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Mersey Maritime launches “Innovating Maritime” project

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Regional cluster organisation, Mersey Maritime, is launching a new service to its North West maritime ecosystem, which will help organisations maximise and capitalise on innovation funding opportunities within the UK’s maritime sector which is known to be worth almost £50bn.

In alignment with national and international targets, including the Maritime 2050 strategy launched back in 2019, the UK’s leading maritime cluster organisation, Mersey Maritime, is set to fully fund a pilot project called ‘Innovating Maritime’ led by Dr Matt Fulton from the University of Liverpool.

Following the COP26 global climate summit, the Government is setting ambitious targets to decarbonise the UK’s maritime economy, but many smaller firms are confused about how to make the most out of these opportunities. Mersey Maritime’s ‘Innovating Maritime’ project will act as a complimentary bridge for the maritime ecosystem, pointing it towards sources of funding, expert support, and all-important end users, helping drive innovative change within the sector.

Mersey Maritime Chief Executive Officer, Chris Shirling-Rooke, said: “There is a significant amount of work that is already taking place to transform our industry into a low carbon and digital powerhouse but what is clear is how companies of all sizes feel confused and bewildered about how they can be part of this transformation. They are beginning to understand that investors will now want to see clear evidence of a

commitment to investment in both decarbonisation and digital technology.

“Over the past couple of years, we have seen our ‘Technology and Innovation Forum’ thrive, with partners including Peel Ports Group, Peel Land & Property, Bibby, Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), The Manufacturing Technology Centre and Royal HaskoningDHV, all playing key supporting roles. The part that was missing was the independent expertise to really support businesses draw down the funding as well as showcase their technology to the tier one companies. This new service will be free to our members, and I know they will find it invaluable. The need is clear, and we are 100% committed to supporting them to innovate in order to answer the big challenges that our industry faces.”

As part of Dr Fulton’s new role as Chief Innovation Officer, he will be focused on:

- The delivery of five ‘cornerstone’ regional projects of national significance.
- Advising and supporting members around the development of innovation projects.
- Maximising and capitalising on both private and public innovation funding opportunities, including from central government.
- Representing Mersey Maritime on the national Maritime UK Technology and Innovation Group.
- Developing thought leadership around maritime innovation in the North West ecosystem.
- Leading the Mersey Maritime Technology and Innovation Forum.

Commenting, Dr Fulton, said: “This is a fantastic opportunity to bring commercial R&D interests together with the world-class research institutions within our city region and beyond. Twinning expertise and facilities at the University of Liverpool, Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) and the Manufacturing Technology Centre (MTC) with industrial creativity will enable us to develop projects of national and international significance.

“This is a really exciting time for the maritime sector, which is currently undergoing an innovation renaissance. The unique challenges and opportunities offered by digitalisation and artificial intelligence gives huge scope for us to make a tangible difference, increasing efficiency, investment and jobs whilst reducing our impact on the environment. I look forward to making a positive impact to the industry by providing a service that promotes change for the better.”

Within the sector, several businesses supported by Mersey Maritime were able to draw down grant funding through the first round of the government’s ‘Clean Maritime Demonstration Competition’ in 2021 including Bibby Marine and Expleo.

Nigel Quinn, CEO of Bibby Marine, said: “Mersey Maritime is a results driven organisation with a proven track record of delivering support for innovative companies across the region. We work closely with them to help the sector deliver on these objectives for the greater collective good, and as such we welcome this commitment.

“Innovation sits at the heart of all that work and has an increasingly crucial role to play at this pivotal point in the global energy transition. The ‘Innovating Maritime’ project will help other companies realise similar opportunities and that has to be good news for the industry as a whole.”

(Mersey Maritime)