



Unlocking the potential of short sea shipping

News

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Strategic value of short sea shipping

Last Wednesday and Thursday, the European Shipping Summit 2025 took place in the Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels.

As part of the biennial shipping conference, the KVNR, together with the shipowners' associations Anave (Spain) and Confitarma (Italy), organized a panel discussion on the theme "unlocking the potential of short sea shipping". It was a continuation of the short sea sessions held by the KVNR during earlier editions of the conference.

The strategic value of short sea shipping in the transportation of goods and passengers is not only economically significant but also of great importance for, for example, the transport of energy, food, and raw materials. The Dutch, Spanish, and Italian maritime sectors are strongly represented in European short sea shipping.

In order to seize the opportunities for and of short sea shipping, necessary steps must be taken. It was up to this edition's expert panel to identify and discuss these challenges. Two questions were central to the discussion:

European port calls members of the KVNR





NB: Total number of port calls by KVNR members from the previous month.

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How does short sea shipping continue to make a difference for the European economy?

Shipping plays a crucial role in achieving the EU's climate goals. While road and air transport face high CO₂ emissions, short sea shipping offers a more sustainable alternative with significantly lower emissions per tonkilometer. Moreover, space competition that leads to congestion in land transport chains is not an issue in European waters.

Nonetheless, one thing was clear as day during the panel: short sea shipping must continue to improve its sustainability to meet the EU's climate goals. The panel discussion particularly focused on the availability and scaling up of clean fuels. This is a challenge that shipping cannot solve alone, making it essential for the maritime sector, the European Commission, and member states to collaborate effectively. This collaboration is crucial not only in the development but especially in the application of innovative technologies.

European ports have a major role to play. In ports, supply and demand literally come together. As Mar Chao from the Port Authority of Valencia mentioned during the panel, this involves facilitating shore power and enabling the bunkering of clean fuels.

What is needed to enhance the competitiveness of shipowners?

That sustainability and competitiveness can go hand in hand is clearly outlined in the [Clean Industrial Deal](#). But to make the energy transition successful while maintaining competitiveness, significant public and private investments are needed. Access to broader and better financing options is essential for maritime companies inside and outside Europe to remain competitive.

This importance is also highlighted by the European Commission. Various European initiatives are being developed that might contribute to more capital for sustainability in short sea shipping. Two of them are the Sustainable Transport Investment Plan ([STIP](#)) and the Industrial Maritime strategy ([EMIS](#)). The attending shipowners, including Jacob Roelevink on behalf of KVNR member MF Shipping Group, also emphasized the need to use the revenue from [EU-ETS](#) for the sustainability of the maritime cluster.

“EU ETS revenues must be used to breach the price gap with clean fuels”

APOSTOLOS TZITZIKOSTAS

Clear message

The expert panel had a clear message: **sustainability is needed to fully utilize the added value of short sea shipping, and capital and collaboration are essential.** It is important that the sector clearly indicates where these investments are needed and how they strengthen Europe's industrial base.

Szymon Oscilowski from the European Commission extended an invitation to European shipping to engage in discussions about concrete input for, among others, the STIP and EMIS. The KVNR will certainly heed this call. In the coming months, discussions among stakeholders, the European Commission, and EU member states need to clarify what shipping needs to contribute to a sustainable, competitive, and future-proof maritime sector.



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