

One woman in a boat, but more may follow in her wake

Nadia Jamal

Women in Ms Claudene Sharp's position are not only rare in Australia - there are few of them in the world.

The 27-year-old Sydneysider yesterday became the first Australian woman to be awarded the certificate of Marine Engineer Class 1, which means she is now qualified to sail as chief engineer on any size motor vessel. Ms Sharp, who is employed by BP Shipping working on oil tankers, started as an engineering cadet with the company in 1992.

"I am told most of the other women engineers are from Baltic and Scandinavian countries, who work on coastal ships and not deep sea international trading vessels such as the BP tankers Claudene is currently sailing on," the chairman of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, Mr Ted Anson, said during yesterday's presentation ceremony.

Ms Sharp, who is one of 11 children, has been interested in ship engineering for as long as she can remember. Her father is a ship owner trading out of Papua New Guinea, where she spent many years helping out on his vessels.

Such work has long been regarded as the domain of men,



All at sea...
Chief Engineer
Claudene Sharp
makes it a first
for Australian
women.
Photo:
Andrew Taylor

but Ms Sharp was not put off by working in hot engine rooms. "I loved pulling things apart and rebuilding them," she said. Even so, she knows her new rank is "a big step for females at sea".

A love of the water is a must, she advises. But she said there would be no escape from the hard slog involved in becoming a marine engineer.

"The work is hard physically

and usually you are the only female on board," she said.

Throughout her studies - she has completed a Bachelor of Technology (Marine Engineering) - Ms Sharp watched as the

other women gradually dropped out of the course. "People go to sea thinking it's going to be romantic," she said. "But it's a lot of hard work and people can get disillusioned very quickly."

Whistleblower and uni clash over soft marking claims

Aban Contractor
Higher Education Writer

The University of Wollongong and an academic whistleblower are at war over a statement issued after a closed meeting yesterday held to discuss allegations of falling standards and soft marking.

The university claims Dr Ted Steele denied that he had said he had been instructed to upgrade honours theses - an allegation which caused a furore when reported in the *Herald* last week.

But Dr Steele said he made no such denial and attacked the university's version of what he said at the 45-minute meeting of 13 key academics of the School of Biological Sciences.

"That's rubbish," he said. "I told the meeting I was concerned that the story of the upgrade to PhD entry level and middle range pass got out into the open public domain."

"That quite frankly I was thoroughly disgusted by the way the department upgraded those marks."

The University's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Gerard Sutton, said no mark had been changed. "The process of the department has been followed to the letter," he said.

"Ted Steele at the meeting denied that he was instructed to increase the mark."

The university's statement after the meeting said Dr Steele had denied a paragraph in the *Herald* which said: "This prompted Dr Ted Steele, of Wollongong University, to allege he had been instructed to increase the grades of Honours students, a claim rejected by

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they will receive a quality education for their money following wide coverage in the foreign media, particularly in South-East Asia.

"Conscientious, hard-working Australian university staff are being maligned en masse and fee paying students are being unfairly portrayed as receiving favoured treatment," the statement said.

"If there is any basis at all to the claims then they will be vigorously investigated and dealt with."

"Australian universities deserve their reputations as world class institutions and they are not prepared to compromise by dilution of standards - nor is it in their interests to do so."

Earlier yesterday, the NSW branch of the National Union of Students sold fake degrees for a gold coin donation to protest against falling standards and reduced resources.

The union's president, Mr Ryan Heath, said the protest was on behalf of all students - Australian and full fee-paying overseas students.

The fake degree certificate from the University of [John] Howard said: "Bachelor of Arts awarded to Johnny Rich. Don't want to think? Don't want to learn? Just want a fast-track to a career? Well, at the University of Howard, we don't care as long as you've got the cash."

Mr Ryan said nobody within the university sector was surprised by the mounting examples cited by academics of falling standards.

"What is a surprise is that it's taken so long for the issue to be exposed," he said.

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wool