

Nusrat Ghani MP
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Chamber of Shipping
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Opening remarks

Good morning. And a happy new year to all of you. It's a real pleasure to be here today to address such an expert maritime audience. To talk about the progress on maritime technology we've made over the past year. And to kick off what promises to be a compelling day of discussion and debate.

So, thanks to James Fanshawe for inviting me to speak. And the UK Chamber of Shipping for hosting us at this wonderful venue.

Shared strategy

Let me start by saying how hugely impressed I've been by the achievements of the Regulatory Working Group. To launch Version Three of the Industry Code of Practice was a huge undertaking. And one which has profound implications for the way we are seen internationally. So, I must thank you for all your hard work. And for helping put us in good shape as we embark on a new year, and a new decade.

I'm delighted to return to government as your maritime minister.

With a fresh mandate to deliver the strategy that we published last year - Maritime 2050. A long-term blueprint to make the UK a global maritime leader. A centre for research and development, for technological innovation. To build our expertise in areas like autonomous and zero emission shipping. With the capacity and flexibility to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Maritime 2050 is our shared vision to grow the industry over the next three decades and beyond. And I say shared – because it was the result of a massive, industry-wide consultation programme. Formed by a huge amount of knowledge and experience from right across the maritime sector. From shipping companies, ports and tech developers. To the Royal Navy, Merchant Navy and other government departments.

So, it's as much your strategy as it is ours.

Technology - autonomy

Alongside Maritime 2050 we also published a route map to scope out the future for technology and innovation. Once again, this was a product of close engagement with industry.

Our goal: to make the UK a major international hub for maritime autonomous technologies, which meet the highest safety levels.

To achieve this, and give this country a head start in what will become a vast market, we have to be able to test autonomous vessels in our waters. So, I'm pleased to report that we have made excellent progress since the route map was published.

As you know, in May last year, SEA-KIT, a UK-based manufacturer, successfully guided the first unmanned ship across the North Sea.

And we established the Maritime Autonomy Regulation Lab– known as MARLab. Led by the MCA, and based at the National Oceanography Centre in Southampton. MARLab’s job is to create new and innovative ways to regulate maritime autonomy. To support flagship projects to test in UK waters. And shape regulation internationally at the IMO.

I know many of you will have already been involved with MARLab through its work with Policy Lab and Solis Marine. And I am pleased that MARLab representatives will be speaking at this conference later today. So, please do go and speak to them if you would like to know more.

Other measures – tech and innovation

Another huge success last year was the 2019 London International Shipping Week, which took place in September. With over 160 brilliant events, we welcomed over 20,000 guests from across the world. Gaining new perspectives on almost every aspect of global shipping and maritime.

And I was particularly proud to attend the Shipping Week Technology Showcase onboard RFA Lyme Bay, which demonstrated the breadth of proficiency and know-how we have in this country. From virtual reality seafarer training to wave propelled autonomous vessels.

Maritime 2050 is not going to be one of those strategy documents that ends up gathering dust on Whitehall shelves. It’s designed to inspire real change - practical, deliverable measures that we can start implementing today.

For example, one key ambition was to launch Innovation Hubs in UK ports, to encourage collaboration between industry and academia.

That's why last July I was proud to launch the first 2050 Innovation Hub at the Port of Tyne. A region with a rich maritime history. Now we want the Hub to spark a new era of technological creativity. And build our maritime capability in the North East.

But this is only the start.

We want a national network of Innovation Hubs across the UK. And we will be working with you to make this happen.

It's thanks to collaboration that we've been able to support the launch of Maritime Research and Innovation UK – MarRI-UK. A consortium of leading industry, research and academic organisations united into a single national institute. And this body will play a central role in realising the Maritime 2050 vision, harnessing the skills, investment and entrepreneurial spirit we have in this country. And taking a lead in the development of new maritime technologies within the UK, that we will be able to sell right around the world.

Digitalisation

At London International Shipping Week, I was pleased to announce the launch of a new £1.5 million competition. The Technology and Innovation in UK Maritime Call to channel more investment in research and development. For example, in digitalisation.

Even more pleasing was the excellent response to the competition. And MarRI-UK is currently assessing a great number of high-quality Expression of Interest applications.

Digital technologies provide huge opportunities for the maritime sector. That's why, in Maritime 2050, the government set an ambition

for a data-driven 'digital by default' UK maritime industry, where digital documentation reduces administrative burdens on business.

And big data increases the quality and accuracy of information in real time, enhancing communication, reliability and transparency - all of which will be required to support maritime autonomy.

Technologies like blockchain are likely to transform the way services such as insurance and contract management are provided.

So, we need to be among the earliest adopters if we want to remain competitive.

Environment

And, of course there are potentially huge environmental benefits from the uptake of new technologies.

The battle to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and tackle climate change is becoming more urgent every year. That's why we've become the first advanced economy to make a legal commitment to net zero carbon emissions by the middle of this century.

Every sector of our economy must play its part. That's why we also became one of the first countries to lay out precisely how we will address domestic greenhouse gas and pollutant emissions, with the Clean Maritime Plan.

The Plan underpins our long-term vision of zero emission shipping and seeks to place the UK as a global leader in clean maritime. This was backed up with the £1.5 million Clean Maritime Call, organised by MarRI-UK, to provide grant funding to companies innovating to ensure we can hit these targets.

Conclusion

Clearly, these are big, challenging issues, particularly when approached in isolation. They represent a revolution in shipping technology. In the way we run our businesses. And in how we protect the marine environment.

But we are not approaching them in isolation. We're doing it together. Government and industry - Public and private sectors - to build a greener, cleaner, safer, more modern shipping industry for the future.

And I am excited about what we can achieve. Because having had the opportunity to represent this great industry in parliament over the past two years; to work alongside you, and appreciate the incredible professionalism with which you carry out your responsibilities; has been an absolute privilege. And gives me great confidence that we will continue working together to realise the ambitions set out in Maritime 2050.

So, let me finish by saying thanks. For all you have achieved as part of the MAS Regulatory Group. For your continued engagement with the Industry Code of Practice. And for listening to me today.

Thank you.