Dutch Ship Registration in Demand

At Kadaster, the Netherlands' Cadastre, Land Registry and Mapping Agency, we register who owns what in the field of real estate. This enables us to know who owns any given premises, and where the boundary lies between two plots of land. However, few people are aware that we also register ships. Monique Smits, our colleague at Kadaster, and intermediary Boudewijn Meijer are happy to bring you up to speed. Why is ship registration important? How is it organised in the Netherlands, and why is our country increasingly popular?

Transparency regarding ownership

There is no official duty to register recreational vessels in the Netherlands. Customs officials in other countries, however, frequently want to know who owns a ship. "As a ship owner, you can get your ship registered with various bodies. Kadaster is the only body in the Netherlands that officially records ownership", says Monique Smits, legal assistant with the Kadaster.

Unique identification number

Smits explains how ship registration works in practice: "In the process known as 'teboekstelling schip', ship owners register their vessels in Kadaster's public registers. This defines ownership. Each ship is registered under an identification number. This number is physically marked on the ship. The owner receives a registration document, and subsequently sails under the Dutch flag. Moreover, a sea-going vessel can be included in the maritime register; this is mandatory for commercial shipping, but not for recreational vessels. In that case, the owner receives a certificate of registry. This is a kind of passport for the ship, and is valid in all international ports."

Why register?

Registering a ship also has other advantages. After registration, the ship is deemed to be registered property. Any subsequent transfer of ownership is recorded by a notary public, making

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it possible to use it as security for a mortgage. In addition, registration makes it easier for the police to identify a ship - in cases of theft, for example - thanks to the unique identification number. “To give a ship extra protection, an owner can also opt to apply microdots to it. Microdots are extremely small chips with a unique identification number. They are guaranteed to be detectable and can help if the identification number is deleted for some reason”, says Smits.

Preference for the Dutch flag

In 2018, 85 more ships were registered with Kadaster than the year before, representing an increase of 12.6%. That the Dutch flag is in demand is also apparent to Boudewijn Meijer, owner of Lorrendraaier BV. He acts as intermediary for foreign ship owners who want to sail under the Dutch flag. He forms the link between the owner and Kadaster. “There can be various reasons why an owner opts to register in the Netherlands. For example, the Dutch flag is highly regarded internationally, and there is virtually no red tape. In Spain, by contrast, you have to go to three different agencies to get three different stamps.”

Meijer does comment that more and more countries are tightening their rules on ship registration. “From ship to ship and owner to owner, the flag of preference will always differ. In the Netherlands, in any case, the process is smooth and practical, and increasing numbers of ship owners are attracted to that.”