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Press release | 22.05.2012

Sulphur rules for ships/Air pollution

EU sticks to its guns and agrees new rules to boost health and environment

An agreement on new EU legislation aimed at reducing sulphur pollution from ships (1), reached by the European Parliament and Council last week following trialogue negotiations, was officially endorsed by the Council today. Commenting on the legislative agreement, Green MEP Satu Hassi, who shepherded the proposals through the parliament as its rapporteur/draftsperson, stated:

"These new rules are a boost for public health and the environment. Thankfully, the EU stuck to its guns in the face of heavy lobbying from polluting shipping companies, which wanted Europe to renege on its international commitments and adopt less ambitious legislation.

"Urgent action is needed to stem the rapid growth in pollution from shipping, with air pollutant emissions from shipping expected to outstrip land-based emissions by 2020. Highly polluting shipping fuels have a serious impact on the environment but also on public health: air pollution from ships is estimated to cause 50,000 premature deaths per year in Europe.

"Importantly, the new general tougher limits on sulphur emissions from shipping will enter into force in 2020 at the latest in the EU seas, without the possibility to delay for another 5 years. Not only will this have major health benefits, it will limit potential distortions of competition between firms facing even stricter limits in the EU's sulphur emission control areas (SECAs) and firms that do not operate in those areas (2).

"The European Commission has also been tasked with reviewing its air quality legislation, with a view to extending the current stricter requirements on ships in port to all ships in territorial waters. This would be a cost-effective way of reducing pollution from shipping and extending the health benefits in EU coastal areas outside SECAs."

(1) The proposed EU legislation implements internationally-agreed (at the International Maritime Organisation - IMO) standards tightening limit values for sulphur emissions from ships, ensuring they can be properly enforced at EU level.

(2) The proposed maximum limits for sulphur content of marine fuels will be lowered in the designated sulphur emission control areas (SECA) to 0.1% from 2015, affecting the Baltic Sea, the North Sea and the English Channel. In the rest of EU waters, the limits will be reduced to 0.5% from 2020. The provisions for delaying the limit values to 2025 based on IMO decisions were removed.

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