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Shipowners and pilots call for improved mobile communications services for Germany's coastline

Extension of broadband communication of key importance to digital change in maritime shipping

Against the backdrop of the extension of mobile communications networks planned in Germany, the German Shipowners' Association (Verband Deutscher Reeder – VDR) and the German Federal Chamber of Pilots (Bundeslotsenkammer – BLK) issued a joint communiqué calling for urgent improvement of mobile network coverage in German coastal waters. Maritime broadband communication in the North Sea and Baltic Sea was the topic of a symposium jointly held by the Maritime Cluster Northern Germany (Maritimes Cluster Norddeutschland e. V. – MCN) with the VDR and the BLK today.

Ralf Nagel, Chief Executive Officer of the German Shipowners' Association: "At present, Germany is quite justified in discussing 5G standards in order to be fit and prepared for digital change. In addition, this inseparably extends to include decent broadband communication at sea. We certainly have pent-up demand in this regard. A digital infrastructure is a prerequisite for this, however, in order to make Germany future-proof as a port and maritime shipping location in German coastal waters. We will need to become more competitive in this area, too."

Erik Dalege, Chairman of the BLK: "Hundreds of ships pass through the German Bight alone, every single day. In particular, there is an urgent need – for safety reasons on the highly frequented nautical "motorways" off the German coast – to ensure that in our role as pilots, we receive the mobile network coverage necessary to make use of state-of-the-art software."

Dominik Eisenbeis, Chairman of the MCN: "A broadband connection is absolutely indispensable in any economic environment. It is of fundamental importance for digital innovation and, therefore, also for maintaining and improving the competitiveness of the businesses operating them. These foundations are sadly lacking in large parts at sea, however. In its role as the innovation driver of the maritime sector, the MCN therefore supports the political demands of the VDR and the BLK with huge emphasis."



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The broadband infrastructure necessary for maritime digitisation in German coastal waters still is heavily underdeveloped at present. For instance, mobile phone reception in the 200-mile area of what is termed the exclusive economic zone is largely intermittent or even completely non-existent. In such cases, communication takes place via FM radio or by satellite telephone. "Our seafarers working on those ships would be glad to have mobile telephone reception near the coastline, with at least fairly comprehensive coverage. The North Sea and Baltic Sea and even Kiel Canal partly still are dead zones as far as reception is concerned," said Ralf Nagel. In addition to maritime and passenger liners, this also applies to the German Navy, the Federal Police or the vessels operated by the German Maritime Search and Rescue Service (Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Rettung Schiffbrüchiger – DGzRS).

"The pilot project COAST link run by the VDR member shipping company Scandlines has shown what improvements are possible", Nagel said. Today this shipping company successfully deploys modern technology both in the transport corridor across the Fehmarnbelt as well as in operation between the ports of Gedser and Rostock.

Erik Dalege: "The VDR and the BLK have already called for an improvement in the necessary infrastructure on a number of occasions in the past. Now it is high time for this subject to be tackled with concerted action, such as in a working group at federal and state level."

About the German Shipowners' Association (VDR)

The German Shipowners' Association (Verband Deutscher Reeder, VDR) is responsible for representing the common business and social policy interests of German shipping companies at federal and state government level as well as in relation to European and international bodies. The VDR was established in 1907, and in 1994 it merged with the Association of German Coastal Shipowners. With a membership of around 200, the VDR represents the bulk of Germany's merchant fleet. Further particulars are available at www.reederverband.de/en.html

About the German Federal Chamber of Pilots

The Federal Chamber of Pilots represents the interests of the seven brotherhoods of pilots as laid down by the relevant legislation. It is a corporation under public law. Further particulars: en.bundeslotsenkammer.de/

About the Maritime Cluster Norddeutschland e. V. (MCN)

The Maritime Cluster Northern Germany (MCN) supports and reinforces collaboration within the Northern German maritime sector. It facilitates platforms for dialogue of all players, promotes innovation and creates interfaces with other industry segments. The MCN has offices in Bremen, Hamburg, Lower Saxony, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and Schleswig-Holstein and cooperates with those responsible at the various locations. Amongst other things, it provides support in finding innovation partners, guidance concerning promotional funding and arranges contacts as an intermediary within the maritime sector. Over 350 enterprises and institutions from the business community, scientific and political circles are members of the MCN. Further information is available at www.maritimes-cluster.de/en/

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