

ISWAN Conference – port levy

Good afternoon, thank you for allowing us to participate by conference call, and, in effect, expand upon what Dr Olivia Swift has contributed in her research paper about the port levy system.

David MacDonald and I today represent the ports of Tees and Hartlepool and you will see from your conference papers that we each have many years working on the River Tees and also many years' involvement with the four seafarers' charities here.

I say four, because this port is lucky to house two stations of the Mission to Seafarers, North Tees and Hartlepool, and South Tees, and also the German Seaman's Mission, and the Apostleship of the Sea. That gives three actual buildings for seafarers to use, and access to three ordained and two lay Chaplains.

Each year, approximately 5000 ships visit the Tees – which means 10000 shipping movements, and something in the region of 55000 seafarers. Every ship is visited, every seafarer is given the opportunity of being taken to one of

the clubs, or assisted with any other welfare need. In that respect, we have been adhering to the ethos of the Maritime Labour Convention when it was but a twinkle in the eye of SOLAS.

The crucial difference with the Tees is that for the last fifty years, the work of the charities, as seafarers' needs have changed and grown, has been the consistent application and donation of the port levy.

Shortly after the Second World War, the then Tees Liner Agents Association and the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers, Teesside, decided that an amount for "the churches" should be included in the port tariff. In those days, there were indeed "churches" – Norwegian, Swedish and German.

Over the years, both the charitable organisations and the associations supporting them, have changed. The "back up" is now PD Ports, The Tees and Hartlepool Port Users' Association, and the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers, Tyne Tees Branch. What has not changed, is the ethos.

So how does it work? Answer, very simply. The port tariff contains an amount, based on gross tonnage, and varying from £5 to £25, which will be collected

from each ship as part of the dues, by PD Ports. This amount is then “creamed off” from the dues and put in a separate fund now ring fenced and designated for seafarers’ charities. The ICS and THPUA decides annually a monthly amount which will be paid to each – this stands currently at about £600. Any surplus in the fund is discussed on an annual basis and a “bonus payment” made, while keeping a reserve in case shipping numbers drop, so that the monthly commitment can always be maintained. The individual bonus last year was £7000 – each. (Dr Swift’s figures are inaccurate in this respect.)

This regular and constant income stream allows planning, forecasting and budgeting. There are no constraints imposed on its use. The four charities use the funds in very differing ways: for capital projects; to make requested payments to the Central Office of the Mission to Seafarers; for the payment of salaried staff; to purchase a vehicle to transport seafarers; for day to day running costs. There is complete freedom.

Why does the system work? The system works because the Tees is an integrated river, based on a resilient and robust conservancy management system where the welfare of seafarers is considered as paramount to the safe running of the river, and where the work of the seafarers’ charities is valued,

especially as it is predominantly done by unpaid volunteers. In all the ownership incarnations of the port, the port levy has remained constant and has never been subject to threat. It is underpinned by committed, dedicated, experienced professionals who see its benefit. It allows the charities to do, at the ground level, what they do best – serve seafarers, with a sound financial footing, combined with shrewd financial management, good housekeeping, and careful stewardship. The system works, and, as an example of best practice, should be widely publicised and developed.