

March recovery boosts Q1 throughput at Marseilles Fos

Leading French cargo port Marseilles Fos is pondering if its March throughput could indicate “a return to normal” after container and oil volumes began to claw back from a decline caused by the global economic crisis.

First quarter container traffic at Fos deepsea terminal, handling the key east-west trades, fell 16% on last year to 157,039 teu but was just 1% down for March on 63,627 teu – helped by three new weekly services launched by Maersk-CMA CGM, MSC and Turkon.

Total box throughput for the quarter was 21% down on 206,807 teu after a 33% slump in trans-Mediterranean traffic handled in the Marseilles harbour area, but the overall March deficit narrowed to 13% on 78,825 teu.

Meanwhile oil volumes rose 11% to 5.9 million tonnes in March to cut the year-on-year deficit to 4% with 15.3MT for the first three months. The quarterly total included crude imports of 9.9MT, down 8% but boosted by an 11% rise in March to 3.9MT. Refined products were up 3% to 3.5MT over the quarter, while LNG added 1.2MT (+15%) and LPG finished 6% better on 0.7MT.

The port’s total January-March cargo throughput fell 14% to 20.85MT, although the March figure of 7.9MT was only 4% down.

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PORT NEWS FROM MARSEILLES FOS

Despite improvements in March, quarterly general cargo traffic fell 24% to 3.27MT, with container tonnage down by the same margin to around 2MT, ro-ro traffic down 9% to 0.94MT and conventional volumes – largely steel products - almost halved on 0.34MT.

Dry bulks crashed 51% to 1.6MT for the quarter as demand for steel industry raw materials continued to lag by 69%. Liquid bulks, mainly chemicals, fell 16% to 0.64MT despite biofuels surging 90% to 0.2MT.

Passenger numbers rose 8% to 65,000 in March to leave the quarterly total of 172,000 on a par with 2008. While ferry carryings fell 12% to 144,000 for the period, the cruise total soared by 204% to 28,000. This included 19,000 passengers (+147%) from eight calls in March, when MSC introduced the 3,500-capacity mega-ship *Fantasia*.

For port images, see Espace presse/Phototheque at www.marseille-port.fr