November 2026

Strengthening EU Shipyards Competitiveness through Enhanced Sustainability

Policy lunch at EU parliament hosted by MEP Jeannette Baljeu

Brussels, 4 November 2026 — MEP Jeannette Baljeu hosted a policy lunch at the European Parliament on *Strengthening EU Shipyard Competitiveness through Enhanced Sustainability*, in collaboration with the EU Horizon project CirclesOfLife consortium. The event brought together EU policymakers and representatives from across the maritime manufacturing value chain to discuss how circularity and sustainability can strengthen the competitiveness and resilience of Europe's maritime industrial base.

Sustainability as a driver for European competitiveness

Opening the policy lunch, MEP Jeannette Baljeu highlighted the importance of European sustainability and innovation in enabling the sector to take the next steps. European shipyards and maritime manufacturers operate in a highly competitive international market, where differences in energy and recycling costs can have a significant impact. A strong European maritime sector is essential to the EU's strategic autonomy, security and economic strength. The key question is how Europe can translate its ambitions on sustainability and innovation into a stronger and more competitive maritime manufacturing industry. **A central message was that sustainability should not be regarded solely as an environmental objective, but as an increasingly important component of European industrial competitiveness**. CirclesOfLife demonstrates how European shipyards can measure and improve their environmental performance, identify opportunities for improvement and translate sustainability efforts into tangible value.

From circular ambitions to practical implementation with CirclesOfLife

Benoît Loicq, Director R&D Technical and European Regulatory Affairs at SEA Europe, and **Jorinus Kalis**, **Manager Process Innovation at Damen Shipyards and coordinator of CirclesOfLife,** presented how the project is seeking to anchor circularity more firmly within European maritime manufacturing. Benoît Loicq highlighted three areas in which CirclesOfLife contributes to circularity:

- **Providing practical tools** that support decarbonisation, resource efficiency and competitiveness within maritime manufacturing;
- **Improving material circularity throughout the ship lifecycle**, including through a blueprint for Digital Product Passports for ships; and
- **Connecting practical industry experience with emerging European policy initiatives**, including the Circular Economy Act (CEA) and European Industrial Maritime Strategy (EIMS)

Benoît Loicq also shared several conditions that will be important for implementing circular solutions at scale: regulatory clarity, clear governance of data, stability of the policy frameworks, and better economic alignment across the maritime value chain. Jorinus Kalis complemented this policy perspective by presenting the practical objectives and outcomes of CirclesOfLife. The project investigated how maritime manufacturing can move from a predominantly linear model towards a more circular model, reducing the environmental footprint of shipbuilding processes while decreasing dependency on raw materials and unlocking greater value from material and waste streams. He highlighted one of the practical solutions developed within the project is the **Shipyard Environmental Performance Index (SEPI)**. The approach supports shipyards in identifying environmental hotspots in their processes and provides insight into technologies and measures that can help address them.

The project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 101138013

From the European Green Deal towards competitiveness and resilience

The policy discussion demonstrated how the context surrounding CirclesOfLife has evolved since the project started. **Gabriel Mialocq,** Head sector for Aviation and Waterborne research and innovation at CINEA, reflected on the project's origins in the European Green Deal and its initial focus on greener shipyards. The discussion now increasingly connects these environmental objectives to **competitiveness and resilience**. Gabriel Mialocq highlighted the collaborative character of CirclesOfLife, bringing together complementary expertise from industry, research, NGOs and associations across Europe. He emphasized that the value of the project extends across the maritime value chain, with environmental performance and circularity delivering benefits for shipyards, shipowners and recycling. He also shared it is a great milestone that a successful project as CirclesOfLife is presenting the results to the maritime community.

The policymakers in the room further connected the project's results to the European Industrial Maritime Strategy (EIMS), in which the horizon projects CirclesOfLife and EcoShipYard have been recognised. They also highlighted The Industrial Maritime Value Chains Alliance as an important mechanism for translating the ambitions of the strategy into industrial action. From an environmental policy perspective, circularity was emphasized as an important priority and interest was shown in how the practical experiences developed through projects such as CirclesOfLife can inform future policy and potential legislative initiatives, while also supporting the development of business plans.

Circularity across the entire ship lifecycle

Following the policy perspective, the discussion turned to the practical experience of industry, following the lifecycle of a ship from **shipbuilding, through operation, to recycling**.

→ Shipyards: measuring sustainability and investing in efficiency

From a shipyard perspective, one of the shipyards highlighted the increasingly direct relationship between sustainability and competitiveness. Energy efficiency is particularly relevant for an energy-intensive sector such as shipbuilding: investment in more efficient processes can reduce both environmental impacts and operating costs. An industry association for maritime equipment manufacturers and suppliers added another fundamental challenge: data availability. Reliable and comparable information on the environmental performance of shipyards and on the materials incorporated into vessels remains difficult to obtain. Common approaches to measurement could therefore help both individual companies and industry associations better understand and improve performance. Another association underlined that these challenges are not limited to large commercial vessels. Smaller shipyards and the use of materials such as fibre-reinforced composites create their own challenges around lifecycle assessment, ecodesign, dismantling and recycling.

→ Shipowners: creating value throughout decades of operation

A shipowner highlighted the importance of reliable environmental information across the vessel lifecycle, including emissions within the wider value chain and environmental impacts. Greater insight into the environmental performance of shipyards could help shipowners identify opportunities and make more informed choices. Another shipowner similarly stressed that circularity touches not only on environmental performance, but also on economic sustainability, resilience, strategic autonomy and access to critical raw materials. The shipowner also shared that circular material flows do not necessarily remain within the maritime sector. Components and materials recovered from ships may find a second life in other industries. Interoperability with other sectors will therefore be essential if Digital Product Passports are to realise their full circular potential.

The project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 101138013

→ Ship recycling: circularity cannot wait until tomorrow

Companies in ship recycling shared the importance of looking at both the long-term transition and the vessels that will reach end of life much sooner. A significant volume of ships will need to be recycled over the coming decade, creating an opportunity to recover valuable and potentially critical materials. During the discussion was also shared that maintaining and expanding European capacity requires sufficient and predictable demand. Without the right market signals, volumes may continue to be recycled outside Europe, limiting both the development of European recycling capacity and opportunities for recovering materials domestically.

The steel industry emphasized that closing the loop is also crucial for maintaining a strong European industrial value chain. CirclesOfLife covers much of the intelligence the sector needs, but the next step is to connect the different parts of the value chain and recognise recycling facilities as strategic assets for securing valuable secondary raw materials. At a time when the European steel sector faces a major competitiveness challenge, projects such as CirclesOfLife are essential to keeping value within Europe and turning circularity into an industrial advantage

From successful projects to industrial scale

Jaap Gebraad of Waterborne Technology Platform underlined the highly innovative nature of the maritime sector and the need to connect private industry investment with continued public support for research and innovation. Deployment of successful project results and maintaining maritime manufacturing within future European research and competitiveness programmes will be important to ensure that innovations move beyond individual demonstration projects.

Antidia Citores, General Manager of Green Marine Europe shared that they will support the further exploitation of the CirclesOfLife results through its certification and help connect them to the wider maritime value chain. Future initiatives and projects will continue to build on the project's results, supporting their further uptake and implementation.

Closing the discussion, MEP Jeannette Baljeu returned to the importance of innovation, standardisation and clear policymaking. For Europe to remain competitive while raising its environmental ambitions, industrial innovation needs an enabling framework that accounts for the realities of international competition.

The project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 101138013



[Photo taken by Maryne Despres]

The following organisations participate CirclesOfLife: DAMEN Research Development & Innovation BV, BALance Technology Consulting GmbH, Center of Maritime Technologies GmbH, Green Marine Europe, Netherlands Maritime Technology Foundation|Maritime&OffshoreNL , FSG S+O Shipyard GmbH, Bureau Veritas M&O, VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, Delft University of Technology, NGO Shipbreaking Platform, University of Genoa, GALLOO, SEA Europe, ERIKS, Nordic Circles, Meyer Werft, Meyer Turku.

For further information please visit www.circles-of-life.eu or contact:
Rosanne van Houwelingen, info@circles-of-life.eu, +31 6 57733654

The project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 101138013