

Robert Courts MP

Pre-record speech for Maritime Autonomous System Regulatory Conference

Opening remarks

Good morning. And a happy new year to all of you. I'm pleased to be here, albeit virtually, to discuss some of the progress the sector and government have made this year on maritime autonomy despite the challenges brought on by the global pandemic. And to kick off what promises to be a compelling day of discussion and debate.

I must thank you for all your continued hard work to put the UK in a strong position as we embark on a new year. And, thank you to James Fanshawe for inviting me to speak.

Covid-19

Let me start by briefly touching on Covid-19. I have been hugely impressed by the achievements of the sector in these difficult times. The critical role that the maritime sector plays for our country has been demonstrated time and again, with the sector keeping the economy moving during lockdown and now transporting the vaccines and medical supplies which will help put us on a pathway to recovery.

I am hopeful that as a country we can progress along that pathway quickly, and start really delivering on the Government's wider agenda

including making the most of the UK's strengths in technology, research and development. This year has driven home the importance of new technologies and the benefits of new ways of working, to keep us connected with our work colleagues and our loved ones.

And we cannot achieve some of our aims, such as decarbonisation, without infrastructure and technology. We want to make the best use of new and developing technology to enable more efficient, resilient and greener working practices. The UK aims to be the world-leader in design, manufacture, uptake, and use of maritime autonomy and other innovative ship-board technologies.

I am immensely proud of the work and achievements in technology by the maritime sector, particularly in automation. If we continue to work in partnership to deliver our ambitions, I am confident we will be the world leader in maritime technology, innovation and productivity in a way that strengthens UK maritime business for the future.

Maritime 2050

The Government remains committed to our shared long-term vision of the maritime sector as set out in Maritime 2050. As you will all know, Maritime 2050 builds upon previous strategies and sets out an ambitious vision for the sector developing and adopting new technologies

The UK has an opportunity to become a centre for maritime research and development and to build our expertise in areas like autonomous and

zero emission shipping. And to further increase the capacity and flexibility to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Technology - autonomy

The work of the Maritime Autonomous Systems Regulatory Working Group is a key contributor to achieving this vision. The updated Version Four of the Industry Code of Practice is a demonstration of the continued leadership that the UK provides on the global stage. And it encapsulates the commitment that you all have to the safe use of the autonomous and remotely operated vessels.

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

2020 saw continued developments in testing and operation of unmanned vessels in UK waters to take this work forward, and I know there are already projects being prepared to take place this year.

Government Support

2020 also saw the publication of the Maritime Autonomy Regulation Lab, or MARLab, report. This work represented the culmination of almost 2 years of intensive work between the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, the National Oceanography Centre and industry partners to explore the regulatory requirements for unmanned and autonomous vessels to

operate in the UK and to support the UK's contribution to the work at the IMO.

We all know that good regulation in this area is critical to the success of maritime autonomy. Safety must be our number one priority, and poor or uncertain regulation can stifle innovation –so getting this right is a complicated, but important, task. I am pleased with the progress the MCA have made in developing a future regulatory regime and you will hear more from Katrina Kemp about the MCA later today on the next steps for their work. I know that you will all continue to work with the MCA to support this work in the coming months.

The UK Government also continues to provide funding to support the research and development of maritime autonomy. Last summer we announced the 21 projects which have been funded through Maritime Research and Innovation UK – MarRI-UK. The variety and quality of these projects is ground-breaking, and demonstrates the strengths of the UK maritime sector.

MarRI-UK have also recently launched a Smart Maritime Land Operations competition, funded by the Department for Transport. This £1.35m competition will fund technology development aimed at how ports will interact with smarter and more autonomous operations both at sea and on land. This will help develop a key link in the future transport chain.

On top of the work by MarRI-UK, another exciting project taking place is the Belfast Maritime Consortium, led by Artemis Technologies, which has received £33 million of public funding from the Strength in Places fund to develop zero emission, hydrofoiling ferries. This consortium shows the additional employment, skills and opportunity that new technologies can bring to local areas.

All these projects, jointly funded by Government, industry and academia, will help in the realisation of our shared vision. harnessing the skills, investment and entrepreneurial spirit that 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.

Environment

And, of course, as you know there are potentially significant environmental benefits from the uptake of new technologies which will help in our collective battle against climate change. This is why the Prime Minister's Ten Point Plan, published in November, set out our ambitions for a green industrial revolution. This included the announcement a £20 million fund for a competition to develop clean maritime technology, such as feasibility studies and technology trials on key sites. To be launched in the coming months, this will lay the foundation for a growing network of projects gearing up maritime decarbonisation in the UK.

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.

This continues to be a critical focus of this Government and supporting the decarbonisation of the maritime sector will also help to create new, skilled jobs and contribute to the economic recovery from Covid-19.

Conclusion

We have achieved many successes, but we cannot rest on our laurels. The work that your organisations do and the discussions which will be had at this conference represent the future of the maritime sector. The government is committed to supporting the continued development of maritime autonomy in the UK and the necessary regulatory changes needed to enable the safe operation of these vessels.

The progress made so far is worth celebrating and, in particular, the collaborative way in which it has been achieved. I ask that you continue this collaboration, with academia, with government and with each other.

Let me finish by saying thank you, for all you have achieved to date, and the best of luck for the continued successful development of the Industry Code of Practice.