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OF MARINE SURVEYORS

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September 2026



- Marine Surveyors Symposium in 2027
- Report on AIMS biennial conference
- Marine incident annual report

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Thanks to all AIMS members and the Board for allowing us to be part of your 40th anniversary conference. We enjoyed catching up with existing clients and members.

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FROM THE BRIDGE:	5
THE CEO'S DESK: A BUSY 2026 KEEPS ROLLING ON	7
AIMS INTERNATIONAL MARINE SURVEYORS SYMPOSIUM 2027	11
REPORT ON AIMS' BIENNIAL CONFERENCE RELEASED	16
TRAINING: MARINE SURVEY REPORTS – SOME COMMON MISTAKES.....	18
CARGO HATCH COVERS SET A CHALLENGE.....	20
MARINE INCIDENT ANNUAL REPORT 2025.....	22
DIGITALISATION REDEFINING MARITIME DUE DILIGENCE	26
A.I. FOR SMALL BUSINESS: MANAGING CYBER SECURITY RISKS.....	28
GUIDE FOR SHIPPING LITHIUM-ION CELLS AND BATTERIES	33
IS YOUR POLARITY-TESTING DEVICE ELECTRICALLY-SAFE?.....	34
FINALE FOR INCAT HULL 096.....	38
A STUDENT'S JOURNEY: KRZYSZTOF BIELICKI	42
SAFETY INSPECTIONS: ONE YEAR, HUNDREDS OF LESSONS.....	44
MARINE SURVEYING: MORE THAN A CHECKLIST.....	46
SURVEYING THE WORLD'S LARGEST HOSPITAL SHIP	48

Front Cover: *Global Mercy*, the world's largest purpose-built civilian hospital ship. Tymor Marine recently completed a lightweight survey and inclining test aboard the vessel. (See page 48.)

Back Cover: Marine Rescue Queensland's *Gladstone Rescue 1* at Gladstone, Queensland.



From the Bridge (Page 5.)



CEO: AMSA stakeholder forum. (Page 7.)



Marine Surveyor Symposium. (Page 11.)



Marine incidents report 2025. (Page 22.)



Cyber security risks. (Page 28.)



Incat 096 oversea-bound. (Page 38.)

ADVERTISING AVAILABLE

Advertising is now available in *Shipshape*, the official journal of the Australasian Institute of Marine Surveyors (AIMS). For all the information about advertising in our quarterly magazine, contact AIMS CEO Eric Perez at gm@aimsurveyors.com.au or on +61 492 881 737.

The use and interpretation of standards

STANDARDS form the invisible backbone around which economies round the world survive, grow and prosper.

Industry and governments use standards for consistency in decision-making which affects the safety, health and well-being of everyone. From my perspective, standards sit at the heart of good marine surveying practice. They give us a common reference point for safety, quality, compliance and consistency. They also help surveyors explain and defend their decisions to vessel owners, insurers, regulators, builders and operators. But standards are only useful when they are properly understood and applied with sound professional judgement.

In the marine industry, standards – whether national, international or classification-society generated – control how vessels and equipment are built and operated. Age, design, construction method, maintenance history, operating area, modifications and intended-use all use standards. A standard provides the benchmark, but it rarely tells the whole story.

The challenge for the surveyor is to understand what the standard requires, why it exists, and how it should be interpreted in the circumstances of the vessel being assessed.

Marine surveyors use standards to inform and drive their decision-making processes. Most of our decisions will be supported by some form of standard. Class and DCV surveyors extensively use standards on a daily basis in the design, construction and through-life monitoring of a vessel.

One of the biggest issues a surveyor is confronted with is ambiguity. Standards often use terms such as “adequate”, “suitable”, “reasonable”, “where practicable” or “as appropriate”. Those words, while promoting a certain element of subjectivity, are necessary because surveying depends on judgement, not just measurement.

However, they can also lead to different interpretations. Two experienced surveyors may read the same clause and form different views about what is acceptable. That does not necessarily mean one is wrong and the other is right, but it does



highlight the importance of reasoning, evidence and clear reporting.

We, as surveying professionals, must maintain a significant amount of caution when using standards and not treat standards as a simple checklist. A checklist has its place but it cannot replace professional experience and judgement. A vessel may appear to meet a particular clause, yet still present concerns when viewed in context.

For example, the condition of a structure, the quality of repairs, the suitability of equipment or the way the vessel is operated may raise issues that are not captured by a narrow reading of the standard. Compliance should never be confused with guaranteed safety or fitness for purpose.

Another concern is currency and obsolescence. Marine technology, materials, propulsion systems, survey methods and regulatory expectations continue to change. A surveyor needs to know whether a standard is current, superseded, advisory, mandatory, or incorporated into legislation,

contract, class rules or regulatory guidance. Applying an outdated or misunderstood standard can create risk for the surveyor, the client and the vessel owner.

The situation becomes more complex when multiple requirements apply at the same time. A vessel may be subject to national law, international conventions, marine orders, classification society rules, manufacturer specifications, industry codes and contractual requirements. These documents may overlap, use different language or set different thresholds. In those situations, the surveyor must identify which requirement carries authority, how any conflict should be managed and whether a higher professional duty applies.

Selective use of standards is another problem I have seen in practice. In disputes, claims, audits or commercial negotiations, a single clause may be quoted to support a convenient position while definitions, notes, exclusions or related requirements are ignored. That is not proper interpretation. A standard must be read as a whole, with its purpose and context in mind.

Competence remains the foundation. Standards assume that the person using them has the technical

knowledge and practical experience to interpret them responsibly. Templates, software and AI tools may assist, but they cannot carry the accountability of the marine surveyor.

The surveyor must be able to explain the basis of the decision and show how the standard was applied.

For me, good practice means confirming the current version of the standard, understanding whether it is mandatory or advisory, documenting the interpretation, seeking specialist advice where required and continuing professional development. Professional bodies also have an important role in supporting consistent interpretation through guidance, training and peer discussion.

Ultimately, standards are powerful tools, but they are not substitutes for judgement. Used mechanically, they can create inconsistency and risk. Used thoughtfully, they support safer vessels, stronger compliance, better client confidence and a more professional marine surveying industry.

Eric McIlwain
Chair of the AIMS Board

