



— CULTURE & PEOPLE

BRM is a world-leading innovation born in Australia – let's not lose momentum

JULY 2025 • BY MATT SHIRLEY • 5 MIN READ



The stricken Iron Baron.

On 10 July 1995, I was a cadet aboard the Australian Maritime College's training vessel, MV Wyuna, rounding Tasmania's northwest coast – a stretch of ocean that, on that night, was living up to its reputation as one of the windiest corners of the planet.

Having already lost a dessert of ice cream and strawberry topping over the side, as it were, I was one of the few still standing - or rather, holding on - as we turned west around the northern tip of Hunter Island at around midnight.

The force 7 northerly that had rolled us most of the day backed west, and Wyuna began to show her true colours. The corkscrewing, pounding, shaking, and shuddering did its best to throw everyone out of their bunks. So by the time we rose the next morning to news that one of my company's ships, the Iron Baron, had run aground near the mouth of the Tamar River, most of us felt a kind of seasick sympathy. It had been a hell of a night in Bass Strait.

What none of us realised then was the profound and lasting impact that grounding would have - not just in Australia, but worldwide.

Anecdotally, many international masters comment that they feel safe when entering an Australian port. That reputation was, I think, while not exactly born that night, certainly cemented in the months that followed.

In the years leading up to the grounding, exponents of the Australian shipping industry, concerned by a string of incidents under pilotage, had begun advocating for human factors and communication training to be included in Master Class 1 courses. Fortunately, they found the right person at the right time in Ravi Nijjer.

Following a chance meeting with Hans Hederstrom at IMPA 1988 and a study tour to Scandinavia to review maritime programs modelled on Cockpit Resource Management, Ravi introduced elements of what we now know as Bridge Resource Management (BRM) into the MC1 course at RMIT. And then came the Iron Baron. Within a year, BRM training - shaped by Australian industry, not mandated regulation - had been born.

And that matters. Because here, BRM isn't constrained by a fixed syllabus. It evolves, drawing on new thinking, new research, and practical lessons from the bridge and around the world - which may be what sets Australian BRM apart.

As the anniversary of the Iron Baron grounding (and the one and only time I've ever been seasick) comes around again, it's worth reflecting on just how much BRM has shaped us. For nearly 30 years, it's been a silent standard underpinning every safe pilotage transit in Australia. But it's also time to ask, in true BRM style: what else can we do?

Latest versions of Ravi's course now explore Big Data and its implications for public perception, legal accountability, and bridge performance. Other versions delve deeper into evolving human factors knowledge. And because it's not locked down, BRM here remains responsive, relevant, and varied.

So, what's next?

As I've written before, understanding the interface between people and machines - the pace of change in technology, automation, and AI - will be critical. Our industry has to adapt, not just to internal change, but to external forces: geopolitical upheaval, climate-driven volatility, green fuels, cyber risks, port congestion, and the layered realities of augmented decision-making. At the heart of all this stands the seafarer. We owe it to them to ensure they're equipped, not just with the tools, but with the understanding to use them well.

One thing's certain: whatever comes next will require both the vision of leaders like Ravi - who was rightly recognised with an Order of Australia - and the will of industry to keep pushing forward.

With thanks to Ravi Nijjer, for his tireless advocacy of human factors thinking and for helping me understand the complex, interwoven story of BRM in Australia. Someone should

write the book - and I hope they do.

This opinion piece was first published in [Daily Cargo News \(DCN\)](#) on 9 July 2025.



WRITTEN BY

Matt Shirley 


CEO & Co-founder, Safe Harbours Australia





Safe Harbours Australia


Independent maritime consultancy
delivering trusted judgment and real-
world impact across port safety, risk,
and operations.

CONTACT

 consultants@safeharbours.com.au

 +61 438 752 500

 [LinkedIn](#)

 www.safeharbours.com.au