

Boxships back up across Northern Europe

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May 6, 2025

Port of Antwerp-Bruges



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Ports across Northern Europe are dealing with what broker Braemar describes as “serious congestion” right now.

In Antwerp, Braemar reported yesterday the yard is already at 96% capacity, and reefer plugs are overloaded at 112%. Nearly half the arriving ships are waiting for a berth, and there are 52 more containerships on the way.

Bremerhaven in Germany is facing similar problems, with about 30% of ships delayed while other major ports like Rotterdam, and in the UK, Felixstowe, London Gateway, and Southampton, are also congested due to vessel diversions from the continent, which are sending more volume to these alternative ports.

“Experts expect this congestion to last another three to four months, until alliance network adjustments kick in and volumes settle down,” Braemar warned in a container report published yesterday.

“Northern European ports are all challenged by heavily disrupted operations. Waiting time is too long, yard utilisation too high, and the berth line-up is extended,” Peter Sand, chief analyst at Xeneta, a freight rate platform, told *Splash*.

Sand cited strikes in France and Belgium, maintenance carried out in a traditional slack season, and record-high levels of imports leaving Asia in January, as reasons for the boxship queues.

“It’s particularly worrying right now, as carriers are lining up an all-time high of containership capacity to carry the frustrated US-bound Chinese-manufactured goods that will arrive 50 to 60 days from now. If the terminals are still severely congested at that time, chaos will reign,” Sand warned.

Hua Joo Tan, co-founder of consultancy Linerlytica, said he expected the European box crunch to persist throughout the summer.

Linerlytica data shows carriers have reacted swiftly to remove capacity deployed on the US trades in the wake of president Donald Trump’s tariff assault on China, with 8.6% of Asia-North America west coast capacity now removed. According to Linerlytica, 27 ships for 200,000 teu have been removed from the west coast since April, with the bulk of the surplus tonnage redeployed to the Asia-Europe and Med routes.

Simon Sundboell, founder and CEO of liner analytics firm eeSea, acknowledged the growing delays but questioned the congestion narrative.

“I believe carriers and vessels are becoming better at not steaming over to a port and sitting idle, at least less so. They’re instead slow steaming and thus not necessarily categorised as congestion or waiting outside a port,” Sundboell explained.