

MAS have critical dependency on high quality PNT - does the DfT see a role for the department as the UK lead in this area going forward?

Position, Navigation and Timing (PNT) is crucial in the development and establishment of Maritime Autonomous Systems (MAS) and Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships (MASS) generally, and with the establishment of the Maritime Future Technologies Team at the MCGA, we are actively considering themes such as PNT alongside a broad range of other factors and will be linking these subjects with subject matter experts within the MCGA such as our UK Technical Services Navigation Directorate to ensure nothing is overlooked.

The Geospatial Commission has identified the importance of geospatial data across the transport sector, including in maritime and DfT will work with the Geospatial Commission and other organisations such as the UK Hydrographic Office to make the most of data to add PNT.

We are seeing a number of UK based initiatives moving to Norway for support services. How do you intend to make UK the home for autonomous technologies?

Our goal is to become a global leader in autonomous technologies, harnessing our existing technological and maritime strengths and building on the work set out in the Maritime 2050. The rise of digital technologies, improvements in communications, and the development of AI are simultaneously creating the conditions for fundamental shift in the way that the Sector operates. This can be realised by leading and supporting innovation, creating an enabling regulatory environment nationally and internationally through the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and working with industry partners.

The UK Government is supporting this by providing funding for technology development directly targeted at maritime, as well as in enabling sectors such as AI, and through the work of the MCA to develop a supportive regulatory framework for autonomous vessels is a critical to their future success.

Minister, you mentioned that Britain is leading the way with developing autonomous shipping. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency is currently working on developing the Workboat Code (the regulations for ships up to 24m length), to include autonomous and crew-less operations. Can you confirm that the MCA will be developing this in concert and full consultation with the autonomous operators and the Certifying Authorities and Classification Societies which certify the ships, on behalf of the MCA?

The review of the Workboat Code will be conducted with regular engagement and input from all relevant stakeholders, building on the approach the MCA have already adopted with the Maritime Autonomy Regulation Lab (MARLab). The outcomes of MARLab were published and presented on Nov 11 and the products developed during this project will support the MCA in conducting further engagement with industry, certifying authorities and classification societies.

Minister, how important do you think it is that the UK develops and attract people with the right skills to support autonomous vessels?

It is imperative that we attract the right people to support the development of autonomous vessels. Smart Shipping will create skilled jobs in the UK and open seafaring to new demographics. Digital transformation will bring fixes for crewing and manning problems. Smart shipping, will potentially change the way ships are operated and as a result the working conditions of seafarers, making the sector much more attractive for young people.