

Upholding the P&I club tradition

By DAVID HEASELDEN

FROM its roots in the United Kingdom where it was founded by John Holman in 1855, the Shipowners' Mutual Protection and Indemnity Association (Luxembourg) has expanded into Asia. During the late 1980s and early 1990s the P&I club which was established to provide mutual third party liability insurance for vessel owners, started to write business from South-east Asia and the Pacific Rim.

This period saw the seeds of a very strong relationship being sown as the number of members in the South-east Asian region has increased apace. From the beginning of the 21st century over 25 per cent of the club's business was being written from the area, making it our single largest operating area and is a reflection of the confidence the regional maritime community have themselves.

For a number of years the club's management looked at the feasibility of opening a regional office and in 2007 it was felt that with the expansion of business in the area, the time was right for us to do so. The club's main board took the decision to open a local office in Singapore and a fully operational branch office of the club was opened in April, managed by a wholly owned subsidiary company, Shipowners' Asia Pte Ltd.

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because it is a major maritime hub and a gateway to Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, other key areas for the club. The communications are second to none with frequent flights available to all corners of the region, ensuring that, if required, we can be with a member within a few hours of making the decision to go. Shipowners' Asia is now well-placed to provide all three key functions to its local membership – underwriting, claims and loss prevention.

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The Singapore government is committed to continuing with the development of Singapore into a major maritime centre encompassing all aspects of the maritime industry, including in our case marine insurance. To achieve this, several assistance programmes are available for new starters and existing establishments.

In the summer of 2007 whilst we had commenced making our preparations to open the office, a delegation from the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) led by the then chief

executive, BG (NS) Tay Lim Heng, paid a visit to our London office. This was to be the start of a very good relationship with the MPA who have assisted us along the way.

At the meeting we were advised as to the wide-ranging extent of the initiatives the Singapore government was providing to support the training of staff in the maritime industry. At the Shipowners' Club we place great emphasis on the training and development of our staff, and the availability of

these manpower development programmes helped immensely.

Our plans for the office included an equal mix of both expat and local executive staff and to ensure the quality of our product was not compromised during the initial period of bedding down, we had planned that the local executive staff would spend time in the London office prior to Singapore opening in order to become familiar with our business style and to train on our computer systems. We were able to tap into MPA's

Maritime Attachment Programme (MAP) to send our staff to London for training.

Going forward, now that we are a fully functional office, we are evaluating the need for trainers from our London office to come to Singapore to train the local staff on the various bespoke administrative software packages being implemented. MPA's Overseas Trainer Attachment Programme (OTAP) will meet our need in this situation. Going forward further, we hope to take full advantage of their Graduate Attach-

ment Programme (GAP) to capture graduates who have a desire to take up employment in our industry.

We have been operational in Singapore for four months now and the foundations are set for a long and fruitful relationship. We can honestly say that the help and assistance provided by the authorities has been second to none with a very positive "can do" attitude. They maintain close contact with us which has made us feel not only welcome, but the road to becoming a functional entity has been made as smooth as possible.

The club has always guarded its reputation for providing a first class service to its members and our long term aim is to build on this reputation by offering a truly global service through the establishment of branches in each of the world's three eight-hour time zones. With the opening of the office in Singapore, not only can we provide a real time service to our members, we are strategically placed to achieving our long-term goal of providing a global service in collaboration with the London and Vancouver offices.

When the upturn in the world's economy materialises, Singapore wants to be well-placed to take full advantage, and we have every intention of making our contribution.

In February 1999, the Shipowners' Club became a full member of the International Group of P&I Clubs. In 2009, the 154th year of existence, the club insures over 28,000 vessels and 6,300 members worldwide equating to just over 15.8 million gross tonnes.

The writer is Principal Officer/Director of Shipowners' Asia Pte Ltd