

## London International Shipping Week Reception at Dover House



The Cluster was delighted to be able to host a drinks reception at Dover House, by courtesy of the Secretary of State for Scotland on 13<sup>th</sup> September, the first day of London International Shipping week.

Some 80 members and their guests attended what was a most convivial evening and appreciated the chance to meet in person after such a long period.

There were several short speeches by the Secretary of State, Alistair Jack MP, Robert Courts MP, the Shipping Minister, Graeme Day MSP, Scottish Minister for Transport and our chairman Douglas Lang a copy of whose speech follows.

*Secretary of State, distinguished guests and members a very very warm welcome to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Scottish Maritime Cluster reception held in conjunction with LISW.*

*I would always offer a warm welcome however the pleasure it gives me to see everyone this evening in full surround sound 3-D increases it by a magnitude. It would have been awful to have missed the opportunity to hold a reception in this magnificent venue.*

*The Cluster is enormously grateful to the Secretary of State for hosting tonight's gathering. As an onshore venue it will take a lot of beating – our last reception was on board of the "Pharos" so that still counts as our best afloat reception.*

*Thank you Secretary of State.*

*I have observed that when staff return to the office they spend the first couple of hours just chatting, it is as if they have 15 months of chat to catch up on and I suspect it will be no different here this evening. Personally, I haven't seen most of the people here for the same length of time. Therefore, the good news is I'm going to keep this very short so we can have the maximum time to connect.*

*My first declaration is that I'll donate £5 to charity every time I use the word "unprecedented" and £10 if I use "new normal", it gets a tenner only because I'm not sure whether it is one word, hyphenated or two!*

*When the lockdown started there was a short period when most people were rather like rabbits caught in the headlights, nobody knew how long it was going to last and most thought it would be a brief inconvenience. Once businesses realised it was going to take longer we quickly adapted to remote working, In fact the speed and effectiveness of the switch was truly remarkable. Likewise, the Cluster, adapted and thanks to my fellow Board members and our Executive we have not only sustained our activities but we have grown them. Over the last fifteen months we have had a full program of meetings and workshops. The participation has been extremely good and our outreach has also been extended. Having said that we can see a certain amount of fatigue creeping in.*

*I must mention Duncan and his team from Brodie's for steering us through our early webinars. His team were patience personified and helped us look like seasoned campaigners. Thanks Duncan.*

*It has always been my view that the Cluster acts as a catalyst: facilitating the coming together of individuals, businesses, ideas and dreamers. We have held workshops on various aspects of the environment, new markets, export opportunities, sources of support funding and the supply chain. As we develop relationships and understand what we all have to offer we expect to see the number of lightbulb moments increase.*

*Our membership has continued to grow and the number of members and associates is around 45, a number of new applications are pending. It is also encouraging to see interest*

*from outside of maritime. I think this is an essential part of our development. I have stated before that maritime tends to be adopters and evolvers of technology so it is sensible that we bring in the impulses from a wider business and technology base.*

*When the Cluster first started we were very fortunate to receive support from Scottish Enterprise which allowed us to move from being a Board of active and enthusiastic part-timers to a situation where we could retain an executive team. Without whom none of the workshops, webinars, meetings could have happened. Our income now is based on the membership fee and previously from surpluses from the workshops. Obviously there hasn't been the supplement from workshops for the last fifteen months which has left us in a very precarious position and we are having to try and deliver a full programme based on membership fees alone. In fact, the Board has some very important discussions to have over the coming months. Ideally, we need to find additional support and we are looking to the UK and Scottish government to help. The Secretary of State has been generous in his praise of our efforts and you will hear later a similar statement from the Scottish government but if they genuinely wish to see us continue to assist in the growth of Gross Value Added to Scotland then we do need support. I see regularly appeals for billions even trillions of pounds to support greening and bluing of our sector and wonder at what lies behind these numbers. In our case we seek very modest sums for a very specific purpose. Not necessarily to create green jobs or blue jobs but to enable the existing maritime businesses to find solutions to the real challenges posed by environmental and societal change.*

*The actions of our membership support our view that the Cluster has an important role to play in finding better, safer, cleaner ways to meet the needs of society as a whole. I'm extremely lucky to have a Board and Executive made up of people with a hunger and passion to help businesses, including their own, to succeed.*

*It would be a scandal to let the momentum that we have built over the last four years be squandered and the Board and I will do everything we can to ensure it is not.*

*But that is a discussion for tomorrow, this evening is all about catching up and reacquainting and for others meeting for the first time. Please enjoy the hospitality so generously provided by Champagne House and Stream Marine in the guise of Colin. Thank you for your contribution.*

*Secretary of State, distinguished guests, members please enjoy the rest of the evening and hopefully go home this evening having had that lightbulb moment – but do write it down before going to bed. Champagne dulls the memory!*

*Thank you.*