

This movie shows the major, unknown climate polluter



The end of January, the movie 'Seablind' by Bernice Notenboom premiered at the film festival in Rotterdam. It is a revealing movie that hopefully rouses the social indignation regarding black carbon.

I have never realised that the problem with regard to black carbon was this big. To me, that was the eye-opener of this movie,' director Tjerk Wagenaar of Nature and Environment said after the movie *Seablind* by Bernice Notenboom had finished.

Black carbon, also called soot, is released in large quantities because the large seagoing vessels use heavy bunker oil. This is oil from the cesspits of the oil industry, the cheapest and dirtiest oil available.

17 container ships emit the same amount of sulphur annually as all the cars on earth. And a cruiseship emits just as much soot daily as 1 million cars.

It only swirls through the air for approximately three weeks but because it also descends on the glaciers and snow plains of the North and the South Pole, the sunlight will no longer be reflected. This results in an accelerated melting process.

Notenboom, known for her travels across the North and the South Pole and her ascension of the Mount Everest (she was the second Dutch woman who conquered the mountain) sets her sights on the shipping industry in the revealing and compelling documentary *Seablind*.

Notenboom, who blogged for *Vrij Nederland* from the climate conference in Paris, described the shipping industry itself as 'the most unregulated, secretive and polluting industry in the world'. However, it is this industry that transports ninety percent (!) of all the goods we sit on, we build with, we eat, we wear, and so on. Big problem, according to Notenboom: the international sea belongs to everybody, and the legislation is sluggish because consensus has to be reached on every rule by all 170 countries.

It is distressing that an agreement was concluded during the climate conference in Paris on limiting the global warming, a major breakthrough, but that regulation of the aviation and shipping industry fell through at the last moment. The International Chamber of Shipping stated that it was very well capable of taking its own responsibility. Notenboom was not so sure about that: 'One thing has become clear to me: we cannot leave these industries without supervision and expect them to solve the climate issues themselves.'

Yet, there is hope at the end of the tunnel: the emission of black carbon (and of sulphur, which is extremely harmful for the public health) can be easily limited: if ships start using a lighter type of diesel instead of bunker oil, or switch to liquid gas. Problem: it costs more (light diesel) to a lot more (liquid gas).

In the meantime there are numerous initiatives in place to counter the use of bunker oil: certain areas have been established in which ships are no longer allowed to use that type of oil, such as in front of the Dutch coast. The port of Rotterdam charges a lower port rate to ships that no longer use bunker oil, the North Sea foundation started the Clean Shipping Index in order to register shipping companies that want to operate in the most sustainable way possible. Companies such as Friesland Campina, Akzo and DSM have initiated the Biceps-initiative: they have agreed to only have their goods transported by the more sustainable shipping companies. 'We aim to an acceleration of the clean shipping industry,' Walter Vermeer of Friesland Campina said.

This can be improved. At the moment only 10 percent of the ships entering the port of Rotterdam are checked for the (illegal) use of bunker oil. Survey on the high seas? That does not happen at all yet.

The problem of black carbon is a bit similar to the problem of acid rain during the nineteen-eighties: it is (compared to the emission of CO2 by cars and factories) a relatively small problem that can be solved, as long as the business industry and the governments are willing. We would already come a very long way if the thirty largest ship-owners would no longer use bunker oil, or if it would be agreed that all large ports in the world would stop the sales of bunker oil.

In order to achieve those kinds of measures it is first of all necessary that the subject gets a higher ranking on the political agenda in the Netherlands, that a public outrage arises. With her revealing movie, Bernice Notenboom has made a significant first move. So, let the public debate unleash. Where are you Greenpeace? Where are you Nature and Environment? And especially: where are you, Minister Melanie Schultz van Haegen? The shipping industry is part of your portfolio. This is a subject you can tackle with both hands!



Harm Ede Botje

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Harm Ede Botje (1965) schreibt seit 1995 für *Vrij Nederland*. Er ist Generalherausgeber mit speziellen Bereichen Asyl, Integration, Klima, Energie, Umwelt und Nachhaltigkeit, und Außenpolitik .