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World's first bunkering of containership with renewable synthetic natural gas advances sustainable shipping

MAN Energy Solutions, Elbdeich and Unifeeder herald new milestone for Maritime Energy Transition

In a world-first for the maritime sector, the containership, 'ElbBLUE' – owned by German shipowner Elbdeich Reederei and operated by charterer Unifeeder – has bunkered some 20 tons of green SNG (Synthetic Natural Gas) at the Elbe port in Brunsbüttel, Germany. MAN Energy Solutions held a ceremony to mark the event, which marks the first time ever that synthetic fuel – generated from 100% renewable energy via power-to-X technology – has been employed in commercial shipping.

Formerly known as the 'Wes Amelie', the 1,036-teu feeder container ship previously made headlines in 2017 when its MAN 8L48/60B main engine was retrofitted to its current, four-stroke MAN 51/60DF unit to enable dual-fuel operation. The first such conversion of its type globally, it showed that existing engines could be converted to LNG operation with a tremendous effect on exhaust emissions and the environment. The ElbBLUE sails in the North and Baltic Seas.

Speaking at the event, Wayne Jones OBE, Chief Sales Officer, MAN Energy Solutions praised the leading roles that the various partners involved in the project played – including Unifeeder, Liquind and Wessels Marine – and commended them on their determination to drive green shipping.

He further said: "This is an important lighthouse project, essentially a proof of concept for the maritime energy transition. At MAN Energy Solutions, we strongly believe in the synthetic-fuels roadmap but joint efforts across the industry are needed to make it happen. The fact is that the respective governments need to establish a framework to make synthetic fuels readily available, while power-to-X needs to be developed on an industrial scale in order to bring down costs and make truly sustainable fuels a reality."

Stefan Eefting – Senior Vice President and Head of MAN PrimeServ, Augsburg – said: "This is a crucial step on the road to decarbonising shipping and, in Elbdeich, we have the perfect partner. In reducing or even eliminating future emissions generated by the global supply-chain, synthetic fuels and engine retrofits have a crucial role to play. While a retrofit instantly reduces a ship's emission-levels, synthetic fuels like SNG can enable it to run 100% climate-neutrally. Today, we are demonstrating that any LNG-retrofitted ship can also run on fuels generated by power-to-X technology, and even as a mix of fuels depending on availability."

The liquefied SNG was produced in a power-to-gas facility in Werlte, Germany, owned by kiwi AG. It is generated using 100% renewable energy. The ElbBLUE is now set to continue its journey under the supervision of engineers from MAN

PrimeServ, MAN Energy Solutions' after-sales division. As a result, the vessel's direct CO₂ emissions are expected to decline by 56 tons for this coming trip.

Jens Moje, Managing Director Elbdeich, said: "Elbdeich's philosophy is that the key to a successful shipping company is its ability to detect emerging, economic developments and trends – and to react flexibly by taking the appropriate measures. We view decarbonisation of the shipping industry as inevitable – and very welcome – and are delighted to play a pioneering role in its advancement."

Timm Niebergall, Shortsea Director Unifeeder, said: "This is a great technology showcase and we are excited to be part of this. From the perspective of a charterer and as a leading operator of Feeder & Shortsea services in Europe and around the globe, we think that the future availability of green(er) fuels will be essential. Our customers in Europe and beyond are expecting innovative solutions for improving our, and thereby also their, carbon footprint – green SNG is an interesting product and we are therefore very proud to be the first Feeder & Shortsea operator testing this new fuel on one of our vessels."

Hermann Pengg-Buehrlen, CEO of kiwi AG, said: "Our e-gas facility was the world's first multi-megawatt installation to generate synthetic natural gas from CO₂ and renewable electricity. The liquefaction unit taken into operation in 2021 was especially designed for the liquefaction of SNG. We are very proud to deliver the world's first SNG in the shipping industry to MAN and Elbdeich."

The Maritime Energy Transition

MAN Energy Solutions believes that it is time for what it calls a 'Maritime Energy Transition' to find clean, decarbonised solutions for seaborne trade and transportation. Essentially, it is the company's call to action to reduce emissions and establish zero-carbon fuels as the fuels of choice in global shipping. It strongly promotes a common approach by the shipping industry and politics to invest in infrastructure development and retrofits.

Power-to-X

Power-to-X is a number of electricity conversion, energy storage, and reconversion pathways that use surplus electric power, typically during periods where fluctuating, renewable-energy generation exceeds load. Power-to-X conversion technologies allow for the decoupling of power from the electricity sector for use in other sectors.



In a world-first for the maritime sector, the containership, 'ElbBLUE' has bunkered green SNG (Synthetic Natural Gas) at the Elbe port in Brunsbüttel, Germany.

MAN Energy Solutions enables its customers to achieve sustainable value creation in the transition towards a carbon neutral future. Addressing tomorrow's challenges within the marine, energy and industrial sectors, we improve efficiency and performance at a systemic level. Leading the way in advanced engineering for more than 250 years, we provide a unique portfolio of technologies. Headquartered in Germany, MAN Energy Solutions employs some 14,000 people at over 120 sites globally. Our after-sales brand, MAN PrimeServ, offers a vast network of service centres to our customers all over the world.