

2009 Conference: NR opening remarks

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to our 2009 annual conference. More than 360 delegates from more than 30 countries registered ... not bad considering the current economic pressures on everyone, but I daresay holding the conference in Istanbul has been an added attraction to what we hope will be an interesting and valuable agenda.

Hosting our conference requires a great deal of support, including financial support in the host city. Without it delegate fees would have to be much higher. We are very grateful to the Turkish Chamber of Shipping, our principal host for this year's conference and to the Istanbul European Capital of Culture Agency who will host the Gala Dinner, which promises to be very special this year. Here this morning from the Turkish Chamber of Shipping is Capt Yilmaz Dagci, and from the Istanbul European Capital of Culture Agency is Nilgun Oren.

Most of what I want to say this morning is about the future rather than the past. But any perspective on the future needs to be placed in the context of the past and a realistic understanding of our current strengths and weaknesses.

As most of you know, we started Sail Training International just seven years ago. Everyone involved was a part of what was then the International Sail Training Association, a subsidiary of one of the UK sail training vessel operators. ISTA, as it was called, essentially did two things: it ran The Tall Ships Races in Europe in the summer and a conference in the winter. We decided that we could do more for sail training internationally if we were a separate stand-alone organisation ... and that's what we did.

When we created Sail Training International in 2002 we had ideas, ambitions, the energy that goes with a new venture ... a smile on our face, a spring in our step ... but no money and no staff. It was in effect an act of faith by our national organisations around Europe and beyond. But we soon discovered we had many loyal friends (none more loyal I must say than one man in Antwerp who helped us enormously ... we haven't seen him for a few years but he is here with us today: David Van Riel where are you?)... We had a great deal of support too among sail training vessel operators and host ports, particularly in Europe – and we quickly acquired the staff and port contracts held by ISTA. Well, that was then and this is now.

We've come quite a long way since then, and 2009 is a good illustration of this:

- The two races we organised, one in the Baltic, the other around the North Atlantic ... the creation of our International Youth Forum to give young people more of a voice in what we do ... the 'soft launch' of our International Trainee Logbook ... securing a rolling four-year sponsorship deal with the port city of Szczecin, Poland, to replace the arrangements we have had for the past six years with the port, province and city of

Antwerp as the supporting sponsor for The Tall Ships Races in northern Europe... and the recruitment of a new Chief Executive.

- This year has also seen a great deal of planning for activities in the future because 2010 will be busy too: four Tall Ships events involving 11 host ports in nine countries ... the development of 'self help research tools' to enable individual vessel operators to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of their programmes ... the launch of a much expanded internet strategy and the new *Tall Ships and Sail Training International* annual publication ... the launch too of our 'Friend of the Tall Ships' scheme ... further piloting of our International Trainee Logbook ... and a root-and-branch review of the support we provide to host ports and vessel operators that participate in our events.

We will tell you more about most of these things over the next two days. And it is important to know that these are not just a random list of unrelated projects and opportunities ... they are very much all closely linked with the 'direction of travel' that we have been on since creating Sail Training International, contributing to the vision we have of where we want the organisation to be as 'the international voice of sail training' ... 'changing young people's lives'.

You can define what we do in two very different but related and overlapping activities:

- Our traditional area of activity, the thing for which we are best known, is the organisation and management of races and regattas for sail training Tall Ships. In any one year these events now usually involve more than 100 vessels and several thousand young trainee crew members from around the world. They contribute in many important ways to our charitable purpose: the development and education of young people through sail training internationally, regardless of their cultural, religious or social background. And these events help to fund the other area of activity that we want to see grow exponentially in the coming years.
- This other area is the development, promotion and growth of sail training outside the context of a race or regatta. This is about helping to improve the quality and effectiveness of sail training programmes and standards of safety and seamanship, and promoting a better understanding of the value of sail training for young people to a much wider audience of authorities and sources of funding than is reached at the moment.

So let me tell you where we plan to go with these two areas of activity in the coming years.

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We plan to grow the number of races and regattas we organise and improve their value for both the ports and vessel operators.

In Europe we see two main opportunities for new events beyond The Tall Ships Races in northern Europe which will remain the jewel in our crown into the foreseeable future. Next year's Historical Seas Tall Ships Regatta, with host ports in Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey, will be the first of what we hope will become an annual series of events in the Mediterranean and adjacent seas in the Spring or Autumn. The other opportunity for us is 'one off' events relating to a national or city anniversary (last year's Funchal 500 Regatta and next year's Garibaldi Regatta in Italy are good examples of this), and themed events (one idea we are looking at is a regatta between three cities with major concert halls with, yes you've guessed it, a musical theme).

We see a number of opportunities outside Europe too. We have a proposal in with relevant interests in the Caribbean for an event there, to capitalise on the presence each year of a number of ships from Europe and north America and as part of a bigger programme to develop sail training for indigenous young people there. There are longer term opportunities too, we believe, in the Asia/Pacific region (a possible event involving Australia)... and we are already working on another event around the north Atlantic to coincide with Canada's 150th anniversary a few years down the road.

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We have a very good reputation in the technical aspects of running races for Tall Ships. We are a good deal weaker than we want to be and can be in the commercial aspects of these events ... this is a priority area for us now, and particularly for our new Chief Executive Paul Reilly who started with us officially at the beginning of this month and you will hear from him briefly tomorrow. Our key partners in these events are of course the vessel operators and host ports. Generally we enjoy excellent relationships with both; but we do not take either for granted. We know there are areas where we can and need to add more value for these partners: for the ports it is mostly about ship recruitment and marketing support. For the vessels it is mostly about trainee recruitment and, particularly for the big ships, in-port income.

Contract enforcement is another area that will get more of our attention. This is mostly about branding ... and in some ports it is also about meeting commitments made on services and facilities for the participating vessels and trainee crews. Most ports play by the rules and meet their commitments to us, but we had a couple this year that let us down quite badly ... in future we will find ways to ensure there is some pain attached to these infringements. Branding is going to be a big issue for us as we seek to secure a significant increase in sponsorship income, and we need this additional funding to do three important things:

1. Improve the international marketing and promotion of our events which will benefit host ports and participating vessels as well as promote sail training

2. Generate funding for a trainee bursary scheme to attract and help fund more trainees
3. Provide funding for the many other projects we undertake outside the races to develop and promote sail training for young people.

We have been very fortunate to secure a rolling four year contract with the port city of Szczecin as Presenting Sponsor of the annual summer series Tall Ships Races in northern Europe. You'll hear more about this later in the conference; but they will be hugely supportive and very demanding partners with a clear vision of what they want to get out of the investment.

Two other developments in the commercial area of what we do:

We are putting a significant new investment into our exploitation of the internet, with event-specific Newsletters and news service, and a more general newsletter and news service for a wider audience on other projects and activities. You'll see the first of these when you get back to your offices on Monday, a comprehensive conference newsletter in the new design and format.

We will also be introducing in the first quarter of 2010 our 'Friend of the Tall Ships' scheme aimed at building a relationship with the friends and families of the young trainees that participate in our events and the millions that visit in host ports. We will use this scheme among other things to drive interest and traffic to our member national organisations and the Tall Ships that engage with us.

The importance of the commercial aspects of what we do is why we hired a new Chief Executive with broad international commercial experience who has worked all over the world and lived in a few other countries besides his native UK as well. Paul Reilly knows one end of a boat from the other but does not come from the sail training or sailing world ... we have plenty of people around us with that kind of background and expertise. In addition to hiring a commercially and internationally experienced CEO we have also decided, just a couple of days ago, to hire a second Commercial Director to work alongside Gwyn Brown who most of you know. We hope you will take it that these appointments demonstrate a commitment and not just lip service to improving our commercial performance, not least for the benefit and support of host ports and the fleet.

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Now let me turn to the programmes and activities we undertake beyond our races and regattas. Our purpose here is really three-fold ... I'll say just a little about all three ... and these are not in any order of priority:

1. To increase awareness of sail training and its values with relevant international institutions.

2. To help raise standards in the delivery of sail training programmes, safety and seamanship.
3. To attract more young people to participate in the sail training experience.

Increasing awareness of sail training among key international institutions, its social value but also its strong record in key areas of safety and seamanship, is getting more of our attention. As most of you know we were successful in securing recognition of sail training for the first time ever in the regulations of the International Maritime Organisation, the IMO, through its Code for Special Purpose Ships. This has helped open the door to three projects we are working on.

We want to build on this tentative relationship with the IMO and are working with the UK's Maritime and Coastguard Agency to joint host a reception at the IMO for 'sail training friendly' flag states. Representatives of the relevant national sail training organisations will also be there. The purpose of this will be to establish some personal contacts, develop a better understanding of sail training in this key institution, and begin to explore what areas there may be of common interest.

And here's one potentially very exciting opportunity that fits with this ... we are going to start working on this with a meeting here in Istanbul after the conference. Last year the International Maritime Organisation and International Chamber of Shipping, among others, issued a paper titled 'Go To Sea'. It was driven by the realisation that there is a growing crisis in the shipping industry in attracting young people to a career at sea. The current shortfall of officers in the global shipping fleet is estimated to be 34,000 today and projected to grow to 84,000 by 2012'. The three year officer training course approved by the IMO requires a year of it to be at sea. This could be a big opportunity for sail training and not just for vessels operated by maritime academies. We are discussing with others a possible proposal to the international shipping industry and other potential backers for a training programme that will include a defined period at sea on a sail training vessel. Of course, recruitment of cadets is about pay, the duration of voyages, life on board and a number of other things; but training is also a part of marketing careers at sea and we believe time on a sail training Tall Ships could be part of the marketing as well as the training effort. It may be we have to explore this first in a narrower national context, with countries that have a significant shipping industry. Turkey clearly falls into this category ... and, together with our national organisation in Greece, Sail Training Hellas, we already have a proposal in to the Union of Greek Ship Owners.

The European Union and European Commission is another international institution with which we want to have a much closer relationship, and related groupings like the European Sea Ports Organisation. We have begun to open a few doors here too ... or rather I should say a few doors have been opened for us by someone you can expect to see a little more of in the future because we

have just invited him to join our board of Trustees: John Richardson. John has recently retired from a very varied 35 year career with the European Commission. He was the EU Ambassador in New York for a number of years and his last assignment was to head a Unit to develop a comprehensive European Maritime Policy that is now being implemented. John isn't here right now but he will be with us later today and for the rest of the conference.

So far as developing standards are concerned, two projects to mention here: Our International Trainee Logbook was to some extent born out of our work with the IMO and is designed to help raise standards in the delivery of sail training programmes, notably in areas of safety and seamanship. The other very important project for us in this general area we announced just last week: the development of a set of self help research tools that will enable individual sail training vessel operators to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of their individual programmes. This is something we committed to do following the international research programme we commissioned a couple of years ago from the University of Edinburgh. The project is being undertaken for us by Dr Kris Von Wald of Learning & Change Consulting, working with Dr Pete Allison of the University of Edinburgh, guided by a small working group of sail training vessel operators from Europe, north America and Australia.

The third area I mentioned just now is developing ideas and projects to attract more young people to sail training ... it's a big issue for us, of course, but I just want to mention one thing on this that happened this year. At our International Council meeting in March, the Country Representative for Bermuda raised a point that none of us could understand why we hadn't done anything about before now. "Here we are," he said, "we're meant to be representing sail training for young people and there's no-one in the room under the age of 50!" So we invited our member national organisations to nominate a young person, under 26 years old, to help launch our International Youth Forum. Most of its members are here for the conference, the Forum met for the first time yesterday and we will hear from at least one of the Forum members in the closing plenary session tomorrow ... I certainly urge you to be here for that.

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Well, I hope that gives you a sense of where we are in Sail Training International and what we're up to. We are delighted to see you all here and look forward to spending time with you over the next couple of days. I've covered quite a lot of detail in the past 20 minutes or so.

Now let me hand over to Terry Davies, a fellow Trustee of Sail Training International, to give you more flavour and detail on the three key projects for which he has been providing some leadership and direction: our International Trainee Logbook, the self-help evaluation tools and, not least, the International Youth Forum.

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