

SEMAPHORE

NEWSLETTER OF THE SEA POWER CENTRE - AUSTRALIA

ISSUE 13, AUGUST 2007

CIVILIAN ACCREDITATION OF RAN SEA TRAINING

The decline in Australian flagged shipping over recent decades has seen the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) become the most significant trainer of maritime professionals in Australia. As an island nation, Australia is highly dependent upon the sea for security and economic prosperity. A strong and vibrant maritime sector, both naval and civil, is critical to our nation. The RAN is committed to having the professional skills of our personnel recognised by the civilian maritime industry allowing those who do decide to leave naval service to pursue careers in the marine sector. In recent years, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) has worked closely with the RAN to develop a system for recognising naval training and sea time for the award of civilian deck and engineering qualifications.

Many former and serving RAN personnel have sought recognition for their naval service, but limited interaction between AMSA and the RAN in the past made the process difficult. This has posed problems for both ex-RAN personnel seeking employment in the civil maritime industry and for the industry itself, which suffers from a shortage of qualified and experienced mariners. The maritime industry recognises that the RAN represents a source of competent mariners with a great deal of local and regional knowledge and experience; mariners that may consider further employment in the maritime sector once they decide to leave the Navy. However, the absence of a clearly defined means for gaining a civilian Certificate of Competency has seen many former RAN personnel move into non-maritime related fields upon discharge.



The Bridge Training Facility at HMAS Watson (RAN)

Aligning State Standards

The recognition of RAN qualifications by State marine authorities came under review with the advent of the National Marine Safety Strategy in 1998.¹ This strategy, produced by the National Maritime Safety Committee, sought to improve marine safety through development of a

national regulatory system to align each of the State marine authorities on key issues.

In terms of qualification standards, the strategy outlined a uniform national approach to recognising crew levels and qualifications among marine jurisdictions. This approach identified components of Australian Defence Force (ADF) maritime training and sea service that could be recognised by State and Territory marine authorities. The strategy also supported greater recognition for sea time accumulated on military vessels in the award of civilian Certificates of Competency. In late 2000 the AMSA Advisory Committee directed that a 'gap analysis' be undertaken to identify further similarities between RAN training and AMSA's qualifications issued under the Standards of Training, Certification & Watchkeeping (STCW) Convention for both deck and engineering competencies.

RAN Seaman Officer Competencies

On the deck side, AMSA's Marine Standards and Ship Qualifications team reviewed RAN competency standards for Officers of the Watch, Navigators and Commanding Officers. This review was completed in 2002, with preliminary results showing significant parallels between naval and civil qualifications. Cargo work, engineering knowledge, ship structure, stresses and stability were the only notable shortfalls in the existing Seaman Officer Application Course (SEAAC) (now known as Junior Warfare Officers Application Course (JWAC)) training syllabus. RAN Ships Safety and Survivability training does cover such shortfalls in part, but some of this training is not directly convertible to the civil environment.

In 2003 the RAN contracted Australian Maritime College (AMC) Search Limited to complete a further gap analysis of the RAN JWAC and the AMSA approved AMC Diploma of Applied Science (Watchkeeper (Deck)) program. A second, more comprehensive study by the Canberra Institute of Technology is currently underway. Once agreed by AMSA, this will form the basis of an RAN-delivered bridging course to align qualifications.

RAN Seaman Officer Training Practices

In September 2005, the Officer-In-Charge of the Bridge Training Facility at HMAS *Watson* invited senior AMSA representatives to inspect the RAN ships and training facilities.

They toured a range of RAN ships, where they inspected bridge layouts and equipment, and spoke to several Seaman Officers onboard. Later, at *Watson*, the group observed a 'Fleet Board' oral examination, bridge simulator training and a navigation theory class. As a result of these interactions, AMSA staff concluded that the RAN's Seaman Officer training program was rigorous, and that its internal auditing system was robust. This ensured a high standard in the competencies required by STCW for the award of



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deck officer qualifications. AMSA staff also concluded that, contrary to existing policy, sea service on RAN supply ships was equivalent to warship service in terms of creditable sea time for the award of civil deck qualifications.

As part of the continuing review process two AMSA representatives were given the opportunity to ride in HMAS *Arunta* in February 2006. They joined *Arunta* in Cairns and observed pilotage and general navigation, watchkeeping, seamanship evolutions, training and general administration throughout the ship's five-day transit to Darwin.

Recognition of RAN Sea Service

In July 2006, AMSA issued a document detailing a new system of recognition of sea service for Seaman Officers to gain a STCW Certificate of Competency (Deck) whilst serving in the RAN. The document enables AMSA to recognise RAN sea service as 'equivalent qualifying sea service' in the award of a STCW Certificate of Competency.²

In essence, this means any qualified Seaman Officer (with the minimum period of qualifying sea service) can qualify for a STCW deck officer Certificate of Competency after completing an AMSA approved course of study (for the particular Certificate of Competency) and an oral examination.³

Bridging Course

The RAN is developing a bridging course for Seaman Officers to address the syllabus gaps identified by AMSA. Once approved, the course will meet requirements set out in Marine Order Part 3 for a STCW Watchkeeper (Deck) Certificate of Competency. The bridging course will be delivered to all RAN Seaman Officers as part of their JWAC training and will also be available to all currently serving Seaman Officers who wish to be awarded a deck watchkeeping qualification.

Any RAN Seaman Officer who wishes to complete an AMSA approved course prior to completion of the AMSA/RAN approval process should approach an AMSA approved training provider to gain more information on available course options and the possibility of recognition of prior learning.⁴

A similar process will be initiated for identifying and bridging gaps between high-level RAN Seaman Officer training and the AMSA Approved Advanced Diploma course.

RAN Engineering Officer Competencies

AMSA has assessed a range of RAN engineering practices and qualifications and defined a process to allow RAN personnel to have their qualifications recognised. AMSA may recognise RAN engineering sea service, provided:

- it meets the requirements of Marine Orders Part 3 - Seagoing Qualifications, and
- the applicant supplies a letter from the RAN explaining their employment detail in terms of watchkeeping on main propulsion or auxiliary machinery, day-work maintenance, etc.

Sea service must have been accrued on ships using propulsion of the kind to which the certificate of competency relates. However AMSA will recognise sea service on gas turbine ships, at half rate, up to the following amounts:

- Engineer Watchkeeper certificate – 20 weeks
- Engineer Class 2 certificate – 6 months
- Engineer Class 1 certificate – 6 months.⁵

Once the applicant has gained a STCW Certificate of Competency from AMSA, all sea service for future certificates commences from the issue of that certificate. Sea service accrued before the issue of the STCW certificate will not count towards future certificates.

RAN Sailor Competencies

Fully documented seagoing service as a rating in the specialist seaman department of the RAN, or on deck duties on equivalent Australian Government ships, will be accepted as qualifying sea service on trading ships. Such service is applicable when qualifying for a certificate as Watchkeeper (Deck) or Mate (<500 GT) with capacity limitation as Watchkeeper only.

Since 2005, mechanical technical sailors with appropriate training and experience have been eligible for Maritime Certificate of Competency as Marine Engine Drivers Grades 1 to 3. Many other technical sailors' qualifications are now also recognised within their particular civil field, including electrical, cabling, refrigeration or aircraft mechanics.⁶

The Long-Term Goals of Civil-RAN Accreditation

The joint AMSA/RAN project to assess RAN qualifications, training and sea-going duties aims to develop a smooth and practical transition for RAN personnel wishing to obtain STCW deck and engineering qualifications. This will allow them to pursue a seagoing career in the commercial sector should they decide to discharge from the Navy.

Maritime power is not just about people in grey ships fighting wars – it is the totality of the nation's interests in the maritime environment. It includes sea communications and trade, marine services, conservation of the marine environment and the managed exploitation of marine resources. Personnel who decide to leave the RAN and gain employment elsewhere in our maritime industries are not lost; rather they continue to contribute to Australia's maritime power. The processes being put in place by the RAN and AMSA should assist those who move from the Navy to elsewhere in the maritime sector.

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¹ The *National Marine Safety Strategy*, National Maritime Safety Committee (NMSC), August 1998, is available at <www.nmsc.gov.au/documents/strategy.pdf> (28 May 2007).

² Accessible online at <www.amsa.gov.au/MarineQualifications/RAN> (28 May 2007).

³ Approved training providers are listed on the AMSA website <www.amsa.gov.au> (28 May 2007).

⁴ A list of AMSA approved training providers is available at <www.amsa.gov.au/Marine_Qualifications/AMSA_Approved_Courses> (28 May 2007).

⁵ Full details regarding AMSA's requirements are available on AMSA's web site <www.amsa.gov.au/Marine%5FQualifications> (28 May 2007).

⁶ See the article at the RAN web site <www.navy.gov.au/publications/engineering/march2006/backtothefuture.html> (28 May 2007).

