

## Letter

# Wind will play a big part in carbon-neutral shipping

From Robert J Elliott, Chairman, WindShip Technology, London EC2, UK



Look at the history of sail giving way to mechanical power. It did not happen immediately © Getty

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Your timely Big Read “[Can shipping clean up its act?](#)” (May 31), on the pollution caused by shipping globally, makes key points about the environmental problem caused by the fuel used by the global merchant fleet. The International Maritime Organization has regulated for lower sulphur from 2020 onwards but regulation for carbon emissions has yet to come into force and is some years off. The conservative shipping industry has been slow to adapt and innovate. Scrubbers are not a long-term solution as the pollutants they capture still have to be disposed of safely and not simply discharged into the ocean.

While your analysis touches on wind as a solution, it does not expand on the serious role it has to play and how that might be played, an omission in my view.

The shipping industry has rightly been sceptical about many of the wind power systems proposed in recent years — some of them based on old technology, including simple sails. Progress is being made, however, and powerful new wingfoil designs are

being developed, based on America's Cup technology, which will initially be able to provide auxiliary propulsion with projected annual savings of about 30 per cent in fuel consumption and corresponding reduction in emissions. Naturally, weather routing will play a part in optimising performance and, unsurprisingly, the old trade routes will come into play.

This technology will be capable of being retrofitted on to existing vessels, particularly bulk carriers plying their trade on long voyages, thus retaining value in the current fleet. The "holy grail", however, will be new-builds with custom-designed hulls, rudders and controlled pitch propellers which, with these propulsion systems and alternative fuels, give a real prospect of developing carbon-neutral ships.

Look at the history of sail giving way to mechanical power. The Falmouth Packet was operated by Britain's General Post Office from the late 17th century from deep water Falmouth on the south coast of Cornwall carrying the mail to the Iberian peninsula and beyond. And so it operated for approximately 160 years until steam- and propeller-driven craft, able to travel easily up the English Channel, put the service out of business.

This did not happen immediately. There was a hybrid period of mechanical power and sail in commercial shipping during the mid- to late-19th century until mechanical power eventually won the day. With modern technology, design and control systems able to harness the wind, the global industry should urgently embrace this innovation and welcome a new hybrid era which should lead to a sustainable future for global shipping and world trade which so depends on it.

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