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ECMAR

EUROPEAN COUNCIL FOR MARITIME APPLIED R&D

Response to the European Commission's Call for Evidence on an EU Ports Strategy

The European Council for Maritime Applied Research (ECMAR) welcomes the European Commission's Call for Evidence on an EU Ports Strategy and recognises the critical role of Ports in the maritime blue economy. **The ECMAR position paper advocates for accelerated Research & Innovation deployment in Ports areas.** Recognizing ports as crucial facilitators in the shift toward towards green and digital transition of the maritime sector, ECMAR emphasizes more particularly the role of Ports in the deployment of Green Technologies and autonomous shipping. Training of Ports operators is also essential to ensure a smooth transition to these new technologies.

First, Ports plays an essential role in the **deployment of Energy Transition technologies** (alternative fuels, electrification, free energy propulsion…). Ports have the essential role to provide access to these new energies (refuelling, recharging stations…) to enable their development. **ECMAR advocates for the deployment of Wind-Assisted-Ships-Propulsion** in particular which requires increased flexibility and improved communication between Ports and Ship operators to enable the widespread of this technology. In addition, ECMAR highlights the strategic importance of offshore wind energy production as a key enabler of the EU's energy transition. Ports are not only gateways for maritime transport but also **critical hubs for the development, installation, and maintenance of offshore wind infrastructure**. The growing demand for offshore wind energy—especially floating offshore technologies suitable for deep waters like the Mediterranean—requires specialized vessels and port facilities capable of supporting this emerging sector.

To achieve this, the EU Port strategy should focus on facilitating Investments for these new technologies and establishing digital platforms for real-time information exchange between ports and ships operators. This includes supporting port infrastructure that enables the deployment of offshore wind energy, particularly innovative floating wind technologies, which are essential for the European maritime energy transition and require specialized port logistics and vessel services.

Secondly, Ports can facilitate the **deployment of Autonomous shipping** by encouraging these investments in their own ecosystem. Autonomous small Vessels can be used for the need of Ports logistics. Autonomous technologies, such as remotely operated vessels and intelligent cargo handling, are key to enhancing efficiency, optimizing resource use, and improving safety within port environments. **To achieve this, the EU Ports Strategy should focus on incentives and harmonised regulations for the deployment of autonomous shipping.**

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Finally, ECMAR emphasizes **the role of human factor** in these Green and Digital transitions and adoption of new technologies. **The EU Ports Strategy should recommend maintaining employment and ensuring worker safety through adapted training.**

In conclusion, ECMAR recommends the European Commission to integrate these principles into the forthcoming EU Ports Strategy. By prioritizing R&I, deployment of Energy Transition technologies and autonomous shipping as well as investment in workforce, the EU can ensure its ports remain competitive, sustainable, and safe, serving as vital hubs for the European economy.

More Information about ECMAR:

Scope of ECMAR:

ECMAR contributes to shaping a strategic research and innovation agenda for the European maritime sector, with a focus on aligning priorities with EU Framework Programmes. The association works closely with research organisations, universities, and industry to advance R&D in areas such sustainable ship design, digitalisation, decarbonisation, and advanced maritime technologies. Its activities span waterborne transport, offshore renewables, autonomous systems, and maritime safety, contributing to the competitiveness and resilience of the European Blue Economy.

Membership:

ECMAR's membership offers a research-driven, technically grounded perspective to complement broader industrial strategies. It includes research-performing organisations active in applied maritime R&D, primarily from within the EU, candidate countries, and the European Economic Area. ECMAR brings together a focused group of 24 research-performing organisations — including public and private research centres and innovation-oriented SMEs — active in applied maritime R&D across 14 European countries. Members are engaged in collaborative EU projects and contribute with advanced technical expertise across a wide range of maritime domains.

ECMAR's Maritime Strategic Research Agenda:

This document outlines the technology challenges and opportunities facing the European maritime transport sector up to 2030 and beyond. It provides recommendations for future research and innovation (R&I) priorities, particularly for FP10 (2028-2034).

Full document accessible via this link: https://ecmar.systeme.io/sra

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