

Honourable Peter Frederick Morris OAM
29/7/1932-26/4/2026

A Valedictory acknowledgement to our esteemed Long Serving late Chairman, as presented at the 51st Annual Newcastle Memorial Service, *'For Merchant Mariners Lost in Time of War'*. 6 June, 2026

Sadly, the Australian Maritime and Transport Industry, lost a true icon of the Industries, with the passing of the Honourable Peter Morris OAM FNI, on Sunday 26 April, 2026 at the age of 93.

He was regarded universally by Industry, and particularly the Maritime Industry, as Australia's most successful Transport Minister, in the modern era.

Political

Peter Morris was the Federal member, for the Newcastle/Lake Macquarie electorate of Shortland, from 1972-1998. He was appointed the ALP spokesman on Transport in 1976, while in opposition under leaders Gough Whitlam, Bill Hayden and Bob Hawke. On Labor gaining Government, Peter Morris was appointed the Australian Federal Minister for Transport, in March 1983, later in 1984 including the portfolio of Minister for Aviation, in the Hawke Government. In July 1987 following a restructuring of Ministries, he was pushed to the back Bench by a Labor faction deal. He moved to Resources 1987-88, Transport and Communications Support 1988 and Industrial Relations. He then became Minister Assisting the Prime Minister in Public Service matters and Minister Assisting the Treasurer 1988-1990. He was not re-elected to the ministry due to being a non-member of a faction, with the Labor Party newly formulated faction system. After leaving the Ministry he was given the role as Chair of the House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Transport and Infrastructure, from 1990-96 in which he gained wide respect across the Maritime World and criticism with the resulting 'Ships of Shame' report.

Family Origins

Peter's Father, Agapitos Montiadis, came from the small Greek Island of Symi (Simi), 20 mile north of Rhodes, leaving home at 14 to support his widowed Mother. He arrived in Australia in 1915, working as a 19-year-old Cabin boy, on a British cargo ship (*Port Lincoln?*), that had sailed down from attending Gallipoli. He jumped ship at Port Pirie, and found work in Broken Hill NSW, where his fellow Miners having difficulty with his surname, suggested he adopt the name of Morris.

During the depression his father crewed on the Sixty Miler colliers His Dad having initially taken up residence in Sydney, then moved the family, to the NSW Central Coast, on a mixed farm near Munmorah where the Morris Family of five boys and four girls were raised. As such, Peter, had a life of hard work determination, make do and perseverance. He attended Newcastle Boys High, commencing in 1944, Peter had seafaring in his blood and at 20 he joined as pantry man, on the London Greek tramp *Wynchwood Hill* employed on the Black & Tan trade carrying Coal, Newcastle to Melbourn/Adelaide returning with Iron Ore, from Whyalla for the two NSW steel works. These tramp ships were not known for their luxurious living conditions, and he immediately wondered what he had let himself into. He advised however, it was an interesting experience giving him an insight into living conditions, the treatment of young seamen, and the class distinction on British ships. This short experience held him in good stead later in life. After that he went to Canberra, working in the finance and taxation section of the Bureau of Statistics and studying accountancy. This was followed by a return to Newcastle and position of Chief Clerk, at Repco in Newcastle, where he joined the Clerks Union.

Maritime Industry:

In the 1980's he was instrumental in supporting Australian shipowners, in acquisition of new tonnage. In the case of BHP he was involved in

assisting the Company expanding into the Australian overseas export Coal trade, with their fleet of bulk carriers. The Company negotiated a triangular trade which involved, loading Coal from NSW/Qld to Asian Ports, returning in ballast to Port Hedland WA, loading Iron Ore for the NSW steel works, at Port Kembla/Newcastle.

This trade operated very successfully without a major industrial stoppage, over nearly four decades. **BHP** in acknowledgement named their 100,000dwt bulk carrier, *Iron Shortland* partly no doubt in recognition, of his electorate and practical support. His support saw BHP build the quite remarkable *Iron Pacific* at 352 m in length the largest actual Coal carrier in the world, at 232,000 dwt. Peter was on the bridge, on the ship's initial visits to Sydney, for public open day Inspection and on her first arrival into the Port of Newcastle. He argued persistently, and successfully with the British shipowner consortium, that wanted to exclude ANL's entry into the UK European Australian trade, for which they were begrudgingly 'allowed to enter'.

International Inquiries of conditions in Overseas Maritime Industry

After leaving the Ministry, he became the Chairman of the House of Representative, Standing Committee on Transport, driving as Chairman a lengthy Inquiry interviewing Maritime organisations and overseas Ship owners, World-wide as to treatment of Seafarers and Ship Safety in general, with the report that followed which was aptly titled 'Ships of Shame'. This report shone a light on substandard shipping practices, in the overseas shipping industry. Peter related that he was not a welcome or popular visitor to many shipowners, especially some Greek owners, through high lighting the darker side of the overseas shipping industry.

This inquiry followed the loss by sinking between 1988-1991 of 47 bulk carriers worldwide, including nine that had loaded and departed Western Australian, bulk loading ports. This problem was dramatically highlighted when on 21 July, 1991, the 1969 built Greek owned Aframax tanker *Kirki* carrying 82,000 tons of oil, struck heavy weather

off the West Australian Coast north of Fremantle. Although *Kirki* possessed all the appropriate documentation relevant to her seaworthiness, the bow detached (fell off) resulting in a significant oil spill. Fortunately, unlike other incidents in which 380 seafarers, had lost their lives over the three years, no fatalities occurred.

International Commission on Shipping (ICONS)

Always busy Peter was then appointed chair of the International Commission on Shipping (ICONS), a body established by the International Transport Workers' federation, to inquire into International shipping standards. In 2001, he published another hard-hitting report, which concluded that modern slavery, and other exploitative practices were rife, among developing countries' shipping industries.

Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA).

Peter is acknowledged 'as the Father' of AMSA the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, it being his initiative and driving force that resulted in its formation emanating from the previous Federal Maritime Department of Transport. Originally based in Melbourne, it later relocated to Canberra. It was formed following the passing of the Australian Maritime Authority Safety Act.1990. It was reformed and modernised, to enhance Navigation Safety, establish Search and Rescue in Australia's allocated International Zone, Vessel Regulation and Protect the Environment. An intended move to relocate the centre from Canberra, to an all-encompassing port city (Newcastle) did not eventuate, despite both Parliamentary and local Maritime, Political and Local Council and City lobbying.

Some Aviation and Road Transport Initiatives.

Peter was involved in a controversy in relation to Australia's two Airline system which incurred the displeasure of one of the Airline principals which reflected on his original, back bench demotion. He pushed ahead with the setting up of what is now the Newcastle International

Airport which grew from a small building situated on RAAF Base Williamstown to a smart overseas and local airport.

Various major roads including the M1 extension with its improvement from Sydney north. Another saw the Stuart Highway improvement SA/NT.

Some Newcastle and Hunter Valley Initiatives.

Recipient of the Order of Australia Medal OAM

Newcastle City Council Alderman 1968-1974.

Chairman of the Newcastle Maritime Museum, which was reestablished in Heritage listed A Shed, on the waterfront in 2000 at the cost of \$2m which amount was directly attributable to Peter's persuasive expertise. Unfortunately, this excellent facility closed in 2018, due to lack of significant financial and Council support.

Encouragement and Support with the formation of the privately-owned World-class model ship handling facility at Port Ash, near Raymond Terrace.

Chairman of the Annual Newcastle Memorial Service for Merchant Mariners, lost in Time of War from 1995 to 2025.

An Honorary Fellow of the Nautical Institute, London.

Supporter of the building locally, of the replica of the first ocean going steamship built in Australia, the Paddle Steamer 'William the Fourth'. Pleasingly, their new jolly boat was recently named PETER MORRIS.

The Honourable Peter Morris, was a politician of the old school. His ability as my local Member, with his humble upbringing, gave him the ability to be able to converse with the managers of Industry to the wide-eyed youngsters, such as deck boys or a Cub Scout. An extremely hard worker, he was always across any brief he was given and he made sure he was correct. Small of stature, pugnacious, direct, a great conversationalist, persuasive with an immense knowledge on many subjects. Sadly, following a car accident, following an acrimonious

AGM of the Newcastle Maritime Museum (the contents of which are now in storage) and for which he raised with his persuasive manner over two Million dollars, toward its relocation at (heritage listed A Shed), he unfortunately never fully recovered and losing his ever patient and charming wife Flo, a few years back he was forced to enter comfortable retirement care. Unfortunately, he was forced to slow down and basically was restricted to a certain extent from the outside world lost.

Being of a generation where the modern forms of communication, neither the computer nor the telephone were fully able to be mastered, which was an unfortunate handicap. Then came Covid and loss of his voice, to add to his still active brain, the aging process was such that his last few years have been difficult in many respects. His large collection of papers and historical documents, hopefully they are not lost.

The Honourable Peter Morris OAM FNI was respected, greatly liked and appreciated certainly in his efforts for both his wide Family, local friends and constituents, many in the greater public area and especially for the Seafaring fraternity, with his initiatives both locally and world-wide such that has left a living memory in with the formation of AMSA .

For modern seafarers, Peter Morris stands alongside Samuel Plimsoll as a champion of their safety and wellbeing.

RIP Peter Morris

Captain Iain Steverson FNI presented this speech on behalf of the MN Memorial Committee.

.