



Media Release

The Hon Alan Griffin MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs

VA065

Friday 4 July 2008

3 SEPTEMBER EACH YEAR TO BE KNOWN AS MERCHANT NAVY DAY

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, today announced that the merchant seamen who served Australia in wartime would be officially commemorated with the proclamation of Merchant Navy Day. The Minister made the announcement during a visit to Port Adelaide, where he met with a group of Merchant Navy veterans, Deputy Premier Kevin Foley and local MP Mark Butler.

Mr Griffin said the proclamation by the Governor-General, Major General Michael Jeffery AC CVO MC (Retd), delivered on an election commitment to declare 3 September each year as a day of national observance to commemorate the service and sacrifice of Australia's merchant mariners.

"The role of Australia's merchant mariners was vital and often dangerous," Mr Griffin said.

"During the Second World War they evacuated civilians from threatened areas, and transported supplies and personnel to and between areas of conflict."

Mr Griffin said the date for Merchant Navy Day was chosen by the ex-service community to mark the loss of the first Allied merchant ship in the Second World War, which occurred the day war was declared in 1939. The United Kingdom and Canada also commemorate Merchant Navy Day on 3 September.

Thousands of Australian merchant mariners served during the two World Wars on Australian, Commonwealth and Allied ships, as well as merchant ships from other nations. Australian and Commonwealth memorials commemorate 435 Australians known to have lost their lives serving in the Merchant Navy.

Mr Griffin said that from this year, Merchant Navy Day would be an occasion to give merchant mariners the prominence in Australia's wartime history that they deserved.

As with the recently announced Battle for Australia Day, a national day of observance would not detract from the importance of Anzac Day and Remembrance Day and would not be a public holiday.

The local member for Port Adelaide, Mark Butler, and the Port Adelaide Seafarers Memorial Community Committee is already planning a march and commemorative service to mark Australia's first national Merchant Navy Day.

Details of other commemorative ceremonies will be published on the Department of Veterans' Affairs website www.dva.gov.au as events are confirmed.

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