

Box volumes drive Marseilles Fos growth

Major growth in Marseilles Fos container volumes to the end of February helped the leading French cargo port to total throughput of 13.5 million tonnes – up 4% on the first two months last year – in a further sign of global economic recovery.

Container traffic rose 24% overall to 159,202 teu. Far East trades prompted a 30% jump at Fos, which handled 121,218 teu, while Marseilles improved 10% to 37,985 teu thanks to recovering markets in North Africa and the east Mediterranean.

Box volumes amounted to 1.59MT (+31%) and led general cargo to a 19% improvement on 2.39MT. Conventional traffic also contributed with 42% growth to 0.31MT as demand for steel products continued to grow, although ro-ro traffic was down 16% on 0.49MT in the aftermath of a slump in trade with Corsica and Sardinia.

The revival in the local steel industry – and imports of raw materials – nudged dry bulks back to normal on 1.54MT (+41%) courtesy of a 40% increase in calls. Meanwhile liquid bulks rose by a third to 0.53MT on the strength of the chemicals industry - aided by the ever-rising biofuels sector, which gained 26% to 0.16MT.

The only blip came in the oil and gas sector, where total throughput was down 4% on 9.04MT due to industrial action at six Total refineries in France over plans to close the company's Dunkirk facility. The impact at Fos saw refined products and crude imports each down by more than 0.3MT. In contrast, LNG and LPG each rose 2% to 0.75MT and 0.45MT respectively.

Passenger throughput included 15,700 cruise visitors (+121%) from 16 calls (+78%), but the overall number dipped 7% to 99,600 after ferry carryings were hit by a ports blockade in Corsica for several days in February.

Med partners meet on market links

The Marseilles Fos port authority has hosted a meeting of fellow partners in a Mediterranean ports and infrastructure project part-financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

The Backgrounds project, part of the European MED Programme, aims to improve links from ports and their industrial hinterland to global markets. Participants will be developing an operational template based on shared experience of their intermodal networks.

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The meeting in Marseilles included representatives from the Ligurian coast region of France and Italy, the ports of Koper (Slovenia) and Patras in Greece, Thessaloniki's Research and Technology Centre, Spain's Institute of Port Studies and Sicily's department of transport.

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