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Press Release · Pressemitteilung

SMM 2021: New impetus for the maritime transformation

Every two years SMM brings together industry stakeholders from around the world. Because of the coronavirus crisis, the leading international maritime trade fair has been postponed until 2-5 February 2021. Not surprisingly, the effects of the pandemic were the main topic at the SMM Advance Press Conference. Leading experts assessed the current situation in the shipping industry and its consequences for the SMM agenda, which will focus on Green Shipping and Digitalisation.

Hamburg, 14-05-2020 – Social distancing, face masks, avoiding crowds: In a matter of weeks the coronavirus has turned our lives upside down. That goes for the SMM advance press conference, as well: This year the CEO of Hamburg's expo centre, **Bernd Aufderheide**, did not welcome his guests in person but to a virtual venue. Panel experts and dozens of top-ranking media representatives from around the world joined him for a video conference.

The President and CEO of Hamburg Messe und Congress GmbH first commented on the postponement of SMM, the leading international maritime trade fair. "The continued, highly dynamic development of the pandemic and the resulting ban on major events have compelled us to reschedule SMM to February 2021. The vast majority of exhibitors support the new dates. We have been receiving plenty of positive feedback. We are therefore confident that we have made the right decision," said Aufderheide. The expo CEO takes an optimistic view of the future: "Together we will overcome this crisis and host an SMM that will live up to the high standards everyone expects."

The panel of experts who joined the advance press conference exemplified SMM's claim of reflecting the entire value chain of the maritime industry. From shipowners and suppliers to a classification society, leading representatives of the industry's key segments were part of the digital expert panel. The theme of the event was the coronavirus and what it means for the transformation of the maritime sector.

Globalisation is slowing

The maritime industry has been facing climate change, the digitalisation challenge, and now, the coronavirus crisis. These changes are of "a similar scale as the move from sail to steam", said **Martin Stopford**, President of Clarkson Research. It is important to remember that trade growth was already slowing before COVID-19 hit, he added. "We are moving into an era where globalisation is no longer the issue. We will see more short-sea shipping and local manufacturing," said Stopford. He anticipates three conceivable scenarios for shipping after the coronavirus: In the best of cases sea trade will pick up again in 2023, growing by 3.2 per cent

annually. The second scenario assumes a prolonged recession with world trade shrinking by one per cent between 2020 and 2024, followed by renewed growth at a rate of 2.2 per cent. "In scenario 3 there is an extended recession with sea trade declining by 17 per cent by 2024," said Stopford in his most pessimistic forecast.

As for future ship fuels, the renowned shipping expert expects three innovation waves. "Diesel is wonderful stuff and replacing it is not going to be easy," Stopford pointed out. The first wave will see conventionally propelled but optimised vessels. This will be followed by gas and hybrid or electrically powered ships featuring low emissions, advanced digital control systems and batteries. In the third wave, fuel cells will allow ships to operate emission-free.

Suppliers in need of support

One possible way to reduce emissions today is wind propulsion, a technology **Cristina Aleixendri**, COO at bound4blue believes in. She sees the pandemic opening up many new opportunities for the industry: "The coronavirus could be the driving force enabling us to achieve the decarbonisation goals even before 2050," she said. Her Catalan start-up does its share to make it happen: Bound4blue has developed a smart sail system called 'Wingsail'. "Shipping companies can save up to 40 per cent of fuel and the associated emissions," says Aleixendri who has made it onto the 2019 Forbes "30 under 30" list. "The purpose of green technologies and digitalisation is to cut emissions and costs. They must be profitable from day one, without any subsidies," says Aleixendri. But how can shipowners invest during a crisis?

A question **Dirk Lehmann**, Managing Director of the Hamburg-based company Becker Marine Systems, and Vice Chair of SEA Europe, has been mulling over. He calls on governments to make far-reaching concessions and provide support: "Shipyards and maritime suppliers are important pillars supporting the sea transport sector. These companies and their employees are suffering from the pandemic in especially severe ways," Lehmann stressed. "They depend on the support of the political decision-makers. Providing this support is the only way a steady supply of goods and technical progress can be ensured in Europe."

Following through with the green agenda

Smart transport logistics keeps supply chains going and plays a vital role in the economy, especially in times of the coronavirus. At the same time it places a heavy burden on seafarers, some of whom have been on board for months without a break. They are forced to take over their colleagues' shifts as long as crew changes are impossible and there is no way for them to return to their home countries because of the risk of infection. **Sadan Kaptanoglu**, President of the International Shipowners Association BIMCO, has called on governments not to abandon ship owners and their crews at sea and on land. Since taking office, Kaptanoglu has also been advocating for greener shipping, a goal the industry must pursue despite the crisis, she said: „We still need to reach the 2050 reduction target for emissions, and one or two years of low revenues will not change that.“

Digital services

The crisis not only affects shipping companies but classification societies like DNV GL, as well. But the class experts were well-prepared: Since introducing its remote diagnostics system DATE (Direct Access to Technical Experts) in 2018, DNV GL has performed more than 15,000 surveys remotely. "We have been lucky to have gained experience working with remote survey schemes over the past few years. DNV GL's unique DATE service allows us to ensure safety and regulatory compliance through the use of modern technology on board," said **Knut Ørbeck-Nielsen**, CEO of DNVGL – Maritime. In these times, flexibility wins. To the Norwegian class society this means granting customers more options: "We know that many shipowners are in a difficult situation today. That's why we grant the postponement of surveys, applying a force majeure clause," Ørbeck-Nielsen added. Every crisis harbours an opportunity for improvement, he said: "We are on the cusp of a renaissance of shipping and the maritime industry. Within just a few months the pandemic has turbocharged the sector's digitalisation journey, advancing it by half a decade."

Discussing crisis management in times of the coronavirus, along with green shipping and digitalisation, the SMM advance press conference gave participants a foretaste of the industry's key topics eight months ahead of the fair. The specialist conferences accompanying the trade fair promise to deliver fascinating new insights, as well. "We look forward to welcoming visitors from more than 120 countries next February. Here in Hamburg they will meet up with exhibitors whose innovative products and services will reflect the maritime state-of-the-art," says Bernd Aufderheide.

To video stream the entire advance press conference please go [here](#).
For more information on the trade fair go [here](#).

About SMM

SMM, the leading international maritime trade fair, takes place at the Hamburg Messe und Congress exhibition complex every two years. In response to the coronavirus crisis, the 29th issue of the trade fair has been rescheduled and is now set to take place from 2 to 5 February 2021. Around 2,000 exhibitors and 50,000 visitors are expected to come to the famous port city. Covering more than 90,000 square metres of exhibition floor, SMM reflects the entire value chain of the maritime industry. Decision-makers, experts and multipliers from all parts of the world will gather at the exhibition, making SMM the foremost innovation platform of the maritime sector.

Press contact: Nora Hirschfeld, ph +49 40 3569 2445;
E-mail: nora.hirschfeld@hamburg-messe.de