

Connectivity is central to Dubai's maritime future

Like twinned stars, the fortunes of the maritime connectivity industry and Dubai Maritime City are both shining brightly.

And Nabil Ben Soussia, Vice President – Maritime at IEC Telecom Group, predicts that by 2030, connectivity will play an even bigger role in improving operations and efficiencies in the maritime industry.

"The need for fast and efficient communications, including video conferencing, tele-medicine, IoT and more, aboard vessels and between land and sea, will drive greater usage of VSAT technology," he said, adding that the number of vessels connected by VSAT is projected to rise to more than 37,000 vessels by 2026.

Meanwhile, thanks to ambitious infrastructure projects and judicious planning, Dubai, currently ranked ninth, is predicted to become one of the top five of the world's most important maritime centres by 2024.

According to the Dubai Maritime City Association (DMCA), Dubai currently hosts more than 5,500 maritime companies and 13,000 maritime activities, which in turn support more than 76,000 jobs. The sector contributes almost seven per cent of the Emirates' gross domestic product, equivalent to \$7.3bn, which the Government hopes to significantly increase by 2030.

Several infrastructure developments are expected to boost the UAE's maritime sector which, at \$65 billion, accounts for 30-35% of the total regional maritime sector investment. Some of these include the \$1.6-billion expansion of Jebel Ali



Nabil Ben Soussia, Vice President – Maritime, IEC Telecom Group

Port's Terminal 4, which will increase the port's capacity by 3.1-million 20-foot equivalent units TEU by 2018-19, the development of the Nasr oilfield in Abu Dhabi, Phase 3 of the Dubai Canal Extension Project, Meraas Holding's 20-million-square-foot Dubai Harbour, which is set to become the nation's new cruise terminal, and Dubai Creek Harbour, home to the world's next tallest tower and a shopping centre bigger than Dubai Mall.

Which makes Dubai the ideal base for IEC Telecom's middle east operations. Mr Ben Soussia commented: "Dubai is the place for us to be. The environment here is designed for business success and the standard of living makes it easy to attract highly-qualified staff. The beauty of Dubai is that you can readily generate new ideas. Customers are challenging us to stretch our minds and be innovative. They have a drive to be the best, the fastest, the most

efficient – there is a strategy here to constantly evolve and develop."

On the global stage Dubai shines brightly, but when it comes to its own shores Mr Ben Soussia believes the state could further embrace the benefits of satellite communications to enhance its domestic sea-going regulatory regime. "In countries with an advanced fishing industry, such as in Europe, there is a requirement today for transparency and traceability across the food supply chain. Consumers, environmentalists and legislators all want to know where their food comes from. In Dubai, at present, this is missing. Better regulation for small vessels would lead to greater optimisation for the fishing sector," he said.

Mr Ben Soussia explained that the transformation towards a new regulation regime can be surprisingly affordable. "Satcom is still considered as a privileged channel of communication, but technologies

have evolved dramatically in the past 10 years," he said. "With affordable terminals like Thuraya MarineStar, for the same cost as an average smartphone a vessel owner can now equip his crew with a reliable satcom solution which enables advanced two-way vessel tracking and monitoring, real-time reporting, and geofencing."

Such satcom technologies could potentially give local authorities access to a whole new range of data which could increase the efficiency of local governance in a wealth of spheres including fishing monitoring, traffic control, maritime safety and more. With a fixed terminal on each vessel, ship to shore communication would be enhanced, enabling the crew to report on the vessel performance and receive new instructions at any time.

Mr Ben Soussia said he is now aiming to promote this scheme in



the Middle East where fishing is an important sector, a traditional occupation in many coastal communities and a significant domestic source of food. Gulf countries are working to promote the development of the fishing industry, particularly fish processing for re-export, while preventing over

exploitation of marine resources. "Telecommunications solutions will be a crucial factor in supporting the regulatory framework needed to allow our fishing industry to meet the food traceability requirements of European consumers and thus compete on a more level playing field," he said. ●