
BUILT TO LAST

Theo Hooning discusses the vital role SYBAss takes in representing the world's leading superyacht builders on the global stage to help develop and adapt vital regulations and professionalism within our industry



Superyacht Builders Association, or SYBAss as it is mostly commonly known, is a collective force that unites and represents the builders of large yachts. Its mission is simple: ensure that the unique needs of the world's leading superyacht builders are addressed on the international stage.

It was in the mid-2000s that the seeds for such an association were first sown. The industry was rapidly growing, yet was still relatively immature and lacked the basic organisation of larger sectors. Because of this, superyacht builders were finding themselves increasingly squeezed between the international regulations of the commercial maritime industry and those that applied to the smaller leisure sector. Without an industry body, the superyacht sector was simply being overlooked. It was against this backdrop that SYBAss was officially founded in 2007 so that the superyacht industry could finally have a collective voice.

TODAY, SYBASS CONTINUES TO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE REGULATORY FIELD, WORKING CLOSELY WITH THE IMO, ISO, FLAG STATES AND OTHER REGULATORY BODIES

"Before SYBAss, there was very little knowledge of the superyacht sector within the regulatory world. It was always seen as part of the leisure boating market," explains secretary general, Theo Hooning.

"One of the most shocking experiences I had was when I was talking with a high-ranking official of a regulator and he asked if superyachts were sailing on the lakes of the Netherlands. But that's what the image of the industry was. There was no appreciation of the complexity, nor the size, of the products our industry designs, builds and maintains. We have since worked hard so that superyachts are recognised as a separate sector, next to the cruise sector and commercial shipping."

With SYBAss' help, the industry has achieved the recognition it rightly deserves. A pivotal moment came in 2011 when SYBAss was granted consultative status at the International Maritime Organization, the agency of the United Nations responsible for regulating the maritime industry. Since then, SYBAss has had a seat at the table, monitoring and influencing regulations, ensuring that they are fit for purpose and developed with the superyacht industry in mind. "What is designed for cruise ships or shipping vessels cannot always be replicated in superyachts. Through having a collective voice, superyacht builders have avoided regulations that would have been detrimental to the industry," says Hooning. But SYBAss isn't looking to stand in the way of progress. "We only request exceptions and delays when a piece of legislation does not apply to, or is unfit for, superyachts, or when more advanced solutions are already common practice in the superyacht industry."

With environmental legislation only increasing in importance, having influence at the heart of the regulatory environment is crucial. "Having a seat at the table also means that we are in a position to inform the industry about what is around the corner, so that builders can stay ahead of incoming legislation. Looking towards the future, we'll need a proper way to implement the increasing number of the environmental requirements," explains Hooning.

Today, SYBAss continues to play an active role in the regulatory field, working closely with the International Maritime Organization, International Organization for Standardization (ISO), flag states and other regulatory bodies. But regulatory work is by no means SYBAss' only focus. SYBAss also works to enhance the professionalism





of the sector. Along with commissioning several market intelligence reports, the association has made strides in how the industry measures its global impact, culminating in two ground-breaking studies: the Economic Impact Study and the Compensated Gross Tonnage Study.

The first determined that the industry had an annual economic impact of €11.9 billion while the second offered scientific proof that the construction of a superyacht involved significantly more labour than other passenger ships – something they were previously classified as and compared to. “Together, these studies were used to show that we, as SYBAAss, represent a significant industry. Superyachts may be for a privileged few, but their impact is far greater,” says Hooning.

“It’s only appropriate that the industry is supported by a well-functioning association.” It’s clear that, 14 years on, SYBAAss has earned itself a solid position within the superyacht community as the industry representative for the wider world.

