

# 1602 Charter of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) Online

The Dutch East India Company, the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), was founded in 1602. In so doing it became the first multinational corporation in the world, and only the third joint stock company in history. It went on to become the world's largest commercial entity of the 17th and 18th centuries, employing up to 30,000 people, at a time when the Netherlands had a population of barely two million.

Trading from Japan to the Red Sea, the VOC displayed considerable diplomacy and business acumen in the building its trading empire. In essence, it was for them a new business environment and a new business model, one in which they generated huge wealth by bringing goods, much in demand, to Europe through utilization of their superior maritime technologies and organizational skills. In the period of its existence it also carried a million people from Europe to Asia.

But the significance of the Charter and the VOC goes well beyond that. The VOC came to play a significant role in the history of a number of countries, Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, South Africa, Japan and New Zealand for example, and of course Australia. Their Cape Colony was the beginnings of modern South Africa. They colonised part of Indonesia. VOC ships were the first outsiders to make contact with Australia (Janszoon in the Duyfken in 1606) and New Zealand (Tasman in 1642). The VOC mapped about two thirds of Australia's coasts. Many historic VOC shipwrecks litter the waters of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, the west coast of Australia and many others. One such shipwreck, the Batavia off the west coast of Australia in 1629, led to the infamous Batavia Mutiny, and resulted in two of the mutineers becoming the first Europeans to reside in Australia.

The indelible impacts the VOC left on history, both good and bad, have been analysed and retold in a staggering number of books, research papers and popular accounts. A number of replicas of VOC ships, such as the Batavia and Duyfken, have been built, and many museums and libraries in various countries have displays dedicated to VOC history.

Given the historical significance of the VOC and the Charter as its foundation document it is surprising that no English translation is readily available. The history and heritage division of the Australasian Hydrographic Society, Australia on the Map, recently sought to rectify this. As a result, the world's first online English translation is now available for all who care to see on the Australia on the Map Division website.

Visitors to the site, be they hydrographers, historians, researchers, students, or anyone with an interest in maritime and commercial history, can see for themselves how the States General of the United Netherlands was motivated to grant a trading monopoly to the new united company from the Cape of Good Hope to the Straits of Magellan, what percentage the Directors earned, what amazing powers were given to the management and how the VOC was structured and put together. It is with great satisfaction that we have been able to make such an important document available to all people, so that they can see for themselves and assess the original source as directly as possible, instead of relying on others' interpretations and secondary sources. We urge anyone with an interest to visit the site to appreciate the significance of such an important document.