

# **U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy**

## **Maritime Transportation Panel**

New Orleans

7 March 2002

### **The Role of Classification within Maritime Safety**

Stewart H. Wade  
Vice President  
**ABS**

Mr Chairman, Commissioners, ABS is honored to have been invited to address this Commission on the positive role that the classification profession plays in establishing and verifying industry accepted standards for the design, construction and operational maintenance of ships and marine related facilities.

There is a great deal of commonality between the Mission of ABS, as one of the largest and most respected classification societies in the world, and the brief that has been handed to this Commission under the Oceans Act of 2000.

Our Mission as a not-for-profit organization is "...to serve the public interest as well as the needs of our clients, by promoting the security of life, property and the natural environment..." We do this primarily through the establishment and enforcement of the standards previously mentioned.

We note that, inter alia, the Act charges the Commission with developing policies that will promote "...the protection of life and property against natural and manmade hazards..." and "...the protection of the marine environment and prevention of marine pollution...."

We also note the Commission is charged with recommending areas for "...close cooperation among all government agencies and the private sector to ensure - coherent and consistent regulation....." and "....cost-effective and efficient operation of Federal departments, agencies and programs...."

In this respect we would like to stress the long standing relationship that exists between ABS and the U.S. Coast Guard, as both officially laid down in Memoranda of Understanding and through almost daily contact at all levels of our organizations.

A similar relationship exists between ABS and the Minerals Management Service in respect to relevant maritime safety issues governing the exploration and production of oil in U.S. coastal waters.

It is recognized that the role of the international classification society may not be fully understood by some of the Commissioners. We would like to use the brief time available to summarize for you the responsibilities and activities of class as they benefit not only the operators of ships, boats and offshore facilities, but also the public at large.

Classification is the mechanism by which the international maritime industry has traditionally regulated itself. Class has an obligation to the insurance industry, flag States, port States, charterers, and the financial sector, in addition to ship and rig owners and the public, to be independent and impartial in the application of its expertise.

We would emphasize that it is not up to class to determine the acceptable degree of risk associated with shipping and offshore operations. It is also not possible to mandate an error free operating environment. There will always be a degree of risk associated with navigating the uncertain waters of the world's oceans. It is the task of the government to assess that risk on behalf of society. In so doing they must take into account the degree of technical expertise available.

It is the role of classification to provide technical advice, to help the regulators frame a philosophical demand for safety into practical, implementable standards.

Given the international nature of the shipping industry, responsibility for codifying standards through international conventions lies with the International Maritime Organization, a United Nations agency. The leading classification societies provide the IMO with technical guidance as they grapple with that task.

National agencies, such as the US Coast Guard, are then responsible for implementing those standards within their coastal waters and ports, following enactment of appropriate domestic legislation.

ABS not only works with the US Coast Guard but also with more than 100 other national governments to verify that those standards are then applied and adhered to on ships registered in that nation. Examples of the type of regulations for which survey or inspection responsibility is delegated to classification societies are those relating to life saving and firefighting equipment, loadlines, anti-pollution equipment and safety construction among others.

By using the highly skilled professional classification society surveyors to undertake these delegated responsibilities, governments have obviated the need to maintain and train their own technical staff, enhancing both effectiveness and efficiency, and lessening the burden of duplicate inspections that would otherwise be placed on ship operators.

Each year thousands of ships call at United States' ports. Those ships carry this nation's trade. From TV sets and sneakers to crude oil and liquified natural gas, these cargoes are our national lifeblood.

As a nation we have the right to expect that those goods will be carried safely. We expect that our coastline should not be fouled by oil spilled from a maritime casualty. And we believe the people who sail on those ships, whether crewmembers from all the nations of the world, or American passengers enjoying the respite of a Caribbean or Alaskan cruise, should be adequately protected from harm.

It is to help meet those expectations that classification societies, such as ABS, establish comprehensive technical engineering and mechanical standards for the design, construction and maintenance of those vessels.

These standards are embodied in what are known as classification Rules. They reflect the enormous reservoir of experience and empirical evidence that has been gathered by the societies. And they reflect some of the most advanced technical research being undertaken within the maritime industry, conducted by the research and development departments of societies such as ABS.

The Rules address such fundamental issues as the structural strength of the ships, the quality of the materials used in their construction and a vessel's fitness for its intended purpose. They are derived from principles of naval architecture, marine engineering and kindred disciplines. At ABS they are developed in consultation with industry through a comprehensive technical committee review process.

For a vessel to be accepted into class the design must be reviewed and found in conformance with the selected classification society's Rules. This review is undertaken by the experienced engineering staff of the society and may include extremely sophisticated, computer based analytical procedures.

During construction, class surveyors attend the vessel to verify that the approved plans are adhered to and that good workmanship practices are followed. This may also include extensive testing of materials and systems. Once delivered, for the vessel to remain in class it is subject to periodic surveys of its hull and machinery to determine whether it is maintained in accordance with the society's Rules and standards. Similarly, any repairs or modifications must be carried out in accordance with classification society requirements.

Perhaps the pertinent question for this Commission is: to what extent does this self regulated system of classification enhance maritime safety, protecting lives and the natural environment.

The answer can be found in casualty statistics maintained by the marine underwriters and by various government agencies such as the US Coast Guard. By every accepted statistical criteria it can be shown that more cargo is currently being carried across the world's oceans by more ships with fewer casualties, less pollution and less loss of life than at any time in history.

To set this statement in context, approximately 2 billion tons of oil and oil products are carried by sea every year. 99.996 percent of that oil is delivered safely.

Can we, as an industry, do better. Of course. The safety bar is being constantly raised. Standards are being made tougher. Our technical knowledge and understanding is constantly increasing. At ABS we take our mission very, very seriously. And we believe

the current system of self regulation through classification, working closely with the appropriate government agencies, is the most effective, practical method of further improving maritime safety.

I thank you for your attention and will be happy to answer your questions.