INTERVIEW: Major ports, including Singapore, to prepare for alternative marine fuels future, says IMO

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The following interview arranged by Conference Connection is part of pre-event coverage for the upcoming 12th International Fujairah Bunkering & Fuel Oil Forum (FUJCON 2021), where Manifold Times is an official media partner. Readers can register for the virtual event by clicking on the link here.

It will be a matter of time before bunker suppliers at Singapore start embarking on concrete plans to supply non-hydrocarbon based fuels in order to support shipping's alternative renewable fuels future, says the Head, Air Pollution and Energy Efficiency at the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

"Based on available information, shipping is likely to transition from majority reliance on liquid hydrocarbon fuels to a diverse range of alternative (renewable) sources of energy when operating at sea or when being in ports," Roel Hoenders tells Singapore bunker publication *Manifold Times*.

"So it is likely that major ports like Singapore are preparing to be ready for and plan for this diversity.

"The energy transition in shipping will require new technologies, alternative fuels and infrastructure to support low- and zero-carbon shipping."

According to Hoenders, low and zero carbon fuels such as biofuels, (renewable) hydrogen, ammonia and methanol, including through their on board storage in batteries and fuel cells, are being trialled but are not yet widely available.

“There are wider questions about ensuring safety of ships and crew dealing with new fuels; about generating and supplying renewable marine fuels across the world; and about the entire emissions life cycle of new fuels that will come to market,” he shares.

“IMO also regulates the safety aspects related to the bunkering as well on-board storage and handling of alternative fuels and has already developed numerous internationally binding instruments in that regard, including the International Code of Safety for Ships Using Gases or Other Low-flashpoint Fuels.”

Hoenders suggests electrification may be feasible for short-sea shipping; but other fuels will be needed for ocean-going cargo ships with their huge energy requirements. While in port, more and more ships can connect to the land-energy grid to avoid using their engines.

“This transition will need collaboration and cooperation across many different stakeholders, including land-based energy suppliers and ports, as well as major investments,” he adds.

“It will also provide opportunities for countries to upscale, and thereby reduce costs of, renewable energy production.”

“IMO, in addition to its role a global regulator, will also continue to be a global platform for knowledge sharing and to explore cleaner fuels for shipping to ensure also less advanced countries can be involved and explore opportunities from the decarbonisation of international shipping.”

Hoenders, meanwhile, believes the implementation of IMO 2020 “went very well” for the shipping industry and shared Paris MOU detected only four deficiencies for sulphur content of fuel used in vessels during inspections last year.

“In 2020 there were just 55 cases worldwide of 0.5% compliant-sulphur fuel oil not available, reported to IMO through the year,” he shares.

“There was a great amount of preparation by IMO in terms of developing dedicated guidelines for ship owners, coastal States, and other stakeholders in the lead up to 1 January 2020 and clearly this paid off underlining the importance of IMO’s role as regulator of the global shipping industry.”

Draft new mandatory regulations for IMO 2030, which aims to cut the carbon intensity (transport work) of existing ships by at least 40% in 2030 compared to 2008, will be put forward for formal adoption at IMO’s Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) in June 2021.

Similar to IMO 2020, Hoenders is confident IMO 2030 and IMO 2050 will be implemented on schedule – despite the current coronavirus pandemic.

“It is still too early to identify the long-term impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, but overall I remain hopeful that IMO can maintain the mid- and long term timelines for implementation of greenhouse gas reduction measures,” he states.

“While there was a postponement of one MEPC meeting in 2020, we have got the meeting schedule back on track.

“In late 2020, the intersessional working group on GHG emissions met remotely and then in November the MEPC met remotely and was able to approve the proposed new draft regulations aimed at reducing carbon intensity of the entire fleet, as amendments to MARPOL Annex VI, for planned adoption in June 2021.

“So I anticipate the great willingness to work cooperatively and collaboratively within IMO will continue.”

Note: Roel Hoenders will be among speakers giving the keynote speech during at official opening of FUJCON 2021 on 23 March.

Photo credit: International Maritime Organization
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