

London International Shipping Week Gala Dinner

Good evening everyone

It's a pleasure to join you at this dinner to celebrate London International Shipping Week 2019.

And what a brilliant few days.

Since Monday (9 September 2019) we've held over 200 events.

We've hosted royalty, shipowners, and apprentice seamen and women.

We've welcomed over 20,000 guests.

And gained new perspectives on almost every aspect of global maritime.

From [improving gender diversity](#), to the latest advances in maritime technology and even how it feels to row solo across the Atlantic from trail-blazer Debra Seale.

Now, this was my first London International Shipping Week.

And I had a few personal highlights.

There was the Ministerial Roundtable discussion, focusing on how we support the future success of the UK Maritime industry.

And there was the fantastic reception at the Banqueting House where we welcomed the Princess Royal, along with over 500 representatives of the maritime industry.

But the real standout moments were getting to meet you.

I've been left inspired by the imagination and dynamism of maritime innovators.

I've been deeply impressed by the professionalism of the Royal Navy personnel who keep our ships safe around the world.

And I've spoken to members of the Merchant Navy – in its centenary year – hearing about its incredible job at keeping trade flowing.

It really has been a pleasure to meet you all.

Importance of shipping and vision

I'm hugely excited to represent the maritime sector as Transport Secretary.

And I'd like to speak briefly about my vision for shipping and UK maritime.

This is a job for which I fought.

My goal is simple.

I want to build a country that is better connected.

Not just within the United Kingdom.

But between the UK and every other nation.

Enjoying warm friendships with our close neighbours – but embracing the rest of the world too.

Changing world

As part of this, I'd like to assure you that this is a government that fully recognises maritime's significance.

Only today the Prime Minister's announced a £1.25 billion contract for the Rosyth shipyard to build 5 new frigates.

And earlier this year we launched our [Maritime 2050 strategy](#).

It set out our shared vision to prepare the industry for the challenges of the next 3 decades and beyond.

Because while it's vital that we celebrate UK maritime's extraordinary past, recall our 'island story' and rightly honour our proud seafaring tradition, we also have a responsibility to invest in its future.

Because as this week's theme reminds us – the world is changing.

People

And as our best asset, people must always be our focus – and helped to adapt to change.

The future maritime worker may need to understand algorithms and programming.

We must also ensure that the best and brightest people – no matter their background – see maritime as a career for them: whether at sea, in professional maritime services or at one of our many thriving ports.

That is why, this week we launched our [People route map](#).

Setting out how we will ensure the sector has the skills to meet the demands of the coming decades.

And we must draw on all of our country's talent, because, like other transport sectors, maritime does not make full use of the talent spread across our nation, we may be offshore Islanders but the people of our towns and cities away from the coast have played a crucial part in our maritime past. We must ensure they are equally a part of our future.

We must inspire boys and girls from all backgrounds.

And this week has highlighted the really exciting work happening on this front.

At the maritime careers fair onboard NLV Pharos, we heard from those, including the 1851 Trust and the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers, who work to create a broader, deeper pool of talent.

And we announced extra funding for the Maritime and Me Campaign, to encourage the recruitment of women, as well as more girls into the STEM subjects that maritime will urgently require.

My excellent Maritime Minister, Nus Ghani, is an inspiration in her work in promoting maritime careers.

I want to thank her for her hard work – including her efforts in making this week such a success.

Environment

Now one area to have benefitted from British leadership is environmental protection.

We were the first advanced economy to make a legal commitment to net zero carbon emissions by the middle of this century.

And earlier this year we set out how we will reduce maritime emissions, with our [Clean maritime plan](#).

But such is the enormity of the challenge that we must be imaginative.

And ready to incentivise and inspire.

That's why this week we launched the Clean Maritime Awards, which will highlight best practice across the industry.

We must also harness the power of the financial sector to bring about a greener future.

The UK is already a trailblazer in the development of green financial products.

Providing capital to projects that tackle climate change.

It offers huge opportunities for maritime.

So this week we announced the launch of the Green Finance in Maritime Conference.

This will enable industry and government to unleash the power of financial markets to secure sustainable growth.

Technology

Another fundamental change is the way we use technology.

Self-driving vessels are in operation.

In May, Essex-built Sea Kit became the first autonomous vessel to cross the North Sea.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency is exploring the [use of drones to save lives](#).

And this week at our technology showcase we saw many other exciting innovations.

From established companies to dynamic start-ups, these advances could mean more efficient ports, safer seas and a cleaner environment.

Not to mention the huge economic benefits from design and manufacturing.

But to take full advantage of these opportunities of tomorrow, we need to nurture the start-ups of today...

We have a proud tradition of invention and innovation – from the screw propeller to the first 'SONAR'.

But we must ensure we stay ahead of the pack.

So this week we announced a £1 million competition for maritime technology and innovation.

Money that will get more projects off the ground, bringing long-term gains.

This is added to £1 million we have already announced for environmental maritime research.

Now, I am a believer in the free market.

As a former International Development Minister, I know it is the best poverty-fighting tool yet discovered and sea-borne global trade is the embodiment of this.

But I believe government also has a role to play in helping to catalyse human endeavour.

The story of the invention of the chronometer by John Harrison is an excellent illustration of this.

Back in the 1700s the inability to calculate accurately the longitude of a ship, led to countless shipwrecks and lives lost.

So acute was the problem – that in 1714 Parliament passed the Longitude Act – offering a £20,000 award to anyone who could solve it.

Harrison, a self-taught clockmaker, came up with a number of solutions.

And his work saved thousands of lives and aided the growth of the global maritime trade.

We need the John and Jane Harrisons of the modern age to tackle maritime challenges of today, from the environment and migration; to the sustainability of our fish stocks and security of our sea lanes.

We cannot afford not to act.

That £20,000 award in 1714 amounts to about £3 million today.

Now I have already mentioned the £2 million we've made available for grant-funding of research.

I am convinced that we must show the same determination of those that came before.

From our men and women of science, our captains of industry and our politicians.

We must act to ensure a prosperous future for our country.

And so, 305 years on from the Longitude Act, I am tonight announcing a further £1 million to fund ground-breaking research for maritime challenges.

This takes our total commitment up to £3 million – the equivalent of that 1714 figure, but this is only the beginning.

I have also this week challenged my brilliant officials to harness and develop the best thinking out there, including on maritime.

In years' time, I hope to have some progress to report and not only because it means I'm still in the job.

Brexit

Finally, I want to talk about the most immediate major change facing this industry and the country.

I know that preparing for Brexit has meant hard work and the UK maritime sector has responded brilliantly.

I believe it offers us many opportunities too.

The data is clear – the world is changing and has been long before the referendum.

In the decade to 2015, UK goods exported to the EU increased by 8.5%, while those to non-EU countries went up nearly 70% – 8 times faster.

So, we must seize this chance.

For Britain has been and always will be globally minded.

I was reminded of this on Monday when we announced plans for a new vessel to maintain the 400 light houses that provide such an invaluable service to shipping.

For centuries those lights have provided the first glimpse of this country to people arriving here from around the globe, guiding seafarers' vessels through perilous shallows, helping them reach the shore and showing that Britain is ready to welcome the world.

That's the message I want you to take home from this London International Shipping Week.

For as this week has illustrated, the future of maritime is based on shared ambitions, shared knowledge and shared endeavour.

So, thank you for making the last few days such an enormous success.

Let's continue to work together, continue to be ambitious and through maritime build a better world.

Thank you.