



# Blazing a trail for others to follow

DCN's Paula Wallace speaks to Jillian Carson-Jackson about her recent election as president of The Nautical Institute and other high points in her maritime experience

**A** fierce advocate for women and campaigner for greater gender equality in shipping and maritime, Jillian Carson-Jackson is a force to be reckoned with. Respected within the senior echelon of the industry in Australia and beyond, she has just attained a position she has been working towards for many years – president of The Nautical Institute, the global body for maritime professionals. Ms Carson-Jackson is not only the first Australian president of the member society but the first female one.

When DCN caught up with Jillian recently she says of her appointment, “I think it is an important step for the NI, and for the industry as a whole”.

“Women are still identified as only representing 2% of seafarers, and a proportionately low percentage of maritime professionals ashore. For those women who are working in maritime, there is still a large percentage at the lower levels,” she says.

“I hope that, by electing me as president, the NI is demonstrating to the world the ongoing commitment to embracing, supporting and benefiting from diversity and inclusion.”

Jillian has identified three key challenges for her time as president: promoting diversity and inclusion; empowering and engaging with the NI branches; and looking to the challenges and opportunities of the digitalisation of the maritime environment.

The latter is the focus of her professional life – adapting to the increasingly digital and autonomous

environment – and is an area of enduring interest.

“I am passionate about safety, human capacity and technology – and where these intersect,” she says.

Having branched out into consultancy in 2016, much of Jillian's work involves vessel traffic services, vessel tracking systems, maritime domain awareness, port collaboration, bridge resource management and the development of the ‘smart port’.

“I would love to see Australia implement a ‘smart port’ test bed, looking to learn from the outcomes of the significant work done in this area to support the Australian industry,” she says.

She also spends much of her time teaching, both vessel traffic services skills and train-the-trainer type of courses.

“I do also teach other things, occasionally, such as project management and other government related courses. I do general maritime technical consulting on port-related activities, pilotage services, vessel tracking technologies and policy development and the like, both within Australia and overseas,” she says.

## FORTUNATE ACCIDENT

For Jillian, a maritime career was something that unfolded quite unintentionally.

“I fell into this career – it wasn't really on my agenda in high school. I was going to be a figure skater, even had a position in an ice show... until I failed a medical with a torn cartilage in my knee.

“Then I was going to go to university, but I heard of the Canadian Coast Guard College by accident and made the effort to find out more. I applied and was offered a cadetship.

“It seemed like something different, so I accepted the cadetship and headed from Ontario to Nova Scotia,” she says.

Jillian joined the Canadian Coast Guard as a bright-eyed navigation cadet at the CCG College in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada. She served for a number of years at sea, mostly on ice breakers in the Canadian Arctic and on the Great Lakes, as well as buoy tenders and search and rescue vessels in the maritime provinces.

“I eventually moved ashore and initially worked at the JRCC in Halifax, then moved to VTS in both Halifax and Saint John.”

This began her long relationship with VTS, including teaching at the CCGC for 10 years where she worked with international experts through the International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities to develop the VTS training standard and model courses.

## KEY MOMENTS

There have been many turning points in her career and “each builds on the other” says Jillian. “Even the difficult times, the harassment and the challenges faced as a woman in this industry provide learning and growth opportunities.

“I fell into maritime as an industry and had no idea where it would lead me. I still don't. I take each challenge as it presents and try to identify innovative solutions to move forward,” she says.

Aside from her early years as a cadet, Jillian remembers fondly her first ship, the CCGS *Alexander Henry* in Thunder Bay.

“In January you can imagine, it was cold, windy, snowy and lots of ice. I fell in love with ice breaking! So many different types of ice!

“My first Arctic trip was amazing, the long days, remote locations and incredible people that I met in the Inuit communities.”

She also recalls the “ever-present comments about being a woman on a ship”.

“I was constantly being judged and often felt uncomfortable, sometimes unsafe. It wasn't easy, but the joy of the job, my love of navigation and the camaraderie onboard helped.”

Once Jillian moved ashore, she had the opportunity to obtain a Bachelor degree and a Masters of Education, while teaching at the CCGC.

“This was an incredible opportunity to see ways to support the industry that I had come to love.

“The opportunity to work to influence international developments has been amazing – through the CCGC I began attending IALA meetings to develop the first ever internationally recognised VTS training standard,” she says.

“Of course all that would not have been possible without the support of my amazing husband. He left his career to become the primary care giver, staying at home full-time for over 15 years with our two children.”

A moment in history that she relishes is from the IALA VTS Symposium in Rotterdam in 1996. At the time, the IMO Standard for Training and Certification of Watchkeepers (STCW) contained Resolution 10 – a resolution that invited development of similar standards for the training of VTS personnel and pilots. In the final plenary, as Torsten Kruuse, then secretary general of IALA, was going through the conclusions of the symposium, there was one on VTS training.

“In the plenary I took the floor with a challenge to IALA to develop such training, which was met with spontaneous applause. It was quite a moment! Torsten then stood up and said ‘IALA accepts the challenge’.”

This was the start of the work on the IALA VTS Training Standard and model courses on which Jillian was invited to participate. Now, over 20 years later, the training programs have been implemented globally, and it is time for them to be reviewed and updated.

*Opposite page from left to right:*

Cadetship on the CCGS *Alexander Henry*, lighthouse re-supply run, Lake Superior, Ontario, Canada

A mother in uniform, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada - 1999

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Participating in on-ice survival tests, Resolute Bay, Nunavut, Canada - February 1988

Images supplied

From left to right:  
Chairing an IALA  
working group of the  
ENAV Committee in  
Saint-Germain-en-  
Laye, France

Meeting at the CSmart  
simulation centre in  
Almere, Netherlands



It wasn't easy, but the joy of the job, my love of navigation and the camaraderie onboard helped.

"It is a great honour for me to represent the NI in this work, and to once again chair activity to develop the training to support VTS personnel from 2020 and beyond," she says.

Jillian first came to Australia in 2006 at the invitation of the then AMSA CEO, Clive Davidson, to head up the development of vessel tracking and VTS policy in Australia.

After almost 10 years at AMSA, she moved into private consulting to pursue developments in digital data exchange, including the VHF Data Exchange System, and returned to her love of teaching.



Jillian Carson-Jackson has reached a watershed in her career in 2020, being appointed as the president of the Nautical Institute

### NOT JUST A JOB

"Working in maritime is not just a job, it is a passion, a 'calling' if you will," says Jillian.

While Jillian has achieved much in her professional roles, she also devotes much of her time to voluntary work through the NI and IALA, and promoting gender diversity and inclusion.

She remembers one of her early role models.

"When I was doing my confirmation class I had the honour of being in the class led by one of the first women ordained in Canada in the Anglican Church.

"I think that was the first time I really realised that women really could do anything, be anyone."

Jillian says she gravitates to work that "will empower maritime communities, promote safety and encourage capacity building through connecting communities of experts".

"While my work in maritime has been immensely rewarding, it has also been extremely difficult at times. I hope to promote the industry, but also acknowledge that there are changes that need to happen.

"I believe that you have to be the change you want to see, that people are inherently good, kind and supportive - you only have to show the way forward," she says.

When asked whether we will see a real change in women's representation in seagoing roles in our lifetime, Jillian says, "That's a tough one. I hope so, I will work for this, but since the IMO introduced the focus work to promote women in maritime back in the 1980s we haven't seen much change".

"The recent difficulties for all seafarers with crew changes and the ongoing challenges that we will see in the coming months and years as we continue to grapple with COVID-19 will certainly change the face of the industry," she says.

As for her own future in the industry, Jillian says, "The people, the communities, the technology, and the challenges - it continues to intrigue me.

"As my husband says, I will never 'retire' from maritime, but will continue to find new and exciting challenges. I think he is resigned to that, which is pretty lucky for me." ■

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