

Webinar on underwater radiated noise from shipping:

Speaking note

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over 90% of the world's trade occurs via maritime transport. Air pollution, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and underwater radiated noise are unintended by-products of this international shipping.

The maritime sector is already very much aware of the urgency to reduce its impact on climate change and greenhouse gas emissions. Thereto, in 2018, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has adopted an Initial Strategy on reduction of GHG emissions from ships. Besides this, IMO has also taken a progressive reduction approach of NO_x, SO_x, and particulate matter to prevent air pollution from ships. And now, to help protect maritime wildlife, IMO's work also includes the reduction of underwater noise from ships. As such, we do hope this study from the BE authorities can contribute to the important work ongoing at the IMO.

As Belgian shipowners, we were eager to make our little contribution to this study on underwater noise, and that is because we support the research, the science, science and policy need to go hand in hand, as economy and ecology do. Only when we have solid, objective facts and data available, a good and sustainable international policy can be developed.

Ideally, measures taken to reduce GHG emissions would also reduce underwater noise, but the link between the two has not yet been clearly demonstrated. In this study, researchers have investigated all options for reducing GHG emissions as well as underwater noise, with a focus on our Belgian shipping fleet. I'll leave it to the experts to explain this further in detail.

As said, studies like these are of utmost importance, especially today, as we all can agree that the ship industry is at the beginning of a seismic revolution. Being part of the transformation is not only fascinating, but it comes with a great responsibility as well. We have to choose for the most sustainable way forward, even if it seems the hardest one at first sight. What I can tell you already today is that we will remain engaged from our side, to contribute to this research where possible, today and tomorrow.

We need to make sure our children and grandchildren still have a beautiful world tomorrow... but a paradise cannot be built on an economical graveyard. So we need the international policies in place to ensure the world fleet's competitiveness, and to protect the frontrunner shipowners who are taking substantial risks at times, be it to reduce their GHG, waste or noise. We are convinced that studies like these will help increase transparency and will contribute to a better and more sustainable tomorrow.

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managing director of the Royal Belgian Shipowners' Association