

## Amsterdam Yacht recycling conference: A Summary

16 November 2015 was a very informative and interesting conference. 'The Future of Yacht recycling', organised by [Quaynote Communications](#) in cooperation with [Yachtmedia](#) at Amsterdam RAI, was a pretty intense, 1-day conference filled with speakers from the most different backgrounds.

The Netherlands as a maritime nation was an obvious choice as conference location. The exact venue and date both were smartly chosen, too: Well-known METS, the nautical industry trade show started just the next day and hosted this yacht recycling conference. Who was there? What follows below is a rough and certainly incomplete summary for you of what was said, and by whom. [Here you can download the presentations given by the various speakers](#), all in one place.

From the varied contributions gradually emerged a fascinating landscape, with lots of features.

There appear indeed to be sustainable income chances for different people in the nautical industry – in theory. But some impressive obstacles currently still lie in the way of fully grabbing the chances that now present themselves. Projects and initiatives can be seen sprouting everywhere in this young nautical landscape. But their diffusion is patchy; meaning: Most initiatives are hardly connected to each other, leave alone across country borders. For stable, operative yacht dismantling and recycling structures to be established, more enabling grounds must be created, among which:

- Clear legal frameworks and business enabling policies.
- Public environmental awareness and a wisely shared 'problem ownership', from boat owners to yachting professionals.
- Financial incentives and directed funding, especially also for nautical SME's.
- Affordable fibreglass recycling, respective cooperation across industries.
- A constant stream of sufficient yachts to recycle.
- Affordable, low-threshold collection and transportation solutions for yachts to reach the dismantling facilities.

One thing that repeatedly surfaced throughout the sessions was the fact that the counted numbers of boats at their end of life can notably differ even within one given country, depending on the source. Which shed light on some core challenges:

How many EOL (end-of-life) yachts are out there, to begin with?

Even suitable yacht recycling structures in place assumed, how many boats would be there to recycle at all? And how steady would the streams of boats be, throughout, say, a year? That you do need a certain continuous stream of yachts to recycle was made plausible, besides other, by Gert Jan van der Have, Project Leader at ARN's Sustainability department. He presented the work of [ARN, the Dutch auto recycling association](#) including experiences which are transferable to yacht recycling – therewith, just one argument more for cooperation across industries.

So when exactly is a boat to be considered to have reached its end of life?

Completely independent from boat registry systems existing or not in a given country (which obviously would facilitate counting the numbers up to a certain point): Many sailors love their boats, hang on to them as long as possible. And many of them at a certain point are forced to give their boat away, be that for financial, professional, age or health related reasons. The ways in which that 'saying goodbye' happens was subject of a separate presentation & discussion session. But it is safe to say that for yachts, 'end of use' does not necessarily equal 'end of life'.

And vice versa, some might sarcastically add when talking about safety.

If the owner of a yacht does not decide anything, who determines when the time for removal of a yacht has come? The marina? The municipality? Jeroen van den Heuvel, [HISWA](#) Membership Manager, explained the legal framework and competences in The Netherlands in that regard: Especially with harbour fees not paid over a certain time (6 months?), a yacht can be confiscated by authorities (and provided with visual evidence that this

has happened, for instance, by means of a chain). The last known owner is also notified of the action. Waiting another fixed time period, the yacht owner loses his property rights, provided that he or she did not take any action to claim the boat (and therewith, assumes respective responsibility).

There was some discussion as to whether an official court order would be needed to eventually enforce the transfer of property rights. And there was interesting contrasting information from Spain: Jose Luis Fayos, Technical Consultant at [ANEN](#), informed that Spain to date would be much more hesitant to undertake similar steps as described by HISWA. In Spain, the owner can come back and claim the boat even after years. Also, van den Heuvel mentioned a scheme currently practised at the city of Amsterdam which uses RFID chips to 'mark' boats considered for removal. Comparably inexpensive and easy to manage, he says and therewith, a useful method.

Now imagine you are a responsible yacht owner and you decide to have your boat decommissioned. What then? You're up for a bigger challenge as it looks right now, starting with transportation:

Some speakers suggested to encourage boat owners to hand in their yachts for responsible recycling way ahead of the point of no return, that is to say: At a time when they still can safely sail their boats (close to) a dismantling facility. Why? One, because there are no mobile dismantling solutions in place right now. So in most cases, a yacht, as soon as it can be recycled, has to reach a dismantling station somehow. But also, transportation via land to date is prohibitively expensive in most countries. The alternative? Waterways. These, however, in case of severely damaged yachts would require special permissions and regulations which to date simply do not exist yet. As nautical transportation service business, if you thought about packing several of those EOL yachts on one big transport ship and offer to get them to a dismantling facility, think again. It would be a new type of industry service, requiring respective insurances and safety measures.

A Gordian knot to handle for the administrative inclined among us.

So both transport and easily accessible, low-threshold acceptance schemes for EOL boats in the various countries are two of the big road blocks on the way to sustainable yacht recycling. As Mirna Cieniewicz, Secretary General of the [European Boating Industry](#) pointed out in her presentation, quite a few yacht owners dump their boats in the landscape or at conventional landfills not because they are so immensely proud to 'fool the system'. But in many cases, simply because they have to get rid of their old boat and see no structures available within their reach which would allow that.

The day this changes, it will be a very good idea to let yacht owners actively know about it. Albert Willemsen, Environmental Specialist at [ICOMIA](#), mentioned a fine example as case in point: In the waterways of his home town, Dutch Haarlem, he took photographs of several smaller boats in bad conditions. One of these is made of steel and moored a mere 500 metres distant from a steel recycling plant. No whatsoever connection between those two – the boat is there in the water, since impressive 10 years, waiting to rot.

More yachts being actively brought to dismantling by their owners of course would mean less hassle for marina managers or municipality staff. It also would generate the (economically needed) stream of yachts mentioned above – best case scenario.

France has made some impressive progress in this regard, with a bigger network of over 50 yacht dismantling stations meanwhile in place, most of them situated near the coast. And obviously there is much best practise to be shared from the works done thus far at those stations. Pierre Barbleu, Manager of [APER](#) in France, reported about this in his presentation and explicitly invited anyone interested to visit the network facilities and get in touch for questions and cooperation: A constructive spirit and openness which is very welcome and necessary for this young nautical industry branch, to get sustainably established.

Such a constructive and flexible approach will also greatly facilitate the building up of a circular economy with future yachting. The vital importance of the latter was highlighted by Carla Demaria, President at [UCINA \(Italian Marine Industry Association\)](#) in her presentation.

Meanwhile indeed thousands of new yachts join the markets every year. And yacht brokers would love to sell these without bigger hindrance. Marinas would also welcome space on their premises being freed up and above all, liberated from rotting boats which very rarely are a beautiful sight. Material recyclers very probably would

welcome more aluminium, steel, iron, copper and in the near future who knows, also fibreglass. And we all love unpolluted ecosystems, no doubt. Which means: Everyone wants those old boats to exit the circulation.

But no instance has a magic bullet to take care of all aspects by itself, or in one round. And no one wants to pay for the entire dismantling and recycling alone. Therefore, no surprise that an extra session was dedicated to just one big vital question: Who should pay for recycling?

This is why to date, a certain inertia and paralysis blocks yacht dismantling and recycling structures to be created. Most stakeholders are waiting for each other's moves, no one wants to advance and "lean too far out of the window", as my co-nationals love to put it. Most of the small businesses that get active do so on small scale and very cautiously.

Bram van der Pijl, owner of a yacht recycling facility '[Het Harpie](#)' at Dutch Enkhuizen, describes the problem: "I would have no problem up-scaling manpower if works would increase. Right now we get many requests for boat decommissioning and send out our offers, but costs are a mighty factor for boat owners. Also, in The Netherlands the plastic from boats is not recycled at this scale. So it makes little sense right now to extract and separate it. I send big part of the boats to my neighbour right next to me who has a scraping facility and I regret that. The moment this changes I'd be happy to know about it."

Another big roadblock discussed at the event indeed is a challenge which could transform into big chances: Recycling of fibreglass, the material most modern yacht hulls consist of. As we know various options exist here; one of them being to grind the fibreglass to fine particles and incorporate these into cement kilns – and this is practised in various countries. The fibreglass would not vanish completely by such a method, but it is a start. Another participant at the conference claimed to have achieved a viable solution for separating the fibreglass constituents. Yet soon added that it would require extracted fibreglass materials to be as pure as possible for the procedure to be successful. The latter unfortunately is not the regular case with many EOL yachts.

Albert Willemsen in his presentation pointed out that the water sports industry and specifically, recreational yachting is about to risk a fine reputation here: Both as sport and mode of transportation it was known as environmentally friendly for the longest time. Compare sailing to racing cars, off-road motor crossing, skiing or flying, for instance. You'll get the idea.

He also added these excellent points:

The concept of responsible yachtrecycling has to be brought to the yacht owners through information campaigns, if we want them to accept any responsibility or "ownership" of related costs. Meaning: Once low-threshold structures are being created, sailors must be informed about their new options in a timely manner. Which is what also Mirna Cieniewicz presented when she summarised the recently concluded, EU funded [Boat Digest project](#). Whose outcome, besides a very useful map of boat dismantling stations in Europe, also are boat dismantling training modules and recommendations for the industry. Additional fine steps in a circular economy direction.

Albert Willemsen added that owners of a pre-owned yacht could not be expected to pay the entire costs for the final disposal of that yacht alone. "Let's assume that the price for recycling will be €2000 – for many of us that sum is not too impressive as a cost figure for works being done on a yacht. But I imagine that the last owner of such a yacht, who has to decide for final decommission, may not be too affluent and will think twice before spending such an amount for this very scope alone."

Either way, not successfully tackling the problem with old boats very soon means to allow that yachting will become notorious as a pollution-generating sport. Not very cool.

Speaking of which. One presentation was given by Enrico Benco of [GS4C \(Go Sailing, for a Change\)](#) who proposed a wonderful idea. His main point was that the industry needs to perceive yacht recycling as something cool, positive, harbouring lots of chances. Something you want to engage with, as opposed to a nasty mighty problem you have to deal with. So why not introduce Optimist boats for kids, made of recycled, former Volvo Ocean race 560 boats? Apart from this fine idea, Benco also laid out how and why boat design already should take into account the yacht's eventual, sustainable recycling right at design stage already (and if you

remember [LADIDA](#)'s presentation at the 2014 yacht recycling conference in Düsseldorf, you know why this idea makes perfect sense.). [Oracle has understood](#) that long time ago, too – but again, that's another story. Design for dis-assembly right from the start using all sustainable materials, is Benco's proposal in a nutshell.

This first yacht recycling conference in The Netherlands of course could not cover every possible aspect of the topic yacht recycling within its limited means. It is known, for instance, that other methods of fibreglass recycling have already successfully been tested and Scandinavia, among others, is definitely a region to investigate further in that regard. As soon as fibreglass can be recycled at affordable costs on larger scale, very interesting cooperations (read: business & working opportunities) become possible. After all, the blades of wind turbines are made of the same material, to name just one example. And knowing the average lifespan of windmills today (30 years) plus the huge numbers of windmills out there already, a cooperation across industries looks like a real smart idea.

Everyone signals the will to cooperate and the interest to get the problem resolved. Yet given all of the above described challenges, investors and other funders hesitate to get involved, which is completely understandable. But as Victor Hugo said it: "Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come." Momentum has clearly set in and more and more pieces begin to fall in their places.

On a related side note, the EU framework programme [Horizon 2020](#) as a potential enabling funding scheme was not discussed at the event. But with this very topic is definitely worth a closer look. I wish the national contact points would provide much more actively information events, to demystify EU funding and make Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) aware of their options.

Progressively stricter environmental regulations (like the EU recreational craft directive and the [Basel, Rotterdam](#) and [Hongkong conventions](#)) are another mighty factor enabling urgently needed changes. Geert van Dijk, director of HISWA, presented a very useful overview of that legal framework development over the years. Fascinating indeed to note and keep in mind that environmental protection laws have a comparably short history.

With all due consequences: A very interesting point regarding these was made by a Danish speaker working for [Litehauz Aps](#), Denmark. Dr. Frank Stuer-Lauridsen presented working realities from the big ships industry – those who should possibly not get transferred to recreational yachting. He gave a vivid account of the hazardous working conditions which by an apparent total lack of training initiatives also includes workers extracting asbestos from ships and creating taxi furniture from it, unaware of the health risks. The question whether fibreglass poses a similar health hazard as asbestos under certain conditions is indeed still debated. Should it turn out that health risks are high, obviously the workers dismantling pleasure craft must receive respective training and protective gear.

Seen from the famous *glass is half full* (as opposed to: Half empty) perspective, there are many great chances, in different fields, on multiple levels. The nautical industry is in perfect time to co-shape terms and conditions in a way that spreads the costs to pay for recycling fairly and evenly between all involved parties.

By the complete picture of all views and agendas presented at this event, the overall definition of a fair and even spread of responsibilities & costs looks like this: Make best possible use of opportunities by cooperation. Facilitate technical innovation with material recycling. And above all, avoid to cripple owners of a yacht, the operability of marinas or related businesses by loading them with excessive costs or bureaucracy. Instead, help them resolve the problems of abandoned yachts right were they are, among other through financial incentives for yacht transport and sustainable dismantling structures.

Next upcoming event: A yacht recycling conference at Paris. [See here for details.](#)



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