

## **Letter from Richard Owen OAM, Chairman, Offshore and Specialist Ships Australia Ltd to candidates for the forthcoming federal election.**

I am writing to thank you for your willingness to be a candidate in the upcoming Australian federal election and to provide important information regarding the state of Australia's maritime capability.

Offshore and Specialist Ships Australia Ltd (OSSA) is a registered charitable organisation formed to promote Australian shipping. Our membership spans the nation and comprises active and retired professionals from the maritime industry, providing us with a wealth of knowledge and deep pride in our industry. We are at a critical juncture in Australia's maritime capability. OSSA believes it is crucial that urgent steps are taken to rebuild our capability during the term of the next Australian government.

### **Australia's Dependence on Maritime Trade:**

- \* As an island nation, Australia relies heavily on sea trade, with virtually all goods and materials exported and imported via sea.
- \* Australia is the fifth largest user of commercial shipping in the world.
- \* Australia has the third-largest marine exclusive economic zone and the sixth-longest coastline in the world.

### **The Current Crisis:**

- \* Australia currently has no Australian-controlled ships engaged in international trade, leaving us exposed during times of crisis for both exports and imports.
- \* In the mid-1980s, Australia had approximately 150 Australian-controlled ships in international trade.
- \* The collapse of our fleet and an ageing workforce has resulted in a chronic shortage of experienced Australian seafarers, further exacerbating our vulnerability.

### **Geopolitical Risks Highlight the Urgency:**

- \* Rising global tensions underscore our dangerous reliance on foreign shipping, especially when key trading partners also present strategic challenges.
- \* The Pentagon has blacklisted COSCO, a major container, tanker, and bulk shipping company, for its direct ties to China's People's Liberation Army. This company conducts a significant portion of Australia's shipping trade, increasing security risks.
- \* The COVID-19 pandemic exposed our reliance on foreign shipping for essential materials.
- \* Australia's fuel reserves remain critically vulnerable, with at most a 35-day supply and no dedicated oil tankers available for emergency use.

### **What Needs to Be Done:**

- \* Establish Ministerial-level responsibility specifically for both Strategic Shipping Planning and Maritime Skills Shortages.
- \* Stimulate the use of the Australian International Ship Register (AISR) which industry has confirmed will work in its current format, if supported by government.
- \* Collaborate with specialist organisations and associations to develop a future training structure.

### **What You Can Do as a Candidate:**

- \* Raise this issue within your electorate and in discussions with other candidates.
- \* Continue to educate yourself on the topic using additional resources listed at the end of this letter.

What You Can Do if Elected:

- \* Prioritise maritime capability at the highest levels of government.
- \* Promote decisive steps to restore Australia's sovereign maritime capability. OSSA has developed a commercially viable, long-term strategy to rebuild Australia's maritime capacity.

We welcome the opportunity to brief you further and work towards a solution that safeguards Australia's economic and national security. Please contact us at [austflag@ossa.org.au](mailto:austflag@ossa.org.au) (<mailto:austflag@ossa.org.au>) Thank you for taking the time to read our letter. We wish you well in the upcoming election.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Owen OAM  
Chairman, Offshore and Specialist Ships Australia Ltd

31<sup>st</sup> March 2025

Supporting Resources:

- ASPI Article (<https://offshorespecialistships.us18.list-manage.com/track/click?u=3443459dd79a60577c68c4509&id=505e23cd5d&e=9c4a7394a9>)
- Podcast with John Anderson: Discussion on maritime resilience. (<https://offshorespecialistships.us18.list-manage.com/track/click?u=3443459dd79a60577c68c4509&id=22e0a95f04&e=9c4a7394a9>)