

Strong first quarter for Marseilles Fos

Container volumes and a revival in local steel and chemicals production helped leading French cargo port Marseilles Fos to total throughput of almost 21.5 million tonnes in the first quarter, a 3% increase on January-March last year.

Container volumes rose 17% to 245,029 teu, marked by a 31% jump to 63,933 teu in the Marseilles harbour area's mainly intra-Mediterranean traffic. The deepsea Fos terminal added 13% on 181,096 teu and is set for further gains with the introduction of two new lines – the Med-Gulf Express serving the US and Mexico, which started in mid-March, and CSAV-Norasia's Asia-East Mediterranean service, which now extends to Fos.

Container tonnage was up 20% at 2.42MT and saw general cargo rise 18% to 3.8MT, with ro-ro contributing 0.9MT (-1%) and conventional trades soaring 52% to 0.53MT on the back of renewed demand for steel products.

A 154% increase in raw materials for the steel industry – which typically represent 60% of dry bulks traffic - drove the sector to 2.72MT and a 70% improvement on Q1 2009. Meanwhile the chemicals industry underpinned a 47% rise in liquid bulks, where the 0.89MT total included 0.25MT (+31%) in the thriving biofuels market.

The oil sector was the only main category in decline, down 9% for the period on 14MT in a reflection of current difficulties in the French refining industry. Crude for national refineries held on 7.4MT (-1%) but pipeline deliveries to Germany and Switzerland plunged 23% to 2.1MT and refined products also fell by 23 points to 2.6MT. With LPG 5% worse on 0.7MT, LNG was the sole improver on 1.3MT (+10%).

Passenger volumes nudged 2% ahead on 175,000, which included a 69% increase in cruise numbers to 37,000. Ferry passengers fell 8% to 138,000, with Algerian services stable on 40,000, Tunisia adding 10% for 21,000 but Corsica down 15% to 77,000 due to shipping line strikes.

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

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