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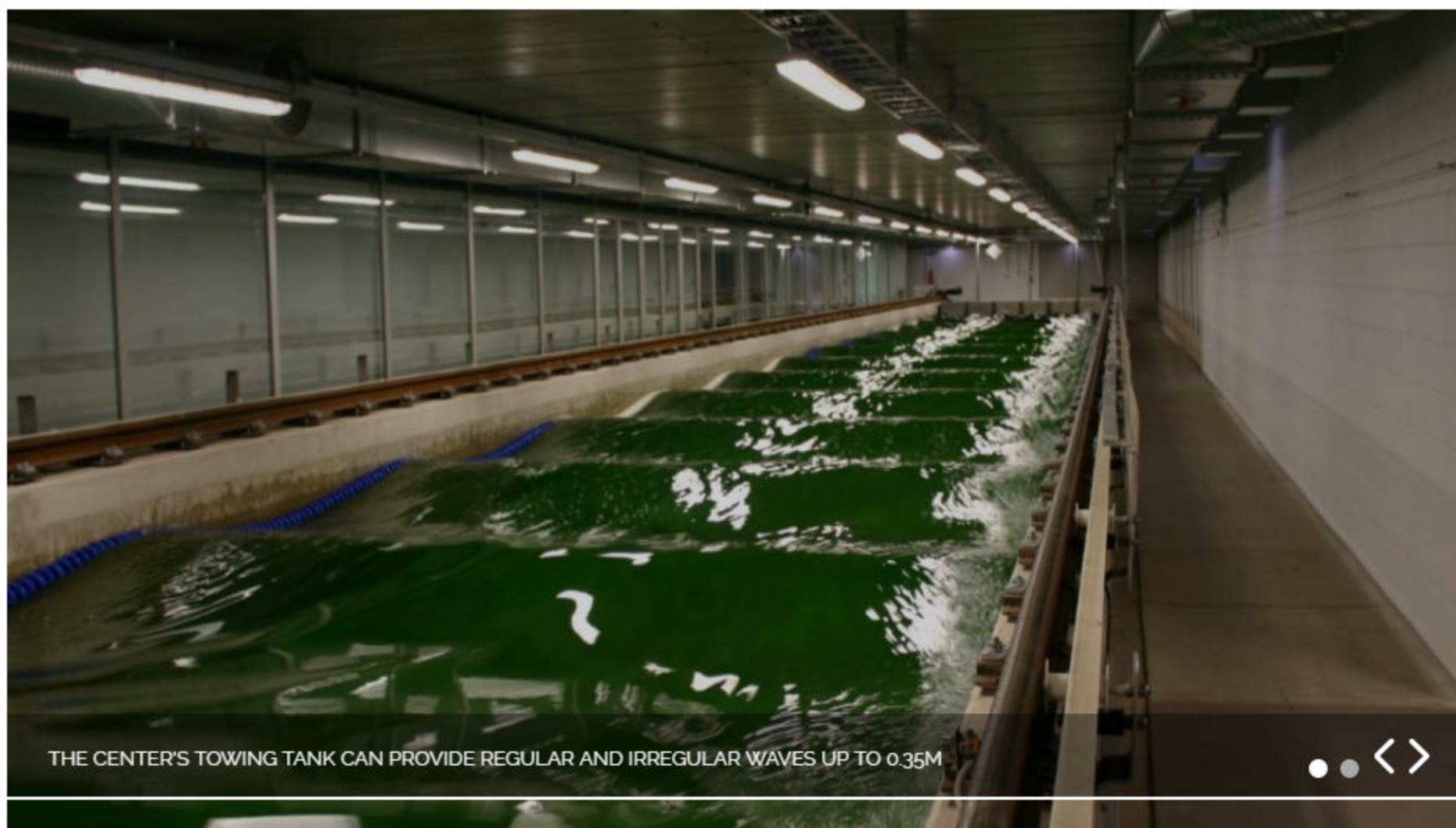
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30 Oct 2018

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The Small Craft Competence Center (SCC) at Kuressaare on the Estonian island of Saaremaa has revealed an ambitious five year plan.

The Center, which now fully describes itself as Tallinn University of Technology Estonian Maritime Academy Centre for Blue Economy, currently offers two applied higher education programmes (at 1st level of higher education level, comparable to bachelor's), one of which, Marine Engineering, is taught in English. The plan centres around offering a new International Masters degree level qualification with a working title of 'Naval Engineering'. This has partly been brought about thanks to a joining of forces with the adjacent Kuressaare College.

It will, according to Center staff be a worthwhile move, that is hoped will broaden the appeal of the institution well outside of Estonia's borders, attracting a truly international student body for the first time.

Maritime Journal was fortunate enough to visit the Center in Autumn 2018. While the summer holiday island of Saaremaa felt pretty deserted, even by Estonian standards, the Center was a hive of activity.

PLANING RAILS

As part of the design and consultancy services that the Center offers to its wide client base, it has embarked on the most detailed, and possibly the first serious study worldwide of how planing rails on high speed hulls actually work. Planing rails, and their ability to reduce overall drag was partially understood, but it was not until detailed model tests in the Center's 60m towing tank were conducted earlier this year, that additional properties, such as the rails' ability to quite significantly alter the whole vessel's trim are now beginning to be more deeply understood.

In another project we noticed some of the Center's course leaders and PHD students were putting together NYMO, an autonomous catamaran platform, that could have multiple future roles from port trash collection to hydrographic survey. The finished solution is planned to be ready to offer as a commercial product in 2020. The twist to this story was that students were also working on exactly the same project brief themselves, except they had been given a full year to conclude the project instead of the tight three months that the Competence Center staff were working to.

The towing tank already attracts clients from all over Northern Europe, especially the Baltics thanks to fast outputting of results, keen pricing and short notice availability. Along with the hopes to raise the academic bar to Masters level, there are parallel hopes to increase the length of the tank. At the moment it can accelerate a model to a speed fast enough to simulate 45 knots at 1/12 scale. With the hoped for expansion of some 25-30 metres, Center staff claim it will simulate 65 knots at 1/10 scale- an altogether more marketable proposition to high speed craft builders.

ESTONIAN HUB

The Center cannot be mentioned without a brief nod to the much larger plans that Estonia, as a country, has when it comes to punching more than its weight as a marine industry player. Much has been written about this sparsely populated country's sparkling performance in recent years in the tech industries. Household names in the app world are regularly released from the trendy 'development spaces' of Tallinn. Who has not heard of the Estonian developed Skype for instance?

But on the marine side, Estonia looks like it could be set to repeat this, and the Southern Island of Saaremaa thanks to the presence of the Competence Center and big commercial employers like Baltic Workboats and numerous smaller leisure yacht and equipment manufacturers, could well find itself right at the centre of this key cluster.

As well as a cost effective labour market, especially in comparison with its Scandinavian neighbours, when considered within Central and Eastern Europe, Estonia boasts some of the highest credit ratings and attracts the highest level of foreign direct investment. Companies tend to be young, agile and fast moving SMEs. The body of locally available maritime-specific knowledge, experience and labour is relatively large and with the plans at Kuressaare, are only set to grow.

By Jake Frith

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