

Maritime Skills

2019





Position

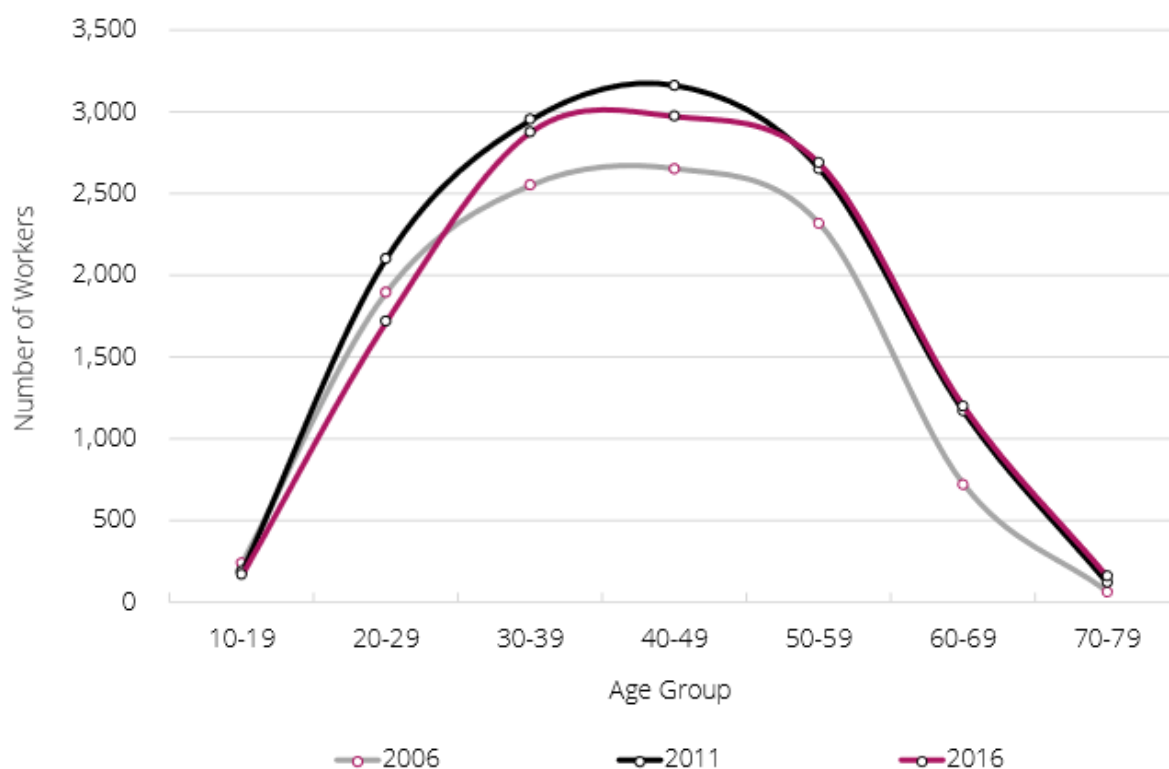
Australia is an island nation with over 98% of its trade arriving by sea equating to around \$1.2 billion of trade goods moving through our Ports every day. Our ability to trade with the world, the bedrock of Australia's economy, is therefore unequivocally linked to port operations.

However, current data and industry analysis indicates that there is a skills shortage in the maritime sector coming our way, with some employers already unable to fill certain specialist roles. Australian Ports are projected to be impacted by this shortfall.

Future Port operation vacancies such as Harbour Masters, Marine Pilots, Tug Masters and Hydrographers that are essential for the safe and efficient passage of ships through our ports, are projected to not be filled by Australians given:

- the decline of the shipping industry in Australia
- a lack of training berths for seafaring graduates
- the resulting lack of qualified and experienced mariners to undertake specialist roles
- the small aging workforce – 62.7% of workers are 45 years or older[1]
- the lack of long-term planning of the maritime labour market in Australia by Governments.

[1] <https://joboutlook.gov.au/Occupation.aspx?code=2312>



What does the maritime labour market in Australia look like?

According to the Australian Government, the average age of maritime personnel is 49 years with many workers 45 years or older (62.7%).

This is consistent with the global average. According to the Australian Industry Standards[1], the alarming trend is that the number of Maritime workers under the age of 30 has gone backwards in the 10 year period to 2016, falling 11.7 per cent, while the number of workers aged 60 and over have grown almost 73 per cent over the same time.

Analysis of this data suggests an aging workforce and a significant supply problem of new seafarers coming through the pipeline to undertake future maritime vacancies. The top two reasons identified by industry for the shortage of qualified and experienced seafarers are:

- mariners not having the relevant qualifications to undertake advertised roles and the subsequent cost/time required to invest in them; and
- an ageing workforce/current staff retiring.

These reasons are not surprising given the decline of the shipping industry in Australia, the lack of training berths for new graduates and the resulting lack of qualified and experienced seafarers to undertake specialist roles.

The rationale for this higher age of employment in these roles is the significant experience required as a prerequisite for consideration of employment. This generally includes holding appropriate tertiary education qualifications, on-the-job training requirements, around a decade or more of time at sea, and a certificate of competency as a Master Mariner.

How did it get to this stage?

The decline of the Australian shipping industry over the last two decades and the consequential inability to train and employ seafarers in Australia has contributed significantly to the limited pipeline of future mariners.

Australian shipping is on its last legs and requires significant legislative and policy changes for it to be a viable transport option when considering the management of Australia's domestic freight task. The number of Australian shipping vessels have fallen from over a hundred in the 1990's to about a dozen today.

Additionally, the legislated labour arrangements that specify wages higher than the International Transport Federation rates for seafarers traversing the Australian coast has resulted in shipping companies planning in a manner that limits opportunities for Australian seafarers.

As a result of these issues, there will be less qualified and experienced Australian seafarers who are eligible to undertake key marine operational roles in our country. In a recent industry survey 75% of employers are already reporting experiencing a maritime skills shortage in the last 12 months[1]. This is part of a global problem where a shortfall of around 80,000 seafarers is projected by 2020[2].

A survey of port managers conducted by Ports Australia indicated that the pool of candidates to choose from is adequate at this time for our major metropolitan ports but overall our regional ports are struggling to recruit adequately experienced and qualified personnel that can fulfil these roles. Regional areas in Australia are often challenged in attracting or retaining suitable personnel, and a limited pool of experienced maritime candidates is not helping this situation. Given the expected skills shortage in the maritime industry it is only a matter of time before metropolitan ports are facing the issues experienced by our regional ports.

[1] Australian Industry Standards, Maritime Industry, 2018 Key Findings Discussion Paper

[2] Australian Maritime Officers Union Submission: Coastal Trading (Revitalising Australian Shipping) Amendment Bill 2017 [Provisions]

What changes need to occur to increase our maritime skills workforce?

The solution is two pronged:

- develop a sensible shipping policy that facilitates the training and employment of Australian seafarers thereby ensuring they continue to develop and gain adequate skills and qualifications
 - undertake changes to the Temporary Skills Visa System that allow for the recognition of this maritime shortfall facing Australia and the world.
- Accordingly, this will facilitate the hiring of a limited number of foreign maritime specialist that will ensure the ongoing operations of our local maritime industry and train future Australians to succeed them.

Without considered change in policy settings, a void of specialist mariners with the necessary skills and experience to fill key roles in Australian Ports and other maritime sectors will result in the long-term insecurity of Australian Ports, the broader maritime industry and consequently the economy.



[1] Australian Industry Standards, Maritime Industry, 2018 Key Findings Discussion Paper

[2] Australian Maritime Officers Union Submission: Coastal Trading (Revitalising Australian Shipping) Amendment Bill 2017 [Provisions]