



Accelerated digital transformation of the waterborne sector is critical to ensure a resilient, competitive and prosperous future for European citizens

Waterborne Technology Platform paves the way for a coordinated digital transformation of the European waterborne sector

Brussels, 21 November 2024

On 13 and 14 November 2024, the members of the Waterborne Technology Platform met for the annual General Assembly in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Over 100 representatives of the member organisations discussed the long-term mission and vision of the association's different working groups, namely: ships & shipping, ports and logistics, and blue growth. During the meeting it was agreed that digitalization is the key enabler for human centric innovation and sustainable solutions, enhancing sovereignty, efficiency, security, safety and reliability.

The European waterborne sector includes all relevant actors, including, inter alia, shipyards and equipment manufacturers, shipowners (both maritime and inland navigation), ports, classification societies, blue economy, infrastructure and service providers, and the academic and research communities. It includes, inter alia, all main ship types, included in the Partnership on Zero-emission waterborne transport, and has been extended with underwater vehicles: inland waterway transport vessels, ferries, short sea shipping, offshore, cruise ships, long-distance shipping, underwater and unmanned vehicles.

The sector is fundamental to Europe's sovereignty, economic and strategic autonomy. It also provides the most sustainable way to achieve the EU Green Deal ambitions. However, the sector is very different to other sectors due to its huge scale, unique technologies and fuels, endurance, special operating environment and regulation. This sets it apart from other activities and raises specific challenges related to 1) increased labour shortage combined with increased demand for the waterborne sector, 2) international competition and geopolitical developments, 3) transition to zero-emission waterborne transport, 4) modal shift, 5) fragmentation and 6) urgency to meet the different policy objectives set.

The General Assembly concluded that whilst there is a consensus concerning the need to digitalize the waterborne sector, a coordinated approach in terms of research, development, innovation and the deployment of innovations is needed to mobilise a critical mass that is committed to the urgent development of the necessary knowledge, technology and business models, and to ensure its deployment. This approach is expected to enhance Europe's technological leadership over competitors in other geographical areas, who are stepping up their R&I investments, in particular in the transport sector with advanced technology. The digital transformation is a major game-changer for the waterborne sector that cannot be addressed through the traditional sectorial in-silo approaches. It requires to be tackled with focused effort and by the entire waterborne sector through a horizontal and collaborate approach.



Eero Lehtovaara, Chair of the Board of Directors, Waterborne TP, said: *“The Board welcomes the mandate provided by the General Assembly to continue the work in the area of digitalisation, and the emphasis on the need for a coordinated approach. As with the development and demonstration of zero-emission technologies for the waterborne sector, a coordinated approach is a catalyst for activities and investments. Taking into account the challenges identified, digitalisation will be key to ensure the future operations of the European waterborne sector, being able to deal with increased labour shortages, geopolitical tensions and achieving the European policy objectives, including the transition to zero-emission waterborne transport and fully utilising the potential of the sector. During the Waterborne Days scheduled for 4 and 5 February 2025, digitalisation will be one of the key items to be discussed and reflected upon.”*

WATERBORNE TP has been set up as an industry-oriented Technology Platform to establish a continuous dialogue between all waterborne stakeholders, such as classification societies, shipbuilders, shipowners, maritime equipment manufacturers, infrastructure and service providers, universities or research institutes, and with the EU Institutions, including Member States (www.waterborne.eu). The members of Waterborne TP comprise members as well as associated members from both maritime and inland navigation countries, representing about 19 Member States. In addition, the Associations member of the Waterborne Technology Platform represent the broader waterborne sector throughout the entire EU.

Enquiries concerning how to join and become more closely involved in the “Zero-Emission Waterborne Transport” partnership or other activities of the Waterborne TP can be sent to: Jaap Gebraad, Secretary General Waterborne TP, jaap.gebraad@waterborne.eu, tel: +32 493 835 626