

With plans to designate the coastline of the US and Canada as an Emission Control Area (ECA) advancing at IMO, Cruise the Saint Lawrence is among the interested parties discussing what executive director Rene Trepanier describes as a 'worrying issue.'

And with good cause: Canada's federal government, the province of Quebec and local public and private interests are investing \$156m to develop the cruise business at ports along the St. Lawrence. But this emerging region could suffer if ships pull out or stay away because of the higher costs of operating in an ECA.

An ECA puts strict controls on emissions of nitrogen oxides, sulphur oxides and particulate matter. Vessels would have to shift to using more expensive low sulphur distillate fuel, and there are questions about whether there are adequate supplies to meet the needs of all ships operating within 200 nautical miles of the US/Canada coastline, the area encompassed in the North American ECA.

As earlier reported here, speaking at last month's Canada/New England Cruise Symposium in Saguenay, Rich Pruitt, director of environmental programs for Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd., alerted ports and destinations that their business may be impacted by the ECA. He suggested a 'disconnect' between different sectors of government, with tourism officials investing in cruise growth and environmental officials proposing regulations that could curtail ship operations.

The ECA is a topic for today's executive board meeting of Cruise the Saint Lawrence, which hosted the June symposium.

'This is a worrying issue that will be discussed with our ports representatives quite soon,' Trepanier told Seatrade Insider. 'It must be done as well by our governmental partners.'

He noted the ECA concerns not only the St. Lawrence but the whole Canada/New England region as well as Canada's west coast.

Still, there seems to be little awareness of the potential impact. When Pruitt asked Canada/New England Cruise Symposium delegates if they knew of the proposal, only two hands went up.

The issue's visibility is certain to increase since IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee approved the North American ECA proposal last week. IMO members have until the next session of MEPC, in March, to contemplate and object. Under the tacit amendment procedure, the ECA finally approved will come into effect in 2012.

Seatrade Insider understands the North West CruiseShip Association, for one, intends to encourage Transport Canada and environmental officials to give briefings so ports understand the ECA.

As for Quebec, 'We want to develop a sustainable cruise industry in the St. Lawrence,' Trepanier said. '2012 is close and [the ECA] could slow down our growth . . . We need some time to react and find alternative solutions, such as providing hydroelectric power when ships are docked.'