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Tighter emission requirements drive up demand for fuel-saving equipment

WHILE SHIPOWNERS SPLURGING on the exploration of future green fuels and vessels makes compelling headlines, many of them are seeking mature and cost-effective solutions when grabbing with stricter emission requirements.

That is at least a case argued by MOL Tech, a subsidiary of Japanese shipping major Mitsui OSK Lines, and its product propeller boss cap fins.

The company claims that the addition of PBCFs, which create extra thrust by breaking up the propeller hub vortex, can lead to fuel savings of 3%-5% depending on the vessel type and size.

At the cost of $90,000 per unit plus one installation day, it is easy for a capesize dry bulker, for example, to recover the investment within one year, said the company's senior managers Masao Fukushima and Gen Wada.

Since 1987, the device has been ordered for more than 3,500 vessels of various types. Most uptakes were seen during the period of high oil prices when owners were keen to cut bunker costs, the two told Lloyd's List in an interview.

But the latest upsurge in ordering appetite has been mainly fuelled by two events: RightShip's greenhouse gas emissions rating and the International Maritime Organization's new decarbonisation measures.

Owned by major charterers BHP, Rio Tinto and Cargill, the Rightship's tool measuring ships' emission performance has become increasingly

influential in recent years, especially in the sector of large dry bulkers.

DHT to buy VLCC pair for $136mNowadays, even other charterers, such as the large power companies, are looking at the RightShip rating." said Mr Wada. "Vessels suffering low scores, like F or G, can no longer be hired by those majors. So owners have approached us to make improvement."

Many of those shipowners are household names in the market, he said.

Previously engine power limitation (EPL), which establishes a semi-permanent, overridable limit on the maximum engine capacity, was deemed one of the most convenient ways to make a ship look greener. Installation is inexpensive, and most vessels nowadays don't sail at full steam anyway in a slow steaming environment. However, it is what Mr Wada describes as a "cup noodle-like solution" in that it is cheap and fast, but not a substantial way to reduce emissions.

RightShip's assessments, meanwhile, have tightened up the way in which they categorise EPLs.

RightShip said in statement that while it still accepts EPL, it now implements criteria that ensure the process is properly documented and validated, and it aligns with the IMO minimum propulsion guidelines. That will make other energy saving equipment, such as Mewis ducts and PBCFs, "perceived as equally suitable option for operators and suppliers", it added.

There were more than 100 capesizes facing the rating issues last year, according to Mr Wada. Of those, more than 20 ships opted for the PBCFs as a solution.

Meanwhile, the new energy efficiency requirements on existing ships, widely known as EEXI, has given the product yet another lift.

As part of the efforts for shipping to reach its 2050 decarbonisation targets, the tool was approved by the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee in November. It will be implemented from 2023, although the granular standards remain under discussion.

"Until the MEPC 75, the inquiries were almost all about Rightship every day. But all of the sudden owners' interest in relation to the EEXI had increased," said Mr Wada.

Mr Fukushima said his company has received about 30 inquiries since last November from owners — not just of dry bulkers but also in the tanker segment — who were concerned about the IMO new methods.

"Recently, we have been approached by one of the largest VLCC owners, who requested for a study about our product's effect on their ships."

He foresaw big market potential, with many vessels of 5-10 years old yet to install the PBCFs.

His company is expected to win 110 orders in the fiscal year 2020 ended March 31, 2021.

For the next two fiscal years, however, Mr Fukushima estimated the number of orders will reach 150-200 per annum, driven by the EEXI-related demand as well as a possible correction to the current low fuel prices.

Mr Wada added that MOL Tech is also working with makers of other fuel-saving equipment to deliver better results for owners. Its study shows that the combination of a PBCF, duct and rudder bulb can trim vessel energy consumption by up to more than 6%.

The better performance and more devices of course come with higher cost. "But if that will make a difference for a capesize, such as winning another year of contract, owners might consider paying more," he said.

WHAT TO WATCH

Tanker scrapping to rebound from 23-year low

TANKER scrapping in 2021 is forecast to rise from a 23-year low as poor earnings, regulatory pressure, higher steel prices and the lack of floating storage close the gap between resale and demolition prices.

Three very large crude carriers have already sold for demolition in 2021, according to Paris-based shipbroker BRS, which estimates the rebound will see some 93 tankers above 34,000 dwt sent to breakers' yards this year.

They include 25 very large crude carriers, 14 suezmaxes, 21 aframax tankers, two long range two vessels and 18 medium range tankers, the

shipbroker said in its weekly Alphatanker newsletter.

Some 25 tankers of more than 34,000 dwt were scrapped in 2020, according to Alphatanker.

"Perhaps the most important development during the past few weeks, which has motivated tanker owners to consider demolition, has been the narrowing delta between scrap prices and resale prices for vintage tankers," the report said.

"Six weeks ago, scrap prices were significantly below secondhand tanker prices but since then scrap prices have firmed while resale prices have weakened."

Record volumes of vintage tankers sold to anonymous owners using them to ship sanctioned crude over the past 18 months has been attributed for skewing resale values last year, with owners including Frontline noting the trend.

By last November the difference in price between the resale and scrapping value was as much as $10m, with owners of elderly tonnage preferring to sell them for alternative use.

However, the scrapping price for larger tankers in Bangladesh has gained 9.6% so far this year, data from the Baltic Exchange shows.

Bangladeshi yards were paying $468.75 per light displacement tonnage the exchange's January 15 assessment showed, although cash buyer GMS pegged levels closer to $450 per light displacement tonne.

BRS said scrapping prices for Bangladesh, India and Pakistan averaged $453/ldt, compared with $365 per ldt at the beginning of December.

Rates had slumped as low as $298 per ldt in July exchange data shows, after many yards closed because of coronavirus concerns and extraordinarily high freight rates for tankers discouraged recycling.

"Secondhand prices for vintage crude tankers have softened over the past six weeks driven by a surfeit of vintage tonnage on the sale and purchase market," BRS said.

Resale prices for a vintage VLCC at $21.4m were $4m higher than scrapping prices, but operators needed to consider investments in ballast water treatment systems — a similar amount — as special surveys were due at the 20-year mark, it said.

The Alphatanker report has not changed scrapping estimates despite the rising steel price, which it noted could reach as high as $500 per ldt if China restarts scrap steel exports that were suspended in 2019.

ANALYSIS:

Supply chain chaos rooted in box shipping's contract culture

THE current chaos in the container supply chain is not only predictable, but also could well happen again, due to a peculiar quirk in the nature of box shipping.

"What is happening now, to everyone's great surprise, is a rerun of what has happened every five to seven years in this industry," said Jesper Præstensgaard, chairman of freight rates platform the New York Shipping Exchange.

"Due of some external factor, chaos ensues because of lack of capacity, lack of containers, congestion and so on. What is playing out right now is Einstein's definition of insanity: repeating the same action and expecting a different result."

When chaos does ensue, the shouting starts. Carriers blame shippers for no shows, or shippers blame carriers for rollovers.

"People resort to the same old lines," Mr Præstensgaard said.

"The situation at the moment is not because people get into work and decide to do a bad job of things. It is not because carriers are colluding with each other. It is not because shippers are trying to cheat carriers by not showing up with volumes. It is simply because you have a scenario where people are wrongly incentivised."

The key issue at fault was a lack of mutual commitment on both sides.

"The calculations both sides make is based on the fact that it costs nothing to either not show up with a booked container or to roll a cargo or blank a sailing," he said.

"Carriers will blank a sailing because they think demand will justify it. The only thing they consider in that calculation is the saved cost. There is no cost included for letting down shippers."

After a 30-year career in container shipping that included roles as Asia-Pacific chief executive at Maersk, chief operating officer at Hapag-Lloyd and chairman of Unifeeder, Mr Præstensgaard has seen much of this before, including earlier attempts to enforce contracts.

"All other industries work with mutual commitments," he said. "It is a given. But in liner shipping it has never taken off. To people outside shipping it is a bizarre idea."

Even in the contract freight market, where carriers agree to minimum quantity commitments, there is still wriggle room for both sides. A shipper will argue its contract allows it freight at the agreed rate up to its MQC, while a carrier will argue it is only required to carry the MQC divided by 52 each week.

"You only need to look at the lack of cases around where a carrier hasn't provided the capacity or the shipper hasn't provided the volumes to see that contracts offer no protection," Mr Præstensgaard said.

"If you take a customer to court, you're going to lose that customer. The problem is that if you try and charge a no-show fee, the shipper will go elsewhere. It's not that people are disloyal, it is just that the incentives are not there."

NYSHEX, which has seen its volumes triple in the past year and expects to repeat that growth this year, provides what Mr Præstensgaard regards as the as the "only proposition that offers benefits to both carriers and shippers".

Carriers offer capacity at a rate guaranteed to shippers. If either side fails to perform there are financial penalties to make up for losses incurred. It claims 99% contract compliance, even under the current circumstances.

Mr Præstensgaard said that even under the current sellers' market for carriers, there were still benefits for lines.

"The inventive for carriers is there because they can go into an exchange and offer capacity at a given price," he said.

"Once you put it on NYSHEX, you're certain the bookings that are made will materialise. If you go by the normal rules, you could be raking it in now but not know how much is going to show up."

For shippers, it gives the security of guaranteed carriage at a time when over a third of cargoes are being rolled.

"It does cost shippers a lot of money when the freight rate triples, but what really costs them money is when they don't have product in store when the customer wants to buy," Mr Præstensgaard said.

"Everyone who has been chasing that last $25 off the freight rate needs to realise it is so unimportant compared to the cost of unreliability."

How long the current crisis continues remains to be seen, but he confident that the NYSHEX offer is valid in times of both high and low capacity.

"Rolling nearly 40% of cargo is not helping as because the industry is so big, once this gets disjointed it takes forever to get it back together again and it costs everybody money," he said.

"I don't know how long it will last, but what I do know is that there is no change in the structural overcapacity of the market. Eventually we will get back to the situation we had before.

"What we are in right now is a nightmare, but the corrective actions are not to do another investigation into carriers. What they should rather do is look at how they can get mutual commitments between carriers and shippers."

Digital focus turns to data access

THE pandemic may have pushed shipping down the road to digitalisation, but this has focused attention on critical questions to be addressed before further progress is made.

At a simple level, shipping must decide who gets access to what data. Sharing of data will be fundamental to the success of digital shipping, so what data should be shared and to what purpose?

Then there are the more complicated issues that bring in stakeholders from outside the industry. Such as, should a shipowner pay for the installation of equipment that generates fuel consumption data if the charterer pays for fuel? Why do ships continue to wait outside port for a berth when data would have recommended a reduction of speed to ensure a just-in-time arrival alongside?

Eero Lehtovaara, head of regulatory affairs at ABB Marine & Ports in Finland, and Antto Shemeikka, the company's vice-president for digital services, said these questions go the heart of how shipping operates.

The greatest concern about digitalisation, said Mr Lehtovaara, is not the technology itself but a concern that vessel-generated data is commercially sensitive and would have significant repercussions if shared.

There are many different levels of data. Some is proprietary, operational and strategic, and is unlikely to be shared widely. Some data has been requested by industry authorities such as ports.

However, while it is accepted that commercially sensitive data ought not to be shared, vessel performance numbers inform the industry's understanding of shipping's carbon footprint. Therefore, reluctance to share this data has implications for public health and protection of the environment.

On the issue of who pays for fuel consumption monitoring technology, Mr Lehtovaara understands both sides of the argument. However, he said this disconnect has stopped the industry seeing the bigger picture.

"I hear those discussions on so many different levels," he told Lloyd's List. "It's just a question of time. There's so much pressure and so many stakeholders involved.

"Cruise shipping operators pay for their own fuel; they are extremely aware of the value of data-driven efficiency measures. A discussion with a cruiseship owner is completely different from a discussion with a container shipowner."

Mr Shemeikka has seen a surge in demand for maritime digital technology during the past year as shipowners seek ways to keep their ships running.

This has led to a change in emphasis from the pre-pandemic request for digital technology businesses to outline how an investment would cut costs to a new request: "Can you ensure my asset's operating capability remotely?".

The cost of equipment and connectivity remains important, although now it is secondary.

"There's no perfect world," Mr Shemeikka said. "Every technology is evolving. Covid-19 has shown you can get benefits when you start.

The shift towards digitalisation has impressed on regulators the need to deepen the level of dialogue with equipment manufacturers, shipowners and operators, shipbuilders and classification.

ABB has been pushing the benefits of collaboration for several years. Constant dialogue has proved invaluable to keeping all stakeholders on the same page. Even so, he warned the industry that digitalisation is a medium-term project.

"The digital journey is not a one-year process — it is 10 years at least. There are so many things at a product level that must be tested incrementally. As with autonomy, systems need to be tested. That takes time."

Mr Lehtovaara believes one of the real bottlenecks for digitalisation is "seeing the ship as a system and seeing that system as an important part of the logistics chain."

Shipping will not be able to grasp the bigger digital picture if it focuses on the individual products and services, he warned, although he concluded that the perception is beginning to change.

"We need the big picture to see what detail is needed."

MARKETS:

More expensive PI seen as inescapable imperative

THE 2021 renewal round will certainly prove more expensive for all owners and a lot more expensive for some, according to the chief executive of the American Club.

Joe Hughes — a British expat based in New York — predicted further premium hikes in the years ahead and a continued climate of more expensive major claims, although it is too early to declare that pool claims will continue to climb inexorably, he added.

American itself is looking to a 5% general increase for this year, a rise described by Mr Hughes as modest, and at the lower end of current International Group GIs, which stretch as high as 10%.

However, he made it clear that this should be seen as a baseline rather than a cap, and regards the club as having a mandate to seek more where fleet-by-fleet safety records justify taking a tougher stance.

“The board made clear to us, in so far as a general increase is given a nominal value, we are expected to probably do better than that. And certainly those records that deserve it should be looking to increases in excess of that.”

Although renewals run until February 20, things are off to a start Mr Hughes describes as slow, given that all clubs are adamant in going for increases this year.

Combined ratios have topped 120% in some cases, making this development unsurprising.

“There is an inescapable imperative that rates do start to move upwards, because they have been too low for too long,” he said.

To some extent the P&I market is echoing the recent turnaround in the hull market, which has started to strengthen again in recent years after decades in the doldrums.

Higher deductibles and even the introduction of annual aggregate deductibles could be on the cards, Mr Hughes said.

The American Club’s portfolio generated a 5.3% return last year, despite market jitters over coronavirus in the first part of 2020, it has been advised by its main investment advisor Merrill Lynch.

But the substantial degree of support provided to many clubs in the recent past by investment returns is no longer a given, and risks now have to be more carefully calibrated to rates.

Mr Hughes did not dispute the assessment of some of his peers that annual P&I premium increases will be seen for next few years, in line with predictions of a ‘cycle of hardening’ made by his opposite number at Skuld, Ståle Hansen.

He highlighted statistics indicating that the average rate per tonne applied collectively by the International Group has fallen by 40% since 2014

This points to a possible incremental process of building more realistic rating profiles for club memberships over a period of time.

There is also the issue of increasing pressure on the IG pool, after three years of elevated pool claims, pushing claims to an all-time high at the halfway point of the current year.

“Whether that’s a trend or just a series of bad luck years remains to be seen. We’ll have a much better idea in the first six to nine months of next year.”

What is clear is that ships are getting bigger, and most major claims are caused by unforeseeable events such as human error, as seen in the Costa Concordia casualty, or by freak weather conditions, which may increase in frequency on account of global warming.

“You may have a confluence or intersection of different trends that may be pointing to a longer-term escalation of this kind of loss, but it is a bit too early to say.”

Legal action brought by Munich Re, alleging that the American Club conspired with Greek shipowner brothers Stathis and George Gourdomichalis to abandon a vessel rather than face a substantial claim, is still working its way through the US federal court system.

Mr Hughes declined to comment further, other than to reiterate that the claim is contested, and still ongoing.

As set out in an online market presentation last week, Eagle Ocean Marine, the fixed premium facility aimed at domestic and regional operators, continues to perform well, thus subsidising mutual business.

It has written consistently profitably, with a cumulative combined ratio of 76% for all years to date.

American Hellenic Hull has also been successful, recording a current global market gross written premium of $15.7m and a $3.2m underwriting profit.

It now insures 3,049 vessels on a subscription basis, and has ambitions to expand in the wake of the Lloyd's market's retreat from hull since Decile 10 kicked in.

Unlike UK-based clubs that have had to establish affiliates in continuing European Union member states, and EEA-based clubs that are in the process of applying for regulated insurer status in the UK, Brexit has had no particular impact on the American Club, Mr Hughes said.

The Alliance suspends AL1 transatlantic loop

THE Alliance container shipping consortium plans to remove one of its five transatlantic offerings as part of a service rationalisation.

From April 1 it will suspend the AL1 loop, which previously sailed between northern Europe and North America's east coast.

Port calls served by the AL1 have been integrated in the consortium's remaining transatlantic services to ensure regional customers continue to have access to its network.

This includes Philadelphia, forming part of the AL2, and Halifax, assigned to the AL5 loop, which calls at destinations on both the eastern and western seaboards of North America via the Panama Canal.

The Alliance, comprising Hapag-Lloyd, Yang Ming, Hyundai Merchant Marine and Ocean Network Express, said the move comes after its network was evaluated and reconfigured to "offer a more focused product with further improved reliability while keeping the existing wide range of port coverages."

No details were provided regarding ship capacity on the revised schedule.

The Alliance has previously announced further adjustments to its wider network to better match capacity with demand on both the transpacific and Asia–Europe trade lanes in December effective from the second quarter of 2021.

They include a new transpacific loop (EC6) connecting the US Gulf with key Asian hubs, and the deployment of larger ships allowing for the merger of both its EC1 and EC3 offerings on the same trade.

Hyundai Merchant Marine does not participate on the transatlantic trade under its agreement with the Alliance.

IN OTHER NEWS:

New dry bulk safety standards issued
THE dry bulk industry has launched a "quality standard" for the sector to improve safety.

The Dry Bulk Management Standards, or DryBMS, will be governed by a new non-governmental organisation to be set up later in the year, according to a statement.

It has been launched by vetting agency RightShip and shipowners association IntercargoBoth which have "strongly and consistently advocated the need for significant improvements in dry bulk safety standards".

Bank creditors take shares in Bourbon restructuring
BANK creditors of French offshore shipping major Bourbon have emerged with an unspecified stake in its new holding company, according to the law firm which negotiated the deal.

Partial details of the arrangements were issued by Watson Farley & Williams, which acted on behalf of the unidentified French banking groups, China's ICBC Leasing and Standard Chartered Bank.

Troubled times at the marine services provider were apparent as long ago as 2016, with the collapse of a $1.5bn lease deal with ICBC in the wake of the downturn in oil prices two years previously. In July 2019 it

suspended its Euronext listing to facilitate talks with lenders.

DHT to buy VLCC pair for $136m

TANKER owner DHT is buying two scrubber-fitted very large crude carriers for a total of $136m.

The New York-listed firm announced it is buying the two Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering 2016-built VLCCs from an undisclosed buyer during the first half of 2021.

The vessels were built to high specifications by their current owner and are fuel-efficient, scrubber-fitted Eco-designs that will "further improve the DHT fleet's efficiencies," the company said.

Castor acquires first capesize bulker

CASTOR Maritime, the US-listed dry bulk carrier owner, has increased its fleet to seven vessels with a purchase deal for the company's first capesize.

The Petros Panagiotidis-led owner said that it had agreed a purchase price of $17.5m for the vessel, that it only identified as a capesize built in 2006 in Japan.

However, the description matches the 15-year-old, 180,200 dwt *Ocean Compass* (IMO: 9346330), built by the Imabari Shipbuilding Saijo shipyard.

Denmark's call to tackle piracy makes little progress

DENMARK is making little progress in its call for European powers to join a joint military effort against piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

Defence minister Trine Bramsen has contacted the French-led European Intervention Initiative (EI2) to call for stronger military co-operation to police the Gulf of Guinea amid growing calls for military action following pirate attacks off Nigeria.

This week she appointed a special representative for maritime security and increased funding for the issue.

Maersk vessel loses 750 containers overboard

HEAVY weather has claimed another casualty in the Pacific with the loss of 750 containers overboard from a Maersk containership.

The Danish carrier said the 13,000 teu *Maersk Essen* (IMO: 9456783) "experienced heavy seas during her North Pacific crossing".

"All crew members are safe and a detailed cargo assessment is ongoing while the vessel continues on her journey," it said in a statement. "The US Coast Guard, flag state and relevant authorities have been notified."

MOL launches start-up fund

MITSUI OSK Lines has jumped on the start-up bandwagon, announcing plans to establish a wholly owned corporate venture capital fund firm called MOL PLUS.

The ¥4bn ($38.6m) fund will invest mainly in early and middle-stage global start-ups that can "reform ocean shipping business models and create new businesses from mid-to-long-term viewpoints", MOL said in a press release.

These investments will be centered on domains that can reform business models in ocean transport and logistics, and other domains relating to the MOL Group's future, such as offshore, environment, ferries, and cruiseships businesses, the group added.

Navigator Gas plans first carbon-neutral voyage

NAVIGATOR Gas has started a project for carbon neutral voyages.

The US-listed company which owns the world's largest fleet of handysize liquefied petroleum gas carriers revealed that it has used carbon offsetting, which entails supporting a renewable energy project to compensate for emissions, to achieve the milestone.

Navigator's first carbon-neutral voyage was launched by its 20,550 cu m semi-refrigerated gas carrier *Navigator Capricorn* (IMO: 9403774) carrying LPG for US midstream company Sunoco Partners Marketing & Terminal on January 18, from the Marcus Hook export terminal in Pennsylvania to Morocco.

Navios Logistics eyes New York IPO

NAVIOS South American Logistics appears to be eying an initial public offering in New York after previously showing interest in floating on the Brazilian stock market.

The 63.8% subsidiary of Navios Maritime Holdings, one of three Navios Group companies already trading on the New York Stock Exchange, has now confidentially submitted a draft registration statement related to a share sale to the Securities and Exchange Commission.

The company said that an offering is expected to take place after the US regulator completes its review process, subject to market and other conditions.

Rainmaking to expand maritime start-up platform

VENTURE development firm Rainmaking is looking to broaden the scope of its start-up programme, expanding into new

areas such as port orchestration and safety and risk management.

It has delivered close to 75 potential partnerships between start-ups and corporate partners during the past year when it focused on decarbonisation and supply chain resilience, said trade and transport director Tarun Mehrotra.

Among these is Vale Shipping, which has benefitted from better collaboration with start-ups through working with Rainmaking.

Total agrees LNG carrier charter deal with Sovcomflot

TOTAL, the French energy major, has entered a deal to charter in up to three new liquefied natural gas carriers from Sovcomflot.

Total will take in a 174,000 cu m LNG carrier, owned by the Russian shipping company and under construction at Hyundai Heavy Industries, in the third quarter of 2023 for up to seven years. It has the option to charter in two more carriers.

Sovcomflot did not disclose how much revenue it expects the charter to generate.

Tropical storm triggers Port Hedland shutdown

A TROPICAL storm intensifying off Australia's northwest coast has put a halt to all shipping services at Port Hedland, one of the world's largest iron ore terminals.

The Weather Bureau is predicting a tropical low will form into a category three cyclone in the early hours of Friday morning, with Port Hedland in its path.

"The low is forecast to bring significant swell from Thursday afternoon and gale force winds from Friday as it approaches the Pilbara coast," Pilbara Ports Authority said.

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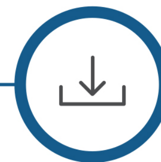

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