

Cargo volumes for mega cracker project at Antwerp to peak in 2025



Bullet-shaped tanks are unloaded in Antwerp from a Jumbo Maritime heavy-lift ship. Photo credit: INEOS / Jumbo Maritime.

Keith Wallis, Special Correspondent | Jan 9, 2025, 12:13 PM EST

Transportation of outsized and heavy-lift cargo components for INEOS' \$4 billion Project One ethane cracker at Belgium's Port of Antwerp is set to peak this year in the ramp up to the cracker becoming operational in mid-2026, the chemical company says.

About 35% of the total shipment volumes for the complex have already arrived at the INEOS marshalling yard in Antwerp, Gert Geeve, INEOS Project One logistics manager, told the *Journal of Commerce*.

The cracker will produce 1.45 million metric tons of ethane a year and is the largest investment in Europe's chemical industry in more than 20 years. The project is expected to drive further investment at the Port of Antwerp, INEOS said.

Ethane is a key component in manufactured goods such as washing machines, automotive and healthcare products, wind turbine blades, solar panels and packaging, while hydrogen is produced as a by-product of the cracking process.

The Port of Antwerp described the construction of Project One as “a unique project on a unique scale” that poses “enormous logistical challenges.”

The scheme has brought together a smorgasbord of heavy-lift specialists. Freight forwarder and project logistics company deugro UK is involved in organizing the ocean transport of components, while Belgian forwarder Gosselin Group is the logistics control tower for the project, according to INEOS and the Port of Antwerp.

Ocean shipments have been carried out by BigLift Shipping and Jumbo Maritime, while Belgian heavy lift and transport player Sarens and German counterpart Felbermayr are involved in craning and the land transport of components.

BigLift Shipping’s heavy-lift vessel *Happy Star* delivered the first heavy-lift cargo last June, a 591-ton splitter and a 347-ton demethanizer.

That was followed by two shipments in August and September, each carrying five bullet-shaped gas processing units weighing 570 metric tons each and transported by Jumbo Maritime’s heavy-lift vessels *Jumbo Fairmaster* and *Jumbo Fairplayer* from Zhangjiagang in China’s Jiangsu province.

The shipment of the 10 tanks — critical elements in Project One’s storage and processing infrastructure — was organized by deugro UK in partnership with deugro China and deugro Chartering, Jumbo Maritime and the Port of Antwerp.

Challenge to secure suitable ships

deugro said sourcing the heavy-lift vessels and loading the cargo onboard the ships posed challenges.

“A challenge was to identify and secure sufficient vessel space on suitable heavy-lift vessels with the appropriate lifting capacities and within the tight schedule of only six weeks, from the receipt of the order to loading,” Kai von Taube, deugro’s head of global chartering, told the *Journal of Commerce*.

The *Jumbo Fairmaster*, with a total lifting capacity of 3,000 metric tons, and the *Jumbo Fairplayer*, with a smaller combined capacity of 1,800 metric tons, are among the few heavy-lift vessels globally capable of handling loads of more than 1,500 metric tons.

“[The number of] such vessels which can safely handle and ship sensitive oversized and heavy lift components are limited and often booked for considerable periods in advance,” von Taube said. “However, thanks ... to our long-standing strategic carrier relationships, we were able to secure the required vessel space within just two weeks.”

David Richardson, deugro’s UK operations manager, added that loading oversized and heavy-lift cargo components onto a floating vessel is “always a critical operation.” “Even more when deck and vessel space is strictly limited and calculated down to the nearest centimeter,” he told the *Journal of Commerce*.

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