

MARITIME LAW ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

17TH ANNUAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE

- AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND - 14 TO 18 OCTOBER, 1990

COMITE MARITIME INTERNATIONAL - 34TH CONFERENCE

- PARIS - 23 TO 29 JUNE, 1990

By: Ron Salter

Article 1 of the constitution of Comite Maritime International (CMI) reads as follows:-

"The Comite Maritime International is a non-governmental organisation the object of which is to contribute by all appropriate means and activities to the unification of maritime and commercial law, maritime customs, usages and practices.

To this end it shall promote the establishment of national associations of maritime law and shall co-operate with other international associations or organisations having the same object."

The Maritime Law Association of Australia and New Zealand is a constituent member of CMI together with some forty-eight other national maritime law associations. The objects of our own Association, as expressed in our own constitution are akin to those of CMI.

Since its establishment in Antwerp, Belgium in 1897, CMI has been the single most successful international body in promoting the uniformity of international law relating to maritime matters, and whilst it has now lost a little of its influence as other organisations have developed, it nevertheless remains a very important force in the field of international maritime law. This is evidenced by the fact that the 1990 conference in Paris was attended by representatives of UNCITRAL and UNCTAD, as well as by representatives of such organisations as the International Maritime Organisation and the Baltic and International Maritime Council. The United Kingdom delegation was led by Lord Donaldson and Mr. Justice Kerr and many other delegations had amongst their members some very distinguished names. Some 41 national maritime law associations were represented by around 500 delegates.

Unlike our annual conferences which involve business sessions where people give papers and reports, the CMI conference is more in the nature of an international assembly. As you will be aware, the Paris meeting was held to deal with four special topics, upon which much work had been undertaken by various international sub-committees over the previous three or four years. The purpose of today's session is in fact to hear reports from delegates of our Association who participated in the four working groups.

The conference was officially opened on the evening of Sunday 23 June, 1990 at a ceremony in the quite magnificent Salon Opera at the Grand Hotel. The opening ceremony involved three speeches (all in French) by, respectively, the President of CMI, the

President of the French Maritime Law Association, and by the French Minister of Justice. The working part of the conference began with a plenary session on the Monday morning, following which delegates broke up into the various committees to deal with the subjects under discussion. Committee discussion and debate then continued throughout the rest of the week (with a great deal of politics as well), and the conference concluded with a plenary session on the Friday afternoon, at which time the various reports which had been compiled during committee were adopted.

The programme during the week was extremely hectic. The four working days (Wednesday was free) all involved 9 a.m. starts and 5.30 p.m. finishes, there were receptions on the Monday and Tuesday nights, and there was a gala closing dinner on the Friday night. For those who felt able to spend around A\$340 per head, there was a very fine excursion on the free day to Burgundy where at least one or two members of the Australian and New Zealand delegation consumed a little too much wine!

Quite apart from the official activities, there were various fringe activities, such as the holding of receptions by various organisations. It is almost impossible to describe the atmosphere of the conference which, while on the one hand full of politics and endless debate, was on the other hand a most interesting exercise in international legal affairs. Speaking for myself - and, I believe, for the other Australians and New Zealanders who attended - I am very pleased to have had the opportunity of attending. The fact that CMI has accepted an invitation from our

Association to hold its 35th conference in Sydney is, I believe, as much a tribute to our organisation as it is to the desire of CMI representatives to visit a new place. Our Association can look forward to the opportunity of hosting the largest gathering of the "Who's Who" in the world of the maritime law in 1994.

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