

Halifax pots extra call as Maersk cracks lobster trade

Sea freight now viable option for shellfish

Gavin van Marle

MAERSK is to return to the Canadian port of Halifax following the development of new technology that allows shellfish to be transported live in sea freight containers.

Maersk will include Halifax as the last port of call in North America on the TA4 service that links Montreal with Bremerhaven and Rotterdam, after the line and Danish company Aqualife trialled successfully the transatlantic transport of lobsters in the tanks loaded in specially designed reefer containers.

Thomas Esekens, the Maersk director responsible for its global refrigerated business, said the development of a purpose-built shellfish-handling facility in the Dutch town of Urk, a centre for the country's seafood industry and home to a major fish auction, was the catalyst for the launch of the weekly container service that will look to capture a slice of the 15,000 tonnes of lobsters that are flown from Canada to Europe each year.

Due to the extremely delicate nature of lobsters as a food source, the accepted way to transport them safely from the harvesting grounds of Nova Scotia to Europe is by air freight.

However, Aqualife chief executive Lars Nannerup told Lloyd's List that may be about to change. "The Nova Scotia lobster industry has recently been suffering due to the twin effects of low prices and a



Maersk will transport safely two 40 ft reefer units carrying 20 tanks of live lobsters.

growing reluctance among European consumers to eat food that has been air-freighted.

"It is actually a very simple technical solution, where we use a double compressor system that, through the container's piping system, supplies air to the tanks in which the lobsters are kept. Effectively, we create an artificial state of hibernation by creating an environment that slows down the lobsters' metabolism."

Mr Esekens added: "There is no doubt that the carbon footprint aspect has become a real motivator for both consumers and retailers."

In late March, UK shellfish supplier Homarus signed a contract with Aqualife to take delivery of 100 container shipments from Canada this year, with the intention to book another 150 shipments in 2011.

Aqualife said the freight is expected to generate revenues of Dkr6.5m (\$1.2m) and Dkr10m this year and next respectively.

Mr Nannerup said the deal in effect takes all its current transport capacity.

Homarus signed the contract after Urk agreed to build its Aquaport facility, which is due to become operational next month.

Mr Esekens said the development was the last piece of the supply chain jigsaw.

"The Urk Aquaport is a significant investment and that is why we are also very confident of the success of this. There are some serious investors behind it and there is enough demand for the foreseeable future."

"Urk was the last component of the distribution system to be resolved, and the primary distribution channel will be through Rotterdam."

The first Maersk sailing carrying the product is due to leave Halifax on May 18. On board will be two, 40 ft reefer units each carrying 20 tanks of live lobsters, delivered from Aqualife's Aquaport facility near the port of Halifax.

Mr Esekens said that transit time from Nova Scotia to Europe was 10-12 days, compared with 2-3 days via air freight. "We are comfortable to handle [the product] within a 20-day time frame. We did some trial shipments from Montreal, but it is much better not to have the trucking element from Nova Scotia — so we decided to return to Halifax."

The tanks and containers of the Aqualife system are built at Maersk Container Industry's Danish facilities and the line owns the assets, while the patent on the technology is co-owned by Maersk and Aqualife.

Mr Nannerup said that the focus would be on expanding into Asia. "The big potential for this technology is bivalve shellfish — mussels and clams — and in Asia this is a mainstream business. I hope that we will be able to establish a shipping station in Asia next year."

Costa boosts Middle East foray with Dubai office

GENOA-based Costa Crociere aims to boost its growing presence in the Middle East with the opening of a new office in Dubai, writes *John McLaughlin*.

The facility, which will target both Arab and expatriate passengers in the area, will mark a further step in the Carnival-owned company's effort to transform Dubai into a cruise hub for the region.

Company president Gianni Onorato said: "Our objective is to invest in Dubai, the Gulf and the Middle East, not only as a regular destination for our ships but also as a sourcing area to increase the number of cruisers choosing us for their vacations."

Costa Crociere said it handled around 140,000 passenger movements in Dubai over the last winter season, 40% up on 2008-2009, producing €14m (\$18.6m) of business.

It will deploy its two newest vessels, the 92,600 gt sisterships *Costa Luminosa* and *Costa Deliziosa*, in the region in winter 2010-2011, when it anticipates handling 150,000 passengers in 31 calls.

It will also offer cruises tailor-made for an Arab clientele, with services including regional food and drink, Arabic-language staff, signage and entertainment, and separate prayer rooms for men and women

lastword lastword@lloydslist.com



Outstanding Friends of Seafarers: Shapiro used his acceptance speech to criticise the Obama administration's apparent attempt to make it harder for owners to pay ransoms to free crews.

Liberty chief honoured

THE Setting the Course awards banquet hosted by Seafarers & International House was held on a poignant backdrop for the second year in a row.

This year's event recognised Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association president Donald Keefe, Liberty Maritime chief executive Philip Shapiro and law professor Joseph Sweeney as the 2010 Outstanding Friends of Seafarers.

Shapiro is among the proponents of arming crews to fend off pirates.

He used his acceptance speech to voice displeasure with the Obama administration's apparent attempt to make it harder for owners to pay ransoms to free their crews.

Last year, his company's ship, *Liberty Sun*, was attacked off Somalia, just days after the drama involving *Maersk Alabama*, whose master was held captive by pirates before a dramatic rescue in a US Navy Seal operation.

As luck would have it, last year's Setting the Course winners included Maersk Line chief executive John Reinhart.

The 2009 award banquet, which happened just a few days after the rescue, thus ended up as a mini-celebration.

In contrast, this year's banquet was held the same day the semi-submersible drillship *Deepwater Horizon* sank in the

Gulf of Mexico, with 11 crew members missing. The sea remains the sea — but what a difference a year makes.

More ash heading to Germany

AS IF Europe did not have enough ash, Polish freight operator CTL Logistics has proudly announced its intention to rail-freight more of the fine-powered stuff to Germany. According to its press release, CTL has "singled" (sic) an "ash freight agreement for three years with one of the top Polish exporters of that goods".

Executive vice-president Artur Pielech said: "Customs procedures at the German border do not take now more than one hour and we keep the full control over the transport."

CTL was happy to explain that ash has nothing to do with Icelandic volcanoes, but is a product of burning coal at Polish power plants and is used in German mills to produce cement.

Rectory runners

CHURCH of the High Seas rector Chris Burke this week swapped his Sunday vestments for a running vest as he left his altar to compete in the London Marathon for the Mission to Seafarers.

His wife, Helen, a GP in Hackney, joined him in the great race. Burke finished the Marathon in 4.36 hrs, despite sustaining injuries during training, while his wife pipped him to the post at a fit 4.18 hrs.

Burke worked with the Mission to Seafarers in Japan, before taking up his post as rector of St Dunstan's in Stepney, a church that flies the Red Ensign and is historically known as the Church of the High Seas. It has a seven-acre cemetery, where seafarers were traditionally buried.

There is still time to support the Burke's fund-raising efforts at: www.just-giving.com/rectoryrunners.

Fresh interest in reducing keel friction bubbles up

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