

SUBMISSION TO PARLAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO KING ISLAND SHIPPING

BY IAN BERRY RETIRED MARINE ENGINEER.

I spent most of my working life at sea. During that time, I spent approximately 2 years working for the Tasmanian Transport Commission on their vessels the Joseph Banks and the Rah. The Joseph Banks was trading to both King and Flinders Islands as well as Melbourne while servicing King Island. During that time, I experienced everything that Bass Strait and the Rip into Port Phillip Bay could throw at us regarding weather and sea conditions.

Almost 50 years ago Captain "Bob" Houff had the Straitsman designed and built specifically for the triangular run from King Island, to Melbourne and Stanley. At the time the Straitsman was industry leading technology. Unfortunately, Bob was forced into bankruptcy shortly after introducing the service.

The Straitsman was laid up in Melbourne for quite some time. In the end the Federal Government were intending to direct the Australian National Line to take over the service but it was the Tasmanian Transport Commission that took it over with the financial backing of the Federal government. It is interesting to note that at the time there was a push from some people on King Island to secede from Tasmania due to the extended disruption to their shipping service.

Not long after recommencing service the Straitsman unfortunately sank in the Yarra river as the result of an error by the crew. As an aside I was due to join her the day before she sank! Obviously my number was not up that day.

Due to the sinking, the Transport Commission put out an urgent call for a similar ship to replace the Straitsman while she was being repaired. This lead to the Rah being purchased in Europe in very quick time and sailed out to Australia. I joined her upon arrival and remained on her until she was withdrawn from service when the Straitsman came back into service some 12 months later. In my opinion the Rah was the better vessel and they should have kept her and disposed of the Straitsman.

The point I want to make is that there are hundreds of islands around the world that are similar to King Island and they are serviced by a vessel or vessels that meets their needs. In the past the Government has stepped in to provide the island with a proper shipping service when disruptions occur.

If it means that a ship has to be designed and built specifically to meet the needs of the King Island community and the constraints of Grassy Harbour, then the Government will have to bite the bullet and get on with doing just that.

They don't necessarily have to operate the vessel. It could be bare boat chartered to a reputable and experienced shipping company that already have the infrastructure and personnel in place. In my opinion TasPorts do not have the experienced nor personnel to efficiently operate a shipping service.

Recently the Victorian Government commissioned the well respected and highly regarded marine shipbuilding company Damen to build a dredge that will operate in the Gippsland Lakes. The point I'm wishing to make is that Victoria have had a vessel built for what is essentially a non-commercial port, so surely the people of King Island deserve a shipping service at least as good as they had almost 50 years ago.

I realize that it was many years ago that I was involved in King Island shipping and that some things have changed. However, there are some things that haven't change and providing King Island with a suitable ship to service their island with a triangular service remains an obligation that the State Government must meet.

Respectfully yours.

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