



Dedicated to promote the interests
of the Maltese maritime sector

Proposals for a Maritime-Centred Electoral Manifesto

A Document Submitted to Malta's Political Parties
in advance of the 2026 General Election.

May 2026

Executive Summary

The document outlines the Malta Maritime Forum's (MMF) recommendations for strengthening Malta's maritime industry ahead of the next general election. While acknowledging political cooperation and the sector's economic importance, the MMF highlights insufficient policy focus, leading to irregular communication and follow-up potentially causing competitiveness issues and missed growth opportunities. The Forum calls for a more maritime-centred national approach aligned with long-term strategies such as Vision 2050.

Four key priorities are identified. First, circumstances dictate the need for **focused governance** through the **re-establishment of a dedicated maritime authority**, the **appointment of a Minister for Maritime Affairs**, and **improved inter-ministerial coordination**. **Second**, the implementation of a comprehensive **National Maritime Transport Strategy** to guide investment, digitalisation, decarbonisation, and competitiveness, alongside stronger support for Malta's ship registry and investment incentives. **Thirdly**, the Forum places strong emphasis on addressing **critical skills shortages** through **enhanced education, training systems and career promotion** to build a **sustainable workforce**. **Fourth**, significant **investment in infrastructure**, including port capacity, logistics hubs, and multimodal transport solutions.

The MMF also stresses the need for **stronger engagement with EU policies** to ensure they reflect Malta's island realities. Overall, the document advocates coordinated policy, strategic investment and public-private collaboration to secure long-term growth, resilience and global competitiveness in Malta's maritime sector.

Malta's maritime sector depends on maintaining a strong global reputation, which requires **consistently high standards** supported by ESG principles and a commitment to sustainable, responsible practices. To achieve this, the MMF calls for stronger regulation, enforcement and industry measures—such as ship agency rules, bunkering codes, and recognized qualifications—while urging decisive government action to ensure quality, compliance, and long-term growth.

List of Concrete Proposals

1. Focused Governance

- Re-establish a **National Maritime Authority**.
- Appoint a **dedicated Minister for Maritime Affairs and the Blue Economy**.
- Set up a **permanent interministerial maritime coordination structure**.
- Establish a **structured public-private consultation and monitoring mechanism** for EU legislation.
- Malta should use its international clout to **lead like-minded countries to push for an EU maritime agenda**
- Allocate **more resources to entities dealing with EU maritime matters**.
- Advocate at EU level for **proportionate, non "one-size-fits-all" policies**.
- **EU directives should not be "gold plated"** when transposed to Maltese law.

2. National Maritime Strategy

- Finalise and implement the **National Maritime Transport Strategy** with a **clear action plan** (who/what/when) and **SMART objectives**.
- Allocate **resources for implementation of NMTS**.
- Act decisively to ensure **high standards in the maritime industry whilst embracing technology in ensuring efficient compliance**.

2.1 Malta Flag Competitiveness

- Conduct an **audit of shipowners, service providers, and administrators**.
- Carry out a **SWOT analysis** of the Malta Flag.
- Set up a **public-private marketing entity** for the Malta Flag.
- Introduce **fiscal and other incentives** for maritime investment.
- Establish an **analytical desk** to monitor competing flags.
- Increase **participation in trade fairs**.
- Organise **targeted international roadshows**.
- Seek **alternative legal advice for more client-friendly interpretations**.
- Introduce **training (customer care & shipping awareness)** for staff.
- Increase the **marketing budget** for the Malta Flag.
- Harness the strength of the Flag to **create sea going opportunities for Maltese cadets**.
- Implement complementary enhancing measures to **strengthen the corporate framework**

2.2 Maritime Services & Investment

- Develop **integrated ship management “one-stop-shop” services**.
- Promote **specialised maritime finance and leasing structures**.
- Improve **customs efficiency and Free Trade Zone use**.
- Expand **maritime education and workforce access** for operators.
- Engage with **banks to improve access to finance for maritime clients**.
- Introduce **new incentives for ship registration under Malta Flag**.

2.3 Investment Policy

- Include maritime sector in **national investment incentive schemes**.
- Ensure **public infrastructure complements private investment**.
- Maintain **consistent pro-maritime policy messaging**.
- Strengthen **consultation with industry on investment-related policy**.

2.4 Research & Innovation

- Allocate **additional funding to universities and research institutions**.
- Promote **industry-academia collaboration in maritime research**.

2.5 Promotion & International Positioning

- Set up a **public-private maritime promotion agency**. Agency to:
 - **organise** one professional **national maritime event**
 - **coordinate participation of Malta-based organisations** trade events abroad

2.6 Logistics & Trade Hub

- Establish a **free-trade zone logistics hub**.
- Designate **land for logistics use**.
- Create a **Free Zone Act with simplified procedures**.
- Upgrade **Free Zones Authority**.
- Introduce **investment incentives for logistics operators**.
- Modernise **legal frameworks (AI, blockchain, data systems)**.

2.7 Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

- Reserve **Hurd Bank (Area 1)** for anchorage and marine traffic.
- Ensure EEZ allocations **respect navigation routes**.
- Conduct: (a) **Shipping risk assessment**; (b) **Environmental impact assessment**; (c) **Economic impact assessment**

2.8 Bunkering & Energy Transition

- Develop a **national strategy for cleaner bunkering fuels**.
- Invest in **clean fuel infrastructure**.
- Provide **regulatory clarity and simplified compliance**.
- Introduce **financial incentives for alternative fuels**.
- As long as ETS/FuelEU remain in force, its **revenues should be reinvested into maritime decarbonisation and competitive-enhancing initiatives**.
- Establish **legal frameworks for LNG, hydrogen, ammonia, biomethane**.
- Introduce **incentives for retrofitting and green technologies**.
- Adopt **standard operating procedures for bunkering**.

3. Education & Skills

- Implement the **Maritime Skills Strategy**.
- Establish a **National Maritime Certification Centre**.
- Increase **number of Maltese Certificates of Competency (CoCs)**.
- Simplify **career pathways and certification processes**.
- Promote **maritime careers nationally**.
- Develop a **national cadetship framework**.
- Introduce **financial incentives for cadetships**.
- Expand **digital and blended maritime learning**.
- Streamline **administrative processes for training and certification**.

4. Infrastructure – Ports & Operations

- Invest in fixed and permanent **Ro-Ro infrastructure and capacity**.
- Develop **backup options for critical Ro-Ro operations**.
- Complete **Ras Hanzir multi-purpose quay project**.
- Upgrade **cruise facilities (Pinto, DWQ, Boiler Wharf)**.
- Commission a **Nautical Risk Assessment for Grand Harbour**.
- Ensure **alternative facilities before reallocating port space**.

4.1 Transport & Decarbonisation

- Expand **waterborne transport as part of multimodal strategy**.
- Introduce **Ro-Ro cargo sea link (Malta Freeport–Gozo)**.
- Allocate **resources for planning and implementation of sea transport solutions**.

4.2 Land Reclamation

- Support **new land reclamation projects for maritime infrastructure**.
- Ensure projects are: (a) **Industry-led** and (b) **Environmentally compliant**
- Design **modular reclamation with flexible use**.
- Ensure capacity for **large vessels (400m length, 18m draft)**.
- Require:
 - **Risk assessment**
 - **Environmental assessment**
 - **Economic assessment**

Preamble

As a politically neutral organisation dedicated to promote the interest of the maritime industry, the Malta Maritime Forum looks forward to work with the incoming Administration with a view to ensure the right conditions that foster investment, sustainability, employment and prosperity in and through the maritime industry.

The MMF acknowledges the political consensus that the maritime industry has garnered to the benefit of stability and thanks the incumbent protagonists – Hon Chris Bonett and Hon Ivan Castillo for managing to forge between them a healthy working relationship that has benefitted the industry and Maltese economy.

On the other hand, the Forum believes that the maritime industry is often deprived from due appreciation and the necessary attention worthy of its systemic importance to the Islands' economy. This lack of focus often results in policy inconsistency and allows detrimental issues to linger forever placing undue risk and loss of competitiveness on industry operators whilst stifling potential for future growth in existing and innovative sectors.

In line with the above and of its Mission, the Forum presents the views and opinions on the maritime industry for the forthcoming general election. The MMF expects the incoming administration to adopt a more maritime-centred approach to its national policy for economic and social development and to give more focus and importance to matters relating to the maritime economy and those who invest in it. This approach will allow the industry to fulfil the prominent and rightful role bestowed on it in the Envision 2050 document and the related economic targets.

The Forum outlines four policy priorities for the industry, along with (77) specific proposals for the new administration to review.

Policy Priorities

1. Strengthening Maritime Policy Focus
2. National Maritime Strategy
3. Education & Skills
4. Infrastructure

MALTA MARITIME FORUM – (MMF) BACKGROUND

The MMF is a non-governmental organisation established in 2015 with a vision to champion all matters related to the Maritime Industry. As a maritime cluster, it embraces the major economic players in activities such as ship-owners, port and terminal operators, bunker operators, ship agents, pilots, vessel towage providers, ship repairers, mooring-personnel, dockers, cargo haulage operators, maritime lawyers, suppliers of yachting services and other professional service providers. Its mission is to serve as a common platform for Malta-based maritime entities aiming to influence national maritime policy by facilitating communication between the various sectors as well as with Government to assist and promote the development of the Industry.

The Forum submits this Maritime-Centred Manifesto on behalf of the Industry to ensure the right environment and conditions for investment, sustainability, employment, and prosperity in the maritime industry.

In light of (i) the systemic economic importance highlighted above and (ii) its ranking and importance at a global level, the MMF advocates more focus and importance to matters relating to the maritime economy and those who invest in it. To this end, it is putting forward the following concrete proposals for consideration.

Policy Priorities Outlined

Priority 1 – Strengthening Maritime Policy Focus

1.1 Re-Establishment of a National Maritime Authority

The MMF acknowledges the complete reversal in policy direction between the present Government and the one in power before the 2022 General Election. Prior to that election, in fact, government had accepted the Forum's recommendation for the maritime responsibilities to be bestowed on separate dedicated entity and for this purpose a special committee was set up to oversee the transition, yet, unfortunately, this direction was changed soon after the election without any consultation with the industry.

Despite this unexplained change of policy direction, the Forum continues to voice its strong opinion on the matter and provide the necessary expertise because it is more than convinced that the re-establishment of a national authority solely responsible for the Maritime Sector is a necessary investment for Malta to safeguard its leading position as a Maritime centre of excellence on a global scale particularly in the face of cut-throat competition from other aggressive flags of registration.

This opinion is shared by its general membership as amply expressed during a public national conference held in September 2024. Prominent maritime players across all sectors, including shipowners, terminal operators, legal consultants and service providers all expressed a common view that **further expansion of the Maltese maritime industry is dependent on the support of a focused and dedicated entity to take timely decisions within a complex environment.**

Moreover, it has never been felt more important for the Authority to be focused, technically prepared and to have a marketing strategy for the maritime industry in order to be adequately primed for challenges coming from the European Commission by way of port competitiveness and changes in regulations pertaining to flag state inspections and similar regulatory challenges.

1.2 A Ministry for Maritime Affairs

The Forum recognises the great strides which our country has achieved over the past decades to establish Malta as a leading Maritime centre of excellence on a global scale. Through the efforts and consensus-building approach of successive Administrations, Malta developed a strong legal and regulatory platform that enabled Malta to become an established and reputable place for Shipping Registration so much so that today the Maltese Flag is ranked 1st in Europe and 6th worldwide in terms of registered tonnage.

The MMF reflects the conviction of its members that the Maritime Industry merits a high position in terms of policy-making and policy-making fora in the country in line with the importance given to other key economic pillars of the country such as tourism, industry and agriculture and fisheries. This would fit within Malta's aspirations of consolidating its maritime position on the global scale.

In this context, **the Forum believes that the incoming Administration is to appoint a Minister solely responsible for Maritime Affairs and the Blue Economy.** The role that Malta can play within the international maritime industry also calls for a dedicated Minister who can pro-actively contribute towards international issues that have a bearing on the Maltese maritime industry.

As things stand, the industry notes fragmentation and duplication of responsibilities amongst ministries and public entities whilst other matters often fall in “no-man’s land” with the consequence that such important matters are left unaddressed.

1.3 Other Measures for Strategic and Institutional Capacity

1.3.1 A Maritime Affairs Consultative Structure

In recent years and from continued engagement with local and European authorities, it is becoming more than clear that Maritime issues are no longer strictly a transport matter but are increasingly becoming a horizontal matter that cut across the responsibilities of a wide array of policy-makers entrusted with such portfolios as climate-change, finance, foreign affairs, energy, economy and others. For this reason, the Forum is proposing that in the forthcoming Administration, **the new Government will appoint a permanent interministerial set up to ensure coordination and policy coherence in all areas connected to maritime affairs.** This will ensure that the maritime industry is able to deliver the role and targets afforded to it within Envision 2050.

At the same time, **the MMF stresses the need for a structured public-private monitoring and consultation mechanism to review upcoming EU laws and regulations, perform initial analyses, engage with stakeholders and advocate for Malta's interests.** The need for this permanent set up is underlined by the expanse and breath of maritime-related proposals and legislation emanating from Brussels which have significant and lasting repercussions on Malta’s connectivity and economy at large.

On the Forum’s initiative and the intervention of various Ministries, a Committee was set up in 2024 to discuss alerts and positions between government and industry on developments concerning pipeline EU laws and regulations. This set-up is positive but requires more resources and momentum to function efficiently and effectively and ensure that Malta’s interests are continuously safeguarded in the face of challenging legislative proposals coming out of Brussels.

The scope and composition of the above set-up will also likely need to be refined to incorporate government-industry as well as inter-ministerial consultations on decisions related to the implementation of the National Maritime Transport Strategy and also other maritime measures that require an integrated approach including like National Climate and Energy Plan, Fit For 55 measures and others including the implementation of the Union Customs Code and Single Window and Entry Exit system.

1.3.2 Maritime Malta and the EU

In line with the above, **the Forum calls for a better resource allocation to those entities and organisations – both public and private – that have a stake in safeguarding the nation’s interest in the face of continuous new legislative proposals and regulations from the European Commission,** which, whilst appearing to be taken in good faith, may result in serious adverse effects for Malta’s maritime industry and economy in general. The general tendency of the Commission to apply a one size fits all approach is detrimental to Malta. Ample recent experience resulted from :

- (a) the Fit for 55 Package, most notably the Emission Trading Scheme (ETS), FuelEU and the Renewable Energy Directive) and,
- (b) the string of EU Sanctions against Russia
- (c) the Mobility Package, on which the ECJ subsequently annulled in October 2024, the obligation requiring vehicles to return every eight weeks to the operational centre of the transport undertaking because the Commission was not able to prove it had undertaken a sufficient proportionality assessment.

These instances clearly show how EU measures can impose disproportionate effects on different Member States and regions within the EU especially when the EU decides to push through measures without adequate consultation whilst overstepping its remit and jurisdiction.

The various packages of EU sanctions on Russia brought to the fore the reality of the continuous challenges faced by Malta and its flag. The limitations imposed by the EU on a unilateral basis serve as strong encouragement for certain shipowners to migrate from EU to non-EU flags whose authorities did not adhere to the sanctions.

In the case of the Fit for 55 Package, the Forum has continued to make active representations with the Commission on the strong incentive created by the ETS for shipping lines to evade the regime by diverting their transshipment activity away from EU ports to new terminals that were recently built or expanded in North Africa. The Forum remains deeply concerned about the risks to Malta's maritime connectivity which the ETS has imposed. To this end, it recently made strong submissions to the EU Commission that gave evidence of business leakage; carbon leakage; loss of maritime connectivity; and the compromising of EU principles: including competitiveness, cohesion, fair competition, de-risking, safeguarding of supply-chains, carbon neutrality and socio-economic resilience.

The Forum has consistently highlighted that the risks imposed by ETS on the country are far-reaching as far as the economy is concerned with concrete repercussions on a macro level in terms of operational costs and limitations imposed on the manufacturing, tourism and importation sectors that, in turn, could translate into inflationary pressures. That said, the primary impact of ETS is on transshipment and the central role this assumes in terms of connectivity for our islands and the Malta Freeport - an intrinsic element of the maritime eco system for the entire mediterranean region which deserves protection and enhancement. The ETS experience cannot be allowed to repeat itself, Malta can ill-afford continued risk to this activity. Rather it should be safeguarded, encouraged and given all the required support.

Going forward, **the MMF expects the incoming Administration to continue to uphold Malta's position to safeguard its unique interests as an independent, small, peripheral Island Member State.** In this regard, the Forum strongly contends that **the incoming Administration needs to insist with the European Union for it to adopt better a calibrated and proportionate approach to its key policies** in order to ensure success in the very objectives they seek to achieve.

The incoming government must stress with the European Union that its uniform application of unique regulation (One-Size-Fits-All approach), when applied to structurally unequal contexts can produce inequitable outcomes. Island economies like Malta face unique constraints—limited scale, geographic isolation and dependence on imports and exports—that mainland operators do not share. Malta exemplifies these challenges. It lacks natural resources, operates within a small domestic market and is geographically distant from Europe's economic core. Its economy is therefore highly open, with trade volumes far exceeding GDP. This openness makes it particularly sensitive to disruptions in maritime connectivity.

Consequently, **the Forum holds that the incoming Administration must also argue with the EU that regional and cohesion policy should not be based on current economic performance but on the structural realities of insularity—permanent geographic disadvantages and inherent vulnerability.** Malta, despite its strong economic growth in recent years, remains highly exposed due to its reliance on international trade, export-led services and uninterrupted global connectivity.

Moreover, **Malta should not “gold plate” EU directives** when transposing them to the domestic statute books. On the contrary, Government should work more closely with local stakeholders entrepreneurs to identify attractive niches and investment opportunities.

Malta at the Core of a Coordinated European Approach

It is more than acknowledged that within the EU’s legislative process, decisions are taken according to the will of the majority and this in itself often creates difficulties for smaller, peripheral members, such as Malta, which may not be supported by other member states on issues that are very sector or region- specific.

The ETS experience has made it amply clear that there is need of leadership in the Mediterranean when it comes to negotiation at EU level. The MMF appreciates the sterling work undertaken by Malta in its consistent attempt to press its views and influence those of other Member States.

The Forum believes that **Malta can use its international clout, consistently manifested within ILO, to take the lead amongst like-minded countries in the region to push for a maritime agenda that safeguards and promotes the maritime industry** in such a manner that benefits Malta, the Mediterranean and the EU.

The Forum believes that **Malta can turn the current predicament into an opportunity by developing common strategies to promote with the European Institutions and drive home the relevance of the maritime industry to national economies whilst influencing other Member States in giving a more sympathetic consideration to maritime matters.**

The proposed way forward requires a public-private partnership requiring resources at both levels to build the necessary internal capacities and take more active roles within the pan-European associations they form part of or can form part of.

The incoming Administration needs to support private-led organisations with the necessary resources required to build and maintain the necessary internal capacities and take more active roles within the pan-European associations they form part of or can form part of. Indeed, Malta’s maritime cluster organisations have shown that they are able to support the Maltese government very effectively through efficient co-ordination with their counterparts and policy-makers on the European level ensuring a stronger, yet common and co-ordinated front in promoting wider regional risks in relation to the EU’s climate ambitions.

Priority 2 - National Maritime Transport Strategy

The Malta Maritime Forum is proud to have instigated and actively contributed to the National Maritime Transport Strategy (NMTS)—now in its final stages of preparation and looks forward to contribute to its implementation. This Strategy has been developed at a crucial juncture for Malta and its execution will coincide with the roll-out of Malta Vision 2050, the country's overarching economic strategy. The NMTS is designed to align with and complement this national vision, consolidating the maritime industry's position as a core economic pillar. Besides, it must fully align with EU laws and regulations referred to above, as well as with the European Commission's own Maritime Strategy which is in the making. This alignment is essential to ensure coherence with Malta's obligations as an EU Member State and to position the country competitively within the wider European maritime framework. The same applies, of course, to the wider global scenario in fulfilment of Malta's responsibilities under IMO and other international conventions.

The NMTS will position the maritime industry as a horizontal enabler for the entire economy—facilitating the import and export of raw materials, finished goods, commodities, and the movement of passengers by sea. Its scope will extend beyond industry operations to support the broader economic ecosystem and the well-being of the Maltese population.

The timing is particularly opportune as the industry navigates two transformational challenges—digitalisation and decarbonisation. Shipping cannot decarbonise in isolation. The sector is being regulated, yet the fuels, technologies and infrastructure required remain insufficiently available. Measures are needed to incentivize their production and take up and to bridge the price gap between traditional marine fuels and alternative fuels is key and needs to be fuel and technology neutral accessible to all shipping segments and also suitable for SMEs. The NMTS therefore needs to incorporate an ecosystem approach.

Digitalisation clearly plays a key part in Malta's future strategy also due to its importance in supporting the achievement of decarbonisation targets. The Industry must leverage technology, automation, and artificial intelligence to bridge talent shortages and skills gaps that affect all maritime sectors. As mentioned, digital transformation will complement decarbonisation efforts while ensuring the industry can continue to create quality career opportunities in line with Malta's changing socio-economic realities.

These “twin transitions” are reshaping regulations, technologies, fuels, infrastructure, and skills requirements. Addressing them proactively as part of the NMTS will be key to maintaining Malta's competitiveness in a fast-evolving global maritime landscape.

Just as no private business can succeed without a robust business plan, the maritime sector needs a clear, actionable national strategy. The Government and the MMF are firmly aligned on the need for the Strategy to incorporate a comprehensive action plan—detailing what needs to be done, by whom, and by when—developed through full stakeholder consultation.

To be effective, **the Strategy should also adopt the SMART approach—ensuring that goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.** This will allow targeted improvements in competitiveness and capacity, such as port efficiency, to be monitored, assessed, and adjusted as necessary. A clearly defined direction will help investors, operators, and public authorities make timely, coordinated decisions that support the strategy's success.

The Forum emphasises that the NMTS represents a pivotal step towards securing a sustainable and prosperous future for both the maritime sector and the wider economy. By addressing the interlinked challenges of digitalisation, infrastructure development, workforce training, global partnerships, and environmental sustainability, the strategy will provide a comprehensive, forward-looking roadmap.

If executed with political will, adequate resources and full industry engagement, the NMTS will enable Malta to:

- Harness and consolidate its full potential as a global maritime player.
- Strengthen its role as an essential economic enabler.
- Drive competitiveness, resilience, and long-term prosperity for the nation.

Besides, the strategy will contribute towards raising much needed awareness about the importance of shipping to the Maltese economy and daily life of citizens - thus raising its image amongst the general public and increasing its attractiveness to younger generations of the wide range of job opportunities it offers has to offer both at sea and on-shore.

For this purpose, **the Forum reiterates its call for the authorities to place the necessary direction and resources behind the successful implementation of this strategy of key national importance.**

2.1 Safeguarding Malta's International Maritime Reputation through High Standards

Malta's maritime sector operates within a highly competitive global environment where reputation is both invaluable and fragile. Upholding high standards is therefore not optional but essential to sustain credibility and long-term growth. The adoption of ESG principles, strongly promoted by the Forum, reflects a forward-looking commitment to responsible and sustainable practices.

However, standards must be underpinned by robust laws, effective regulation, and consistent enforcement. For this reason, the MMF has long advocated for the enactment of ship agency regulations, the establishment of a recognised code of practice for bunkering operators and the maintenance of rigorous maritime academic qualifications with global recognition, as reflected elsewhere in this document. These measures collectively contribute to raising the bar and ensuring quality, which is the underlying theme and objective of Envision 2050.

In this context, **the MMF urges the incoming administration to act decisively, prioritising the national interest by ensuring high standards in the maritime industry through the delivery of quality services that conform to recognised international standards whilst embracing technology in ensuring compliance and addressing any instances of abuse swiftly and effectively.**

2.2 Strengthening Incentives and Support Structures to Enhance the Attractiveness of the Malta Flag

The Forum recently analysed the performance of the Malta Flag and submitted preliminary recommendations with a view to initiate discussions of a consultative nature on the subject. In line with these submissions, the Forum calls on a forthcoming Administration to allocate the necessary resources to facilitate the following proposals in the interest of strengthening Malta's Ship Registry with the aim of improving efficiency, responsiveness and service delivery for operators:

- a) An audit to survey the issues of shipowners, service providers and officials who administer the Flag.
- b) SWOT analysis to help build on the strengths and opportunities while addressing the weaknesses.
- c) The setting up of a marketing entity on a public/private basis to be entrusted with the development and realisation of a marketing strategy in view of huge aggressive competition and headwinds reported by shipowners.
- d) The promulgation of fiscal and other incentives similar to what is offered in manufacturing to attract more "maritime" investment in Malta.
- e) A fully fledged analytical desk within the Merchant Shipping Directorate to review and monitor competing flags.
- f) Participation in more specialised trade fairs to promote Malta flag.
- g) The holding of targeted road shows in key countries to meet shipowners and stakeholders.
- h) Seeking alternative legal advice with a view to allow a more client-friendly interpretation of regulation and conventions.
- i) Basic customer care training and basic shipping awareness training for junior TM MSD staff and the introduction of induction training for all new staff joining MSD.
- j) An increased and more realistic budget for marketing of the Malta flag.

Malta's leading maritime position has been built on an open, international registry serving a global industry. Continued success depends on remaining a jurisdiction of choice for international shipowners and operators. This requires efficiency, legal certainty, predictability, responsiveness and a commercially aware administration.

The Forum therefore believes that **greater attention should be given to seeking complementary benefits through the corporate framework with a view to ascertain that Malta not only safeguards its attractiveness and competitiveness as a flag State, but also as a jurisdiction for maritime companies** — by retaining and growing the number of companies established here and fostering new business and investment opportunities. To this end, it should also seek to implement:

- a dedicated and business-friendly corporate framework for shipping companies, supported by simplified, uniform and unequivocal procedures, without excessive disclosures and disproportionate due diligence requirements and a one-stop-shop administrative interface across the relevant authorities;

- targeted incentives and stronger financing tools, including access to banking and financial services for shipping companies, to retain existing operators, attract new investment and encourage companies to return to Malta or establish here from the outset, including opportunities linked to decarbonisation;
- stronger international promotion and client engagement, including more active engagement in key maritime centres, structured outreach to existing and prospective clients, closer coordination with Malta’s diplomatic and economic network;
- as highlighted above, clear leadership and coordination at government level through a designated maritime focal point, ensuring consistency, efficiency and timely decision-making across the relevant authorities.

Moreover, as a leading maritime jurisdiction, the Forum believes that **Malta needs to place more emphasis on the rules and equally on the role of the service provider to uphold the standards and reputation of the Malta Flag whilst empowering stakeholders and authorities to prevent sub-standard operators from abusive practices to the detriment of upstanding practitioners and the Flag itself.**

In view of the highly competitive environment, the Forum believes **that reforms must translate into tangible improvements in responsiveness, reaction times and the day-to-day experience of operators.**

2.3 Beyond the Malta Flag

Beyond the Malta Flag, the Forum is willing to continue to contribute towards engaging with local bank’s to provide the support required to better understand the risks associated with the maritime industry with a view to be more open to offering banking relationships to clients who establish Maltese companies and who wish to increase substance in Malta.

Moreover, the Forum further suggests new incentives for shipowners and operators to register their vessels under the Maltese flag. These new offerings may include:

(1) Integrated Ship Management Services:

A one-stop-shop facility for shipowners to access technical and crew management, chartering support, maintenance, insurance, and compliance from reputable local and international providers.

(2) Ship Finance and Leasing Structures:

In collaboration with Maltese and international financial institutions, shipowners could benefit from specialist maritime finance desks offering tailored products such as sale and leaseback schemes, vessel refinancing and green transition loans for retrofitting and sustainability upgrades.

(3) Customs and Regulatory Efficiency:

By strengthening and promoting further the provisions of the existing Free Trade Zone Act, registered shipowners could benefit from simplified customs procedures, warehousing flexibility and tax advantages, reducing downtime and improving operational efficiency.

(4) Talent Access and Training:

With local institutions expanding their maritime and logistics education offerings—including a new Masters in Port Management and Logistics—shipowners will have access to a skilled workforce aligned with the needs of modern fleet operations and vessel management. Besides, Malta must also aim at turning this industry sector into a tool for promoting seafaring careers particularly in terms of engaging cadets for sea time services.

This combined offering strengthens Malta's value proposition to shipowners, going beyond ship registration for the country to deliver a complete maritime support ecosystem.

2.3.1 Incentives for Investment Attraction in the Maritime Industry

Within the National Maritime Transport Strategy, **the incoming Administration must truly recognise the role of private investors in the maritime industry – both local and foreign – and their economic contribution** in the generation of prosperity, jobs, tax revenues and other economic multipliers.

As the prime interlocutor for the maritime industry, the Forum naturally, expects to work hand in hand with the authorities in all matters that require consultation and clarification on behalf of economic operators in an effort to not only avoid such instances in the future but to foster investor-friendly conditions within the industry.

To this end, the Forum welcomed the consultation process around the Grand Harbour Revival Plan and contributed actively towards it by mobilising its resources to facilitate feedback from the players. It is, of course, prepared to do the same for a Strategy for the Port of Marsaxlokk which the Forum invites the incoming government to embark upon to facilitate policy coherence and communication amongst investors, regulatory bodies, service providers and other stakeholders.

In the context of long-term economic planning, the Forum expects all relevant stakeholders to ensure the safeguarding of strategic partnerships the country has built over the years with investors, both local and foreign in the long-term interest of maritime business and connectivity within our Islands. In the interest of ensuring the right conditions for investment, sustainability employment and prosperity in the maritime industry, all **responsible stakeholders must do all that is in their power to foster sustainable and resilient growth in the maritime industry by :**

- (1) giving full institutional and policy backing to investors,
- (2) including the maritime sector within the scope of investment incentives and other forms of public-funded support afforded by the authorities from time to time,
- (3) ensuring that private investment is complemented by the necessary public-funded infrastructural investment, the execution of which needs to dovetail with the operational and legal privileges of the private sector,
- (4) communicating consistent policy messages in favour of the maritime industry in tune with its systemic importance to the country,
- (5) seeking to consult wherever necessary with individual operators and the MMF as their interlocutor on matters of policy which are material to investment decisions,
- (6) ensuring that they do not only pay lip service by saying the right things, but by ensuring that their staffers carry out the policies on a day-to-day basis.

2.3.2 Adequate Support for Research in the Maritime Industry

In the face of momentous challenges posed by the twin-transitions of Digitalisation and Decarbonisation, the Maritime Industry must turn to local and foreign research institutions to conduct the necessary research and testing.

To this end, **the MMF believes that the University of Malta, MCAST and other research institutions ought to be afforded adequate resources – beyond Horizon and other EU funding sources – to work with industry in the research and testing space to the benefit of the Industry, the Research Institutions, Students and Academics and Maritime Malta.**

The MMF believes that a cross-fertilisation of ideas between industry and academia in research is mutually reinforcing. The addition of an industry perspective is conducive towards the improvement of the marketability of academic projects or the acceleration of their time to market. On the other hand, the addition of academic input would enhance the quality of policy proposals generated by industry. **Resources channelled towards industry-academia linkages will give returns in terms of exchange of ideas, visions for Malta’s Maritime industries and most of all tangible actions to improve national and regional marine and maritime measures for sustainable development** that will pave the way for much needed innovation in the digitalisation and decarbonisation spaces.

2.3.3 Public-Private Promotional Arm

The MMF believes that the **forthcoming Administration should set up a dedicated entity that would take the form of a public private partnership tasked with the international promotion of:**

- a) Malta as a centre of excellence and a worthy destination for maritime investment
- b) all maritime services offered in and from Malta

The Malta Maritime Forum is eager to partner with Government in this venture which could run on the model of TechMT, Education Malta, Property Malta and Finance Malta amongst other examples. The PPP could be developed in a way that brings together government and industry in a coordinated and outward-facing manner, focused on international client engagement and competitiveness, consistent with approaches adopted in other leading maritime centres.

With this proposal, the maritime industry would benefit from the value and positive results in other sectors generated by the above quoted examples. The proposal would avoid potentially awkward and/or conflicting situations for Transport Malta in balancing its regulatory and promotional roles.

The new set up would seek to achieve its international promotion responsibility through more active engagement in key maritime centres, structured outreach to existing and prospective clients and a more consistent on-the-ground presence internationally in key centres. At the same time, the initiative could consolidate all international promotion of national maritime efforts under one, industry-driven, umbrella. The set-up should also be tasked with holding the organisation of one professional national maritime event which can take the shape of an exhibition/conference and to which are invited shipowners, ship managers, financiers, crewing managers, legal practitioners and other stakeholders similar to other events in the region. The proposed entity would also coordinate the participation of Malta-based private and public organisations at trade events held in Cyprus, Greece, Montecarlo. The final aim is to consolidate Malta’s position at the international level or the country’s strengths as a centre of excellence in the maritime industry.

2.3.4 Establishing Malta as a Regional Logistics and Trade Excellence Hub

In line with the first pillar of Malta's new Maritime Transport Strategy to become a logistics hub that serves the connectivity needs of the Islands, the resource needs of shipping in the Mediterranean and regional transshipment, **the Forum calls for the setting up of a free-trade zone to serve as a regional logistics hub**. This initiative is consistent with Malta Vision 2050 and aims to position Malta as a centre of excellence in regional trade by transforming its logistics capabilities, boosting economic activity, and contributing significantly to national competitiveness and resilience.

Malta's strategic location at the crossroads of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East—paired with an established freeport and airport infrastructures—offers a unique opportunity to transform the country into a premium regional logistics hub. With regular connections to around 140 global ports and the third-largest port in the Mediterranean (Malta Freeport), the foundations for this transition already exist.

The concept behind this proposal goes beyond the scope of the Malta Freeport. A free-trade zone builds on the mere trans-shipment of containers allowing for the processing and value adding of the cargo passing through Malta. To this end, clients of the logistics hub will need to be given the freedom and ability to:

- Store goods under simplified customs arrangements
- Seamlessly import goods into Malta, add value and export via ship, aircraft or road
- Manage their warehouse within the free trade zone

The current geopolitical situation in the Gulf presents a unique opportunity for Malta to establish itself as a reliable alternative logistics hub.

A project of this scale may directly contribute in excess of €100 million annually to the Maltese economy, which figure could easily double when taking account of multiplier effects of related economic activity. Such figures underline the sector's ability to contribute around one percentage point of Malta's GDP. Besides, this development could attract multinational logistics-focused companies, and in the process contributing towards significantly diversifying Malta's economic base in line with Malta Vision 2050 aspirations.

The realization of this initiative and economic potential for Malta will require an extensive plot of land ideally located in the vicinity of both Malta Freeport and Malta International Airport to offer competitive turnaround times and intermodal connectivity for trans-shipment, value-added logistics, and re-exporting.

Besides physical land, this proposal requires the necessary political drive, targeted infrastructure investment, and administrative reform that facilitates ease of doing business for the users of the site. To this end, the Forum calls on government to:

- Designate and develop the required land solely for logistics use.
- Upgrade the Free Zones Authority to coordinate all approvals, customs, and licensing processes in consultation with the private sector.
- Implement incentives to encourage investment in logistics operations, including favourable lease terms, investment aid, and training support.
- Modernise legal frameworks to enable logistics integration with technologies such as Blockchain, AI, and real-time data management systems.

If successfully implemented, this initiative may serve as the regional counterpart of the Dubai Logistics Corridor in the Gulf region, which contributes 20% to the UAE's GDP and sustains over 135,000 jobs. The Dubai case is a compelling reference point for what Malta can aspire to achieve in proportion to its scale.

As already stated, this initiative fully aligns with the new Malta Vision 2050 and the National Maritime Transport strategic documents as well as with Malta's broader strategic goals, including:

- Improving economic resilience through diversification.
- Encouraging high-value sectors that optimise land use.
- Creating quality employment opportunities.
- Leveraging digital and green transition technologies, including Blockchain, to simplify logistics operations and reduce costs.

Furthermore, it supports Malta's ambition to climb the global rankings in competitiveness and logistics performance—creating a lasting legacy for future generations.

The Forum urges the forthcoming Administration to mobilise the necessary resources towards the implementation of this initiative as a strategic national priority. With the necessary public-private cooperation, infrastructural support, and policy alignment, Malta can solidify its role as a regional logistics powerhouse, redefine its position in global trade and drive its new vision for higher value-added, sustainable economic growth.

2.3.5 Exclusive Economic Zone

The MMF considered a document published in 2022 by MFIN entitled "Exclusive Economic Zone – A Sea of Opportunities" and submitted its opinions. The MMF's position considers :

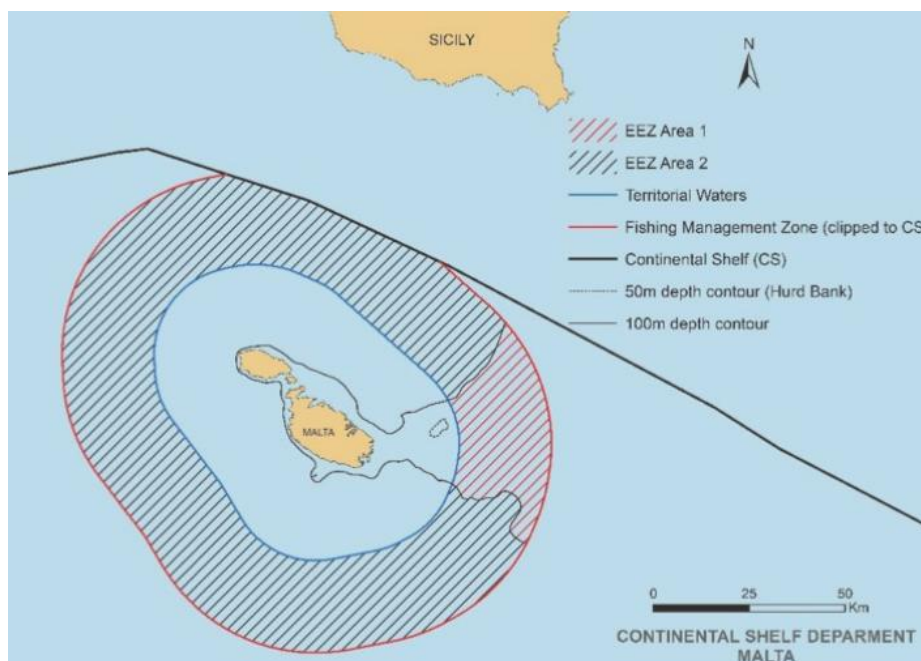
1. What economic activity takes place at Hurd Bank and who benefits
2. The opportunity cost of a regulated allocation of the EEZ?
3. The effects on international maritime navigation routes of potential EEZ designations, and
4. The legal framework that would need to be put into place for the purposes of enforcement and control of the EEZ.

The salient section of the position paper relates to point 2 above. The MMF's gravest concern from an industry and macroeconomic perspective is the effect of a hindrance to business activity and ensuing multiplier effect resulting from a potential limitation on anchorage at Hurd Bank, even by means of an anchorage fee deemed prohibitive by the market. Such limitation on current business provided on and through Hurd Bank will result in detrimental direct and indirect effects on service providers potentially costing the local economy:

- (a) jobs,
- (b) indirect business activity through the multiplier effect,
- (c) investment,
- (d) foreign currency earnings and
- (e) direct and indirect tax revenue in Malta.

A comprehensive (though non-exhaustive) list of sectors which would become affected is provided. Besides, a huge concentration of shipping traffic typically moves along Area 1, i.e. the E to W and E to SE direction within the Malta Channel (between Malta and Sicily) as opposed to relatively sparse traffic below the south coast of Malta.

For this reason, the MMF firmly believes that Area 1 as denoted in the diagram below and representing Hurd Bank should be reserved exclusively for marine traffic and anchorages.



With regards to Area 2, the MMF holds that any regulated allocation of an EEZ must always respect the rhumb lines and navigation routes so as to ensure that maritime traffic may still flow freely, avoid any disruption and costly delays to shipping lines. The MMF recommends that a thorough risk assessment be carried out prior to any decision concerning allocations in the area under consideration.

From the legal perspective the MMF is of the view that there are a number of matters which would need to be considered and covered quite apart from the overarching idea that the country must assess its legal rights and obligations which in turn translate into financial burdens.

The report concludes that any declaration of an EEZ will need to follow from a number of elaborate studies not least :

1. a shipping traffic risk and impact assessment,
2. an environmental impact assessment, and
3. an economic impact assessment.

The latter will need to estimate the net monetary benefit accruing to the country from the economic exploitation of the increased territory after the forecasted costs are deducted. This exercise would need to incorporate those costs that the country would need to incur in shouldering added responsibility, rights and obligations that come with the new territory, in terms of monitoring and enforcement.

Malta has the responsibility to choose and examine the projects carefully to ensure they are compliant with ecological and environmental standards. This point is crucial in light of the declared intention to fast-track permits from the PA and ERA for EEZ-related projects. **The MMF underlines the importance of ensuring that new projects sited in the EEZ do not create negative environmental and/or economic externalities which are detrimental to other economic sectors and/or the common good.**

All in all, the MMF reiterates its position that Area 1 covering Hurd Bank be reserved exclusively for marine traffic and anchorages. With regards to Area 2, the MMF is not against the exploitation of the EEZ as long as the necessary safeguards are in place and as long as the projects contained therein are not detrimental to any Maltese service providers including Maltese-registered companies that provide services on Hurd Bank to ship owner and that the projects do not hinder the existing navigational lines and take into account eventual legal implications.

2.3.6 Bunkering

Bunkering with Cleaner Fuels

The MMF believes that Malta must actively embark on a strategy for its bunkering sector which facilitates the transformation towards cleaner fuels in the industry. This particularly in the light of the growing recognition and focus on decarbonisation across the globe with concrete targets and initiatives being set at UN (SDGs) and EU level – in the latter case through binding legislative frameworks forming part of the Fit for 55 Package, in particular the Energy Tax and ETS Directives.

The Forum welcomes Malta's initiative to join the Clean Energy Marine Hubs and to position itself at the forefront of the transition — but action is needed urgently, as the country lags behind other ports in Italy, Spain and North Africa which are being used by vessels passing through the Malta routes when they need to refuel. **Malta must ensure regulatory clarity and make the necessary infrastructure investments**, drawing on national and EU funding (such as the Innovation Fund), without further delay.

The framework should ensure that:

- regulatory clarity is provided;
- overlapping obligations are avoided;
- compliance procedures are simplified;
- any malpractices are effectively curtailed through strong regulatory controls and enforcement;
- incentives are in place to close the price gap with conventional fuels;
- fiscal measures and ETS/FuelEU revenues are reinvested into the maritime sector to accelerate uptake of alternative fuels;
- alignment with forthcoming IMO rules is secured.

As long as the EU ETS remains applicable to shipping, revenues generated from EU ETS and FuelEU should be channelled back into maritime, through a decarbonisation or climate fund dedicated to supporting clean energy marine hub projects and green vessels via tonnage tax, port fee reductions and incentives for company registrants in Malta investing in fleet greening. This is critical, especially as companies increasingly consider domicile decisions based on access to such incentives.

The Industry largely plays a waiting game for the outcome of research taking place at the global level which remains inconclusive as to which technology and fuel will prevail in the future. Indeed, this uncertainty has created dilemmas to shipowners who are currently ordering ships (with production lags lasting until 2030 or beyond). The cost of a new vessel is very expensive when compared to any road vehicle and the risk of future obsolescence is very high for fleet-owners.

The MMF is therefore calling for the urgent establishment of legal frameworks for LNG/ Hydrogen Biomethane/Ammonia to apply to maritime transport (legislation already exists for LPG and road transport). This is the first step that is required for the direction of the Industry which is vast and diverse requiring extensive and a lengthy process of coordination until decisions are finally taken and executed. Key stakeholders include ship-owners, charterers, ship-builders, port operators, port services, providers of navigation control systems, fuel and bunker suppliers and other stakeholders in the fuel distribution network, builders of propulsion systems, training institutions, law makers, insurers, financiers and others.

Following the establishment of the necessary legal frameworks proposed above, **the MMF calls for regulatory clarity, incentives for bridging price gap and ship retrofitting and clean technologies in ports, and infrastructure support necessary for Malta to become a competitive hub for sustainable marine fuels.**

The MMF also believes in the importance of new technologies and carbon-neutral approaches which are aligned to the demands and needs of the industry. The industry needs to plan beyond certain transition fuels like LNG. Accordingly, it is of key importance for Malta to explore the possibilities of new more advanced fuels such as green hydrogen.

Until the authorities make the necessary legislative changes and support the transformation with adequate support to industry players, Malta will continue to lose precious business to other ports elsewhere. Moreover, local (small scale) vessel operators will continue to show reluctance in investing in retro-fit or new-builds that operate on any transition fuel solution which could have the potential of also being hydrogen ready. The approach is also conducive to a circular economy because retro-fit conversions may extend the legal and technical product life of the vessel.

Standard Operating Procedures for Bunkering

Linked to the above point, **the MMF is proposing to raise professional standards in bunkering business through the introduction of mandatory internationally recognised standards.**

The process of transferring oil supplies to a ship is termed as bunkering operation. Conventionally, bunkering is done in ports but with modern techniques and heavy traffic, bunkering can be done at sea under normal weather conditions. Malta enjoys a very advantageous geographical location for the delivery of bunkering at sea lying at half-way mark between the Straits of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal. Bunkering in and around Malta, in fact, requires little or no need for marine traffic crossing the Mediterranean to alter course.

In this regard, **the MMF believes that the Islands may and should introduce and adopt a set of internationally recognised standards with a view to enhance Malta's reputation in the field and attract the share of international business that generates invisible exports, investment, specialised employment opportunities and tax revenue to the country.** Principal amongst these standards are Standard Operating Procedures for Bunkering.

Ship To Ship Bunkering, the process by which fuel is transferred between two adjacent ships positioned alongside is the most common type of bunkering procedure at sea. The eventual obligation for ship to ship bunkering operations to adhere to minimum standards will mitigate certain inherent risks including Oil Spills, Health Risks to operators, Disputes on the Sulphur Content between transaction parties and Mechanical damage to ships caused by low quality fuel.

The MMF plans to hold a focused event on the matter with a view to formulate a position paper for submission to the competent authorities. Meanwhile, it is willing and prepared to contribute to the formulation of a Bunkering Procedure incorporating detailed steps for the various related phases including (a) Ordering, (b) Preparation, (c) Pre-Bunkering and (4) Bunkering. Procedures must also entail a Bunker Delivery Note, detailed precautions to be taken during the Bunkering Operation and relevant Checklists.

Priority 3 – Education and Skills

The Forum considers Skills as one of the foremost priorities in ensuring competitiveness of the Maritime Industry over the next decade or so. To this end, it appeals to the future Administration to **ensure that all systems and structures are in place to ascertain the quantity and quality required to drive and sustain Malta’s position as a maritime hub of excellence as outlined in Envision 2050.**

Today, the industry faced challenges that are widespread across all economic sectors, both locally and internationally: a growing shortage of manpower and skills in both seafaring and land-based roles. This shortage is already impacting growth, competitiveness and, in certain cases, business continuity, particularly where safety considerations are involved.

Extensive research undertaken by the MMF highlights that this shortage is being felt across all levels of employment—unskilled, skilled, and highly specialised—and across all sectors of the industry. The skills gap continues to widen as recruitment fails to keep pace with attrition. While companies are increasingly relying on foreign workers (EU and third-country nationals) as a short-term solution, long-term sustainable options remain limited.

At the same time, the maritime industry’s career opportunities are not sufficiently visible, particularly among younger generations. The sector continues to face a perception challenge, often associated with hardship, risk, and less attractive working conditions when compared to other industries offering similar or higher income levels. Additionally, career pathways—especially cadetship routes—are often perceived as complex and difficult to navigate.

These challenges are expected to intensify. Demand for labour within the Blue Economy is projected to increase, while the nature of required skills is set to evolve significantly as the industry transitions toward digitalisation and environmental sustainability.

In response, the MMF has actively contributed to the development of a national Skills Strategy for Malta’s maritime sector, led by the OECD and supported through the European Commission’s Technical Support Instrument. Building on this work, it is evident that addressing the skills gap requires coordinated action between public and private stakeholders to reduce labour market inefficiencies and better align talent supply with industry needs.

At the same time, Malta’s position within the global maritime sector presents both an opportunity and a structural imbalance. Malta maintains the largest ship register in Europe and the sixth largest globally. However, its domestic output of seafarer Certificates of Competency (CoCs) remains comparatively low. According to European Maritime Safety Agency data (2025), Malta ranks 24th out of 27 European countries, with only 161 valid Master and Mate CoCs. In contrast, other countries maintain significantly higher levels of nationally certified seafarers.

This disparity is further reflected in population-adjusted figures: Malta has approximately 2.8 CoC holders per 10,000 people, compared to 38.2 in Norway. While Malta is the largest issuer of Certificates of Equivalent Competence (CECs) in Europe—relying heavily on foreign-certified seafarers—this highlights a structural dependence on external human capital rather than domestically developed expertise.

Going forward, **the Forum urges the incoming Administration to take heed of and implement the recommendations of the new Skills Strategy with a view to address both the immediate skills shortage the structural imbalance.** In the coming years, the Forum believes that **Malta must transition toward an education-led maritime ecosystem. Strengthening maritime education and training capacity must take place in parallel to promoting maritime careers amongst children and adults with a view to support the long-term competitiveness of Malta’s maritime industry.**

Practical initiatives could also be considered to strengthen early engagement and awareness, including programmes such as “adopt-a-ship”-type initiatives found in many countries and structured outreach between industry and education institutions.

Additional efforts may also be implemented across a broader talent pool, including measures to encourage greater participation of underrepresented adult groups, as part of ensuring a sustainable and competitive workforce.

A key priority is certainly **the development of a robust national maritime education framework capable of increasing the number of valid Maltese CoCs to a significantly higher baseline.** This would create a sustainable pipeline of technical expertise, supporting both shipboard and shore-based roles, including regulatory, surveying, and managerial functions. A stronger domestic talent base would also enhance the overall competitiveness of the wider maritime cluster.

Achieving this transformation requires structural, educational, and policy reforms. The consolidation of currently fragmented maritime education functions into a single, **unified National Maritime Certification Centre** would provide a streamlined, coherent system. This entity would act as a central point for certification, training standards, and career pathways, eliminating duplication and ensuring consistency across all maritime segments.

In parallel, **maritime career pathways must be simplified and made more accessible. This includes establishing clear, logical, and attainable progression routes within the education system, supported by better alignment between academic qualifications and industry requirements.** Certification and assessment procedures should also be streamlined, particularly in recognising both formal and informal learning outcomes through measurable performance indicators.

Awareness and promotion are equally critical. A coordinated national effort is required to increase visibility of the Blue Economy and maritime careers through the education system, career guidance structures, and targeted outreach initiatives. Promoting maritime professions as modern, high-value, and globally relevant careers is essential to attracting new entrants.

Work-based learning must also be strengthened. The current challenges faced by nautical students in securing cadetship placements highlight the need for a more structured and supported system. A national cadetship framework, supported through collaboration between government and industry, could incentivise shipowners registered under the Maltese flag to take on cadets.

The Forum believes that progress is best achieved through partnership and voluntary engagement, including cadetship opportunities offered by willing operators. **Financial mechanisms such as tax incentives or co-funded scholarship schemes could reduce barriers to entry to further encourage employers and ensure that cadetships are treated as a strategic national investment** rather than a private burden. Of course, any measure considered must ensure full compatibility with Malta’s competitiveness framework and the wider attractiveness of the jurisdiction.

In addition, Malta has the opportunity to leverage its size and agility to modernise maritime training delivery. The adoption of digital and blended learning models can expand access, increase efficiency and position Malta as a competitive provider of maritime education internationally.

Addressing administrative barriers is also important. Streamlining processes related to training, certification and international participation—such as facilitating access for foreign trainees—can enhance Malta’s attractiveness as a maritime education hub while contributing to knowledge exchange and international engagement.

Future Administrations must acknowledge that sea-faring qualifications are most invaluable to people also if and when they eventually decide to alter their careers and settle for land-based positions. The blend of sea-going knowledge and experience of officers, engineers and master mariners is invaluable to them and their employers alike once they take up positions in terminals, regulators and other areas within that make up the industry.

The incoming Government must recognise education as a strategic pillar of Malta’s maritime strategy. A strong education framework not only addresses domestic labour shortages but also reinforces the credibility and long-term sustainability of the Maltese flag. By investing in people, aligning skills with future industry needs, and fostering closer collaboration between stakeholders, Malta can ensure that it not only hosts one of the world’s largest ship registers but also develops the human capital required to expand the industry further around the business activity and opportunities created by the Flag.

Priority 4 - Maritime Infrastructure

4.1 Investment in Infrastructure for Cruise & Cargo Operations

In the past years, the MMF has consistently stressed on the need for investment in maritime infrastructure and timely execution of same. The Forum’s representations mainly centred around the availability of quay space for cruise liners and maritime cargo operations. Both sectors have experienced exponential growth in demand and traffic with operators left to struggle with supply-side challenges and lack of quay space and hinterland, mainly due to the limited size of the natural port and increasing dimensions of vessels.

To this end, in the run up to this General Election, the Forum participated in the consultation process on the Grand Harbour Revival Plan where it highlighted the bottlenecks currently experienced by operators at large and the fundamental necessity for **existing maritime activities and services taking place in the Grand Harbour today to not only be maintained in the future but supported to grow in order to sustain the country’s economic development.**

Cargo Operations

The Forum urges the forthcoming Administration to allocate the necessary resources and effort towards improved infrastructure for Roll-On/Roll-Off (Ro-Ro) operations on which the Islands strongly depend for the importation of consumer and industrial goods. The capacity to receive and process Ro-Ro traffic efficiently within the Grand Harbour is of paramount strategic importance to Malta's economy but an accumulated lack of investment in this area has subjected such operations to increasing limitations over recent years.

In fact, notwithstanding the fact that the trailer traffic to/from Malta, has increased from some 35,000 TIR units to about 75,000 TIR units over the last 20 years, the facilities within the Grand Harbour for Ro-Ro vessels have remained the same and there has been no investment in the infrastructural requirements that this traffic entails. Two decades ago, Malta had three Ro-Ro berths, which, over time were reduced to a single berth at Laboratory Wharf. The technological advances in shipbuilding over the last 20 years have developed at such a pace that today, environmental and economic considerations necessitate the employment of bigger and more efficient vessels. Due to the lack of enhanced facilities at Laboratory Wharf, Malta has already lost out on the deployment of eco ships by some operators because new vessels cannot be accommodated. Similar issues persist around other quays, namely Deep Water Quay (DWQ) and Flagstone Wharf.

The MMF calls for a holistic approach to the pressing issues highlighted above which go beyond infrastructural works and addresses the most critical question that an island economy such as Malta should mitigate existential risks by ensuring back-up options for its existing single Ro-Ro berth on which its connectivity and survival so intrinsically depend upon.

Going forward, given the multitude of demands on our port infrastructure, **the Forum is in favour of multi-purpose quays and facilities within the Grand Harbour and to this end, it urges the forthcoming Administration to see through the project of Ras Hanzir without any further delays** with a view to ensure that this new 365m quay multi-purpose facility to be in operation prior to the commencement of any works related to the Grand Harbour Revival Plan so as to ensure seamless port operations which are of strategic economic importance.

Moreover, the Forum calls for an extension of the logistics chain to a 24 hour basis by giving incentives for logistics during silent hours.

Cruise Liner Operations

Since the last General Election, the competitiveness of the Valletta Port as a destination for cruise ships has been further enhanced by the completion of the ambitious Onshore Power Supply (OPS) project which underlined Malta's commitment towards decarbonisation and a green maritime strategy.

Nevertheless, the operations of cruise liner passenger facilities have also been hampered by continued delays in the works leading to the completion of cruise passenger facilities at Pinto and Deep Water Quay. **Boiler Wharf and its immediate hinterland should be similarly upgraded in order to accommodate higher-end, boutique cruise liners** with passengers that prefer to be further away from mega cruise ships associated with the mass-market. This investment would be in line with Malta's quality tourism aspirations and Envision 2050 milestones.

4.2 Grand Harbour Revival Plan

Cognisant of the strategic role of Valletta Port for Malta's economy and the pressures placed upon it by increasing demand, the Forum has consistently encouraged the authorities to put function over form well before the launch of the Grand Harbour Regeneration Plan (GHRP).

Key to further progress in this regard is **the commissioning of a full Nautical Risk Assessment report** by independent, reputable, expert research institutes, the conclusions of **which will clearly outline the navigational boundaries and related tolerances of the proposed mix of activities identified for the Grand Harbour** taking into account the need for any new infrastructural investment such as dredging, break-waters or wave breakers in order to broaden the possibilities of different activities co-existing within the Port.

The Forum recognises the multitude of demands on the precious shoreline, creeks and hinterland that make up the area of the Grand Harbour and appeal for a long-term vision in drawing up plans that would avoid any irreversible limitation on the functionality of the Port in terms of providing maritime connectivity for the country.

In line with the above, **the MMF continues to appeal to any forthcoming Administration to apply utmost prudence in ensuring that all, strategically important commercial port activity – current and future – is ascertained.** Suitable alternative facilities for each operator and concessionaire need to be identified, allocated and set up before portions of quayside and hinterland are committed towards other non-commercial maritime use such as tourism, yachting and real-estate.

The Forum recommends that the key strategic role of the Grand Harbour in facilitating the Islands' economy through the efficient import and export of goods and fuel in and out of the country as well as the embarkation and disembarkation of passengers. At the same time, prioritisation needs to be given to storage facilities, warehousing, ship-repair and related maritime activity in the immediate hinterland of the shoreline. The importance of the above is intensified by the fuel transition which the world is experiencing and which it shall continue to experience in the global quest for net zero emissions. As already highlighted, the growing need for fuel storage space and bunkering facilities around the port are intensified by the fact that there seems to be no consensus on one single fuel for the future and the distinct possibility that different vessels will use different fuels including LNG, bio-fuels, ammonia and hydrogen each necessitating dedicated storage and distribution points.

In view of the above, whilst the optimum use of quays and surrounding hinterland within the Grand Harbour is encouraged, together with their embellishment and upgrading, the MMF is aware of the existing limitations which have port operators have been encountering for years due to the limited size of the natural port, increased demand, and increasing dimensions of vessels.

With current and future capacity considerations in mind, the Forum urges the incoming Administration to also consider locating certain new activities identified in the GHRP to be located elsewhere ensuring that no unnecessary and irreversible limitations are imposed on the Grand Harbour as one of the country's most strategic assets.

4.3 Waterborne Measures to Curb Road Congestion

The MMF welcomed the successive announcements and concrete initiatives taken by government in the area of shifting road traffic towards waterborne means of transport as a means to reduce road traffic congestion and harmful emissions from Malta's roads. The latest of these initiatives was allowing free ferry services with the Tal-Linja Card and extending the fast-ferry routes via a new terminal and breakwater in Bugibba.

Whilst the Forum commends these initiatives, it believes that they fit within a wider multimodal transport strategy where each mode links seamlessly with the other to ensure efficiency, convenience and reliability for the commuter. The Forum believes that only then will commuters be tempted to use public transport services in lieu of their private cars.

To this end, the MMF has long been advocating for similar measures with a view to increase the share of waterborne traffic as part of the solution towards decarbonisation and traffic congestion. The Forum also presented key data concerning passenger and vehicle traffic between Malta and Gozo during 2022 and the amount of pollution that this generated. It said that trucks generated 0.218 kgs of CO₂ per tonne mile while in comparison ships generated 0.04 kgs of CO₂ per tonne mile. Whilst sea transport still generates pollution, the MMF argues that numbers clearly show that a shift to waterborne traffic needs to be considered as part of the solution towards decarbonisation and traffic congestion.

Subsequently, the MMF took the initiative to enter into preliminary discussions with the Foundation for Transport to explore the viability and resource requirements for the shifting of cargo traffic from road to sea as part of the solution towards decarbonisation and traffic congestion. To this end, **the MMF suggested the introduction of a Ro-Ro service to transport cargo between the Malta Freeport and Mġarr Harbour in Gozo possibly with a stop-over in the north of Malta.** This initiative promises to :

- (a) alleviate traffic on Maltese roads from Birzebbuga to Ċirkewwa, and
- (b) reduce emissions of harmful CO₂ pollutants because of the lower generation of CO₂ per tonne mile generated by one ship compared to multiple trucks

The proposal is therefore in line with European Green Deal objectives as actively promoted by the European Network of Maritime Clusters (ENMC) of which the MMF is an active member.

Whilst appreciating that this proposal has been accepted by the authorities and was indeed mentioned publicly by the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Public Works, the Forum recommends that the forthcoming Administration mobilises the necessary resources for the proper planning of this initiative to ensure judicious investment of capital in the necessary infrastructure. The Forum agrees with Minister Bonett's assertions on the matter that given the vast non-monetary benefits of this initiative, government should still proceed with its implementation irrespective of its financial feasibility.

4.4 Land Reclamation

The MMF acknowledged repeated declarations regarding land reclamation by successive Administration and subsequently welcomed the plans, permits and subsequent works leading to the reclamation of land in the Port of Marsaxlokk for the purposes of the expansion of Terminal 2 at the Malta Freeport.

This decision fits **the MMF's policy in favour of land reclamation projects that are designed and operated by maritime stakeholders and which comply with all guidelines and regulations emerging from local environmental and planning legislation as well as Environmental Impact Assessments.**

Over the years, the MMF also acknowledged the land reclamation projects which have, in the main, provided substantial impetus to the maritime industry in Malta and hence to the economic benefit of the country. With this hindsight, the MMF believes that the maritime industry would stand to gain significant strides ahead should another major land reclamation project be implemented for the purposes of upgrading maritime transport infrastructure.

To this end, the Forum is supportive of such projects that would be designed and operated by the Maritime stakeholders. It should fall within the remit of an already recognised Maritime Authority such as Transport Malta or the Malta Freeport Corporation.

The operating model should represent way forward for affording maximum flexibility in the use of quays without parcelling unnecessarily concessions that could possibly hinder capacity optimisation. Proper management of the quays is essential so that berthing allocations are maximised. This would yield optimum cross quay productivity in terms of tonnage.

Infrastructure needs to be planned to enable modular land reclamation concessions according to each operator's general requirements. In this respect the authority would be able to grant leases to operators on condition that their infrastructure investments are within an overall masterplan.

The maritime industry would benefit mostly were the reclamation to yield depths of waters that are suitable for today's ocean-going vessels. The land reclamation project must deliver berths capable of handling vessels of up to 400m length and 18m draft.

Once again, **the MMF is recommending that any decisions on land reclamation projects are based on the conclusions of elaborate studies** including:

- (a) a shipping traffic risk and impact assessment
- (b) an environmental impact assessment
- (c) an economic impact assessment

The MMF is prepared to participate in a detailed consultation process for a land reclamation project that would give the opportunity for all its stakeholders to expand and modernise their maritime activity.

Summary & Conclusions

Given that, by its nature, Maritime is essentially a global industry and in light of the current extraordinary circumstances and transitions to which it is exposed, the Malta Maritime Forum believes that the forthcoming General Election is of fundamental importance to the continuation of growth and development in the Industry.

For the MMF, the maritime industry is not only a cornerstone of Malta's economy but also a strategic enabler of its future development, resilience and global competitiveness. This is now underlined in national Envision 2050 Plan.

The breadth of issues and opportunities outlined in this document highlights the urgent need for a coherent, maritime-centred policy approach that recognises the sector's systemic importance and addresses long-standing structural challenges. This approach, in turn, requires focus and speedy reaction-time which can only be delivered by a Minister with exclusive responsibility for maritime and the re-establishment of a National Maritime Authority.

In anticipation of the forthcoming General Election, the Forum is both proud and pleased to put forward the 77 concrete proposals listed below for the consideration of the political parties. In so doing, it emphasises that the success of the proposed measures will depend on strong political will, institutional coordination and sustained collaboration between government and industry stakeholders. A consistent policy direction—supported by adequate resources, regulatory clarity, and timely execution—will be essential to unlock investment, drive innovation, and safeguard Malta's position as a leading maritime centre of excellence.

At a crucial juncture characterized by both (a) uncertainty and disruption caused by geo-political tensions and (b) profound transformation driven by digitalisation and decarbonisation, Malta must act decisively to strengthen its institutional frameworks, invest in infrastructure and human capital and enhance its attractiveness as a maritime hub of excellence. The implementation of a robust National Maritime Transport Strategy, alongside targeted reforms and incentives, will provide the necessary roadmap to navigate these challenges and capitalise on emerging opportunities.

The Forum stands ready to work in close partnership with the incoming Administration to ensure that the maritime sector continues to generate sustainable growth, quality employment and long-term prosperity for Malta. By aligning national priorities with industry needs and global developments, Malta can secure a resilient and competitive maritime future.