Navy played a crucial role in our national defence and security. In times of conflict or crisis, it has come to the nation's aid, transporting troops, equipment, and supplies. It has acted as a vital support system for our armed forces, enabling them to carry out their duties and safeguard our shores.

Our Merchant Navy ships took our troops to Gallipoli, landed troops on the beach at ANZAC Cove in the ships' lifeboats, manned by merchant seamen, took the wounded to hospital ships and evacuated most of our troops from Gallipoli to Alexandria, Lemnos and Cyprus and then transported the wounded to Australia.<sup>2</sup>

It is not generally known that during the Second World War, merchant vessels were commissioned into naval service as hospital ships, supply ships and armed merchant cruisers, crewed by merchant seamen.<sup>3</sup>

During WWII, losses for the Merchant Navy were substantial. Around 5,000 merchant ships were destroyed and over 62,000 British and Allied merchant seamen were killed in action.

It has been estimated that the Merchant service losses amounted to 1 in 6, compared to the combined armed forces of 1 in 33.<sup>4</sup>

Each year, on 3 September, Merchant Navy Day, the lives of merchant seafarers lost during the two world wars are commemorated. Also on Anzac Day, the service of members of the Merchant Navy is commemorated.

During the Falklands War, merchant ships outnumbered naval vessels. Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse, Fleet Commander-in-Chief, said:

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.awm.gov.au/research/guide/ww2-merchant-navy> accessed 7 June 23

<sup>4</sup> <https://anzacday.org.au/ww2-the-unsung-heroes-of-the-sea> accessed 26 June 23

“I cannot say too often or too clearly that without the merchant ships taken up from trade and those remarkable merchant seamen, this operation could not have been undertaken, and I hope this message is clearly understood by the British Nation”<sup>5</sup>.

It must therefore be disappointing to Master Mariners, as well as military strategists, to note that our Australian Merchant Navy is now small. Recent analysis indicates that the practice of using ‘flags of convenience’ to register international ships has led to the disappearance of many Australian merchant ships. Three decades ago, our national merchant fleet numbered about 100. Now it is just 14.<sup>6</sup>

This reduction in size affects our ability to use vessels as part of any mobilisation efforts.<sup>7</sup> It also increases our national dependence upon road and rail to move goods around Australia.

In Australia, the Merchant Navy should be supported with comprehensive training programs, and the offer of attractive career prospects.

We have the capability in Tasmania to nurture a strong and skilled maritime workforce. Our Australian Maritime College has state-of-the-art training and facilities, including Bridge and Engine room simulators, the latter able to recreate the operations of both diesel and electric engines.<sup>8</sup>

As I said, of note, your Association was a member of the advisory committee regarding the Maritime College’s establishment.

In conclusion, we should acknowledge our unsung heroes who served and currently serve in the Merchant Navy and thank them for their invaluable contributions. May I also acknowledge our Master Mariners Association of Tasmania. I am sure you will continue to support and promote the growth of this essential industry. I wish you the best in this endeavour.

Thank you.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://anzacday.org.au/ww2-the-unsung-heroes-of-the-sea> accessed 26 June 23

<sup>6</sup> <https://theconversation.com/how-flags-of-convenience-have-shrunk-australias-merchant-fleet-115059#:~:text=Changing%20flags%20largely%20explains%20the,Now%20it's%20just%2014>. Accessed 7 June 23

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-needs-more-than-a-strategic-merchant-shipping-fleet/> accessed 7 June 23

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.amc.edu.au/facilities/centre-for-maritime-simulations> accessed 26 June 23