

# Letters to the editor

## Warning sign raised on new maritime technologies

Dear Sir

I would like to comment on the article *An old lesson* which appeared in *Lloyd's List Australia*, May 28 edition.

The article deals with training and development of the future transport sector workforce with an accompanying photo of a young man holding a sextant.

Hopefully, many of your readers still know what a sextant is.

While it is no longer of such vital importance as when I went first went to sea (in 1969 at the tender age of 16-years old – so yes you can call me a grumpy old sea dog), I would like to highlight the importance of appropriate training in view of the increased use of information and communications technology (ICT) on

board vessels and in the transport sector in general.

Many of you might have heard of the Volvo Ocean Race 2014/15 where seven 65ft yachts race around the world. The race is currently in its final stages, but in November last year one of the yachts (Team Vestas Wind) ran aground at night under sail, at a speed of 19 knots, in the Cargados Carajos Archipelago, an island group in the Indian Ocean about 200 nautical miles north-east of Mauritius.

The yacht was wrecked with the latest technology, including electronic charts, DGPS and satellite communications. However, Team Vestas still managed to run aground on a 190-sq km reef which had been

discovered in the 16th century and is clearly marked on all nautical charts.

It turned out that the navigator and the skipper had discussed the shoals earlier, but had not increased the scale of their electronic chart to a size at which they could identify the reef with some very low lying small islands, so assumed they were passing over 20-metre deep water.

Luckily nobody was hurt and no damage to the environment was caused. However, the yacht was almost a write-off, costing millions of dollars to retrieve and repair, not to mention a loss of prestige and sponsorship money.

The above incident demonstrated that even at a very high professional level, it can be

dangerous to rely too much on technology.

A generous dose of common sense, as well as appropriate training, is invaluable.

Since we are looking into the future towards self-driving cars on our roads and unmanned vessels sailing around the globe, it is important to ensure that these systems are foolproof.

I suppose one could say that it was human error that caused the above incident. If the yacht had been steered solely by a computer it probably would not have happened. Alternatively, if hard copy nautical charts had been used it also may not have happened.

Many *Lloyd's List Australia* readers would argue that ICT has become so ingrained in our industry and is being used in

our daily lives to such an extent that it is only a natural progression to increased reliance on this technology which should enable us to work smarter.

I do agree, but would like to stress that some basic grounding and training in the principles of how our industry works, combined with a good dose of common sense and good people skills, are still important.

Just relying blindly on what is dished up to you from your computer screen or from the voice of the GPS in your car can lead to some serious mishaps.

*Peter van Duyn, master mariner and maritime expert from the Institute for Supply Chain and Logistics at Victoria University.*



GROUNDING: Peter van Duyn.

## Box activity at the port of Newcastle made uneconomic by lease deal

Dear Sir

A secret government fee on container shipping at Newcastle port is designed to make a container terminal uneconomic.

In response to parliamentary questioning, the government says that the restrictions are included in confidential Port Commitment Deeds. It was only

NSW Freight and Ports Strategy are misleading because the restrictions were imposed two years before the strategy's release, on December 13,

Port Botany and Port Kembla were both leased to the same company on April 12, 2013. The government first referred to the restrictions on October

terminal uneconomic.

NSW Treasury made serious allegations about the negotiation at a