

# AMC's last chance to get it right

**T**HESE are challenging times for the Australian Maritime College in Launceston.

One suspects that the new principal, Professor Malek Pourzanjani, will recognise this, too, having listened to industry concerns about the way the institution is perceived to have been run over the years.



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One would hope so, for it certainly is no time for complacency, no time to dally, for time could well be running out.

Professor Pourzanjani's has joined the AMC as the college and the Federal Government negotiate its merger with the University of Tasmania.

Set against this backdrop is the grim reality that the AMC is more highly regarded overseas than it is in Australia and the danger is that it will simply flicker and disappear inside the university in time.

In recent years, it has been losing customers to rival maritime institutions in Australasia, most notably those in Perth and Auckland.

Both have displayed a willingness to better adapt to the educational needs of a changing industry environment. There is a shortfall in qualified seafarers and young professionals entering and staying in the industry, but concerns about the costs associated with retaining skilled people and training new entrants have made this a Catch 22 issue.

The AMC has been perceived in some maritime sectors as a tired institution, too focused on matters academic and too busy searching overseas for business to recognise the changes on its doorstep.

Indicative of this perceived sloth has been the virtual abandonment of the pilotage industry, which can provide a profitable and steady income stream to any maritime centre; especially in an environment where the domestic demand for seagoing officer training is on the wane.

Pilots, who require ongoing training, have in recent years tended to meet their educational needs offshore – often in specialist centres in Malaysia, Sweden or the UK – complemented domestically by the now mandatory Bridge Resource Management courses run privately by Captain Ravi Nijjer.

The irony is that the AMC failed to bring Capt Nijjer on board when the opportunity presented itself in the early 1990s. Essentially, this mistake prompted the pilot exodus.

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Australian Maritime College

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Equally ironic is the fact that pilots are well on the way to establishing their own specialist training centre (probably in Queensland or New South Wales) – what an opportunity lost!

Launceston is a delightful city, but it is not the location you would instinctively pick to build a maritime training centre. In reality, its location is down to one of the nation's most misguided cases of pork-barrelling; Tasmanian seats were needed to re-elect a federal government, so Tasmania got a maritime college.

That's all in the past, and Professor Pourzanjani has his eyes firmly focused on the future. A former marine engineer, he has extensive experience overseas.

Since arriving in November, Professor Pourzanjani has set about the job of restoring confidence in the AMC and the feedback from last week's forum would suggest that he's on the right track.

However, with the impending tie-up with the university, he has difficult decisions to make and he can't afford to get it wrong.