

Press release

SEA Europe urges stronger support for sustainable and digitalised inland waterways fleet under new State aid rules

SEA Europe, the Shipyards & Maritime Equipment Association of Europe, has submitted its formal contribution to the European Commission's public consultation on the draft revised State aid rules for land and multimodal transport, with a focus on inland waterways. Representing Europe's maritime technology industry, SEA Europe welcomes the Commission's initiative to support the inland waterways sector but calls for more ambitious criteria to ensure sustainable, digital, and high-tech solutions are prioritised.

The inland waterways sector, despite transporting 150 billion tonne-kilometres of cargo annually, faces an aging fleet and limited financial capacity, dominated by SMEs and family-run businesses. The European Commission has proposed criteria to facilitate State aid for acquiring and modernising inland vessels. While SEA Europe appreciates this support, the association stresses that these investments must align with the EU's Green Deal and support the business case for the European maritime technology industry, comprising shipyards and maritime equipment manufacturers.

SEA Europe's key concerns:

- **Lack of sustainability and innovation:** The current draft lacks conditions for the use of state-of-the-art, green technologies in new vessels. SEA Europe argues that this is a missed opportunity to drive innovation and transition to zero-emission, digitalised fleets.
- **Unfair competition from non-European shipyards:** The proposed rules do not require vessels to be built or retrofitted in European shipyards, potentially funnelling funds from EU countries to non-European competitors that often benefit from domestic subsidies, further disadvantaging European shipbuilders.
- **Ambiguity in aid eligibility:** SEA Europe calls for clearer eligibility criteria to ensure that European shipyards and maritime equipment suppliers can access aid for the production and modernisation of inland vessels.

SEA Europe recommends that the European Commission's rules include specific provisions to ensure that State aid supports the acquisition of vessels that are equipped with cutting-edge, sustainable technologies and that priority is given to European manufacturers and shipyards.

"Europe's inland waterways present a unique opportunity for greening, digitalization, and automation. However, without clear criteria that promote innovation, environmental stewardship, and support for European shipbuilders and equipment manufacturers, this opportunity could be lost," said Christophe Tytgat, Secretary General of SEA Europe.

SEA Europe remains committed to working with the European Commission to ensure that the inland waterways fleet of the future is both environmentally friendly and built in Europe, fostering innovation across the continent.

Background Note:

SEA Europe represents close to 100% of the European shipbuilding industry in 16 nations, encompassing the production, maintenance, repair, and conversion of all types of ships and floating structures, commercial as well as naval, including the full supply chain with the various producers of maritime systems, equipment material, and services. As an NGO observer at the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), CESA represents the shipbuilding industry and its supply chain from EU Member States, Norway, and Turkey.

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