



Welsh Ports Group Election Briefing

The Welsh Ports Group represents the views of the ports industry in Wales. The Group is the only forum of its type in Wales and holds regular meetings with the Welsh Government and other key decision makers.

The Ports Industry in Wales

Each year Welsh ports handle 9%, or around 53m tonnes, of UK freight and this includes significant volumes of ferry traffic, oil and gas, containers, steel, biomass, bulks as well as other offshore renewable cargoes. Ports also provide vital facilities for cruise ships, marine leisure activities and the fishing industry. These are diverse and fundamental trades, supporting almost 11,000 jobs at the ports as well as sustaining other vital parts of the economy.



Our economy is served by distribution chains spanning the globe – gas from Qatar and Trinidad; iron ore from Australia the Americas; building products and other vital trades to and from Europe; oil and fuel to and from all parts of the world including the US, South American, West Africa and Asia; and motorways of the sea ferry services to Ireland.

Per tonne of cargo moved, shipping has the lowest environmental impact. Sustainability in our economy therefore depends on investment in port areas and the infrastructure that serves them.

Recently the Welsh Assembly's Enterprise and Business Committee published the report of its inquiry into the Maritime Economy in Wales. As part of the inquiry the Committee took evidence from the Welsh Ports Group. A key point we raised is that connections to ports and general transport network in Wales are vital to port and freight performance and also to the wider Welsh economy. The Committee made some useful recommendations on this issue and we are keen that transport schemes connecting ports are prioritised, TEN-T funding opportunities are explored and port connectivity is fed into the policy and planning process at both national and regional level.



Devolution and Ports Policy

The Draft Wales Bill:

The Draft Wales Bill includes proposals to devolve most ports policy functions to the Welsh Government. The Welsh Port Group's view on this remains neutral. What really matters is the policy framework the Welsh Government develops. We would hope this would translate to a stable and market-led Government approach to ports policy, maintenance of the mixed ownership model and a level playing field for all Welsh ports which does not disadvantage them against other ports outside Wales. The current English and Welsh policy framework is a good template for this policy.

The Welsh Government has given positive indications that it would maintain the market-led approach to ports but we are keen to open a dialogue. The recent announcements regarding the review of the Draft Bill will add some delays to the process but we would hope to begin discussions after the Welsh elections.

Suggested Shared Policy Objectives

As a means of promoting cooperation with the Welsh Government, the Welsh Ports Group has produced a number of suggested shared policy objectives. These could potentially be the basis for the discussions regarding with the Welsh Government regarding the development of a future Welsh ports policy. **These include:**

- **Regular industry/government dialogue**
- **Maintenance of the current market-led approach to ports policy**
- **Support the current mix of different port ownership models**
- **Streamlining of the planning and marine consents system**
- **A marine protection strategy which balances environmental, economic and social needs**
- **A policy framework which allows Welsh ports to remain competitive with those outside Wales**
- **Greater recognition of the importance of improved road and rail connectivity schemes for Welsh ports to encourage increased freight and passenger movements**
- **Exchange information on growth opportunities in port markets.**

Also of interest are the arrangements and resourcing of a new ports unit in Wales which would have a key consenting role, overseeing Harbour Revision Order applications.

We look forward to discussing these points with our colleagues at the Welsh Government



The EU and Ports Services Regulation

The EU is another source of legislation. The Port Services Regulation (PSR) currently under consideration in Brussels, represents a very unwelcome restriction on the ability of many ports in Wales to make market choices about service provision and charging. The assistance of Welsh MEPs has been much appreciated in arguing the case for the ports sector.



Environment and Planning

Generally ports have an excellent record on the environment and the industry is committed to continuing its good environmental performance. Port developments are subject to a thorough planning and consenting regime. We are keen that these processes are streamlined as much as possible to help ports press ahead with projects. To function and develop ports often need specific marine licences granted by Natural Resources Wales. These can be for dredging to maintain safe access for ships or for new developments. The Welsh Government are currently reviewing the marine licences fees regime and there could be some increases in costs for ports.

There remain a high number of activities which require licences and we have been pressing the Welsh Government to introduce a number of exemptions for low risk activities, as is the

case in England. We are also keen that as part of the review the consenting team retains a strong focus on customer service and its own performance levels. It is also important that licensing conditions for port development consents are proportionate.

Separately the Welsh Government is in the process of producing its own National Marine Plan. The Plan will provide a strategic framework for all coastal activities in Wales and is required to balance socio economic activities and sustainably. The current draft of the Plan recognises important port and shipping activities however we have suggested that some of the general policies are too prescriptive and we have written to officials outlining our concerns. It is vital that this Plan does not limit development and growth.



For further information about these and all port related issues please contact:

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