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Committee Secretary
Transport and Public Works Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Sir or Madam

Submission to the Inquiry into a sustainable Queensland intrastate shipping industry

My name is Paul Gallagher, and I am currently an elected official of the Queensland Branch of the Maritime Union of Australia.

I went to sea as a deck boy in 1986, following three months of sea college in Tasmania. Over time I became an Ordinary Seaman, then an Able Seaman, and retrained as an Integrated Rating in 1991. I have sailed on every kind of vessel in Australian waters: coastal shipping, ferries, tankers, international shipping, oil and gas platforms, etc.

For most of my time in the industry, there was no problem securing employment and there was always plenty of work available.

That began to change around 2000. The industry was deregulated under the Howard Federal government. The engagement and roster system administered by AMSA (the Australian Maritime Safety Authority) was abolished, and replaced by company employment. We began to lose Australian crews on coastal shipping, as the Federal government began to issue 'single voyage permits' that allowed foreign vessels with foreign crews to operate in Australian waters. Australian ships went to anchor while more and more foreign ships began working in our waters.

In 1986, when I first went to sea, there were over a hundred Australian ships in operation. To the best of my knowledge, there are now twelve. Australian vessels simply could not compete with foreign ships, when Commonwealth legislative changes allowed foreign ships to undermine the Australian industry.

As a result, the Australian coastal shipping industry has declined steadily. The effects of this decline were not immediately felt, because they were offset by a significant – but temporary – boom in the

offshore oil and gas industry. Many seafarers displaced by the decline of coastal shipping found employment in that sector. Seafarers left work on ships for offshore oil and gas. There were also significant dredging projects around the country, and work was still reasonably plentiful.

The boom of offshore oil and gas has since crashed, perhaps four years ago. Now, however, there is effectively no coastal shipping industry for these seafarers to find work in, and many seafarers are experiencing unemployment. Based on my experiences and observations, those seafarers who acquired some experience in offshore oil and gas industry will pick up occasional limited work in that area, but still have no seafaring work for most of the year. Those seafarers without that experience in the oil and gas industry will often not even get that limited amount of work. This is true of many seafarers with years of experience, fully qualified to work on "blue water" coastal ships, but for whom no work is available, because of the prevalence of foreign ships performing that work.

Originally, I always worked on blue water ships. Over time I began to do more work in the offshore industry. I worked in Gladstone for some time, but after that, could not get any work. The only work I could get was a little bit of casual work relieving on tugs. I finally got some work on a fuel tanker out of Brisbane. This was meant to be a six week job, but I was put off the ship after ten days, when the company discovered I was a relieving union official. I was off work for some time after that, and it was clear to me that I was not going to get a job in the industry. I was still unemployed when I ran for office, and was elected to a position with the Queensland Branch of the Maritime Union in 2015.

Signed:



Paul Gallagher

