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Danish shipping company's decision to sell ship to India highlights misconceptions about "green ship recycling"

16/01/2015



(<http://www.offthebeach.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/NGO-Shipbreaking-Plattform-Shacks-in-Alang-India-2014.jpg>)

16 January 2015 – Clipper, a Danish shipping company (<http://www.clipper-group.com/>), sold a ship for breaking that ended up in an Indian shipbreaking yard in January 2015. The “Clipper Concord” was a 14-year-old general cargo ship that had most recently sailed in African and Caribbean waters. The Platform was alerted about the fate of the ship when *Ekstra Bladet*, a Danish daily newspaper, contacted us about the sale. The Platform contacted Clipper on 16 December, asking for clarifications about their decision to sell their ship to a notorious polluted site. An exchange of emails followed, which soon revealed that the CEO of the Clipper Group was genuinely convinced that Alang was a safer choice.

The Platform recognizes that Clipper has taken steps to ensure clean and safe recycling. However, we need to make clear that none of the shipbreaking operations currently taking place in South Asia, even those dubbed as “green”, meet Hong Kong requirements nor will they be compliant with environmental standards under the new EU Regulation on Ship Recycling. There is no external certification or verification of the claim to be “green” and the four presumably ‘best’ yards are just undergoing a gap analysis to define the lacunae to become Hong Kong-compliant. Even the Gujarat Maritime Board (GMB) has recently stated in the press (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/Rs-1000-crore-push-for-greener-cleaner-Alang/articleshows/45830785.cms>) that shipbreaking in Alang is not yet up to international standards.

The Platform would like to make it clear to shipping companies who are contacted by cash buyers and brokers selling to South Asia that we consider the cash buyer GMS’ “green ship recycling programme” and other similar offers a marketing stunt which is not substantiated by offering really clean, safe and just ship recycling.

In Alang and the rest of South Asia, ships can’t currently be recycled in a sustainable way in modern ship recycling facilities off the beach. An economic incentive for shipbreakers in India to invest in modern facilities can only be created by responsible ship owners who demand clean and safe recycling and who are willing to make a compromise on their profit when selling an end-of-life vessel.

There is no modern ship recycling facility in Alang where ships could be demolished afloat (the so-called ‘pier-side demolition’) and the bottom then brought either on to a slipway or a floating dock, nor is there any facility where ships can be landed on to a fully contained and draining area (the landing method as used in Turkey).

The fact that a shipping company will go for a site visit before or while their ship is broken will not change the fact that the beaching method and all its involved risks remain unsustainable. All foreign visitors need a special permit to visit Alang. They will only be presented with a pre-arranged situation such as all other delegations going to Alang have witnessed before. They may be given a nice presentation in a welcoming meeting room and see workers wearing fresh clothes and new helmets. They will not see the reality of everyday work in Alang.

All Alang yards use the beaching method where the primary cutting of the ship is done in the intertidal zone without containment and pollution control – which is made impossible by the tide. Moreover, other risks are the gravity method, i.e. falling steel blocks in the primary cutting area rather than the use of cranes; manual demoli-

tion by torch cutting including toxic fumes to which workers are exposed, difficulty of bringing hazardous waste removal equipment on to the mudflat; no access for emergency response. We do not believe that a ship can be cut in a clean and safe way while on a tidal mudflat considering all the above-described challenges.

Even if some investment has been made in the improvement of a couple of technical aspects such as concrete flooring for the upper part of the beach and a waste treatment facility, the dire working and living conditions of workers have hardly improved since the 1980's. The situation is similar for workers in all yards. In December 2014, the Platform alerted stakeholders that a new report by the most prestigious social science research institution in India, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, pointed out that the conditions have basically not been improved since the industry was first started in 1983: workers live in shacks without access to proper sanitation, they are not represented by a trade union, migrant workers are not properly registered, and there is no proper hospital for 35,000 workers.

We advise shipping companies against using the Leela shipbreaking site, which is being promoted as a "green yard" by GMS to its potential clients. Leela Shipyard is a usual Alang shipbreaking yard. The vessels will be beached and the primary cutting will take place in the intertidal zone, i.e. the ship's hull will be cut vertically – including the bottom. This means that pollutants can be released to the sediments and sea water. As the tide comes in twice a day, pollutants will be washed out to the sea. Also the slag and toxic paint chips cannot be contained or the area dredged later, as the tides wash the materials out everyday. No cranes will be operated in the intertidal zone during primary cutting, thus large steel parts will crush onto the beach – a main reason for the regular severe and fatal accidents. Adequate equipment to remove hazardous materials cannot be brought to the ship while laying in the intertidal zone as no vehicle can reach the ship. Last but not least, in cases of accidents, no fire fighters or ambulance can reach the ship stuck on the mudflats. If a worker gets injured, his colleagues will carry him across the beach. Usually it takes many hours until severely injured workers reach a hospital.

Even though there may be slight difference between yards in Alang, none of them has proven to be compliant with international regulation and no credible certifier would say so.

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