

Owned and operated by generations of the Roche family, Navigators has run cruise and ferry vessels from Hobart's Brooke Street Pier since 1951. The tourism company is part of Tasmania's growing maritime industry.



Locally owned

From a single-vessel fishing operation in the 1920s, Navigators now hosts Hobart's largest fleet which includes modern high speed catamarans and smaller vessels.



Experience counts

Navigators participated in an industry-wide NWDF program involving six other employers



NWDF value

In the first 12 months of MONA's opening, Navigators transported about 80,000 people to its doors. They currently carry over 50% of visitors to the museum.



NAVIGATORS

Case studies of transport and logistics enterprises and real-life accounts of how they have benefited from upskilling their workforce.

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NAVIGATORS

Ferry owner-operator Michael Roche is a second-generation seaman, the “last of the waterfront rats” to grow up on Hobart’s Constitution Dock, but the first to admit that developments in the maritime industry make upskilling essential

His family’s company, Navigators, is contracted to supply ferry operations from Sullivan’s Cove in central Hobart out to the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA). Navigators got the MONA contract in 2010, but even Roche didn’t realise how big a deal it was at first. “No one really predicted how big it would get,” Roche says.

The ferry service carried about 80,000 passengers in the first 12 months, or 50 per cent of MONA’s visitor numbers. “It was just unbelievable,” Roche marvels. To meet demand, Navigators bought a bigger boat, a more expansive and expensive boat than any in the fleet at 34m and 250-passenger capacity with a cruising speed of 25 knots, which required a higher driver’s qualification.

Operating six days a week, Roche was one of just two skippers qualified for the job, covering four days as well as due diligence as the owner-operator. “So to expand the business and relieve me a bit, we’ve trained two more skippers,” he says. “One, Tom Goodwin, he’s worked his way up from deckhand to skipper. He’s a very capable young fellow and now driving a brand-new, \$6 million boat.”

Goodwin attained his Master Class 4 ticket while completing a Certificate IV in Transport and Distribution (Coastal Maritime Operations), a national qualification

developed by the Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council (TLISC), who also brokered federal funding to enable Goodwin’s training. “We funded some of it, but fortunately we didn’t have to fund all of it,” Roche says.

The federal funding contribution was a boon to the small business, which, in upgrading to a six million dollar boat, has seen related costs rise like the tide.

“The bank wants their money back, so we have to be cautious on what we spend,” Roche says. “So the support from TLISC has been fantastic because it means the business is not having to pay a great bulk of the training fees.”

Registered training organisations (RTO) Seafood Training Tasmania and the Australian Maritime College, both based in Hobart, devised and delivered the consortium model of training for several maritime operators simultaneously.

Roche says this was because of the rising use of larger vessels, all requiring Master Class 4 qualifications, across Tasmania’s maritime industry, including aquaculture, marine construction, offshore gas projects activity, and tourism.

“It’s a regional opportunity. The trainees don’t have to go to the mainland and that’s a great benefit, especially

in Hobart. To have that training localised means they’re not away from home. It works well; it is an excellent model,” Roche says.

A modern Master Class 4 uses sophisticated navigational and communication technologies beyond Roche’s teaching ability despite his experience, he says.

“The industry is expanding so you need good training,” Roche says. “When I went through, you basically learnt on the job. There wasn’t a lot of book learning, as we used to call it. It was more practical, but now with the modern vessels, you’ve got to be able to make use of all the electronics we have, the radars and cameras.

“The equipment they have nowadays makes their job safer, and safer for other water users as much as for themselves, and the training gives them that.”

Roche says his “old” ticket has been upgraded to the new standard, “but it’s still only a state-based ticket. Tom’s ticket is national. For what we do here in Hobart, my level of expertise with the electronics is fine, but if you start going up the north-west of Australia” – as Tom Goodwin has – “it’s hundreds of boats and a whole new level of skill and concentration. You’ve got to be on the ball all the time.”

But safety is just critical on the Derwent, Roche says, where daylight hours are much shorter than the

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Australian average from autumn through spring, yet the narrow river is a busy thoroughfare for various water craft, large and small.

A Master Class 4 manages the vessel’s safe operations, including complying with international and local regulations, crew supervision, voyage planning, and maintenance of the boat and its deck equipment, such as cranes and winches.

loading passengers via a gangway, and in between provides a running commentary on the scenery. “It’s full on!” Roche says. “It looks like a glamour job and a lot of the time it is a pretty good job to have, but you are on the money all the time, you can’t relax.

“You need the training to step up these days, but the training gives you the opportunity of achieving something for yourself, your family and your life.

“The world is your oyster.”