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For Immediate Release

Container Weight Verification moves one step closer at Sydney meeting

Operational challenges of meeting new SOLAS Convention requirements for the verification and declaration of a container's mass were addressed at a meeting of shipping representatives, shippers, freight forwarders and the regulator (AMSA), at Shipping Australia's Sydney headquarters yesterday.

From 1 July 2016, a container cannot be loaded onto a ship unless a *verified actual gross mass of the container* is provided by the shipper in advance, and the shipping documentation states the method used for that verification. Delays could occur at the ship-shore interface if incorrect declarations are made, and shippers would bear the resulting costs.

The meeting agreed that operational, cultural and behavioural changes would be required within the maritime supply chain. There were proposed changes to shipping documentation and notification time-frames, and all agreed that education and awareness was essential to ensure conformance to the requirements and thus avoid expensive delays in freight movements.

The primary rationale of the IMO's SOLAS amendment is to ensure that the container's gross verified weight is communicated in shipping documents **sufficiently in advance** of loading to enable preparation of the ships stowage plan.

Attendees agreed that reliable advance notification of container weights was critical in avoiding another *MSC Napoli* incident, the investigation of which revealed that 1 in 10 containers had actual weight far in excess of that declared.

After a lengthy discussion on the appropriate advance notification it was agreed that existing terminal booking times be applied and any subsequent variation that changes the container's gross verified weight could result in the container not being loaded.

Use of existing shipping documentation, such as the electronic Pre-Receipt Advice (PRA) and the Shipper's Letter of Instruction to capture the new IMO prescribed declaration requirements, was agreed as most efficient. Stakeholders using other systems, including paper based systems, would also need to amend them to reflect the IMO requirements.

Brokers/Freight forwarders raised concerns about the responsibility for container's gross verified weight being potentially transferred from exporters to third parties (such as brokers, forwarders or transport companies) due to ambiguity over what party was classed as the *shipper*. The Australian Peak Shipper Association highlighted the importance of

consistent terminology for defining a *shipper*, along with clarity in the mandatory requirements.

Exporters/Shippers must understand what a container's gross verified weight means in the context of the SOLAS regulations and understand the two methods that may be used to verify a container's gross weight.

AMSA accepted that amendments to Marine Order 42 and 44, and Marine Notice would reflect the agreed outcomes. Additionally, declarations of verified container weights will be periodically audited as part of AMSA's Port State Control regime.

"Everyone agreed that education and awareness was vital to ensuring a smooth implementation process," concluded Melwyn Noronha, SAL GM technical services and industry policy. "SAL will develop and promulgate an industry information flyer once AMSA's regulatory material is published."

Editor's note:

For additional information contact Melwyn Noronha, general manager, technical services and industry policy on 0414 842 415.

Shipping Australia is a peak national shipping association comprising 36 member shipping lines and shipping agents that would be involved with over 70 per cent of Australia's container and car trade, over 60 per cent of our break bulk and bulk trades, and significant cruise ship and tug operations.