Adjusted Proposal for U.S. Port Fees

News 18 April 2025 #Competitiveness

Restoring America's Maritime Dominance?

For some time now, potential port fees from America have gripped international maritime shipping. On February 27, an initial proposal for these port fees was published by. According to this proposal, the port fees would apply to ships built in China, ships with a Chinese link and ships flying the Chinese flag. The revenue from these fees is intended to finance the broader package of measures called "Restoring America's Maritime Dominance".

The United States Trade Representative had opened this initial proposal for responses until March 24, 2025. A total of 586 responses were submitted. After which, the USTR had until April 17, 2025, to analyze the responses and, if desired, adjust the proposal. As a result, the entire international shipping community looked forward to this adjusted proposal with a sense of appropriate curiosity. Today, it appears that the revised proposal seems to have significantly less negative impact on Dutch shipowners. Although trade barriers are bad for international business, the KVNR is relieved that the negative consequences of the initial proposal are now limited.

Adjustments

Just before 1 AM last night (Dutch time), the USTR published the amended port fees. At that moment, this new regulation also entered into force immediately. For the first 180 days, a zero rate applies. From October 14, 2025, the rate will increase. Subsequently, an increase follows annually on April 17. The practical implementation of the port fees will therefore be October 14, 2025.

In the explanatory note, the USTR indicated that the submitted responses and the hearings of March 24 and 26 caused the proposal to undergo significant revisions. The economic impact of the original proposal would have resulted in too big negative consequences for the economy, ports, employment and consumer prices in the U.S.

In the adjusted package of port fees, not only has the scope of the fees been modified, but so have the rates themselves.

Scope Rates

Worldwide ship positions of the Dutch Fleet

NB: for the safety of seafarers and ships, not all ship positions are displayed on the map.
Map: KVNR • Source: Data KVNR • Download image • Created with Datawrapper

Scope

For Dutch shipowners, the most significant adjustment seems to be the scope of the regulation. In the original proposal, it was not only about the ship calling at a U.S. port, but it was also dependent on the percentage of Chinese-built or flagged ships in the entire fleet of the shipowner. This has now been removed from the proposal. Ships in order at Chinese shipyards are also no longer included. So, only ships built in China already in service and calling at U.S. ports are relevant for the calculation of port fees. In addition, several exceptions have been included, leading to some Chinese-built ships are outside the scope of the fees.

The regulation consists of the following categories:

- Fees for ship operators and owners from China;
- Fees for ship operators of China-built ships (including various exemptions);
- Fees for ship operators of car carriers built outside the U.S.;
- Restrictions on certain maritime transportation services (especially for the sea transport of LNG intended for export);
- Rates for “ship-to-shore” cranes and other port transfer materials coming from China.

If a China-built ship is replaced by a U.S.-built ship and if this ship is ordered and delivered within a three-year period, the U.S. customs can suspend the fees for that ship being replaced. In addition to this exception, there are further exceptions for shipping companies operating China-built ships that are essential to the U.S. economy and employment.

The following China-built ships are exempt from the regulation above:

1. US owned or US flagged vessels that are enrolled in US security programs;
2. Vessels arriving empty or in ballast;

3. Ships with a capacity up to 4,000 TEU + , 55,000 DWT + (excluding bulk) or 80,000 DWT (bulk only);
4. Short sea voyages of less than 2,000 NM + from a foreign port or point;
5. US-owned vessels, if the US entity owning the vessel is controlled by US persons and for at least 75% beneficially owned by US persons (UBO) + ;
6. Specialized or special purpose-built vessels for the transport of chemical substances in bulk liquid forms;
7. So-called "Laker Vessels", to be identified on CBP Form 1300 or its electronic equivalent.

For Dutch shipowners, the third point above is particularly good news. The Dutch fleet mainly consists of smaller ships. Data analysis of ships affiliated with the KVNR shows that only two ships do not fall under one of the exceptions.

For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that it is currently unclear whether a China-built hull of a ship subsequently completed outside China qualifies as 'a ship built in China' or not.

Rates

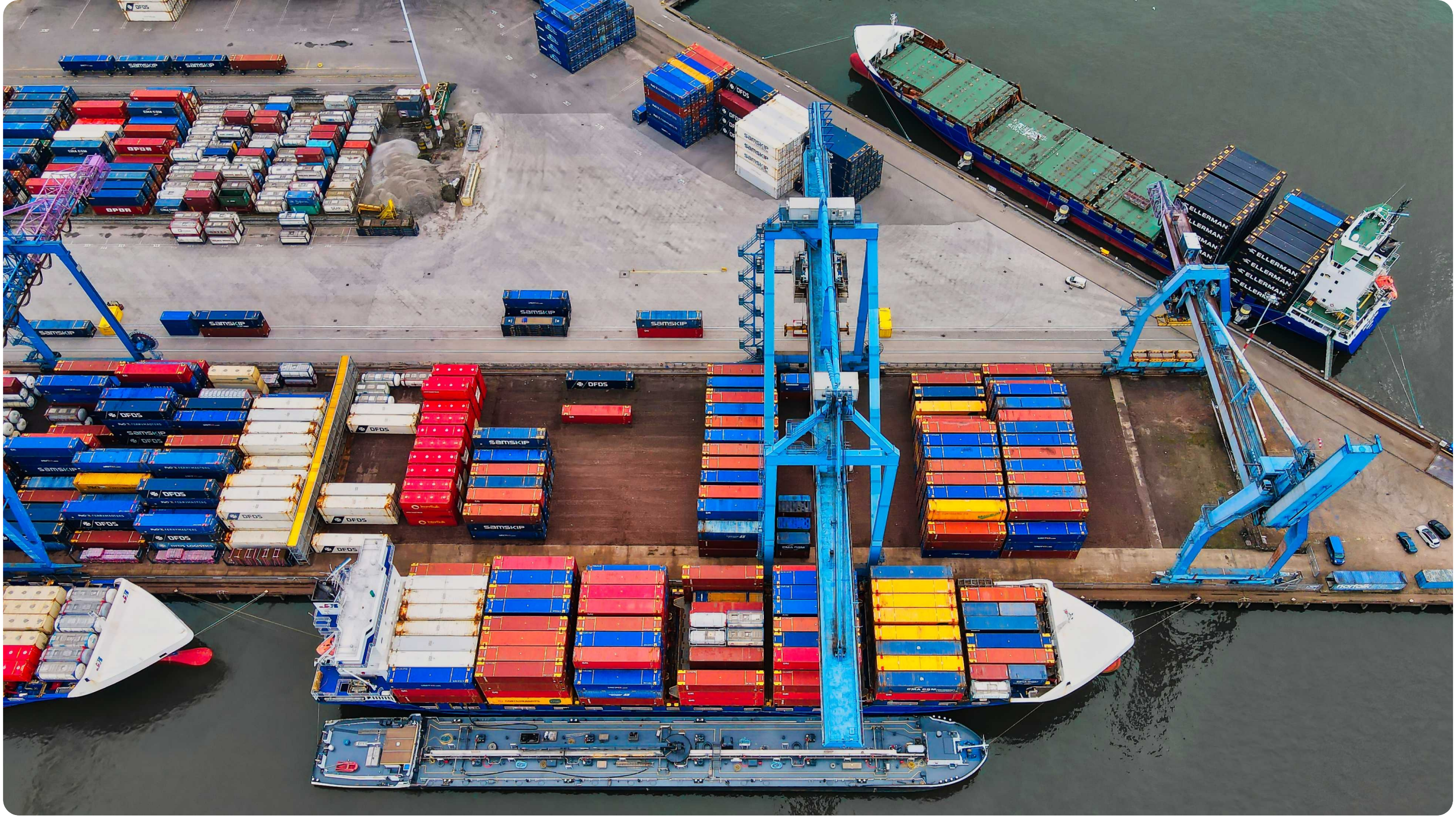
The rates for ships built in China are as follows:

- As of April 17, 2025: $0 per net ton + of the vessel;
- As of October 14, 2025: $18 per net ton of the vessel;
- As of April 17, 2026: $23 per net ton of the vessel;
- As of April 17, 2027: $28 per net ton of the vessel;
- As of April 17, 2028: $33 per net ton of the vessel.

For container vessels the scheme is as follows:

- As of April 17, 2025: $0 per container discharged;
- As of October 14, 2025: $120 per container discharged;
- As of April 17, 2026: $153 per container discharged;
- As of April 17, 2027: $195 per container discharged;
- As of April 17, 2028: $250 per container discharged.

The total amount payable is capped at five times per year per ship. Additionally, the fee is not calculated per port call but only at the first U.S. port the ship calls at per voyage. If the ship subsequently calls at other ports in the U.S. during the same voyage, the fee is not charged again.



China is the scapegoat

With these adjustments by the USTR, it has become clear that the goal is genuinely to target only Chinese shipowners and ship operators. Shipowners and ship operators from other countries, such as the Netherlands, that sail with ships built in China remain largely unaffected due to the broadly formulated exemptions. The nearly 600 responses submitted during the consultation of the proposal published in February 2025 and the hearings in March 2025 have prompted the U.S. government to reconsider. The conclusion was clear: without adjustments, the American economy, jobs, and consumers would suffer. Now, from a Dutch perspective, it seems that only China is affected.

Undoubtedly, questions will arise over time. The KVNR is on top of this and will keep you updated on developments.

Get in touch with...

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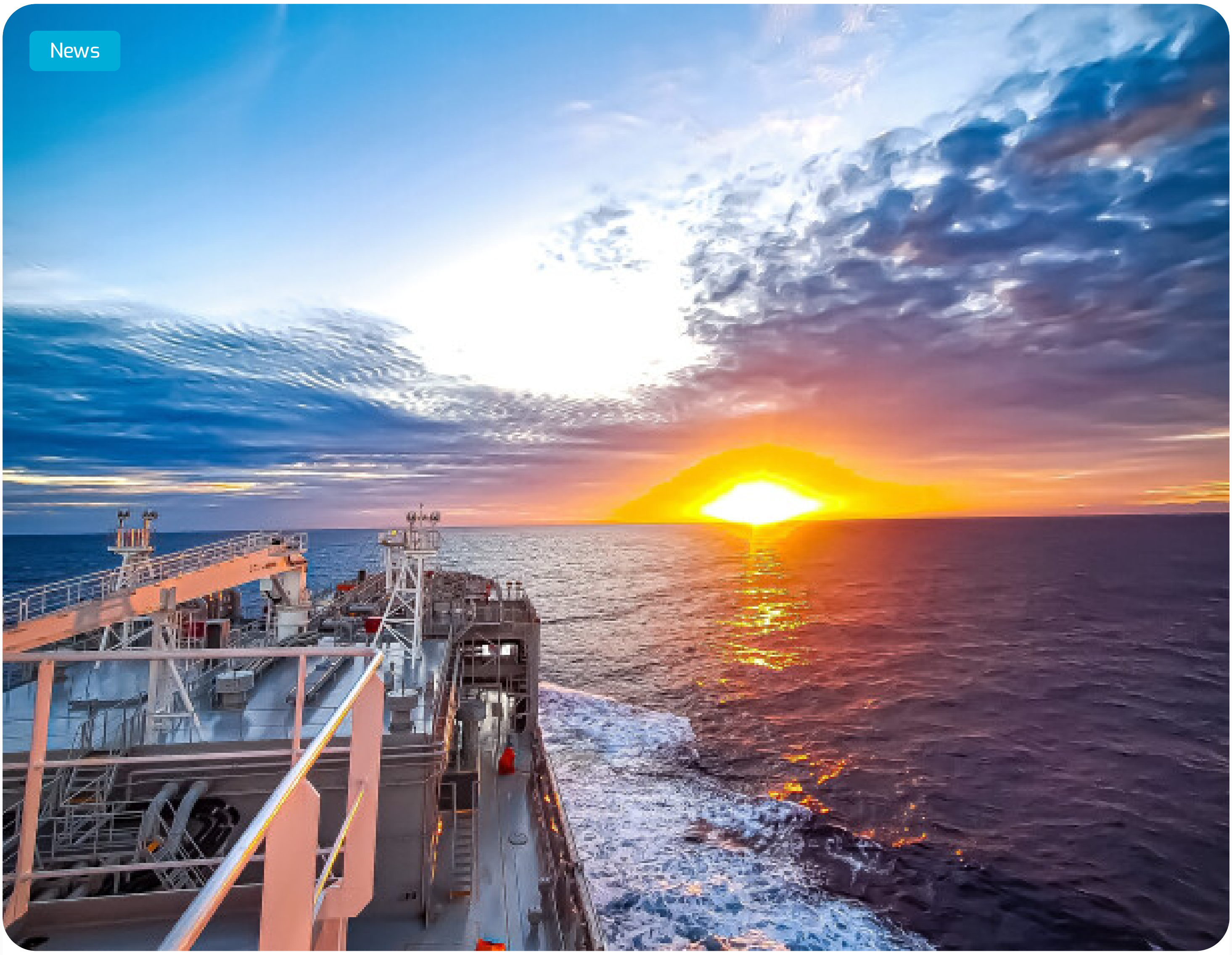
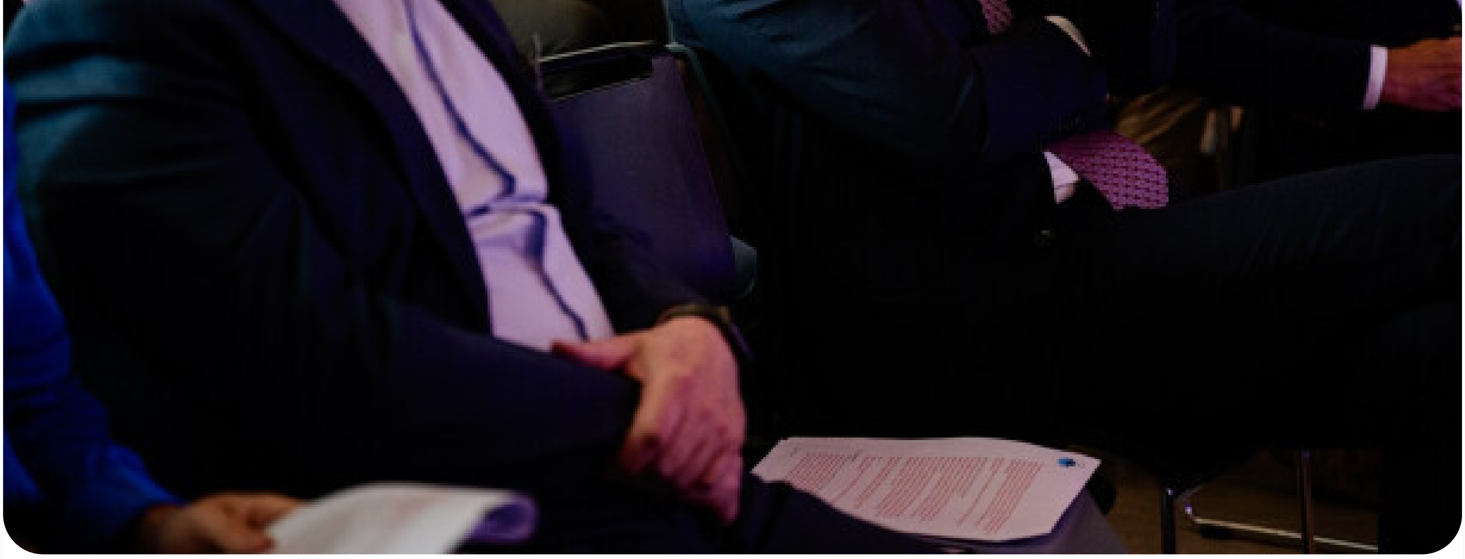


Statement KVNR: reopening Strait of Hormuz

The KVNR has taken relieved note of the ceasefire agreement between the United States and Iran, which seems to have prevented the further escalation previously announced in t... Gulf region.

17-04-2026



May 20: KVNR Networking Event

The Royal Association of Dutch Shipowners (KVNR) is organizing the spring edition of its Networking Event on Wednesday, May 20, 2026. The event will take place at the Mariënhof... in Amersfoort.

07-04-2026

Developments in the Middle East

Since Saturday, February 28, 2026, the security situation in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and adjacent waters has deteriorated due to the armed conflict in the Middle East… It is therefore important that de-escalation occurs quickly in the region.

24-03-2026