

Press Release

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The German government's authority issues an initial permit for test operations for remote-controlled inland waterway vessels on the German canal network

Duisburg/Berlin. An important milestone has been reached for the future: HGK Shipping is now allowed to operate the first remote-controlled inland waterway vessel on the German canal network during test operations that will last for six months. After the push barge combination consisting of "Niedersachsen 2" and "Hannover" had completed test operations on one part of the route, which has now been approved, without any problems at the beginning of May, Europe's largest inland waterway shipping company has now been given the green light for this new phase by the German General Directorate for Waterways and Shipping (GDWS). The German Federal Minister of Transport, Dr Patrick Schnieder, handed over the permit for the inland waterway shipping route from Scharnebeck to Salzgitter yesterday to the HGK Shipping CEO, Steffen Bauer, on the sidelines of a sector event in Berlin and in the presence of the signatory, Head of GDWS, Eric Oehlmann.

The German Federal Minister, Dr Patrick Schnieder, made the following comments as part of the ceremony marking the handover of the permit. "Inland waterway shipping is facing enormous challenges. The shortage of skilled workers, which will particularly become even more critical in the near future, must not be allowed to become a serious obstacle for this hidden champion among the different modes of transport. After all, it's a fact that inland waterways are the only means of transport that we have in Germany with free capacity. Pilot projects such as this remote-controlled push barge combination can therefore become a game changer. The approval procedures have been completed. It's now necessary to get the technology out of the laboratory on to the water and put it into action."

Eric Oehlmann, who is the Head of the German General Directorate for Waterways and Shipping, emphasised, "Innovative approaches are demonstrating what's possible if technology and sustainability join forces. After carefully considering all the statutory requirements – paying special attention to safety – and successfully completing a test run, we've now reached this

point: the push barge combination can be put into service from the company's headquarters in Duisburg using remote controls with immediate effect. I'm grateful that my colleagues have been able to support the approval procedure quickly by focusing on finding a solution – the GDWS is setting a good example here of how innovations in inland waterway shipping can be promoted through cooperation and at great speed. I'm therefore particularly delighted that HGK Shipping has received the first German permit for the remote-controlled travel for an inland waterway vessel in line with the Inland Waterway Shipping Order."

HGK Shipping has been pushing ahead with using the SEAFAR technology for some time in order to be able to counter the enormous shortage of skilled workers among skippers. "We're putting our faith in increasingly digitalising inland waterway shipping together with our technology partner, SEAFAR, which is operating a so-called Remote Operations Center in Duisburg, in addition to modernising our fleet. This is an effective lever to increase the attractiveness of this profession when seeking to attract qualified workers," says Steffen Bauer, the CEO of HGK Shipping, emphasising the motive behind this project. "Based on the careful preparation and implementation of the individual approval stages, we're hoping that we can quickly move to the next stage after this test phase and operate vessels with a reduced crew."

Remote-controlled operations on a trial basis with a full crew on board were previously allowed on the river Rhine with a Belgian permit on the basis of the relevant recommendations from the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine. A full crew will still be on board the vessel during this new test phase, which will be performed on the German canal network between the communities in Scharnebeck and Salzgitter.

The next stage of the test programme could then already mean operating the refitted vessels with a reduced crew. The goal here is to use personnel in a more flexible manner and enable skippers to spend more time on dry land. This new technology has already proved its worth in other European countries, primarily in Belgium and the Netherlands, and has fulfilled the outlined objective for the benefit of everybody involved.

Notes on the attached photos:

1. Steffen Bauer, the CEO of HGK Shipping, accepted the permit for the test operations with remote-controlled inland waterway vessels on the German canal network on behalf of his company from the hands of the German Federal Minister of Transport, Dr Patrick Schnieder (right).

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2. In future, they will work together to promote the inland waterway system and its modernisation: Steffen Bauer, CEO of HGK Shipping, Dr Patrick Schnieder, German Federal Minister of Transport, and Eric Oehlmann, Head of the German General Directorate for Waterways and Shipping (from left to right).

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3. The Remote Operations Center in Duisburg allows inland waterway vessels to be remotely controlled, which will make it possible to use personnel more flexibly and enable the skippers to spend more time on dry land after further permits have been received in the wake of the test operations.

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About the HGK Group:

Häfen und Güterverkehr Köln AG (HGK) is the logistics company within the City of Cologne's public utilities group. Formerly just a port operator, HGK has developed into a group that provides integrated transport and logistics services with operations across Europe. Structured in five divisions, Logistics & Intermodal, Shipping, Rail Operations, Infrastructure & Maintenance and Real Estate, the HGK Group operates the largest inland waterway port network in Germany, one of the largest private railway companies for transporting cargo, specialist logistics firms and terminals as well as its own railway network and workshops for railway goods traffic through its subsidiaries and holding companies. HGK Shipping GmbH is the largest inland waterway shipping company in Europe.

About the HGK Shipping division:

HGK Shipping is part of Häfen und Güterverkehr Köln AG. Its fleet comprises about 350 vessels, including owner-operated ships. The spectrum of goods transported ranges from liquid chemical products and liquefied gases to dry goods and even break-bulk cargo.