



Hanging up the gold braids...

After a lifetime on the water, both at sea in the Royal Navy and as a Deputy Harbour Master for one of the busiest ports in the country, it was time for change. In February 2017, I joined Marico Marine to start my career as a Marine Consultant and, being the experts that they are, there was no time to keep the training wheels on! After a week of introductions, I was packed on my way to carry out my first Port Marine Safety Code (PMSC) audit for Marico Marine.

Having recently completed my UK Harbour Master's Association Master Certificate, and with my previous experience, I was looking forward to getting out there and getting my teeth stuck into the role. Not wanting to leave me out on limb however, I was accompanied by my colleague, David, a principal consultant, and very experienced ex-Harbour Master who has an exceptional, almost photographic, recall of the code and audit process. No matter how confident you are in a role, it's always great to have someone with this experience alongside and it was great to pick up a few hints and tips throughout the process.

I'm quickly learning that my colleagues here are absolute experts in their fields, no stone is left unturned and there's a level of meticulous planning and preparation that happens before each job. Both David and I planned and had a thorough pre-read of all the ports documentation before arriving at the port which was invaluable, however with all the planning in the world, you still need to be ready for any eventuality when you arrive.

On the commute to the port both of our emails pinged and it was the new guide to good practice which accompanies the PMSC. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-guide-to-good-practice-on-port-marine-operations>, with enough time to spare we could refresh our audit forms and be one step ahead of ourselves for the audit.

We were welcomed early doors by the Harbour Master and his team with a cup of coffee, and thankfully, welcoming arms. The Harbour Master was confident in the work he and his team were doing and saw the audit as a great opportunity to be able to showcase this to independent assessors.

The next 48 hours were back to back, we had laid out our plans for the consultation and had meetings arranged with members of their team from the Chief Executive to the Port Hydrography department and many more in-between. The ports willingness to let us engage with so many groups was invaluable to us achieving a successful audit, it's not just the people at the top of the chain that provided the required information, it's the many people across all areas that help us piece together

a full understanding of the inner workings of the port. The more people we can speak with, the better our report will be.

On day one, we were able to meet with the Web Development team which provided a great opportunity for us to discuss first-hand the importance of stakeholder engagement as defined in the PMSC and allowed us to provide guidance on incident reporting and charting the statutory limits of the port.

I was also pleasantly surprised when we were introduced to a local tug operator who was willing to support us with the audit and helped us to review the recent incident history and talk through the facts of the latest incident trends. It was refreshing to see how the port was working closely with local businesses and building relationships that allowed them to make recommendations that can act to prevent recurrence of incidents.

The port's Vessel Traffic Services Supervisor made a great impression on us, when asked, he reached straight for the port emergencies checklist and the contact numbers for the relevant agencies when handling an emergency. A few simple questions from us allowed him to demonstrate that the port had an effective emergency plan in place that worked, was updated regularly, and known by all port operatives.

The port's willingness to cooperate and desire to achieve not only a good audit result, but also the personnel's keenness to ask us question about how other ports did things was both extremely helpful and interesting. So often, people find themselves worried about audits and see them as trying to catch them out – that's just not the case. AS consultants at Marico were here to take an in-depth look at the ports processes and practices and help them to ensure they're achieving the best in the safest possible way.

Working with a port that was so enthusiastic and speaking with so many people in an open and honest way gave us the opportunity to report accurately on our findings and get to the bottom of some very tricky questions. Not all audits go the way we would hope, but even when they don't, they're a crucial part of developing a culture of safety and best practice. On this occasion however, we were delighted to be able to deliver back a positive report to the ports duty holders, with recommendations based on the excellent information the team provided.

Until now, I'd always wondered what consultants did – and now I know – at least for audits! We speak, openly and honestly and we ask questions. Most importantly, we establish the facts. Our role is all about the people, letting them showcase the best of what they do and allowing us to challenge them to, on occasion, think differently about how they could do things better. As auditors we are lucky to see many ports and from my first audit I can already see alternative ways to do things I thought I knew all about. Quite often audits provide a way for us consultants to see best and also occasionally worst practise which allows us to share the lesson learnt.

If you would like to discuss your auditing needs or any of our other services, please feel free to get in contact with a member of our team who would be happy to talk through your requirements and give you an idea on the ways that we could help to support you. www.marico.co.uk

In my next blog I hope to report on the analytical side of being a marine consultant and the need to underpin sound practical expertise with scientific analysis.