Poul Woodall is Director, Environment & Sustainability at DFDS A/S, with his focus on sustainability in shipping, company-wide, including environmental, social, and economic aspects. He is responsible for driving the company’s sustainability goals and initiatives, ensuring compliance with international regulations, and promoting sustainable practices within the shipping industry.

Please talk to us about your main functions at DFDS as Director, Environment & Sustainability:

DFDS is today a pan-European logistics company providing mainly maritime and road transport solutions to industry and the general public. The transportation industry in its current form, will not only have a certain environmental and climate impact. My main responsibility as Director, Environment and Sustainability is really two fold. Firstly I need to ensure that we as an organisation comply with all relevant regulations — national as well as international. The second priority is, in conjunction with the relevant business unit managers, to set targets for where DFDS wants to be with respect to environmental performance over and above the legal requirements. A lot of the day to day work involves ensuring we have all the relevant data and are on target for the goals we have set ourselves. An important function is also to supply customers and other business partners with environmental and climate data they request. We see a growing interest from our customer base to work with companies that have an active and ambitious policy on reductions.

How far is the gap between political intent and actually reducing CO2 emissions in shipping?

This is a very difficult question to answer, as in reality we do not yet know what this gap is. IMO declared both for the 2030 ambition of maximum 40% reduction in CO2 per transport work and the 2050 ambition of minimum 50% reduction of GHG emissions to use 2008 as the base year. We have however yet to see what positive element is in the upstream part of the chain. GHG from the combustion of biodiesel is not much different from that of fossil fuels. So if we end up only measuring and legislating on a ‘fossil-to-fuel’ basis only, we miss out on an obvious opportunity.

In your view, what measures are needed to meet the IMO’s CO2 emissions target?

We need to distinguish between the 2030 and the 2050 targets. Here, clearly the 2030 target will be the most challenging. We will not reach this unless there is a major shift away from fossil fuels. This also means that within the next 15 years we have to start building ships on a bigger scale with non-fossil fuel propulsion. With regards to the 2050 targets, it will as mentioned, depend on the metrics that can be agreed upon, but I am relatively confident that existing technologies may get us there — in fact we may already be beyond the 40%.

In terms of Sulphur Oxide (SOx) emissions, is the industry on target for 2020?

A big unknown here remains what will the 0.10% fuels look like. How do we handle these onboard the ships and not least what are their commingling features that we need to take in to account. We know very little about these products as of now and I expect that a large portion of the compliant fuel post 2020 will be regular 0.10% fuel.

Can the environmental goals of the IMO be achieved whilst maintaining economic competitiveness?

The answer to that question will depend on the specific segment. 100,000 tons of ore cannot be moved from one side of the planet to the other unless by ship. The transport cost represents a small fraction of the total price, even if fuel costs increase. On the contrary when moving a container or a trailer in short term trades or indeed small parcels of liquids and bulk, one may be competing with road or rail transport. However let’s not forget ourselves, in 2030 the main competition for certain transport products may come from a source we do not even know today.

What are the main three actions the maritime sector should implement to improve on carbon footprint?

If you look back over the past 10-15 years you will note vast improvement in efficiency within the industry. I admit this has mainly been driven by aspirations to reduce cost, but it has had a positive effect on GHG as well. The efficiencies have been achieved by a series of small improvements combined with building ever larger ships. The efficiency improvements will continue, but have certain vessel segments reached their maximum size? … and don’t forget large ships are only efficient if they are fully loaded.

What is really needed is a lot more research into renewable fuels and/or CO2 capture. This cannot be done on the company level, but needs to be driven by governmental institutions preferably the IMO.

As a fuel alternative, is LNG the solution?

LNG offers a lot of benefits, depending of the problem one needs to solve. With its low SOx and NOx emissions it may be beneficial to combat air pollution in and around urban areas. It is not one LNG as a viable long term fuel for climate reasons. Methane is a potent GHG and when looking at the entire logistics chain only a small slip can generate more GHG per energy unit than coal. We also need to look at this in a time perspective. Normally we talk about global warming potential (GWP) over a 100 year period. How methane is a factor 25-32 more potent that CO2. If we are however concerned about GHG emissions over the next 20 years, the multiplier for methane is more like 86.

Please name one objective you would like to achieve in 2019:

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