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Is going slow the answer to shipping's emissions mission?

by Nigel Lowry

Environmental bodies have their say as leading Greek owner backs enforcement of slow steaming



Pappas: Reduce vessel speeds by 10%-15%.

Source: Nasdaq

SHIPPING could achieve a huge chunk of its long-term emissions reduction obligations overnight if vessels were obliged to slow down, a leading Greek shipowner has said. Star Bulk Carriers chief executive and Oceanbulk group founder Petros Pappas made the assertion somewhat incongruously at the end of a recent Star Bulk second-quarter earnings call with analysts. But the idea has been brewing in some quarters of the shipping industry for some time.

Other shipowners have expressed interest in the concept, which relies on widely available data on the effects of slow steaming on a vessel's greenhouse gases (GHG) output.

The industry is tasked with cutting emissions by about 42% before 2050, "but you can have less emissions within the next day of 17%-25%", Mr Pappas said.

This could be achieved by "reducing vessel speeds by 10-15%", he said.

Such a move, which would have to be a mandatory worldwide measure, would be instead of waiting for 33 years, said the owner. "I am going to be 97 then," he added.

According to Mr Pappas, Greenpeace "and a number of other organisations" had either suggested a similar move or had voiced support for a fleet-wide slowdown.

The umbrella group of shipping-focused environmental organisations, the Clean Shipping Initiative (CSI) first took the idea to the International Maritime Organization's Marine Environment Protection Committee in 2010 but it was "dismissed with little discussion".

In 2012 Seas At Risk, the European environmental non-governmental organisation grouping, and the Transport & Environment pressure group jointly commissioned a study to further investigate and promote regulated slow steaming. The report stated that a global reduction of 10% in maritime speeds would result in a 19% saving in carbon dioxide emissions.

However, that too was "shot down" at the next MEPC meeting. "There was some support but it was shot down by representatives of the industry that saw it as impractical and also some member states took particular exception to it," said John Maggs, the CSI's president and senior policy adviser for Seas At Risk.

"Since then there has been wider uptake of slow steaming for economic reasons and a lot of the problems that people

raised before have been shown to be not problems at all.”

Reaction to Mr Pappas' remarks showed support for the focus on slow steaming but also revealed different approaches to how ship emissions should be reduced.

Bunker levy 'will ensure slowdown'

Mr Pappas was “absolutely right” as to the important role slow steaming could play in tackling harmful emissions from the world fleet, said George Gratsos, Hellenic Marine Environment Protection Association chairman and a former president of the Hellenic Chamber of Shipping.

“The role of speed is very important, but it cannot be mandatory,” Mr Gratsos said. He said that the technology to monitor the fleet's compliance was “not there” and a mandatory system could not take account of the different sea states that ships must navigate.

The market could “automatically” embrace slow steaming if regulators adopted a bunker fuel levy as the core of the industry's CO2 mitigation efforts, instead of the “unrealistic, variable-price” emissions trading scheme proposals that have won favour at the IMO and in the European Union.

“The Greek shipping community has been saying this for a very long time,” Mr Gratsos told Lloyd's List. “The bunker levy is the only way to collect money from shipping and at the same time it is a simple way to ensure ships will go slower.”

Mr Gratsos' own recent study, Effective Decarbonisation of Shipping, noted that between 2007 and 2012 shipping reduced CO2 emissions per ton of goods transported by about 40%, with three quarters of the savings delivered through a 12% average reduction in trading speed.

Shipping emissions fell 10.1% during the period while overall global emissions were up by 13.5%.

“For a short-term effect, the only sure way to reduce carbon emissions is to induce slow steaming through a properly designed carbon levy,” his paper concluded. However, it also argued that pushing slow steaming too far could be counterproductive as it may cause cargo to be shifted into other, more polluting modes of transport.

Quick fixes 'unrealistic'

The Sustainable Shipping Initiative also saw slow steaming as a useful “short-term play” but emphasised it should be one component in a wider, longer strategy.

“A simple, single ‘quick fix’ solution is not realistic in terms of delivering a pathway to the decarbonisation of shipping, which is what is required to ensure shipping appropriately contributes to the 1.5 to 2 degrees warming targets defined in the Paris Agreement,” said Tom Holmer, general manager of the London-based independent charity.

“While discussions could be had in relation to incentives to reduce speeds and emissions, the reality is that there needs to be widespread change beyond slow steaming to achieve the reduction targets that are required, and to create a shipping industry that is more sustainable and profitable for the long term,” he told Lloyd's List.

SSI's roadmap mentions slow steaming as one strategy among others, but Mr Holmer said that there would be “issues in relation to it being mandatory, including its policing, the equitability of it being applied to different vessel classes and designs, as well as day-to-day commercial pressures within the supply chain”.

At the CSI, Mr Maggs remains a strong proponent of slow steaming, despite the fact that the organisation has said that it is not the one-and-only ‘silver bullet’ to address shipping's climate change impact.

“It is great that it is coming from industry,” he said when told of Mr Pappas' remarks. “Slowly people have been picking up on it.”

Following the Paris Agreement on climate change, the slow steaming proposal was “now very much in the mind of delegates” at the IMO, he said.

Speed is 'most obvious' option

“If your principal objective is minimising climate risk, you should want to mitigate as early as possible and there are not many options,” said Mr Maggs.

“Speed is the most obvious, potent option.”

He believes that equitable formulas for regulating vessel speeds can be worked out and that there will be “no safety issues”.

From the shipping industry's point of view, slow steaming at first glance has the unique attraction of being without-cost,

comparative to other mitigation options, such as fitting of scrubbers, that will land some companies with crippling bills. That is particularly so in a market still suffering from overcapacity.

But Lloyd's List has been told anecdotally by one environmentalist that large shipping companies that have investigated slow steaming by 15% believe the savings would cover the cost of construction and operation of extra vessels if demand outstrips the capabilities of a slowed-down world fleet.

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Höegh FSRUs provide critical link to LNG global export growth

by Lambros Papaeconomou

@lpapaeconomou | lambros.papaeconomou@informa.com

Strategic partnership with Nakilat to pursue new floating regasification projects in Asia-Pacific



Höegh LNG has a fleet of 10 FSRUs, including three under construction.

The deployment of FSRUs allows exporters to spearhead new projects in the shortest possible timeframe.

Höegh LNG noted in its report for the second quarter of 2017 that a total of 36 countries imported LNG in the first half of the year, more than twice as many as 10 years ago. Most of them were emerging economies.

It announced a strategic partnership with Nakilat in July to jointly develop and finance new FSRU projects that will be sourced from Qatar. Nakilat is Qatar's LNG shipping company and transports all LNG cargo that originates in the country.

OSLO-LISTED Höegh LNG Holdings is quickly becoming a critical link to the global liquefied natural gas supply chain, being the largest owner of floating storage and regasification units. Emerging markets, where FSRUs are predominantly used, account for most of new LNG demand.

Rapid expansion of liquefaction capacity in Qatar, Australia, the US and Russia means exporters are flush with LNG and they are looking for access to new markets worldwide.

Höegh LNG is essentially betting that a partnership with Nakilat will give it access to additional growth opportunities, over and above independent projects already contemplated by the company.

Sveinung Støhle, chief executive of Höegh LNG, commented in the company's earnings call that Qatar was committed to remain the largest producer and exporter of LNG in the world, and the Asia Pacific region would be the focus of the joint venture.

He said Qatar planned to increase its export capacity by 30%, or approximately 24m tonnes per annum.

Limited progress on committed projects

Despite a bright outlook for new FSRU projects, the completion of existing ones is frequently hindered by delays, some expected and some not.

Höegh LNG owns a fleet of 10 FSRUs, including three units under construction. Two of these vessels have been committed to projects in Pakistan and Chile, while the third unit remains uncommitted.

This is part of the company's strategy to always have an open vessel under construction to provide it with optionality and to minimise the lead time between start and finish of a new floating regasification project.

The two projects in Pakistan and Chile are not complete yet and the company reported little progress from the previous quarter. The project in Karachi is aiming to start in the second half of 2018, pending the conclusion of the final investment decision. This will be the first one for Höegh LNG and the third overall to operate in Port Qasim.

Mr Støhle said Pakistan faced a significant shortage of natural gas for electricity production and industrial support. The country imported 3m tonnes of LNG in 2016, and the target by 2022 is to import 30m tonnes.

To support a tenfold increase in imported LNG, Pakistan would need an additional three FSRUs, Mr Støhle said.

The project in Chile was at an earlier stage, with finalisation of a "revised environmental process" expected before the end of the year.

The lack of firm progress in these projects might force Höegh LNG to seek alternative short-term employment for the two FSRUs that are expected to be delivered in the first and fourth quarter of 2018.

Hiccup on operating fleet

Höegh LNG, however, is faced with a more imminent roadblock on a vessel already delivered to its fleet. *Höegh Giant* was delivered in April and it was scheduled to begin a 20-year contract in Ghana.

The project is still awaiting final governmental approval. In the interim, *Höegh Giant* is trading as a conventional LNG carrier.

Mr Støhle said delays were not uncommon, even though he acknowledged the final cut-off decision in Ghana was in the not-too-distant future.

Nonetheless, he remained optimistic the project would materialise and said Höegh LNG had substitution rights and an active plan to mitigate risk.

He also said Ghana just announced a governmental deal with Equatorial Guinea to supply it with LNG, starting in 2018. That would presumably require a fully operational FSRU on site.

In view of the lack of progress in Ghana and Pakistan, Eric Haavaldsen of Pareto Securities said: "The company focuses on an 'optimising interim employment period' for the FSRUs that are delivered ahead of contract start-up, yet so far the success here has been limited."

Andreas Wikborg of Arctic Securities expects *Höegh Giant* to continue burning cash until the project's start-up, which he now expects not to happen before the third quarter of 2018.

Results for second quarter beat estimates

Höegh LNG beat consensus estimates for the second quarter of 2017, reporting a profit of \$8.5m versus a \$3.5m profit a year ago.

The company declared a regular quarterly dividend of \$0.125 per share. Analysts attributed the earnings result to continued cost control and stable capacity utilisation.

Höegh LNG fully consolidates the results of its subsidiary, Höegh LNG Partners, a master limited partnership listed in

New York. Höegh LNG owns 46.4% of the MLP's common units, but it is deemed to have a de facto control over its subsidiary.

Höegh LNG Partners reported separately an agreement to acquire an additional 23.5% interest in two FSRUs from Mitsui OSK Lines.

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Deka halves shipping book during first half

by David Osler

@finance_LL | david.osler@informa.com

German lender cuts industry exposure to under \$1bn



Rüdiger: predicting stagnant full-year profit despite a strong increase in the volume of funds and certificates.

finance, running to minus €74m.

Dekabank is predicting stagnant full-year profit despite a strong increase in the volume of funds and certificates, at somewhere around €415m, according to chief executive Michael Rüdiger.

GERMANY's Deka Group halved its shipping portfolio in the first half of 2017, with the volume of lending to the industry dropping sharply from €1.6bn (\$1.9bn) at year-end 2016 to just €0.8bn by June this year.

That contrasts with the €3.5bn exposure at the peak of the shipping boom in 2008, and €1.8bn as recently as 2015. The interim report for Deka – which acts primarily as a securities house for German savings banks – indicates high valuation allowances for ship

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Hurricane Harvey to hit US LPG exports

by Max Tingyao Lin

@MaxL_lloydslist | tingyao.lin@informa.com

VLGC owners await the first Category 3 hurricane to make landfall in the US in over a decade



HARVEY is on track to become the first Category 3 hurricane to make landfall in the US for over a decade, hitting owners of very large gas carriers, who increasingly rely on exports from the Gulf region. With sustained winds of 105 miles per hour, the Category 2 hurricane is expected to continue strengthening to Category 3 prior to landfall in Texas on Friday, according to the US National Weather

Service. The impact of heavy rains and high tides is forecast to last until the middle of next week at least. The ports of Galveston and Corpus Christi are already closed, according to CNN, while other petroleum hubs in Texas, such as Houston, are also expected to be affected.

In a research alert, Stifel suggested liquefied petroleum gas shipments from Enterprise Products Partners, Energy Transfer Partners and Targa Resources could be hit due to “large dock exposure” to the hurricane.

The development is keenly watched by the LPG shipping industry, as the US has grown to become the world’s largest exporter of propane and butane — much of which is carried from the US Gulf to Asia on VLGCs.

Based on the latest government figures, BW LPG estimated US LPG net exports would grow 15.7% this year to 27.6m tonnes.

While adverse weather conditions can sometimes lead to vessel delays at ports, tying up capacity and supporting freight rates, ships without employment might have trouble securing cargoes before normal operations resume.

Even before the hurricane, Fearnleys reported at least six cargoes for September loading have been cancelled and “there are speculations that a further three to four cargoes might be cancelled”.

A London-based analyst said: “Arbitrage economics is still not workable.”

Among the VLGC fixtures over the past week for US exports, *Jia Yuan* was fixed to carry a 44,000-tonne cargo from Marcus Hook to East Asia via the Panama Canal for mid-to-high \$40s per tonne. In the prior week, two VLGCs were fixed at \$46 per tonne for Houston-Asia trade.

The mini recovery in the Middle East-Asia trade has flattened out in a quiet market, but market players will watch

whether traders will lift more cargoes next week to fill the supply gap as a result of Hurricane Harvey. The Baltic LPG Index, which assesses this trade, closed up 1% on week at \$21.32 on Thursday. It had jumped by 10% on the previous week.

This article includes an interactive data tool. Please click below to view it.

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Eurogate boosts workforce on higher volumes

by James Baker

@JamesBakerCI | james.baker@informa.com

New calls at Wilhelmshaven lead to 50% rise in staffing



Eurogate said the optimistic outlook for 2017 will continue to favour Wilhelmshaven rather than Bremerhaven.

Source: Eurogate

Terminal Wilhelmshaven,” said Eurogate managing director Mikkel Andersen.

“The current consolidation process among the shipping lines and the resulting processes of change in the market provide Eurogate with the opportunity in Wilhelmshaven to establish ourselves as a first-class container terminal. We are therefore building up our future capabilities in a difficult competitive environment.”

The increase in staff would reflect the development in handling volumes, Eurogate added.

GERMAN terminal operator Eurogate is to increase staff levels at its Wilhelmshaven terminal following a doubling of monthly container throughput since May.

Eurogate said it would raise staff levels from 400 to 600 after two additional alliance calls at the port and further calls for feederage had increased demand at the terminal.

“Since the consolidation from four to three major alliances, our monthly handling figures have doubled and we are seeing a significantly increased level of interest in Eurogate Container

Eurogate handles boxes at Bremerhaven, Wilhelmshaven, and Hamburg.

The terminal operator reported a significant increase in the number of mega containerships (in excess of 18,000 teu capacity) handled, and suggested the optimistic outlook for 2017 – offered in spite of a reshuffle of alliance members – will continue to favour Wilhelmshaven rather than Bremerhaven.

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Labour dispute weighs on Gothenburg box throughput

by Wei Zhe Tan

@ShipShape2003 | WeiZhe.Tan@informa.com

APM Terminals Gothenburg saw first-half volumes fall 22% year on year



Preliminary figures for July indicate a historic low for container volumes.

among the Nordic nations fell 22% year on year to 318,000 teu for the January to June period of this year, as the dispute between the terminal operator and the labour union stretched on.

Port officials noted the drop was especially significant for the month of June, which saw a 60% decline, while preliminary data showed box volumes for July are expected to hit a record low.

“The upward trend has been broken and we would need to go as far back as 2011 to find a corresponding volume level,” said Mr Kårestedt.

The dispute between APMT and section 4 of the Swedish Dockworkers' Union started in May 2016 and continued with the port operator signing and becoming a party to a collective agreement.

It further escalated with the Swedish government stepping in to set up an inquiry to scrutinise labour market rules.

THE ongoing standoff between APM Terminals and the labour union at the port of Gothenburg in Sweden has taken its toll on container throughput.

“It is painfully clear how the dispute has harmed the port and industry. We have had an incredible rate of growth over the years here at the largest port in Scandinavia, and billions have been invested to serve Swedish trade optimally,” said Gothenburg Port Authority chief executive Magnus Kårestedt. Box volumes at the largest port

APMT Gothenburg chief executive Henrik Kristensen said the announcement was a positive step towards modernising the national labour rules, while the SDU, on the other hand, said the government's move would make it even more difficult to come to an agreement with APMT because the company would have less of an incentive to negotiate. "It is unreasonable that a group of dockworkers in Gothenburg can block trade flows for an entire country in this way," said Mr Kårestedt.

"National mediators have attempted to resolve the dispute on repeated occasions. APM Terminals has accepted all the proposals put forward by the mediators, while the Dockworkers' Union has rejected them.

"I welcome the government's inquiry, although legislation takes time and in the interim we need an immediate local solution that will allow the port to regain its credibility," he added.

In June this year, Lloyd's List reported the APMT Gothenburg-operated container terminal was functioning at 30% of its weekly capability.

As a result, the terminal missed out on SKr30m (\$3.4m) of revenue in May, as APMT Gothenburg and the Swedish Dockworkers' Union carried on a year-long dispute over the union's demand for a collective bargaining agreement, separate from the national one Swedish ports already have with the Transport Workers' Union.

Mr Kristensen said unions had been blocking four policies: working overtime; hiring new employees; hiring temporary workers to work between 1600 hrs and 0700 hrs; and hiring temporary workers to drive straddle carriers at the terminal. Cargo volumes in other freight categories, however, were mostly higher, with ro-ro units rising 7% to 291,000, new cars up 14% to 137,000, oil volumes up 7% to 12m tonnes and passengers little changed at 701,000.

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Seadrill works on restructuring ahead of bankruptcy filing

by Max Tingyao Lin

@MaxL_lloydslist | tingyao.lin@informa.com

by Lambros Papaeconomou

@lpapaeconomou | lambros.papaeconomou@informa.com

Recapitalisation to raise \$1bn in fresh equity and restructure debt obligations



JOHN Fredriksen-led Seadrill Ltd, one of the world's largest owners of drilling units, announced it could file for Chapter 11 restructuring proceedings by September 12. "Our primary objective is concluding final negotiations on our comprehensive restructuring plan, which is at an advanced stage and likely to be implemented via Chapter 11 proceedings on or before September 12, 2017," Seadrill Management chief executive Anton Dibowitz said.

Fredriksen-led firm is likely to file for bankruptcy protection by September 12.

Mr Dibowitz provided a broad outline of the anticipated restructuring plan at the company's earnings call. The plan will most likely entail \$1bn in fresh equity; conversion of existing bonds to equity; a five-year extension on maturities of bank facilities; and deferral of loan amortisation payments.

He declined to further elaborate, pending the company's filing for bankruptcy protection.

"Our business execution remains unaffected by these efforts, as demonstrated by continued delivery of excellent safety and fleet uptime" Mr Dibowitz said.

The announcement came as Seadrill reported operating losses of \$100m in April-June, compared to the year-ago profit of \$364m.

Total operating revenue fell to \$577m from \$868m in the same period of last year.

Net losses for the second quarter amounted to \$143m, versus the year-ago losses of \$78m.

"Market conditions remain challenging... the supply overhang, both in the floater and jack-up markets, means that every tender is fiercely competitive," the company said in a quarterly report.

Earlier this month, the New York- and Oslo-listed company made changes to terms of three of its credit facilities that cover rigs acquired by its subsidiary in preparation for the Chapter 11 filing.

The amendments to the facilities will help prevent the assets under Seadrill Partners from being seized by any lenders looking to recoup loans made out to the company, by striking off the subsidiary and its consolidated units as a borrower or guarantor.

They also split the loan facilities to ensure each one is secured only by Seadrill Ltd assets and not the rig assets owned by Seadrill Partners.

As of end-June, Seadrill's total current liabilities were \$5bn and non-current liabilities were \$5.8bn. Cash and cash equivalents were \$1.3bn.

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Finalists in Lloyd's List APAC Awards decided

by Abdul Hadhi

@@hadhi786 | hadhi.abdul@informa.com

Winners in the respective categories to be announced at the awards in Singapore in October



OUR panel of independent, industry-respected judges has narrowed down the list of entries for this year's Lloyd's List Asia Pacific Awards after a vigorous process of weighing entries in Singapore.

The judges said it was not an easy process given the high standard of submissions across all categories in a year marked by volatility in the maritime industry.

The event, formerly the Asia Awards, recognises and embraces APAC as the world's

The judges pause for a group photograph in between vigorous discussion over entries fastest growing economic region.

With the industry's pace of change occurring at unparalleled speed, shipping is looking for role models and innovation and Lloyd's List is proud to encourage and recognise such endeavours through our awards programme around the world.

The winners of each category will be announced at a gala dinner at the awards night on October 26 at Singapore's Shangri La Hotel. Table bookings, to join the evening's celebration of the industry's achievements in APAC, can be made [here](#).

Lloyd's List congratulates all firms and individuals that made the finalists' list, acknowledging at the same time the hard work and dedication of the rest of this year's entrants.

The finalists are:

Excellence in Training Award

CMA CGM

DNV GL, Maritime Training Academy

Magsaysay People Resources

Malaysian Maritime Academy

Pacific Basin Shipping

Singapore Maritime Academy, Singapore Polytechnic

Lloyd's List Intelligence Innovation Award

CMA CGM, The Lab

Containerchain

DNV GL, ECO Insight platform

Liberian International Ship Registry and Prevention at Sea, Electronic Oil Record Book

Maersk Line

Sembcorp Marine, Semb-Eco LUV Ballast Water Management System

Logistics Award (sponsored by PSA)

AAL, ESP cargo project

China Merchants Port Holdings (CMPort)

Containerchain

GAC, end-to-end solution for new Indonesia paint plant

Shipmanager of the Year (sponsored by Gulf Marine)

Fleet Management

Great Circle Shipping Agency

Thomas Schulte Ship Management

Wallem Ship Management, safety focus and wellness at sea

Next Generation Award (sponsored by Hutchison Ports)

Port Desk – Mr Pallav Pushpit

Reed Smith Richards Butler – Mr Edward Liu

Safe Lanes Consultants – Mr Rachit Jain

Seafarer of the Year Award

COSCO Shipping Lines - Captain Xu Bin

MTM Ship Management – Captain Anubhav Srivastava

Wallenius Marine - Captain Fredrik Krysén

Tanker Operator of the Year (sponsored by Safe Lanes Consultants)

Centennial Maritime Ventures

China Merchants Energy Shipping

Fleet Management

Goodwood Ship Management

MISC

Womar Logistics

Terminal Operator of the Year

Hutchison Ports Thailand

ICTSI, implementation and multiple stakeholder engagement for terminal appointment booking system at Manila

Jurong Port

PSA

Yantian International Container Terminals

The ClassNK Dry Bulk Operator of the Year Award

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The i-law Maritime law award – firm of the year

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RPC – Andrew Horton
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The Safer, Cleaner Seas Award

Berge Bulk
ClassNK, ship recycling initiatives
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Lifetime Achievement Award (sponsored by Containerchain)

This category is to be judged by Lloyd's List editorial staff and the winner announced on the awards night.

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Singapore authorities call off search for missing sailors from damaged warship

by Wei Zhe Tan

@ShipShape2003 | WeiZhe.Tan@informa.com

Move comes as US Navy concentrates search and recovery efforts on the warship itself



SINGAPORE authorities have decided to call off search and rescue operations they have been leading in collaboration with the US, Indonesia, Malaysia and Australia on Thursday at 2100 hrs. They made this decision after the US Navy opted to focus its search and recovery operations on *USS John S McCain* itself, rather than the region where the collision between the missile-destroyer and oil tanker *Alnic MC* occurred.

Search and rescue operations with the aforementioned parties

The US Navy and Marine Corps dive team is surveying the interior and exterior of the warship for the missing sailors.

spanned 5,524 square kilometres, with more than 300 personnel from a number of Singapore agencies taking part over the past four days.

"As the co-ordinating agency for the four-day search and rescue efforts, [the Maritime & Port Authority of Singapore] thanks all personnel from participating nations who worked tirelessly with the Singapore agencies to assist the US Navy," said MPA chief executive Andrew Tan.

"We would like to express our condolences to the families and loved ones of the deceased US Navy crew, and wish the injured crew a speedy recovery."

The US Navy announced that human remains discovered by the Royal Malaysian Navy during the search on August 22 were not those of a sailor from the damaged warship.

"The determination was made following medical examinations of the remains, which will be returned to Malaysian authorities."

Meanwhile, the combined team of divers from the US Navy and Marine Corps continued with search and rescue efforts in and around the warship, which is presently moored at Singapore's Changi Naval Base.

"The dive team is surveying the interior and exterior of the ship, seeking to help locate the missing sailors and inspect damage in order to help develop a plan for repairs," said Master Chief Joshua Dumke, master diver, commander, Logistics Group Western Pacific.

"The diving operations will enable us to get a clear picture of the situation and help to bring closure to those affected by this tragedy."

As for the oil tanker involved in the collision, its owner, Stealth Maritime, said in a statement the vessel had been cleared by Singapore authorities to discharge its cargo of 12,000 tonnes of fuel oil.

Once completed, the vessel will move to a Singapore anchorage to undergo further assessment and repair.

The crew will continue to operate and maintain the vessel during this process.

Stealth Maritime, owned by the Vafias family, said it would continue to co-operate fully with all of the relevant authorities in their investigations into the collision.

"We would like to express our deepest condolences to the families of the US Navy sailors who have been affected by this terrible tragedy," the statement said.

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Round the bend

by Michael Grey

Too many people think that today's huge boxships drive around with the precision of a top of the range car



Tugs pushing CSCL Jupiter after the 14,300 teu vessel failed to make it around the notorious Bath bend on the River Scheldt.

Source: Capt. Richard/Twitter

366 m long ship, I can only guess, but some were pushing. The vessel aborted its outbound passage and was returned to Antwerp, presumably for an underwater survey and assurances that the hull was not unduly strained by the ordeal. This particular bend in one of Europe's busiest rivers has claimed casualties for centuries. In the ships I sailed in, the poor old mate and carpenter had to be on the forecandle all the way down the river, just in case they had to drop the anchor, should the hazards of the Scheldt overwhelm the bridge team. I don't think they bother nowadays; at the speed these monstrous ships charge about, they would just get freezing cold for nothing.

THE tedium of the August "silly season" was relieved no end last week with the astonishing pictures showing people wandering around the bulbous bow of the grounded CSCL Jupiter, after the 14,300 teu vessel had failed to make it around the notorious Bath bend on the River Scheldt. Fortunately the tides were favourable, the huge and capable towage sector of the Port of Antwerp rallied around and the ship was hauled off the putty in a relatively short time. Quite how you manage to secure a dozen or so tugs to a

But we shouldn't make light of these incidents. The structural stresses on a huge, laden hull could see the longitudinal strength of a grounded ship seriously compromised, if it was left unsupported by a receding tide for an extended period. In theory, the girder could be broken in half, which would set the hull insurers back a pretty penny. So far, the moon has smiled on the salvors, because lightening one of these monsters would be a major task if they failed to haul it off promptly.

"It is just a matter of time," pessimists, or perhaps realists, suggest, as the average size of deepsea containerships creeps upwards every year. The ships are now so big that you need tugs in many ports just to get them around a bend in the channel, which would have been out of the question with smaller ships. The lines are in an arms race to build bigger ships to secure their market share. The ports are faced with massive capital dredging to accommodate them, while the safety envelope around bigger ships shrinks all the time. Why should not insurers be worried?

We don't know the circumstances of the latest grounding in the Antwerp approaches. Maybe something broke, maybe the crucial helm order was misunderstood, or the ride too strong astern, maybe there was an unexpected puff of wind, or other traffic causing complications. But that's not the point. Too many people think that these huge ships drive around with the precision of a top of the range car and that sadly includes many of those who control them from the safety of their offices. People who design them are not always absolved from their remoteness from any real understanding of their products' operational limitations.

Pilots' concern

The ships have been designed for the most economical carriage of containers on an oceanic service with their technical performance optimised for their deepsea operations. And in this respect, their designers have done a brilliant job.

But if you talk to the people who have to handle these monsters in port, you get a different angle. Pilots speak of their concern at the high manoeuvring speeds that are necessary to maintain steerage way, with rudders which they suggest are too small for the great length of the ship, and the huge, slow-turning propellers. They have experienced difficulties with propulsion machinery that is too clever for its own good, shutting down the engine when it senses the depth of water under the keel is too shallow for its health, causing heart-stopping moments on the bridge. Then they find that they have to swing these ships in turning circles that were dredged for shorter vessels and take them up channels where it is just about possible to navigate safely, with inches, rather than feet, under the keel.

The operationally unusual has become routine, as it is so much easier to build a fleet of 400 m long ships than it is for ports to undertake a dredging programme with environmentalists rampant.

What happens when one of these babies runs aground on the top of the spring tides, on a rocky ridge, rather than a sandy bend, in a location where they don't have a sufficiency of powerful tugs readily available? The salvors will cope, you might suggest, just as they always have. Except that people who know about these things in the salvage sector are among those who have been raising alarm signals for longer than most, suggesting that the rush for bigger ships has largely ignored the likelihood that somebody, one day, will have the frightful job of coping with something three times the *Rena* casualty.

That total loss on the coast of New Zealand ought to have been a cautionary tale. But when you are striving for market share, when you see your only strategy for commercial survival depending on ever-bigger ships, you put such warnings to one side and hope for the best. "It won't happen to us!" you assert with confidence, fingers crossed and knocking on wood.

The last word is given to a cynical friend: "If it had been one of these autonomous ships, it would never have happened." Somehow, I don't think he was being serious.

rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk

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CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Nikki Handley
Nikki.Handley@informa.com
+44 (0) 20 7017 4751

Our panellists



Dr Johanna Hjalmarsson
Editor Informa's Shipping & Trade Law and i-law.com



Harry Theochari
Partner – Global Head of Transport, Norton Rose Fulbright



Joe Hughes
Chairman and CEO American Club



Iain White
Global Marketing Manager, ExxonMobil Marine Fuels and Lubricants



Henriette Brent-Petersen
Managing Director Global Head of Shipping Offshore Research DVB Bank



Dele Adewale
Senior Trade Services Officer Zenith Bank