

Say what you mean: Drive to standardise port jargon aims to cut inefficiencies

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The Port of Rotterdam will pilot the use of new global definitions this year



THE PORT OF ROTTERDAM WILL BE THE FIRST TO USE THE NEW DEFINITIONS ON A TRIAL BASIS.

A **LARGE-SCALE** cross-industry initiative will test out the unprecedented global standardisation of port information in an effort to optimise vessel

and port operations and do away with the inefficiencies that arise from commonly held misunderstandings of each port's unique functions.

Under the proposed framework, a new set of definitions for numerous terms, including berth and pilotage, among many others, would apply to ports all around the world, optimising port-to-port navigation and port operations.

The definitions covered are broadly divided into three sections; those used during a vessel's call such as berth and depth, the minimum general terms a port should provide on itself and, finally, those covering events recorded during the vessel's call at the port, such as the arrival and departure times.

The initiative was developed by the International Harbour Masters' Association, the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office, Lloyd's Marine Intelligence Unit and the Port Call Optimisation Taskforce.

IPTCO chairman Ben van Scherpenzeel explained that using these definitions would resolve any sort of misunderstandings by crew members on the exact meaning of the terms in each port and therefore allow for better berth-to-berth planning.

The initiative has been more than 10 years in the making, with the first call for action on port call optimisation first made by shipping lines during the 2006 IHMA congress.

The task force, supported by Shell, Maersk Line, MSC, CMA CGM, Port of Gothenburg, Port of Singapore, Port of Houston, Port of Algeciras, Port of Busan, Port of Rotterdam and the Port of Ningbo-Zhoushan, was set up in 2014 in search of a uniform set of definitions.

Despite an intermediate handbook just being published, the new definitions will be officially included in the August 2018 edition of the UKHO Mariners' Handbook, which is available on most vessels.

The Port of Rotterdam will begin using these terms later in 2017 as a pilot programme. Mr van Scherpenzeel explained that if that testbed proves successful, hub ports such as Houston and Singapore will do the same, before regional rollouts take place.

The maritime industry has been working in silos for a long time in terms of sectors, such as tankers and containers, as well as in terms of ports that only consider their own operations and no other port. This project will help tear down these walls, Mr van Scherpenzeel argued.

He explained that the initiative sought to use existing shipping industry standards when those were available because shipping lines want to increase the operational speed and decrease cost of putting any new definitions into effect. “The last thing on earth we would like to do is to invent the wheel again,” he said.

Yoss Leclerc, vice-president of the IHMA, also said the task force sought to harmonise definitions with applied definitions from the wider supply chain sector, unless they were very specific to the marine industry and thus required further development.

“We believe it will improve the overall efficiency and transparency as well as the security and safety of the marine sector,” Mr Leclerc said.

The IHMA vice-president acknowledged that the most likely impediment to the initiative’s reach might be complications from existing contracts for certain services in certain ports; the new definitions could have an effect on the terms of contracts by amending the terms included in these.