



EUROPEAN CLUSTER
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

Sailing Ahead: Towards an EU Industrial Maritime Strategy

Summary



EU Clusters Talks
4 June 2025, 8:30 – 9:45 CET

An initiative of the European Union





Sailing Ahead: Towards an EU Industrial Maritime Strategy

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform, on behalf of the European Commission, organises the EU Clusters Talk "**Sailing Ahead: Towards a European Industrial Maritime Strategy**" on 4 June, 8:30 – 9:45 CET to provide a comprehensive overview of the European maritime industrial ecosystem, look at the key challenges and emerging opportunities, and introduce the upcoming stakeholder consultation process. It is an important opportunity for cluster organisations, industry leaders, and policymakers to contribute to the shaping of a strategic vision for Europe's maritime future.

Agenda of the meeting

Moderator: Chris Burns

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
2. Upcoming Industrial Maritime Strategy and consultation
Dario Bazargan, Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission
3. Panel debate
Laurence Martin, Secretary General, Federazione del Mare, European Network of Maritime Clusters
Leo Budicin, Project Adviser, VDMA AMT – Platform for Advanced Maritime Technology
Lothar Hartmann, Business Adviser, Enterprise Europe Network, TUTECH INNOVATION
Mónica Quesada, Project Manager, Maritime Cluster of the Canary Islands
Piet Opstaele, CEO, Blauwe Cluster
4. Funding opportunities
Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Key messages

- A new EU Industrial Maritime Strategy will prioritise competitiveness, sustainability, and sovereignty in Europe's maritime manufacturing sector.
- Clusters are key players in decarbonising shipping and securing Europe's leadership in high-tech shipbuilding and retrofitting.
- Access to finance, including EU Emission Trading System (EU ETS) reinvestment, is vital to scale clean maritime technologies—clusters must advocate for funding.
- Skills gaps threaten maritime innovation—clusters must support reskilling initiatives to prepare workers for digital and green transitions.
- Clusters should actively engage in shaping the strategy via the Commission's "Have Your Say" consultation platform.
- Budget cuts in the US present talent attraction opportunities—clusters can tap global expertise to boost EU shipbuilding innovation.
- The fragmented maritime regulatory landscape requires clusters to push for coherent EU-wide industrial and environmental policies.



1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

After the introduction by moderator Chris Burns, the following news items were presented:

1. Discover the new [EU strategy for secure, prosperous and resilient Black Sea region](#).
2. Register for the [Matchmaking in New Delhi and Greater Noida](#), India, 29 - 31 October 2025.
3. Register for the [Matchmaking in Taipei](#), Taiwan, 21–23 October 2025.
4. Register for the [Matchmaking in Bac Ninh](#), Vietnam, 4–6 November 2025.

2. Upcoming Industrial Maritime Strategy and consultation

Dario Bazargan, Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission

Dario Bazargan introduced the forthcoming EU Industrial Maritime Strategy; a **joint initiative of DG GROW and DG MOVE** under the political leadership of the Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism. The strategy, mandated by President von der Leyen, aims to enhance the competitiveness, sustainability, and resilience of Europe's maritime manufacturing sector. This sector is broadly defined to include not only shipbuilding but also repair, retrofitting, recycling, and technologies for both civilian and military vessels, platforms, and underwater structures. It sits within a wider maritime ecosystem and strategic value chain that encompasses shipping, inland waterways, offshore renewables, and other blue economy activities.

The strategy will be shaped by key EU policy references, including the Draghi Report on European competitiveness and the report on Europe's civil-military preparedness. The [Draghi Report](#) outlines Europe's dependence on Asian shipbuilding due to price disparities, calling for measures to protect and expand Europe's capacity in complex vessels and emerging markets such as offshore wind. It also highlights the need for substantial investment in decarbonising shipping, estimated at **€40 billion annually until 2050**, with a focus on alternative fuels.

The Ministers' Report reinforces the strategic nature of maritime capabilities, particularly in defence and underwater infrastructure security. Notably, it points to the need for specialised EU-owned vessels to maintain undersea cables (critical conduits for global data) an area already being addressed through the **EU's new Cable Security Action Plan**.

The upcoming strategy is embedded within the [European Competitiveness Compass](#), which sets three priorities: closing the innovation gap with global competitors, aligning decarbonisation with industrial competitiveness, and reducing strategic dependencies. The industrial maritime strategy will serve as a flagship initiative within this framework, alongside others such as the **EU Port Strategy and the Sustainable Transport Investment Plan**. Together, these initiatives aim to strengthen Europe's maritime industrial base and ensure the transition to **clean, digital, and resilient maritime technologies**.

The **strategy's objectives** are expected to include reinforcing shipbuilding, maintenance, and high-tech manufacturing; securing Europe's leadership in inland and maritime transport; supporting dual-



use technologies and naval capabilities; and protecting critical infrastructure. These goals will be supported by key enablers such as clean fuels, digitalisation, access to finance, skilled workforce development, and just transition mechanisms.

3. Panel debate

Leo Budicin introduced the work of the **Platform for Advanced Maritime Technology (AMT)** under the VDMA, emphasising their commitment to sustainable, digital and autonomous shipping. He detailed concrete initiatives such as e-learning modules for seafarers handling alternative fuels and efforts to standardise shipboard digital systems. Leo Budicin advocated for a systemic view of the vessel as an integrated platform, stressing the need for clearer definitions and common standards in digitalisation.

Laurence Martin welcomed the European Commission's strategic shift towards competitiveness, recognising a long-awaited alignment between industry and EU institutions. She stressed the importance of **access to finance, investment in clean fuel production, and skills development**. She also highlighted the need to reallocate EU ETS revenues to support shipping's energy transition and noted France's recent initiative to create a national fund for this purpose. Laurence Martin also underlined that competitiveness must go hand in hand with **green and digital goals**.

Lothar Hartmann shared lessons from the **Enterprise Europe Network** and **TUTECH Innovation**. He described practical tools for connecting SMEs and innovators across the maritime value chain, such as the Partnering Opportunity Database and regional matchmaking events. A notable example was a digital event focused on the circular life cycle of ships, which brought together actors from ship design to recycling. Lothar Hartmann reinforced the need for cross-border cooperation and support for scaling up promising maritime technologies.

Mónica Quesada explained how the Maritime Cluster of the Canary Islands connects SMEs, academia and public authorities to drive innovation in an outermost region. She highlighted the **H2Heat project**, which uses **green hydrogen** to supply heat in a hospital and explores its future potential in shipping. Given the region's geographical position, she stressed the importance of testing new energy vectors and positioning the Canary Islands as a strategic green port hub near North Africa.

The panellists also reflected on broader structural challenges. Leo Budicin noted that the maritime sector's international nature results in regulatory fragmentation, making coordinated EU action essential. He argued for **technological neutrality** in the support of clean fuels and called for better recognition of marine equipment suppliers. Both, Budicin and Martin stressed the urgency of reskilling the workforce to meet the demands of digital and green transitions.

There was broad agreement on the need for coordinated policy efforts to strengthen Europe's industrial maritime base. All panellists supported a shift in **EU policy that balances sustainability with competitiveness and industrial sovereignty**. The importance of collaboration, between institutions, industry players and across borders was repeatedly emphasised. No significant disagreements emerged, though the discussion revealed varying regional perspectives on how best to achieve these shared goals.



All speakers agreed on the importance of **skills development** and expressed strong support for Commission-led efforts to invest in future-proof training for maritime professionals. There was also alignment in calling for better access to funding, support for alternative fuels, and harmonised regulation.

One key question came from Maik Schmahl, from the European Commission, regarding **panellists' priorities for the EU Industrial Maritime Strategy**. Laurence Martin responded by listing competitiveness, level playing field, and simplification as core priorities. She emphasised the importance of maintaining international competitiveness in a fragmented and unpredictable trade landscape. Lothar Hartmann, although not directly representing a cluster, outlined his role in disseminating the consultation process through networks such as the Maritime Cluster of Northern Germany and encouraged broad participation in the **Commission's "Have Your Say" platform**.

Another question on whether EU clusters are seeing an influx of talent from the US, following budget cuts in research and development there, was posed. While panellists did not confirm a direct inflow, Leo Budicin noted that this presented a strategic opportunity for Europe to reinforce its own industrial capabilities, particularly in shipbuilding.

5. Funding opportunities

Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Closing the EU Clusters Talk, Nina Hoppmann shared the following examples of funding opportunities:

1. [Open topic on efficient border surveillance and maritime security](#); deadline 12 November 2025.
2. [WATER](#); deadline 17 June 2025.
3. [Additional activities for the European Partnership Water Security for the Planet \(Water4All\)](#), deadline 16 September 2025.