

Brussels to shame EU ship safety package critics

By Justin Stares in Brussels - Thursday 19 April 2007



GOVERNMENTS blocking approval of the EU's flag state control directive will be publicly shamed if and when a pollution disaster occurs in their waters, Brussels warned yesterday.

The European parliament was prepared to explain directly to the victims of the next oil spill that their government had resisted laws designed to prevent such disasters, said a key Euro MP.

"If there is no response [to the proposed directive] we will call press conferences after the next black tide," said Gilles Savary, the French MEP and parliamentary rapporteur for the Erika 3 package of legislation.

The flag states control directive, which seeks to transfer competence for enforcing international rules from national capitals to Brussels, is being blocked by six governments in the EU council of ministers.

His warning was backed up by Fotis Karamitsos, maritime director in the European commission, who warned governments that there would be a "public outcry" if an incident occurred while they resisted change. "We do not want a spill happening in a country which is opposing" the legislation, he told a seminar in the European parliament.

With no sign of progress on the law, the parliament this week released a list of the governments which have formed a blocking minority in the council. They are: the UK, Sweden, Germany, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands. These are said to be primarily opposed to giving up sovereignty, though parliament sources said the arguments were "unconvincing."

The flag state proposal, which seeks to make IMO standards legally binding in the EU, is said to have just one outspoken supporter: France. Italy is said to be leaning towards supporting it.

The EU was criticised for its knee-jerk legislation after the *Erika* and *Prestige* spills (which led to the Erika 1 and Erika 2 packages) and should be given credit for making its latest proposals "with a cool head," said Mr Savary.

Mr Karamitsos admitted that, as a result of resistance from governments, the calendar for approval of the seven-strong package of laws had "slipped". Rather than aim for conclusion later this year under the Portuguese presidency, the target was now sometime next year, under the presidencies of Slovenia and France. France is expected to make maritime safety a priority.

The decision by the council not to begin discussions on the flag state directive was a “major disappointment” for the commission, he said. It was “very strange” that countries agreed to measures in IMO and then resisted attempts to bring them into law.

Another equally controversial directive on civil liabilities for shipowners is also in limbo in the council and was proving “even more controversial,” said the maritime director. Only two or three of the seven proposals will be examined by ministers under the current German presidency.

The parliament, on the other hand, is expected to finish approving all seven laws next week.

Article from Lloyd's List:

www.lloydslist.com/art/20017418706

Published: 19/04/2007 GMT

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