

Seafarers' Unions: Finnish dependence on winter shipping must be taken into account by EU emissions trading

The proposed 'Fit for 55' climate package of the EU must take Finnish winter shipping into account. According to the information currently available, the preparation of the package has failed to take into account the special characteristics of Finnish winter shipping in any way.

The Seafarers' Unions now fear that the EU Commission has hardly understood what the bill for the damage could be for Finnish shipping and industry and their logistics as a whole. At the worst, Finland could lose entire factories and ports in which it is presently investing, for example, along the coast of the Bothnian Bay in northern Finland.

Almost all merchant ships sailing in the Bothnian Bay, regardless of their ice class or flag state, need the aid of icebreakers. In practice, many foreign vessels sail to Finnish ports without the ice navigation properties of merchant ships sailing under the flag of Finland. These vessels always need an icebreaker to enter a Finnish port, which increases the ice-breaking need and cost.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) decided to reduce the CO2 emissions of sea traffic by at least 40% by 2030 and 70% by 2050 compared with the level in 2008. The emission target will be achieved, for instance, by reducing the propulsion power of vessels. This will weaken the ice navigation properties of vessels so that they will need more and more icebreaker assistance in the future. Furthermore, the size of merchant ships is increasing, which means that compared with the current icebreakers, the new ones must be built wider and be structurally more robust so that they can open up navigable channels for vessels. This will increase fuel costs all the more.

Sailing under icy conditions raises fuel costs. The fuel consumption can be 20% to 60% higher than otherwise. The bill is paid by the industries and ultimately by the consumer. If we fail in the negotiations on EU emissions trading now, the damage will be borne by the whole Finnish logistics sector as well as by the industries located along the south coast. There is a risk that transports will move over to Russia or Sweden.

The question remains whether Sweden has commented on the allowance for winter shipping in the EU climate package or whether it is playing a game of its own. Øresund Bridge connects Sweden with Europe. South of Gothenburg, the sea stays open all year round, so for its maritime transport, Finland seems to be a lone, icy island.

We must be able to influence the content of the EU climate package 'Fit for 55' and take into account our need for winter shipping as well as its requirements, special conditions and significance to Finland. If not, the consequences would be catastrophic for seafaring and the Finnish logistics system as a whole in terms of its functionality and competitiveness.

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