

Evening Technical Meeting: Piper Alpha, 30 Years Later

Report on SUT Perth Branch Evening Technical Meeting
Wednesday 13th June 2018

By Paul Farquharson, Perth Branch Committee Member



The June 2018 SUT technical evening at the Parmelia Hilton was opened by SUT Perth Branch Treasurer, Sarah Elkhatib and chaired by SUT Committee Member Paul Farquharson.

The event was kindly sponsored by Baker Hughes, a GE Company and Quadrant Energy.

The evening was designed to commemorate the 167 workers who lost their lives on the night of 6th July 1988 and those who were directly affected by the disaster. A named rollcall was visible throughout the night as a reminder of the extent of human tragedy experienced.

As an opening for the evening the delegates were asked to stand, through a series of specific questions ranging from “those who may have been on board” to “who knew someone affected”. Over half of the audience were standing, which was extremely impactful to the room.

The first presentation was given by the chairperson and gave a history of Piper Alpha platform and field then moved into an emotional recount of that night. It concluded with a 22minute video called “Remembering Piper Alpha; the night that changed our world”.

The Second presentation was by Brendan Fitzgerald, MD, Vanguard Solutions. Brendan attended much of the first part of the Cullen Inquiry and hearing & reading the testimony of the survivors changed his life forever. His presentation contained some first-hand testimonies from survivors. This was very powerful on the night. The second half of his presentation addressed some of Brendan’s direct involvement in Technical Sub-Committees at the Inquiry as a Principle Process Safety Engineer. Finally, the outcomes from the Inquiry and recommendations to Industry for adoption were noted.

Our Third presentation was by Jeremy Dunster, A&I Vessel Facilities Manager, NOPSEMA. His presentation was a change from the previous emotional pitches and addressed how the Piper Alpha incident in 1988 was the catalyst for change in the regulation of offshore petroleum activities in several jurisdictions. He provided a detailed timeline of how the regulations have evolved and how the fundamental regime for offshore petroleum activities in Australia has been the move from a prescriptive, rules-based approach, to an objective-based approach. Today, NOPSEMA, independently regulates the safety, well integrity and environmental management of offshore petroleum activities across all the Commonwealth’s offshore areas. He closed by addressing the need for industry and regulators to work together going forward, to make a step change in safety, well integrity and environmental performance, and how we should never forget to impact of Piper Alpha.

The final presentation of the evening was by Ian Grant, COO, Quadrant Energy. He presented an in depth and frank perception of how Piper Alpha affected him personally and how he has kept the events of that night with him throughout his whole career and maintains its relevance within the executive position at Quadrant Energy. The presentation provided an overview of the practical methods that Operators use to not just comply with the post Piper Alpha era regulatory requirements, but also by utilizing modern methods to enhance the safety of all personnel in the operating environment, from facility design through to operating, maintenance and integrity philosophies. It concluded with a video showing wide industry involvement in the WA/NT program of “Safer Together”

In a change to normal a SUT Evening Technical Meeting all questions were left to a panel discussion at the end. The questions from the floor included “does the panel feel the industry has learned?” and “as an industry, are we too cautious in our HSE training? for example BOSIET training”. The answers provided a great and varied insight. The presentations and whole evening was extremely well received by the 130 attendees (159 registered).

Thank you to the SUT members, new members and guests for their attendance during the evening. Also, to the four presenters that, in their own time, volunteered to speak at the event. The emotionally charged event ran extremely smoothly and garnered some very thought provoking discussions and meetings in the post presentation drinks. I would like to conclude by thanking again to our ETM sponsors, Baker Hughes, a GE Company and Quadrant Energy. Events like these cannot be realised with key sponsorship and support.