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With some exceptions 1999 was a good year, and 2000 looks very promising. We can be proud of the Vanuatu fleet's safety record which matched 1998's.

Vanuatu's Port State Control detention rates improved significantly from previous years. If this continues, Vanuatu should be removed from the US Coast Guard's boarding matrix very soon. Vanuatu continues to do very well in other MOU areas. We congratulate the owners, officers, and crews of those vessels that were not on any PSC detention list. Well done !

Safety inspections continued at the same rate as in 1998, so we have some work to do in that regard. But overall the conditions found show continuous improvement.

The most disappointing aspect of 1999 was the number of fraudulent certificates identified during the seafarer application process. While the majority of fraudulent documents found were from India, we also found false documents allegedly issued in Spain, Honduras, Colombia, Ecuador, and Montenegro. While we continue to work with those administrations, owners are obligated to verify the legitimacy of documents before applying to Vanuatu.

The February 1, 1999, GMDSS deadline resulted in some last minute requests for extensions, mostly because equipment ordered months in advance was not available on the deadline date.

Five safety seminars were held in 1999: one each in London, Dubai, Hazira (India), Tokyo and Houston. Our first seminar in 2000 will most likely be in March in Louisiana.

The undersigned and Captain Clive Grainger, our Yokohama Deputy Commissioner, attended the eighth Marine Accident Investigators International Forum in Tokyo. The next MAIIF meeting will be in Belize City in August 2000.

False EPIRB alerts remained at alarmingly high levels. In two recent incidents the EPIRBs were miscoded so that it was impossible to positively identify the errant vessels.

We are happy to report that during 1999 there were no pollution incidents and only one traffic separation scheme violation.

And with all that, Vanuatu ended 1999 with over 500 ships on the registry, a nice increase over 1998.

Let me recap some things we need to be mindful of in the coming year and beyond:

The ISM Code becomes mandatory for most other vessels on 1 July 2002.

Many provisions of STCW 95 including the work/rest provisions are in force now.

All licensed officers must have valid Vanuatu licenses on board with them at all times.Realistic fire, boat and lifesaving appliance drills must be conducted weekly. Boats must be launched; line throwing device instructions must be given; and steering gear drills must be conducted and logged quarterly.

False EPIRB alerts are costly. EPIRBs are still being found improperly coded.

Marine casualties must be reported immediately. See the Vanuatu Maritime Regulations.

While Port State Control inspections resulted in fewer detentions, let's not be complacent.

Each vessel is subject to a Vanuatu safety inspection at any time. If your vessels are due for inspection or were not inspected in 1999, please provide their itineraries.

Notify this office immediately if your vessel has been detained after a Port State Control inspection or is alleged to have violated the IMO Routeing Schemes, the Collision Regulations, the ITU Radio Regulations, or fishing treaties or conventions.

Each manned vessel must have a minimum safe manning certificate on board. These certificates must be updated by this office if they do not address GMDSS requirements.

Vanuatu's agreements with IACS Class Societies allow class surveyors free access.

Officers applying for licenses are required to know the legislation and regulations affecting them as Vanuatu licensed officers. Ask for a copy of Maritime Bulletin # 108.

See the updated list of numbered Fleet Safety Letters. Contact us if you need copies of any Fleet Safety Letter. And call us anytime you need to discuss safety, licensing, Port State Control, equipment, pollution, etc. We will be more than happy to assist, where we can.

Best wishes for a safe & prosperous year 2000 !

Donald J. Sheetz
Executive Vice President