Waterborne Technology Platform sets new milestone with publication of strategic research agenda

Strategic Research Agenda encompasses objectives across the transformation of waterborne transport, technology leadership in blue economy sectors, and optimising the link of waterborne transport with port and logistics operations.

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The Waterborne Technology Platform has published its new Strategic Research Agenda for the European waterborne sector. The waterborne sector is dynamic, featuring a diverse array of public and private stakeholders. These stakeholders include classification societies, shipbuilders, shipowners (both maritime and inland navigation), equipment manufacturers, ports, infrastructure and service providers (e.g. dredging), as well as universities and research institutes. While large enterprises play a key role in the development and innovation in the value chain, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) form the largest part of the EU waterborne sector and play a crucial role in the sector and the broader European economy.

The various stakeholder groups offer a wide range of services, trades and products, with the global fleet categorized by ship types and services based on power requirements and autonomy. These categories include **inland waterway transport vessels, ferries, short sea, cruise, intercontinental and offshore ships as well as underwater and unmanned vehicles**. There are also distinctions between liner and tramp shipping and their respective business models, as well as between retrofitting existing vessels and building new ones. Ports are equally important, functioning as multimodal hubs that facilitate the movement of goods and passengers and support a wide range of economic activities, including shipbuilding, maintenance, logistics and energy production. Finally, the waterborne sector is a key solutions provider for the broader blue economy, contributing to areas such as the development and production of offshore platform technologies; the design, production, maintenance and operation of specialised vessels and technology leadership in the underwater domain, e.g. underwater unmanned vehicles.

The sector actively invests in research, development and innovation (RD&I) to remain a frontrunner in the global green and digital transformation. RD&I is key to maintain or increase the competitiveness of the European waterborne sector. Technology leadership will be essential in the design, production, development and implementation, including on-board and onshore integration, of innovative technologies and solutions.

The European waterborne sector is committed to mobilizing significant investments in research, development and innovation, education, training and skills development, and deployment across the full value and supply chain, including SMEs, start-ups, and regional actors. The Strategic Research Agenda developed by the sector outlines objectives in the following areas: the transformation of waterborne transport, technology leadership in blue economy sectors, and strengthening the connection between waterborne transport and port and logistics operations.

Maria Boile, Coordinator, Waterborne TP, said: "*The publication of our new Strategic Research Agenda (SRA) marks a significant milestone for the European waterborne sector. Developed through a truly collaborative process, the SRA brings together a broad and diverse group of stakeholders, united by a shared ambition and commitment. It sets out a clear collective vision to guide the transformation of the sector towards increased resilience, competitiveness, sustainability, and global technology leadership.*

Together, we have defined a strategic framework that will steer our research, development and innovation efforts in the years to come. As Coordinator, I am honoured to support this important collective endeavour."

Jaap Gebraad, Secretary General, Waterborne TP, concluded: *"Technology Leadership will be a key building block of the upcoming industrial waterborne and port strategies. The SRA includes all the building blocks from the perspective of RD&I and its deployment, centred around the industrial base of the waterborne sector. It covers both the waterborne transport, including Europe's maritime technology sector, and its connections to the blue economy in segments where the sector is, or is positioned to become a global leader. Furthermore, the updated inclusion of ports in this SRA not only showcases the interdependent nature of the ecosystem, but also reaffirms Europe's leading role, ranging from port equipment manufacturing and the design and implementation of digital and green corridors to the development and deployment of energy hubs in ports. In the coming period, we will focus on technological roadmaps to achieve the objectives laid down in the SRA and further explore potential deployment avenues. This will enable the Waterborne Technology Platform to contribute to upcoming strategies, from both a research and deployment perspective"*

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