

Mixed fortunes maintains first-half throughput

Leading French cargo port Marseilles Fos has recorded an exact repeat of its 2010 first-half performance with total January-June throughput of 44.6 million tonnes, while passenger numbers rose 2% to 779,000.

The period produced contrasting swings in the major cargo categories. Oil and gas volumes gained 2MT but dry bulks lost 1.6MT. Meanwhile general cargo was down 0.6MT, with the port authority noting it was too soon to feel the effects of the French port reforms implemented in June.

Liquid bulks added 8% for 32.2MT, led by an eight-point increase in oil and gas to 30.5MT. Crude imports for national refineries edged 1% ahead on 14.6MT despite a two-month closure at Reichstett, while South European Pipeline deliveries rose 21% to 4.7MT on the back of supplies to the Cressier plant in Switzerland. With refined products up 5% to 6.4MT and LPG up a point to 1.1MT, the biggest percentage increase saw LNG add 33% for 3.7MT – boosted by the Cavaou methane terminal which opened in April last year.

Other liquid bulks were stable on 1.7MT – chemicals slipped a point due to a five-yearly maintenance shutdown at the Arkema plant in March and biofuels fell 20%, but agro-liquids added 5%.

Dry bulk volumes – dictated by imports of raw materials for the steel industry - slumped 25% to 4.7MT due to the closure of one of Arcelor's two foundries since December and a drop in coal demand. In contrast, sugar and cereals lifted the agro-bulk contribution by 26% to 0.7MT.

General cargo was down 7% on 7.7MT as container traffic fell 9% to 462,781 teu – although this was in comparison with 18% box growth for the first six months last year. Also within this category, conventional trades – closely linked to Arcelor output – dropped 8% to 1.1MT but ro-ro finished a point ahead on 2.1MT due to strong trading with Corsica, Italy and Tunisia, marked by 6% trailer growth to 95,691 units.

Passenger numbers saw cruise passengers up 8% to 318,000 but ferry numbers down 3% to 461,000. In contrast to weak Algeria and Tunisia carryings, Corsica passenger numbers rose 11% to 312,000 following the withdrawal of the competing Moby Lines service at Toulon.

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