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10th Smart Port Challenge Expands Support to Scale Maritime Start-ups

New programmes connect start-ups to mentors and investors to accelerate growth

The Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) and NUS Enterprise, the entrepreneurial heart of the National University of Singapore, have launched the 10th edition of the PIER71 Smart Port Challenge (SPC) at Singapore Maritime Week 2026, with expanded support to help maritime start-ups scale, secure funding, and deploy their solutions.

2. Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Law and Ministry of Transport, Mr Murali Pillai, MPA Chief Executive, Mr Ang Wee Keong, and NUS Enterprise Vice President (Ecosystem Building), Professor Benjamin Tee officiated at the launch. The event drew over 200 international start-ups, investors and industry partners, reflecting continued global interest in Singapore as a platform for maritime innovation. Please refer to Annex A for the launch programme.

3. Since 2018, PIER71 has supported some 170 start-ups, which have collectively raised over S$150 million in funding. One example is SPC alumnus Groundup.ai which uses artificial intelligence to predict equipment failures and optimise asset performance. The company has since scaled across Asia and the Middle East, securing S$5.4 million in Series A funding following an initial S$2.3 million seed round.

New Initiatives to Grow Innovation Ecosystem

4. Building on nearly a decade of developing early-stage start-ups, this year's SPC introduces two new initiatives – Mentors-in-Residence Plus (MIR+) and Venture2Capital – to strengthen commercialisation and growth.

5. MIR+ pairs start-ups looking to scale with experienced maritime professionals and overseas accelerator partners to support market entry and expansion. Venture2Capital strengthens access to funding by connecting start-ups with investors and providing structured training and support for fundraising. These initiatives will extend PIER71's role beyond early-stage acceleration to supporting start-ups in scaling and entering new markets.

6. In addition, MPA has recently introduced an innovation track under the Maritime Cluster Fund – Business Development scheme. This aims to anchor maritime companies' innovation, technology, and venture-building capabilities in Singapore, encouraging them to scale from Singapore while contributing to a vibrant and globally connected maritime ecosystem.

Expanded Global Outreach, Applications Open for SPC2026

7. SPC will expand its global outreach in 2026 through targeted engagement in key markets. These include China, France, India, the Netherlands, South Korea, Spain, the UK, and the USA. These engagements will connect start-ups with investors and maritime partners, while showcasing opportunities in Singapore's maritime ecosystem.

8. Applications for SPC 2026 are now open. The programme will introduce 20 innovation opportunities across four areas — Next-Generation Port, Smart Shipping, Maritime Green Technologies, and Digitalisation, supported by 19 innovation partners[1], with more expected to join. For the full list of innovation opportunities, please see Annex B.

9. Shortlisted start-ups will undergo a 10-week SPC Accelerate programme, which provides tailored mentorship, workshops and opportunities for market validation. Cash prizes will be awarded to top-performing start-ups at the SPC 2026 Grand Finale on 11 November 2026, with thematic prizes sponsored by companies including ABS, OCBC, PSA Singapore & PSA Ventures, and RINA.

10. Following the programme, start-ups may apply for MPA's Maritime Innovation and Technology (MINT) Fund to support proof-of-concept, pilot projects and product development. The fund has supported 68 start-ups, with over 30 innovative technologies deployed in the maritime sector.

11. Applications for SPC 2026 are open at https://pier71.sg until 15 June 2026.

12. Mr Ang Wee Keong, MPA's Chief Executive, said, "As SPC enters its 10th edition, the focus is not just on generating new ideas, but helping start-ups scale and deliver real impact. By strengthening connections between start-ups, industry and investors, we are supporting more solutions to move from pilots to deployment, and strengthening Singapore's position as a platform for maritime innovation."

13. Dr Tan Sian Wee, NUS Senior Vice President (Innovation & Enterprise), said, "The key challenge in maritime innovation is not building solutions, but ensuring these can be deployed at scale. Since 2018, PIER71 has supported nearly 170 start-ups, which have collectively raised over S$150 million in funding. This is a good start, but more will be done to help these companies overcome barriers to adoption and expand into global markets. With Mentors-in-Residence Plus and Venture2Capital, we are bringing start-ups closer to industry and investors, strengthening support for their international growth."

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[1] Innovation partners supporting the SPC2026 challenge statements currently include ABB, American Bureau of Shipping (ABS), Athena Dynamics, BW Epic Kosan, Call Lade, CMB.TECH, Equatorial Marine Fuel Management Services, Iino Kaiun Kaisha Ltd, Jurong Port, Kuok Maritime Group (KMG), Marin-Teknik, Mitsui O.S.K. Lines (MOL) Asia Oceania, Pacific International Lines (PIL), PSA Ventures, RightShip, RINA, Synergy Group, Wilhelmsen Ships Service, X-press Feeders.

About the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA)

MPA was established in 1996 with the mission to develop Singapore as a global hub port and international maritime centre, and to advance and safeguard Singapore's strategic maritime interests. MPA takes on multiple roles as Singapore's maritime and port regulator and planner, international maritime centre champion, national maritime representative, and champion of maritime digitalisation and decarbonisation efforts. MPA partners industry, research community and other agencies to enhance safety, security and environmental protection, facilitate maritime and port operations and growth, expand multi-domain capabilities, and support the cluster of maritime services and manpower development.

For more information, please visit www.mpa.gov.sg.

About PIER71

Founded by the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) and the National University of Singapore (NUS), through its entrepreneurial heart NUS Enterprise, PIER71 (Port Innovation Ecosystem Reimagined at BLOCK71) aims to grow Singapore's maritime innovation ecosystem. PIER71 boosts innovation in the maritime and maritime-related industries by attracting talents, creating opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and ideas, attracting investments into start-ups and accelerating ventures.

PIER71 designs and delivers programmes to uncover opportunities within the industry and supports entrepreneurs from ideation to acceleration of their ventures. PIER71 provides access to various markets, demand drivers, technology solution providers, investors and more. PIER71 also represents a budding and increasingly vibrant ecosystem of stakeholders who are keen to digitalise and create the next wave of maritime innovation.

For more information, please visit https://pier71.sg.

About the National University of Singapore (NUS)

The National University of Singapore (NUS) is Singapore's flagship university, which offers a global approach to education, research and entrepreneurship, with a focus on Asian perspectives and expertise. We have 15 colleges, faculties and schools across three campuses in Singapore, with more than 40,000 students from 100 countries enriching our vibrant and diverse campus community. We have also established more than 20 NUS Overseas Colleges entrepreneurial hubs around the world.

Our multidisciplinary and real-world approach to education, research and entrepreneurship enables us to work closely with industry, governments and academia to address crucial and complex issues relevant to Asia and the world. Researchers in our faculties, research centres of excellence, corporate labs and more than 30 university-level research institutes focus on themes that include energy; environmental and urban sustainability; treatment and prevention of diseases; active ageing; advanced materials; risk management and resilience of financial systems; Asian studies; and Smart Nation capabilities such as artificial intelligence, data science, operations research and cybersecurity.

For more information on NUS, please visit www.nus.edu.sg.

About NUS Enterprise

At NUS Enterprise, the entrepreneurial heart of the National University of Singapore (NUS), we advance the University as a global magnet for talent and an engine for impactful innovation. We seed ideas, spark innovation, and scale ventures through our distinctive 360° framework, integrating education, ecosystem support, and world-class venture building and investment.

This creates a self-reinforcing cycle powering both educational and entrepreneurial outcomes across industries and communities. Since 2001, NUS Enterprise has nurtured 10 unicorns, over 3,000 start-ups, and 4,300 students. Our ambition: to improve the lives of 1 billion people by 2035.

For more information on NUS Enterprise, please visit enterprise.nus.edu.sg.

About Singapore Maritime Week 2026

SMW is an annual gathering of the international maritime community to advance key industry issues and exchange ideas to bring the sector forward. Driven by MPA, in collaboration with industry stakeholders and research and educational institutions, SMW brings together key opinion leaders and industry leaders through conferences, dialogues and forums.

The range of activities and events organised by MPA, industry stakeholders and research and educational institutions, as well as the cosmopolitan profile of participants, reflect the vibrancy and diversity of Singapore as a global hub port and leading international maritime centre.

For more information, please visit www.smw.sg.

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Annex A: Smart Port Challenge 2026 Launch Programme

Date: Wednesday 22 April 2026 Time: 10.30am – 1.30pm Venue: EXPO@SMW, Expo Theatre	
Time	**Description**
10.30am to 10.45am (15 min)	**Welcome** Opening remarks by Guest-of-Honour, Mr Murali Pillai, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Law and Ministry of Transport
10.45am to 11.00am (15 min)	**Introduction of Smart Port Challenge (SPC)** Sharing on the challenge statements and thematic areas of SPC
11.00am to 11.45am (45 min)	**PIER71 showcase of start-up solutions (Part 1)** Thirteen startups will demonstrate solutions aligned to the Smart Port Challenge thematic areas, highlighting real-world applications, pilots, and pathways to adoption.
11:45am to 11:50am	Technical break
11.50am to 12.30pm (40 min)	**Panel Discussion** *Scaling Deep Tech Innovation: From Pilots to Commercial Adoption* Explore the journey from innovation to commercial adoption and how maritime technologies can scale from pilot to real-world impact. This panel brings together corporate leaders, start-ups, and innovation experts to share practical playbooks for scaling deep tech successfully and taking it global. Moderator: Mr Chua Chye Poh, CEO, ShipsFocus 1. Ms Ann Carpenter, CEO, Braid Theory 2. Mr Erwin Verstraelen, VP of Innovation, Port of Antwerp-Bruges 3. Mr Yusik Kim, CEO, TAS Global Co. Ltd 4. Mr Thibaut Humbert, Head (Asia Pacific), ZEBOX
12.30pm to 1.30pm	**PIER71 showcase of start-ups solutions (Part 2)** Another 13 start-ups will demonstrate solutions aligned to the Smart Port Challenge thematic areas, highlighting real-world applications, pilots, and pathways to adoption.
1.30pm	Programme Ends

Annex B: Smart Port Challenge 2026 Innovation Opportunities

Digitalisation	
1	How might we minimise personnel risk during onboard inspections in hazardous, confined, or structurally unsafe environments?
2	How might we enable shipping companies to meet cybersecurity regulations and standards, secure operational systems, and empower crew to better manage cybersecurity risks and incidents?
3	How might we deploy vessel digital twins to deliver predictive insights for safety, energy efficiency, and maintenance?
4	How might we use AI to automate the generation and submission of port call documentation to eliminate repetitive administrative burdens on ship officers and ship agents?
Maritime Green Technologies	
5	How might we develop an effective system for collecting, cleaning, and recycling ship waste or garbage (e.g. used cotton gloves, rugs, and mooring ropes)?
6	How might we help shipowners and operators quantify, verify, and manage emissions exposure in near real time to respond effectively to carbon pricing, regulatory reporting, and commercial accountability?
Smart Shipping	
7	How might we leverage digital tools to achieve near real-time insights, predictive optimisation, regulatory compliance, and empower ship operators to enhance energy efficiency, without requiring major operational disruptions or high capital investment?
8	How might we design flexible, scalable and engaging crew training solutions that empower seafarers with varying skills and languages to adopt energy-efficient practices and be confident with digital tools on ships?
9	How might we create a safer pilot or crew transfer solution that reduces reliance on ladders and minimizes climbing-related risks?
10	How might we improve situational awareness on and around ships, to enhance safety and security of ship voyage and operations in port?
11	How might we reduce human error at sea by unlocking real-time insights into crew behaviour, competence, and potential health risk beyond periodic training or testing, and support necessary intervention?
12	How might we collect and standardize data from multiple onboard ship sensors and systems into a single usable source to enable more accurate vessel performance modelling better monitoring, documentation, and decision-making and voyage optimisation?
13	How might we monitor crew safety in real time onboard vessels to detect emergencies such as man-overboard, incapacitation, or unsafe working conditions, while ensuring that solutions remain unobtrusive and practical for everyday shipboard operations?
14	How might we prevent and manage fire safety risk of highly combustible cargo (e.g. car lithium-ion batteries) that are transported by vessels e.g. container ships?

	(i.e. technology solutions that could ensure correct declaration of the cargoes onboard vessels which would then help prevent or technology solutions which could detect such occurrence before and during ship voyage.)
Next Generation Port	
15	How might we make cargo hold cleaning or discharge on bulk carriers safer and more efficient?
16	How might we transition from a reactive, incident-driven port safety model to a proactive, predictive one by automatically detecting, analysing, and learning from near-miss events in real-time, thereby preventing accidents before they happen?
17	How might we leverage a fleet of autonomous ground, aerial, and sea-based systems to establish a persistent, 24/7 surveillance shield across our entire perimeter, drastically extending our security reach and response capability to both land and maritime approaches?
18	How might we design/engineer an intelligent security system that automatically correlates suspicious vehicular activity outside our perimeter (e.g., loitering, drop-offs) with potential human intrusion attempts at the fence line, enabling us to identify and neutralise coordinated threats before a breach occurs?
19	How might we ensure more accurate prime mover fleet scheduling, navigation and positioning through intelligent prediction and automation solutions to maximise yard productivity in increasingly autonomous container terminals?
20	How might we mechanise or automate shipboard container lashing and unlashing operations across varying vessel and cargo conditions?