

# Opening and Welcoming Address by HRH The Princess Royal

Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Firstly, can I thank you for your invitation to join you, on this occasion of the 24<sup>th</sup> International Towing Tank Conference here in Edinburgh. I hope that you also already know that in 2005 the U.K. is attempting to use every excuse, most particularly because of the bicentenary of Trafalgar, to raise the profile and awareness of the importance of the sea and the maritime industry here in the U.K. Something which I am afraid with the passage of time and a lot of people travelling by air, seems to be easily forgotten. This is another excuse for us to remind people of the importance of the sea and that Britain is still an island, again something which seems to be easily forgotten, with modern information technology and other forms of transport. So we are particularly pleased that you are here after a rather long gap, on the basis that the previous time that the Conference was in the U.K. was in London in 1963. So your deliberations I know are very special and therefore you have your own network but your very presence here does allow all of us to appreciate rather more what goes on in the background of the maritime industry. How important those groups of you are, in advancing the knowledge of the science, research, the building and safety of the ships, the platforms and the drilling rigs, which are part of the modern sea going and maritime industry and sadly we are reminded quite recently about the conditions under which sea going activities are still expected to take place.

There are reminders everywhere but most especially the impact of hurricane Katrina and the damage that it has done. The combination of the effect of the wind and the sea and the conditions of the surges, the impact on platforms and the drilling platforms in the Gulf of Mexico and the impact on all sea going traffic has been quite extraordinary. Now, you are the experts in the field, I do not know how easy it would be for you to recreate those incredible conditions either in a tank or through your computers. Every time something like this happens it challenges your ability to predict and to prevent more damage being done, than is strictly speaking necessary. On the other hand, I say, in a way it is a comfort, man may get a bit arrogant in the sense that they can overcome all adversity but nature has a way of humbling us. The sea and the wind have a way of doing it rather more often. I think those who apply their trade at sea are particularly aware of that this is true and depend on the individuals represented here through the Membership of the Towing Tank Conference. For so much that has been learnt, that has increased their potential to be safe at sea and on the sea wherever that might be and whatever those conditions might be.

We were reminded equally, not so long ago, just off the Scottish Coast, it was a large French trawler, a modern one but the crew had to be rescued because the sea smashed the bridge windows and basically removed all their electronic controls, which were then useless. The hull was fine, it was intact, but not much fun for those onboard. They have always said that water and electronics do not mix and certainly when they meet under those conditions they do not function. So there is a constant reminder out there to those who are interested, of the value of the work that you do and part of the year here in the U.K., reminding ourselves of the importance of the sea. We have had hundreds of events going on, to mark and celebrate the maritime industry and its achievements and

indeed it reminds us of, how much has been known in the past, how good our predecessors and ancestors were at designing for the sea and how much we have learnt since. There are some areas where we feel that we need to go back constantly and remind ourselves of how well people understood the risks and it was the behaviour of those people understanding the risks, that really made the difference between success and failure. I do wonder if those onboard the French trawler had had rather too much confidence in the ship they were on and less understanding about the risks of the conditions in which they were functioning and that giving them an extraordinary sense of security also laid them open to greater risks than they might otherwise have sought. It is good for all of us to be faced with that sort of knowledge and to be reminded of those situations.

The Members of the International Towing Tank Conference play a very important rôle in supporting the development of economical, safe and environmental friendly marine transportation and offshore oil and gas extraction. All of those areas have a potential to produce not just accidents and deaths to humans but also enormous ecological damage. These are significant areas of concern that you tackle and quite often with the understanding that they are out of sight and out of most people's minds, but very important if anything ever goes wrong. So the work that has been going on over the years since the Conference started, has made an enormous impact but sadly not known to quite as many as you would have hoped. In raising your profile here in the U.K., it is important for people to remember and to understand how much has changed and that a lot of that change has been due to those of you who have been Members of this Conference. Even recently there has been a huge increase in sea borne trade and we forget that at our peril. Even in 2002, 24,000 billion tonne miles sounds an awful lot but by 2004 that had increased to 27,500 billion tonne miles. The shipbuilding deliveries have risen from 33,383 million gross tonnes to over 40,000 million gross tonnes. That is an extraordinary increase when people assume that shipping has become less important and that ship borne trade has become less important.

So thank you for all the work that you do and to those of you who make the decision of where you go. I hope you will thank them as well for coming to Edinburgh, because I am sure you will enjoy Edinburgh. I know that a lot of you probably have known Scotland in the past but may I also congratulate the School of Marine Science and Technology at the University of Newcastle which has made all the arrangements for hosting the Conference. That is never as easy as it sounds I realise, but I hope that all of you will have the opportunity to enjoy this Conference but most particularly to enjoy the Programme, yes whether that is the social or the debating Conference. Most importantly to have the opportunity to meet each other for the conversations that you will have in and around the Conference and the knowledge that you have of each other and your places of work in between the Conferences. That is what will make the difference in the long run to improving the communications between all your work and how successful it will be. I am sure you will have an interesting and informative Conference, because it has such a wide ranging agenda, but possibly the real work of the Conference begins when you go back to your places of work, to be able to take with you things which you know are going to be of value to the future and to your particular areas of interest.

Enjoy the hospitality here in Scotland and in Edinburgh, I am sure you will, but once again thank you for asking me to join you here. It may come as a surprise to you to know that ships have been quite an important part of my life, some of my earliest memories have been onboard ship and I am inherently curious about how they function and their likelihood of staying afloat in more difficult situations. So I am grateful for all the work that has been done in the past and will continue to be done in the future by the Members of this Conference. Thank you.



*H.R.H. The Princess Royal*