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Possible further delay to road transport's inclusion in EU ETS causes serious concern

Interferry, the global trade association representing the ferry shipping industry, is raising serious concerns over the current state of EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) negotiations and the persistent regulatory imbalance unfairly penalizing maritime transport. As member states push to further delay the EU ETS2 framework for road transport, ferry operators face an ongoing competitive disadvantage against a higher-emitting mode of transport.

Since 2024, commercial passenger and cargo ships of 5,000 GT and above calling at European ports have been subject to the EU ETS, with compliance costs currently equivalent to approximately EUR 250 per tonne of diesel fuel. For European ro-pax and ro-ro ferry operators, the annual cost is estimated at approximately EUR 1 billion. While intended to incentivize a transition to cleaner fuels, this burden operates in a heavily distorted market. Ferry routes often compete directly with road transport, yet road freight, a significantly higher-emitting sector, continues to benefit from delays to its dedicated EU ETS2 framework. Already postponed from 2027 to 2028, ETS2 is facing renewed pressure from several EU member states for further delays.

This possibility results from grouping road transport into the same regulatory category as the building sector. Consequently, political anxieties, particularly in Eastern and Southern European member states, over winter heating costs for households are shielding road freight from emissions trading. For ferry operators, however, the resulting market distortion is real and damaging, regardless of the political motives behind it.

Higher, unevenly distributed costs resulting from the EU ETS are leading in part to a shift in transportation away from ferry services. At the same time, these disparities make it significantly more difficult to pass the additional costs to customers. Ultimately, this results in a lack of the necessary investments for the rapid decarbonization of the sector.

Interferry reiterates its position: regulatory relief for one sector must not come at the expense of fair market competition, and road transport cannot continue to be exempted from genuine greenhouse gas pricing. Furthermore, Interferry insists that all revenues collected from maritime ETS compliance must be strictly ring-fenced and reinvested into decarbonizing the maritime sector itself: through EU-produced sustainable marine fuels, clean technologies, and onshore charging infrastructure.

"The ETS review addresses many valid points, particularly the use of funds collected for the decarbonization of shipping. However, allowing residential heating concerns to grant an unearned commercial advantage to road freight transport over ferry shipping is unacceptable," says Johan Roos, Director of Regulatory Affairs at Interferry, and continues:

"The burdens and challenges of decarbonization cannot be borne by individual sectors alone, and all transport sectors must be treated equally. To restore fairness, EU policymakers must make the

scope of ETS2 more granular by separating road transport from building emissions to ensure fair competition or, alternatively, apply carbon costs uniformly across all sectors. Anything less simply cements the existing unfair competitive disadvantage, offering no benefit to the climate or the environment."

Interferry is the global ferry trade association with consultative status at the International Maritime Organization and similar influence at the European Union as well as many other maritime governance authorities. With membership exceeding 280 companies and representing plus 2,200 individuals in more than 40 countries, its primary purposes are to represent the ferry industry on regulatory and policy matters, including safety and sustainability; to speak on behalf of the worldwide ferry sector, which provides transport for over four billion passengers and 370 million vehicles annually; and to facilitate networking and communications among its members.

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