



SEMAPHORE

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Plea for IMO to Lead Alternative Fuel Development

A proposal for the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to take a leadership role in the development of “green shipping fuels” is currently in development by liner shipping representative body, the World Shipping Council (WSC).

Expected to be finalised ahead of the IMO’s Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) 75 meeting of March next year, the proposal entails establishment of a new, dedicated-purpose entity, under the IMO’s supervision.

Backed by substantial industry participation, the body – potentially named the International Maritime Research Board (IMRB) – would provide the developmental resource and focus that would not be “feasible” for any one company or country, says WSC chief executive John Butler.

Speaking at this month’s three-day JOC Events Container Trade Europe Conference in Hamburg, Mr Butler urged the IMO to embrace the proposal when finalised.

“The IMO has adopted a very ambitious goal of cutting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from shipping in half by 2050, even as cargo demand is expected to grow, and taking those emissions to zero by the end of this century,” he says.

“If we are to meet those objectives, and we must, then we have to identify and deploy a new generation of fuels. There is simply no other way to solve the problem, and over just the last couple of years the fact that we need a replacement for fossil fuels has become almost universally recognised and accepted.”

Mr Butler envisages the IMRB would be funded by mandatory industry contributions based on fuel use – something already tracked by the IMO.

“The money collected would be used to fund research that could be carried out by a wide range of entities around the globe, ranging from research institutions to national laboratories to independent institutions and companies.

“In addition to some basic science, the emphasis would be on evaluating which technologies have the greatest potential to be commercially feasible for powering long ocean voyages, and then doing the engineering work to get those fuels and technologies to the point whether they can be commercially viable.”

A fundamental characteristic of the IMRB would be its specific design to “work itself out of a job and out of existence”, emphasises Mr Butler.

“That reflects the fact that the whole idea of the IMRB is to solve the root problem of GHG emissions by finding and deploying new fuels, not simply looking for further efficiencies from existing fossil-fuel-based systems.”

IMO Initiatives

As the clock ticks down to the January 1 implementation of the MARPOL Annex VI regulation limiting marine fuel sulphur content to 0.5%, IMO Secretary-General Kitack Lim is advising that “solid progress” is being made to reduce GHG emissions from global shipping.

“The 2020 entry into force of the new global sulphur limit of 0.5% for ships’ fuel oil was first adopted in 2008 and confirmed again in 2016,” he says.

“It has been a long time coming and is now fast approaching.

“IMO has worked hard, with Member States and the shipping and bunker supply industries, to support the implementation of this important, global rule. Detailed and comprehensive implementation guidelines have been developed for the shipping industry, for fuel oil suppliers and for Member States.

“Ultimately, compliance rests with the industry, while monitoring and enforcement are the responsibility of the IMO Member States. I get a clear sense that the Member States and the industry are taking this responsibility very seriously indeed.

“I am confident that the implementation date on January 1, 2020 will be managed smoothly.”

Attending this month’s United Nations’ Climate Action Summit in New York, Mr Lim made various presentations and held a number of meetings to outline the IMO’s proposals and actions in the fight against climate change as well as to explore potential future collaborations.

In support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in particular SDG 13 on Climate change, the IMO is seeking individual ships currently at sea to ultimately reduce their existing emissions by over 80%.

According to the organisation: “The IMO initial GHG strategy has sent a clear signal to the shipping industry of the way forward and there are already strong signs that it is being embraced by both industry and financial institutions. Battery-powered and hybrid ferries, ships trialling biofuels or hydrogen fuel cells, wind-assisted propulsion and several other ideas are now being actively explored.”

During the Climate Action Summit the IMO also published a new leaflet entitled: “IMO Action to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions from International Shipping”.

Getting to Zero Coalition

In a complementary development, an alliance of over 60 companies within the maritime, energy, infrastructure and finance sectors – supported by key governments and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) – has recently launched the “Getting to Zero Coalition”.

The Coalition has stated its commitment to ensuring that commercially-viable, deep-sea, zero-emission vessels powered by zero-emission fuels are in operation by 2030 – “maritime shipping’s moon-shot ambition”.

“The Getting to Zero Coalition is a partnership between the Global Maritime Forum, the Friends of Ocean action and the World Economic Forum,” states the Coalition’s Website.

“It builds on the Call to Action in Support of Decarbonisation launched in October 2018 and signed by more than 70 leaders from across the maritime industry, financial institutions and other stakeholders, as well as on the Poseidon Principles – a global framework for climate-aligned ship financing – launched on June 18, 2019.

“The Getting to Zero Coalition brings together decision makers from across the shipping value chain with key stakeholders from the energy sector as well as from governments and IGOs. The work will be supported by knowledge partners such as UCL Energy Institute, Environmental Defense Fund and the Energy Transitions Commission.”

Transporting about 80% of global trade by volume, international shipping currently emits 2%-3% of global GHG emissions, notes the Coalition.

It says the decarbonisation of shipping could serve as the “engine that drives green development across the world”.

“The falling costs of net-zero carbon energy technologies make the production of sustainable alternative fuels increasingly competitive. Determined collective action in shipping can increase confidence among suppliers of future fuels that the sector is moving in this direction.

“This will translate through the supply chain into increased demand for zero emission fuels. It could also be an important point of leverage for change across other hard-to-abate sector, thus accelerating the broader energy transition.

“New marine fuels, derived from abundant untapped renewable resources, could also bring substantial development gains. Ports and shipping already underpin many countries’ economic growth – if shipping becomes a reliable source of demand for zero emission fuels, it has the potential to drive investment in energy projects in developing and middle-income countries.”

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