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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

I am an unemployed seafarer, and I wanted to write to tell the committee how hard it has been for me because of the decline of our shipping industry.

I have been a seafarer for more than 30 years. My first job on a ship was 1985. Prior to that I had only had a couple of jobs – working as a factory hand, and then a zookeeper.

Since 1985 I have done pretty much every type of work for a seafarer. I have done work in coastal shipping, international routes, and worked in the offshore industry (oil and gas).

I worked my way up from a deck-boy ordinary seaman to able seaman, and eventually, to bosun. My memory is it took me six years to go from deck-boy to able seaman, and then another ten years to get to bosun.

I have worked on the intrastate route between Gladstone and Weipa. Altogether I did about fourteen years on that run. My second stint on this run lasted ten years or more. However, there had been rumours and talk for years of foreign ships taking over the Gladstone-Weipa route. I and other seafarers were concerned that this work would not last much longer, and so I took up an opportunity to go to the offshore oil and gas industry.

I worked in the offshore industry for close to ten years, but the work eventually dried up, and the company I was working for started using overseas workers.

That was four to five years ago, and I have been out of work from the industry since that time.

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When I first finished up, I was not really worried. Previously, I had never been out of work for long; my experience of the industry was that there was always plenty of work around. I thought I would be right, that work would pick up again, and I would have a job. I tried to find work in the industry, paying to keep the validation of my industry qualifications, which cost me about \$2,500 in all. I sent my resumes to the shipping companies, spoke to other people in the industry about possible jobs, but all to no avail. There was never any pick up in work, and I did not get any jobs at all.

With unemployment came a lot of stress. The longer you are out of work, it seems the less likely you are to find new work. This is very true in seafaring, as a lot of seafarers get work by "word or mouth" or being recommended to employers by other seafarers. The longer you are out of work, you lose your contacts who could provide you with those opportunities.

It is very hard when you have had an income, been able to earn a living all of your life, and then suddenly, it just disappears. My career as a seafarer meant a lot to me. Even a kidney transplant did not stop me from returning to sea, I was determined to get back out there. But now, years of unemployment has taken a big toll on my mental health. My wife of 24 years, who has been with me throughout my seafaring career, has also suffered as a result. With unemployment has come a great deal of stress, anxiety, and depression. I have experienced being suicidal. There has, of course, been a financial toll too. For the last eighteen months my wife and I have been trying to sell our house so that we did not lose it instead. It looks like we have finally succeeded in doing so, but only by dropping the sale price by \$50-60,000, so that we can buy a smaller, one-bedroom house outside Gympie.

I believe it is important that something is done to try and restore jobs for seafarers in coastal shipping. There is plenty of work there, but Australian seafarers are not getting the opportunity to do it.

Yours faithfully,

Kevin Robert Thomas

