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A European Vision for the Oceans and Seas

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

European Marine Equipment Council (EMEC)

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I'm delighted to have been given the chance to come and talk to you tonight and for the chance to dust down my evening suit!

Seriously though, EMEC is an impressive organisation, fronting a heavyweight industry of nearly 300,000 people, with nearly half a million more employed indirectly in the sector.

Shipping and ships are big, big business. And EMEC makes waves...

...the right kind of waves.

I like the way EMEC and its membership is driving forward with innovation. To make sure that the most technically advanced and most efficient ships take to the water. To reduce the amount of pollution they generate. Or in the way it is using the life-cycle approach to reduce the impact of hazardous waste from ships over their whole working lives.

We are committed to a resource efficient Europe – we have said so in our EU2020 strategy. We all know that resources are harder to find and more expensive – and will become more so. The industry's high performance in recycling EU merchant ships is entirely in line with this strategy. Making more from less sounds like a tall order...but it's the reality of our resource-strapped world.

I also like the way EMEC has realised that it makes more sense to work together – with ship owners, ship operators and shipbuilders – to work out what all the sectors need. This clustering is a kind of coherence we have been searching for in European policy. And not only environment policy.

Yet in some areas, despite improvements, there are still concerns.

Air quality is one of these.

Air quality standards in Europe are still not upheld properly - especially on particulate matter, ground-level ozone, and nitrogen dioxide.

This has a real impact on European health. Some 350,000 people die prematurely each year because of it – that's not much more than all the people employed directly in your sector!

And let's not forget the severe damage it causes to ecosystems. Acidification and ground-level ozone threats are well known and documented!

I said shipping was big business. It has always been so.

From ancient times to modern times, whole empires have risen and fallen like the tides...because of maritime trade.

Today shipping is just as important.

The EU's merchant fleet is the world's largest. It is responsible for most of the import and export of goods into the European Union – some 90% of foreign trade.

And within the EU, it is a major goods carrier. The EU has more sea than land and is the world's largest maritime territory. There are 1,200 ports. And our coastal regions account for more than 40% of the EU's gross domestic product (GDP)

These are big figures, but they hide also a wider environmental cost like any economic activity.

Because it is also a sector where air emissions have continued to grow - almost at the same pace as the increase in shipping. Under any circumstances it would be difficult to ignore that most land-based sources have reduced their air emissions significantly. At the same time, by regulating the sector, we need to prevent a shift towards more polluting modes of transport.

This is why already in 2005 the Commission called for substantial emissions reductions from international shipping as part of a wide-ranging air pollution strategy covering most sectors. This is also why most of the Member States voted for the new rules in 2008 at the International Maritime Organisation.

The new rules adopted by the IMO will reduce Sulphur Dioxide emissions by around 90% and most importantly, up to 80% for, secondary, particulate matter.

You know that some parts of the shipping community and some transport users are concerned about these new standards.

One particular concern is the very low sulphur fuel to be used in Sulphur Emission Control Areas from 2015 in the Baltic Sea, North Sea and English Channel.

Some have even called for a re-negotiation of the IMO rules, or at least a delay in putting them into effect.

The Commission supports the agreement reached at the IMO - as do most of the Member States. They were the result of much discussion over several years.

And I think it is time now for the Member States and the EU to live up to our commitments.

Consider the alternative - it would do nothing for our credibility to make a U-turn now and start renegotiating this complex and hard-won agreement.

It would do nothing for the industry and it would do nothing for our society, for our health and for our environment.

It would be a siren call for disaster – and we would be heading for the rocks.

With this in mind, the Commission will present a proposal to align EU legislation with the IMO decision in spring 2011.

The proposal will have with it a detailed report. This will include an assessment of the IMO decision and proposed measures the Commission could take to reduce the impact on the sector.

Of course, we have done our homework. And based on information we have gathered, we do not expect that the negative impact on trade in the sector will be as significant as some have feared.

Some will not be happy I guess – you will never please everyone – but we do want to listen to industry proposals.

Particularly those that can help in the development and adoption of new technologies – the things that could offer equivalent emission reductions, within IMO boundaries.

So this is where we particularly need your support. EMEC and its members can help play a crucial role in limiting the compliance costs and reducing the impact of aligning our aims with the IMO.

The legal proposal will align the provisions on the use of equivalent technology as much as possible with the IMO's rules - both the text of MARPOL Annex VI and the specific guidelines.

I believe this will create a more certain market for both equipment manufactures and the shipping industry. And importantly it will encourage early investment in clean technologies.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I recently read a document, which recommended ten actions for a European Vision for the Oceans and Seas...

There were two specific actions which caught my eye – one about "greater support for marine and maritime related research" and another about "ensuring cooperation on the policy-making level".

I think we need these too. And by the way, this was your vision.

It proves that we can achieve more together than apart.

Because if legislators, the shipping industry and equipment manufacturers manage to cooperate in these areas, it will show how greening the transport sector and improving the competitiveness of European industry are one and the same thing.

To conclude: yes, I want cleaner air, yes, I want better quality of our environment and yes, I also want European shipping business to continue making profitable waves in the future.

Thank you for attention.