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THE VIEW
RICHARD HEXT

For a sustainable future

Time for Hong Kong to take leadership role in achieving zero-carbon shipping as maritime body sets ambitious emissions targets

The theme of this year's World Maritime Day, which falls on today, is "sustainable shipping for a sustainable planet". It has a special significance for Hong Kong and the Greater Bay Area, home to three of the 10 biggest container ports in the world.

Recent extreme weather around the world underlines the importance of this theme. Wildfires in the western United States are burning more than 2 million hectares and sending smoke into the atmosphere that has reached western Europe. Meanwhile, new temperature highs have been recorded, including 38 degrees Celsius inside the Arctic Circle.

Many parts of East Asia have experienced devastating weather this summer, and Hong Kong recorded its hottest July since 1884. These weather extremes, which scientists predict will worsen, emphasise the importance for everyone to reduce their carbon footprint.

Hong Kong has always been a maritime place, and it was the maritime trade in agarwood that gave the Frigate Harbour its name. Since the advent of the internal combustion engine and the rapid increase in global trade, shipping gradually became a more significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, which play a part in climate change.

Shipping is still a greener form of transport than road or air. However, the sheer scale of some 95,000 oceangoing vessels moving more than 90 per cent of the world's goods means it is responsible for about 2.9 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.



Container ships at Kwai Tsing Container Terminals in Kwai Chung. The world's shipping fleet is responsible for about 2.9 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Photo: Winson Wong

It is time for the city to take a leadership role in achieving zero-carbon shipping, and it can start by making an immediate local response

It is sometimes noted that this figure is comparable with Germany's greenhouse emissions, but this overlooks that Germany represents about 1 per cent of the world's population whereas shipping helps keep the whole world fed, clothed and supplied with power. More to the point, aviation is responsible for similar emissions, but delivers only a small percentage of the world's goods.

Nevertheless, the shipping industry has recognised the vital importance of action. The United Nations' International Maritime Organisation implemented a global switch to low-sulphur fuel

in January. It has also set a target to reduce ships' carbon emissions by 50 per cent by 2050, compared to 2008 levels, and it is committed to phasing out greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible.

These ambitious targets represent the biggest challenge for local shipping companies, which may be ordering vessels to be operational at sea in 10 or 20 years' time. As part of its support for green shipping, the Hong Kong Maritime Museum is highlighting the efforts of those attempting to overcome these challenges and reduce their carbon footprints.

For example, Pacific Basin

Shipping, Swire Group's China Navigation, KCMaritime, Caravel Group and Taylor Maritime are all members of the Getting to Zero Coalition, an international partnership between the Global Maritime Forum, the Friends of Ocean Action and the World Economic Forum. The coalition encourages member companies to invest in new technology and better operational procedures to improve fuel efficiency and reduce carbon intensity and emissions.

These companies are also leading efforts to adopt innovative propulsion systems that will burn new, greener fuels such as

hydrogen, ammonia, green methanol and other bio or synthetic fuels. Switching fuels will be expensive as it requires a worldwide bunkering system and compatible propulsion and power systems.

In July, another local member of the coalition, Anglo-Eastern, a major ship management company, was officially certified as carbon-neutral in respect to its land-based operations, in line with PAS 2060, the international standard for carbon neutrality. It has almost 6,000 tonnes of carbon emissions offset via a certified climate project in Zambia.

Despite this progress and the commitment by many to the goal of zero-carbon shipping, the industry remains a significant contributor to Hong Kong's greenhouse gas emissions. It is time for the city to take a leadership role in achieving zero-carbon shipping, and it can start by making an immediate local response.

Hong Kong could offer more subsidies to encourage hybrid or fully electric propulsion for ferries and self-propelled barges. It could scale up its liquefied natural gas bunkering facilities for LNG-fuelled ships. The city could encourage the use of biofuels, which can be produced from waste cooking oil collected from Hong Kong and the mainland.

It could encourage burning new fuels such as hydrogen, many of which can now be produced on the mainland. Subsidised electric shore power supplies for visiting vessels would also make a difference, as would a just-in-time berthing system.

Governments and the International Maritime Organisation could also do more to enforce emissions regulations. And the public needs to be willing to pay a little more for goods delivered on zero-carbon ships.

Hong Kong is also well placed to influence policy on the mainland, which now dominates global shipping. Last year, the International Chamber of Shipping established its China liaison office in Hong Kong to increase cooperation and understanding on important, longer-term regulatory issues. The key issue will be the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

The history of Hong Kong is that of a resilient and resourceful city built on maritime trade. Let's celebrate World Maritime Day by recommitting to sustainability. We don't have any alternatives; there is no Planet B.

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