Fiona Cain in LNG Industry: On Auto Pilot

By Fiona Cain | March 12, 2019

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Significant developments were made last year to make autonomous ships a reality on our oceans. In August, Yara, a Norwegian producer and distributor of chemical products, entered into a shipbuilding contract with VARD for the construction of the world's first autonomous and zero-emission electric container vessel, the Yara Birkeland, which is due to be launched in 2020 and operate fully autonomously by 2022. In December, Finferries, the Finnish state-owned ferry operator, and Rolls Royce successfully demonstrated the world's first fully autonomous car ferry, the Falco, including automatic docking in Finland.

Developments were also made in respect of the regulatory framework for autonomous ships. DNV GL issued a class guideline covering autonomous and remotely operated ships in September with the aim of ensuring that the new concepts and technologies required to deliver autonomous and remotely operated ships meet or exceed the safety levels of conventional vessel operations. In November, the UK Ship Register signed its first ever unmanned vessel to the flag; the C-Worker 7 was designed and built by ASV Global. Initial steps were also taken last year by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the United Nations' specialist agency and global authority responsible for creating and maintaining an international regulatory framework for shipping and the marine environment, to ensure that international regulations are appropriate for autonomous ships – or, as the IMO calls them, 'Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships' (MASS). This work, which is examined in more detail in this article, will provide the first steps towards dovetailing the regulatory revisions that will be required for MASS with the existing regulatory framework. The article also considers whether the LNG sector could embrace these technological advances and move to fully autonomous or remotely controlled vessels in the future. …

Excerpted from *LNG Industry*. To read the full article, click here. (Subscription required)

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