

Mitropoulos warns against complacency Bulker casualties and boxship design top agenda

Neville Smith - Thursday 8 May 2008

INTERNATIONAL Maritime Organization secretary-general Efthimios Mitropoulos has warned of creeping complacency over increasing bulk carrier casualties and weaknesses in containership design and operation.

Addressing the 84th session of the Maritime Safety Committee, Mr Mitropoulos also urged delegates to settle issues related to the introduction of the Long Range Identification and Tracking programme.

Other big agenda items for the eight-day meeting include working groups addressing goal-based standards and the role of the human element.

Mr Mitropoulos said that despite the work of IMO to enhance safety, there were occasional reminders of "areas where complacency has been allowed to creep in or where new work should be undertaken".

"One of those areas may concern containerships from both the structural and operational safety points of view," he said.

Commenting on the report of the Marine Accident Investigation Branch into the beaching of MSC Napoli, he said the report "does not make good reading". He added "a fervent hope that the MSC Napoli accident constitutes an isolated case".

The United Kingdom delegation agreed that the casualty will have "significant repercussions for the industry" in terms of amendments to International Association of Classification Society rules on buckling strength, requirements for more accurate container weights and for safety to take precedence over commercial imperatives.

The International Chamber of Shipping is leading a project to formulate a code of best practice for container shipping, which marine director Peter Hinchliffe indicated would include a requirement for all boxes to be weighed before shipping.

The draft code will be presented to MSC 85 for debate on which elements might be adopted into regulations, he said.

Zodiac Maritime Agencies last week said it had identified inaccuracies in the MAIB report "which would benefit from further technical review".

Released too close to MSC to be submitted formally, the MAIB report will instead be presented to the Flag State Implementation committee in June. Mr Mitropoulos also used his address to point out that, although the loss of bulk carriers remains on a long-term downward trend, eight ships and 39 lives were lost in 2007, according to Intercargo data.

He said recently released statistics from the Union of Marine Insurance Underwriters showed the combination of total and partial ship losses has accelerated noticeably over the past few years.

The final figure for 2007 appeared to confirm an upward trend and based on data compiled since the start of 2008 loss of life so far this year "gives rise to serious concern, as in comparison with the average number for recent years, it is worryingly high". All the IMO's relevant bodies as well as member states and industry must "react and react fast" he said to overcome what he hoped were temporary adversities.

Nonetheless, the committee's working groups have a packed agenda, with most attention focused on

agreeing the operational detail of the LRIT programme, discussing amendments to the International Safety Management Code and the adoption of a mandatory code for casualty reporting.

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