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UK ports grappling with 'shambolic' Brexit black hole of information



WITH SIX MONTHS to go until Britain imposes post-Brexit border checks on European Union goods, UK ports lack sufficient clarity to start building the required infrastructure, have no clear guidance on the required detail of border processes and now have to contend with a government IT system that the head of the government's own expert customs panel has described as "shambolic and amateurish".

Following several months of near radio silence from government departments sidetracked by the coronavirus pandemic, the UK ports sector is currently being bombarded with communications daily as plans for the UK to leave the EU rapidly ramp up.

Two weeks ago news quietly started to emerge that a government-led IT system, the Goods Vehicle Movement Service, was about to be introduced to help goods flow across Britain's borders and cut queues. That was swiftly followed by an 89-page consultation document circulated by the government to trade groups setting out draft policy on the EU border processes.

Since then, port officials report a daily barrage of Brexit activity and communications as government departments race to avoid blockages at the border with the European Union, its biggest trading partner.

The draft consultation document, seen by Lloyd's List, sets out the basic processes that everyone moving goods between Britain and the EU will need to follow from January 1, 2021, a second phase of processes introduced from April 1, 2021 for food and other organic imports and finally the full introduction of controls from July 1, 2021.

The document details how operators would have to follow a “prelodgement” model — where trucks carrying goods must file their paperwork electronically before arrival in the UK — or follow the same “Temporary Storage” arrangements as cargo arrivals from the rest of the world.

However, the document contains several blank pages where detail on the import processes are yet to be finalised and contains no information on how government plans to enforce the new pre-clearance processes that are being rolled out on an untested IT system still under development.

And therein lies the problem — UK ports know that post-Brexit border control infrastructure needs to be built, but they lack the basic details that would allow them to start construction and planning.

The concern is even more pressing for those involved in moving freight from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, where GVMS comes fully into force from January 1, 2021.

Lloyd’s List understands that there is significant concern from most big port operators regarding the current lack of clarity on required specifications, the time it will take to deliver infrastructure, the consistency and fairness between locations with onsite and offsite border facilities as well as some basic concern on the emerging border processes now being slowly filtered through government communications.

UK port officials report that the little information they have received suggests that the new processes will make existing well-functioning border processes more difficult and more expensive while channelling traffic to routes with higher underlying risk of disruption.

Like much of Brexit planning, the emergence of The Goods Vehicle Movement Service came as a surprise to the maritime sector.

Nobody Lloyd’s List has spoken to at a senior level in the UK ports sector had heard of it until two weeks ago.

Details remain scant and testing has not begun, but GVMS is essentially a vehicle bookings system that controls truck entry into ports, validated against pre-entered goods movement records and linked to back office port processes, HM Revenue & Customs and the new border protocols.

The issue is that nobody has any clarity on what those processes and protocols are.

“It’s based on a flow of data that we don’t have and it’s been devised without any thought of how things actually work in the real world — it’s a shambles, the whole thing is just amateurish,” said Peter MacSwiney, chairman of the UK government’s expert customs panel, the Joint Customs Consultative Committee (JCCC) & EU Transition Sub Group.

“I’m bemused as to what we’ve been talking about for the past three years,” he told Lloyd’s List. “We’ve been looking at this in depth and we might as well have not bothered. There’s been no external engagement of any real worth for the first six months of this year and then a couple of weeks ago Boris [Johnson] announces there will be no extensions and from there on it’s like the greyhound has been let out of the trap. It’s too late and besides, they’re coming out with things they’ve clearly already decided.”

Despite the lack of detail and some internal scepticism regarding the government’s chequered history regarding delivery of major IT projects, industry officials are more sanguine regarding the delivery of GVMS.

Along with the rest of the industry, the UK Chamber of shipping is reviewing the implications and is locked up in detailed technical discussion with HMRC following the publication of their draft new operating model.

“The model imposes complicated new reporting requirements which will require new IT systems and infrastructure in ports to handle UK trade with our closest EU neighbours,” UK Chamber chief executive Bob Sanguinetti told Lloyd’s List in a statement.

“We are working the haulage industry, individual ports and other stakeholders to prioritise actions and reduce impacts particularly on the roll on roll off sector,” he said.

The chief concern among port sector executives is less about the potential for IT snarl-ups, which are expected and solvable — the more pressing issue is what the plans don’t say about the requirements for new infrastructure that will not be ready for the January deadline if direction is not given immediately.

“Yes, we have some concerns about GVMS, but the feeling is that ultimately it will be workable. We’re more worried about the physical reality of what happens in the ground,” said Tim Morris, chief executive of the UK Major Ports Group. “You can’t work around the fact that we are currently uncertain of the specification of what we need to build.”

While government officials bristle at the suggestion that their history in delivering IT projects is problematic, there is a high level acceptance that some turbulence should be expected.

“You have to accept we will need some friction. We will minimise it but it is an inevitability of our departure,” Cabinet Office minister Michael Gove told delegates at event in February, entitled ‘Preparing Our Border for the Future Relationship’.

And he should know. The fact that the Border Delivery Group – the unit overseeing the government’s plans for the UK border after the Brexit transition period – moved from HM Revenue and Customs to the Cabinet Office, under Mr Gove’s control, at the beginning of June has been taken as a signifier of the centralised control now being imposed on the process.

Responding to Lloyd’s List’s questions regarding the lack of available detail for the UK ports sector to proceed, a government spokesperson said that a border operating model will be published “in July 2020”, adding that consultation with key stakeholders on the issues raised would be taking place “over the coming weeks”.

A government statement, issued by HMRC, responding to Lloyd’s List said: “We are continuing our preparations for the end of the transition period and the introduction of new border controls, including by providing £84m (\$104m) to grow the customs intermediary sector to encompass EU trade after 2020.

“We are regularly engaging with industry as plans develop, in particular with regard to a new IT system that will facilitate movement at the border.”

WHAT TO WATCH

Marinakis’ sanctions battle with Venezuelan shipping magnate revealed

GREEK shipowner Evangelos Marinakis’ legal battle to avoid shipping a sanctioned Venezuelan gasoline cargo has been revealed by a US-based investment firm that monitors sanctions related to the South American country.

The charter dispute occurred as details emerged of Mr Marinakis ending a six-tanker bareboat charter with Iraq’s Al-Iraqia Shipping Services and Oil Trading in a rift over implementing a transparent sanctions policy.

The 100,000-barrel cargo of gasoline on board the Malta-flagged, 2015-built, 13,953 dwt tanker *Alkimos* – beneficially owned by Mr Marinakis’ Capital Maritime & Trading – is being sold at auction in Houston.

The sale this week ends a protracted legal battle with Venezuelan shipping magnate Wilmer Ruperti, who chartered the vessel through his Swiss trading firm.

Sea Energy Co hired the tanker on March 27, according to Russ Dallen, managing director of Miami-based Caracas Capital Markets, which tracks Venezuela sanctions links for clients.

Alkimos was hired for two voyages to pick up gasoline cargoes from the Panamanian port of

Cristobal for delivery to Aruba or Curacao to ES Euroshipping, Mr Dallen said.

The option for ship-to-ship transfers was included in the charterparty.

Caracas Capital used vessel-tracking data and court documents filed in Houston to detail the subterfuge and obfuscation used to source gasoline for Venezuela and how US sanctions deterred the Greek owner from completing the trade.

Details of the fund’s investigation were sent in an email to clients on June 30.

“On March 31, the *Alkimos*’ owners were still gathering data about their counterparty and awaiting full delivery instructions but they apparently were starting to get a bad feeling about this fare and sent the following email via their brokers,” Mr Dallen said in the written account of events

That email from the shipbroker contained a clause that stipulated the vessel must not be involved in any sanctions-related trading.

According to Mr Dallen, loading of *Alkimos* began on April 7 and it sailed two days later, after charterers reported that an STS transfer would take place 12 miles off Aruba.

“Then more warning bells started to go off as the charterers finally provided details of the receiving vessel, the *Beauty One*, and that the STS would take place not in the relatively sheltered Aruba STS area but on the open ocean 50 miles away from Aruba,” the Caracas Capital email said.

The 1993-built, 44,999 dwt product tanker *Beauty One* has been operating in Venezuelan waters and off Aruba and Curacao since at least September 2019, vessel-tracking data confirms.

“Setting off more alarm bells, the payment from the charterers arrived — not from the charterers, but from an unknown third party called ‘Ultra Travel’ in Montenegro,” Mr Dallen said, citing court documents in connection with the cargo seizure in Houston.

“After realising that there was no redeeming the bad situation they were in and that they did not want to be involved with these people — which unknown to Capital Maritime were fronts run by Venezuela regime oligarch Wilmer Ruperti — the *Alkimos* abandoned its Aruba anchorage on April 26, advised the Ruperti charterers, filed for arbitration in New

York and sailed to Houston where Brujo Finance [the Marshall Islands company that owns *Alkimos*] sued in US Federal District Court in Houston to be paid by selling the cargo.”

A senior executive at Capital Maritime declined to comment when contacted by Lloyd’s List, saying that the judicial matter was ongoing.

The *Alkimos* cargo sale comes nearly four weeks after the US Treasury Department sanctioned four tankers linked to Greek shipowners for “supporting the illicit Maduro regime” in Venezuela. Until then, Greek shipowners accounted for 75% of crude shipped from Venezuela.

Sanctions prohibit US citizens from doing business with the government of Venezuela and its national companies, extending to the petroleum sector and therefore shipping.

However, those sanctions do not wield the same expansiveness as secondary sanctions on Iran, which allowed tankers to continue trading until now without falling foul of US administration guidelines.

ANALYSIS

Long-term ocean freight rates decline on poor economic outlook

LONG-term contracted ocean freight rates fell in June for the second consecutive month and are now 1.3% below their levels last year, rates specialist Xeneta reported.

Rates dropped 1.8% in June month on month, following a 1.2% decline in May, according to the Oslo-based company’s latest XSI Public Indices report.

Xeneta noted that although levels remain historically high, the carrier segment has now seen a 0.2% decline since the beginning of 2020, after four consecutive months of increases through to February. And it said future economic indicators “are far from promising”.

Chief executive Patrik Berglund said June’s report “probably will not assuage concerns in an increasingly uneasy carrier fraternity”.

He added: “Containership owners and operators have been working overtime for months to balance

supply and demand, removing tonnage, adjusting routes and constantly reviewing strategy to protect their all-important rates. And, to their credit, it has worked very well in these tumultuous times.

“What will be key now is can carriers resist the temptation of releasing capacity back into the market in an attempt to win market share? The capacity is there ready to be deployed, but do that too soon, and too rapidly, and the rates could collapse.”

The XSI Public Indices is based on more than 200m data points crowd-sourced from leading shippers covering more than 160,000 port-to-port pairings.

Across the XSI Public Indices’ regional analysis of major trading routes, almost all indicators pointed down this month, Xeneta noted.

For Europe, the import benchmark fell 1.9%, the fourth consecutive month of decline, while the export figure fared slightly better, slipping just 0.3%

in value. The US indices suffered sharper falls, with imports dropping by 4.6% while exports declined 3.5% across June.

Both long-term contracted rate benchmarks have now moved downwards over the course of 2020, with imports falling by 2.9% (although remaining high against historic levels) while exports are down 3.3% since the end of 2019, the ocean freight rates benchmarking and market intelligence platform noted.

Rates on the Far East corridors provided the one relative bright spot, with the import figure climbing by 1%. That performance could not be matched by exports, however, which fell 0.4%. Nevertheless, both benchmarks have climbed on a year-to-date

Banking chief says Japanese lenders must restructure

A SENIOR ship financier has called on Japan's regional banks to change their business model if they are to do more than survive.

Jigo Hiyashi, head of international shipping and finance at Tokyo Century Corp, said there were far too many banks trying to support their local communities through lending to shipowners.

Traditionally, these shipowners chartered their vessels to the three major operators — MOL, NYK and K Line. However, these operators no longer need the huge fleets of recent years, and there is nowhere else in Japan's maritime cluster the shipowners can go.

That has forced the owners, backed by Japanese regional banks, to provide indirect funding for overseas owners' fleet portfolios through sale and leaseback deals.

Between 2015 and 2018, while the level of investment to local companies was steady, Japanese regional banks raised the level of funding for overseas shipping companies five-fold.

They are exposed to three big challenges, he said: assessing the risk associated with lending to overseas owners, understanding how overseas owners work, and not being tempted to lend on projects outside their core competence.

There are 47 prefectures in Japan; each one has tier 1 and tier 2 regional banks, making more than 100 regional financiers.

basis, with imports surging by 7% and exports rallying 1.3% Xeneta highlighted.

"Everyone is looking at the big picture now and this month saw the International Monetary Fund lower its global growth forecast dramatically," said Mr Berglund. "It was adjusted down from the 3% annual fall predicted in April to a staggering 4.9% contraction for 2020 — the greatest drop since the end of the Second World War. And many of the major consumer economies will bleed even more profusely, with the eurozone block facing a hit of over 10%.

"Rates have held fairly firm so far, but it remains to be seen how effectively the carriers can fight against such overwhelming odds, and for how long. The next few months will be crucial."

"Do we need that number of banks?" he asked during an Informa Markets webinar.

One of these regional banks has set up in Singapore. "That is a good move," he said. "The bank is trying to reinvent itself from a traditional bank serving Japanese regional clients into a specialised ship financier.

"They have been strong in shipping, they have expertise, good credit models, and a good understanding of their clients. For them, stepping out of their comfort zone is most important. The move to Singapore is a good start."

The bank is trying to differentiate itself from other regional lenders, he added. "It would be much less healthy to remain in Japan and fund international shipping indirectly. These regional banks must either adapt or die."

Mr Hiyashi warned that shipping is becoming too commoditised, with marginal profitability.

"Shipping will transform itself from a very hands-on business to an automated business. Japanese owners are very focused on the hardware. Think beyond the hardware, think about the software, a technological evolution — even a revolution."

He repeated the call for Japan to take a more unified approach to its maritime sector, matching China and South Korea, both of which have received strong support from their respective governments.

Shipbuilders are in a particularly difficult position, Mr Hiyashi warned, with the price-to-book ratio of a listed Japanese shipbuilder at one or less, “meaning you would make more money by dissolving the company”.

As a banker, he said he did not understand why shipyards continued in business. “Shipbuilding has never attracted good external capital. The only reason why family businesses are doing well here

is because there are no external competitors coming in.”

Japan’s maritime cluster must work together to achieve a greater influence in government.

“Look at the experience of the Rugby World Cup, how we pulled together as a nation,” he said, adding that he expected the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transportation to take the lead.

MARKETS

Slowing fleet growth seen as positive for tankers

JEFFERIES, the Investment bank, said it maintained a positive outlook for the crude and product tanker markets, citing the low orderbook and slowing fleet growth through to 2021 for its optimism despite the coronavirus-led demand collapse.

Refined product tanker net fleet growth is forecast at 3.3% this year and 1.9% in 2021, the US-based bank said in its quarterly shipping review published this week.

Net fleet growth for crude tankers was estimated at 3.7% and 2% over the same period.

Average rates for both sectors were forecast to hit the highest level in at least six years in 2020, before falling back slightly in the following year.

Suezmax average rates were estimated to reach a five-year high in 2020, at \$45,000 daily, falling back to \$35,000 daily next year according to the report. Very large crude carrier rates were put at \$67,500 and \$50,000 daily over the respective periods.

Jefferies provided a similar, positive view for estimated product tanker earnings over the next two years, even though demand fundamentals are weakening.

Discharge delays at ports combined with an oil price contango insulated both sectors from lower global demand for crude and transport fuels over the worst of the pandemic lockdown. Floating storage exceeded 2015 levels, according to the Jefferies report.

“Now that floating storage economics have weakened, short-term demand will be driven by how quickly various regional economies can recover from COVID-19 and how fast or slow products inventories are destocked,” the report said.

“Another potential wildcard will be any improvement or weakening of trade relations between the US and China and whether or not China makes good on its Phase One trade deal commitments to purchase more energy products.”

Demand for seaborne transport will continue to support rates beyond cash breakeven levels, with the interplay between the pace of inventory de-stocking and the speed of any recovery in oil demand to be closely watched, Jefferies said.

Ageing crude and product tanker fleets and multi-decade lows of orderbook-to-fleet ratios also supported rates, as supply growth was muted by increased scrapping and fewer deliveries.

Jefferies also noted 1,000 scrubbers had been installed on the broader global merchant fleet so far in 2020, taking the total to more than 3,000. The rising number was noted despite the narrowing price spreads between compliant lower sulphur fuel oil and cheaper high-sulphur fuel oil had reduced savings.

Jefferies’ outlook came a day after Cleaves Securities, the Norwegian investment bank, upgraded five of the 11 publicly listed tanker companies it covered on rising share prices.

Intra-Asia feeders adapt to supply chain changes

INTRA-Asia specialist RCL is among the shipping lines reacting to changing supply chains by revamping its RMS service to take in Jakarta in addition to its current Strait of Malacca service between Singapore, Port Klang and Penang.

To be branded RMS15, the revamped service will link up Malaysia and Indonesia in a new butterfly service served by two 1,200 teu vessels.

The first voyage will begin from Singapore July 1, with the following port rotation: Singapore – Westport – Northport – Penang – Westport – Singapore – Jakarta – Westport.

“With companies relocating their supply chains to Southeast Asia and this region seeing growing middle classes with greater propensity for personal consumption, direct connectivity and increased sailing frequencies within this area are important considerations for our customers,” said an RCL spokesperson.

The new RMS15 service will boost direct connectivity between Penang and Jakarta and add to service frequencies in addition to the weekly sailings now between Jakarta and Singapore with the RTI01 and RTI02 services. The improved service

will also result in better schedule integrity and more competitive transit times.

Meanwhile, Taiwan-based Wan Hai Lines also announced tweaks to its intra-Asia network, adding a new service connecting Taiwan to Vietnam and Thailand. The TVT service will be operated jointly with Interasia Lines, deploying two 1,200 teu vessels, one from each carrier, on a 14-day rotation.

The first voyage will start from Taipei on July 24, with the following port rotation: Taipei – Taichung – Cat Lai, Ho Chi Minh – Bangkok – Laem Chabang – Taipei.

The new service is part of broader moves to optimise service coverage into Southeast Asia. The TVT service will be Wan Hai’s fourth string connecting Taiwan to Ho Chi Minh and the third service connecting Taiwan to Thailand.

Simultaneously, the current KVS service will add a Kaohsiung call from July 23. The rotation will be: Incheon – Kwangyang – Busan – Ulsan – Taipei – Taichung – Kaohsiung – Cat Lai, Ho Chi Minh – North Port – West Port – Cat Lai, Ho Chi Minh – Kaohsiung – Taichung – Taipei – Incheon.

IN OTHER NEWS

Ports welcome UK’s ‘new deal’ on planning reform

BRITAIN’S ports have welcomed a move to simplify planning permission, unveiled as part of the government’s £5bn (\$6.2bn) stimulus package to boost the economy.

The issue has dogged several major port cities in recent years, with Southampton in particular forced to put its proposed major new container terminal at Dibden Bay on hold because of local opposition.

Industry trade association the UK Major Ports Group is on record as seeking a streamlined

planning mechanism, with a presumption of favourable rulings where trade growth and job opportunities are involved.

China Merchants brings in state-owned investor for Hambantota port

CHINA Merchants Port has won support of state-owned Fujian Provincial Communication Transportation Group as a strategic investor to join its port project on the southern tip of Sri Lanka.

The two parties have signed a deal to co-develop the port of Hambantota, which the Chinese port giant, known as CMPort, acquired in 2017 under a 99-year

concession agreement for more than \$1bn, according to a release.

The transportation group, through its unit Fujian Transportation Maritime Silk Road Investment and Management Co, agreed to buy a 23.5% stake for \$268m in a wholly owned subsidiary of CMPort that holds 85% of Hambantota International Port Group.

German owners press for EU support for shipping

THE German shipowners’ association has called on the national government to use its presidency of the Council of the

European Union to support the region's shipping.

"The German maritime shipping sector is ready to deliver staunch support to the federal government and its objectives," VDR president Alfred Hartmann said in a statement. "Shipping companies in Germany and Europe will need to be effectively supported in order to hold their own in global competition – especially in view of the pandemic."

Germany takes over the rotating presidency of the council this week. While activities will focus on overcoming the consequences of the pandemic, other topics will include climate protection, innovation support and Europe's role in the world.

Wallenius Wilhelmsen waives covenant and defers loan

WALLENIUS Wilhelmsen has agreed with lenders to waive a debt-to-earnings covenant, after risking a breach amid coronavirus disruptions.

The car carrier, which saw sharp falls in its business as the virus hit global car demand, said it would waive the covenant, on a revolving credit facility for its subsidiary WW Solutions, for the rest of 2020 before it was gradually reset in 2021.

It agreed with banks to defer instalments of about \$70m previously scheduled for the

second half of 2020 to strengthen its cash position, the company said.

Wartsila to test ammonia engine with funding from Norway

WÄRTSILÄ is to conduct full-scale testing of ammonia as a fuel in a marine four-stroke combustion engine.

The project, which has the financial backing of Norway, will begin in early 2021 at the Sustainable Energy Catapult Centre's testing facilities in Stord, Norway.

Also involved are Spanish energy firm Repsol, Norwegian shipowner Knutsen OAS Shipping and Norway's Sustainable Energy Catapult Centre.

Brit transfers US cargo renewal rights

BRIT Global Specialty USA, a specialty insurer and reinsurer, has said it is exiting the cargo market.

The carrier has agreed to transfer the renewal rights for its cargo insurance business to Rhode Island-based Falvey Cargo Underwriters. As part of the deal, Brit's Will Frohne and Yasu Saegusa will join Falvey as underwriters.

Brit said Falvey was a better strategic fit for the cargo business, given its continued focus on growth through core products. These present the strongest opportunities to build

scale and generate sustainable returns.

Tianjin tops China's LNG import ports

TIANJIN has emerged as the top import destination for liquefied natural gas in China, accounting for almost one fifth of the country's overall inbound shipments of the supercooled fuel during the first five months of this year.

Tianjin's LNG imports rose 24.8% year on year to hit 4.97m tonnes, or 19.5% of China's overall imports, the Xinhua news agency reported, citing data from Tianjin Customs.

Shipments from Australia, Russia and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations made up 75.4% of Tianjin's total LNG imports.

Diana agrees loan extension with BNP Paribas

DIANA Shipping has negotiated a loan extension with another lender.

The Greece-based dry bulk carrier owner said it had agreed a supplement agreement to its existing loan deal with BNP Paribas.

The loan relates to two of the company's capesize bulkers, *GP Zafirakis* and *PS Palios*, and extends the maturity of the loan facility with the French bank by two and a half years, to May 2024.

Classified notices follow



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Visit <https://www.ocimf.org/organisation/recruitment.aspx> for full details about the role and how to apply. The closing date for expressing interest is **Wednesday 8 July 2020**, with selection discussions planned for Monday 13 or Tuesday 14 July 2020. All prospective candidates must be able to prove their eligibility to work in the UK.

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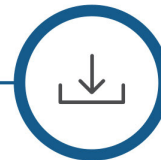
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