

PROPOSAL ON PUBLIC FORUMS TO STUDY THE PROS AND CONS OF SHIP RECYCLING

During the past several months, there has been a lot of attention focused on the pros and cons of proposed ship recycling – often called ship breaking – operations here in the Northwest. The most recent proposal, which generated a great deal of attention and controversy, was the Bay Bridge LLC proposal in Yaquina Bay at Newport, Oregon. As you know, this proposal was ultimately denied by the Port of Newport. However, the conversation about the feasibility and advisability of ship recycling in the Northwest is far from over.

MARAD, the U. S. Maritime Administration, currently has more than 150 decommissioned ships that must be disposed of; at least one-third of these ships are located in Suisun Bay near San Francisco. A mandate from the U.S. Congress, which has already been extended once, requires that these ships be disposed of by the end of 2006. Clearly this will be difficult for any firm to achieve. However, ship recycling companies are urgently scouting potential sites in the Northwest. The Oregon International Port of Coos Bay, along with other ports and communities throughout the Northwest, including in some cases private property owners, has been approached by various ship recycling companies.

In the Port's limited role as a regulatory body, we can play an instrumental part in helping to educate communities and residents throughout Oregon; weighing environmental issues against the potential economic benefits of ship recycling operations. Through information provided by scientists and other third-party experts, we will explore ways to help mitigate environmental hazards and discuss the viability of safely handling and disposing of potentially contaminated materials.

Additionally in our role as an economic development entity for the bay area, we will also assess how our communities and the region could benefit from a significant number of well-paying jobs, if it can be demonstrated that ship recycling can be done in a safe and responsible manner by a firm committed to meeting the standards all Oregonians would demand for protecting coastal estuaries and the environment.

It will be incumbent on Port staff to provide the community and the Board of Commissioners the information needed to have an open and balanced discussion of all the issues associated with ship recycling; from a broad analysis of possible environmental impacts to a critical look at the opportunity to create local jobs.

Consequently, I would like to propose that we bring together, in a public forum, several third-party unbiased experts to begin the education process. We would like to pursue an initial forum in partnership with the Oregon Institute of Marine Biology – O.I.M.B. and South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve and we have talked with the directors of those institutions about working together. In early March we may have the opportunity to hear from Jim Carlton, one of just a few specialists in estuarine ecology in

the country, so we would like to schedule our first forum while Mr. Carlton is visiting the area.

I believe that a public forum such as this will be a solid platform for a community-wide, and even a statewide, discussion of ship recycling. Our intent is to have the first forum launch a series of similar events, each focused on a different aspect of the overall discussion of ship recycling and protecting our multiple-use estuary.

Although we have been approached by a number of ship recycling companies, we as a port and as a community do not have enough information to make a sound judgment. I believe this process will help facilitate a solid decision-making process. By taking this approach we are not endorsing or criticizing any efforts. We believe that we all need to learn more about this issue. We need to learn what are the assets and liabilities. From that we can establish an open process for assessing whether or not the Port of Coos Bay should, and if so how to, entertain any ship recycling proposals.

Statement by Jeff Bishop, Executive Director
Oregon International Port of Coos Bay
February 16, 2006 (at meeting of Port's Board of Commissioners)