

PE1637/M

Port of Cromarty Firth submission of 11 January 2021

Following the meeting of the Public Petitions Committee on the 12th November 2020 regarding petition PE1637: Ship-to-ship oil transfers and trust port accountability, the Port of Cromarty Firth (PoCF) are providing the below information in response to a number of the issues which were discussed.

Stakeholder Interests & Engagement

As stipulated in the 'Modern Trust Ports for Scotland: Guidance for Good Governance', it is PoCF's duty to operate in a manner which respects the interests of all our stakeholders, not just one group. We are acutely aware of the challenges we face in obtaining the best balance of stakeholder interests to achieve a 'common good' for all, and we are confident that the Port's activities are supported by the vast majority of our stakeholders, including local communities, port users and local & regional businesses. The most significant impact which PoCF has within local communities and the regional economy, is the creation and support of essential employment opportunities. This not only includes direct employment by PoCF, but also indirectly through the facilitation of port-related supply chain activities, which utilise the Cromarty Firth for commercial operations. A Highlands & Islands Enterprise study highlighted that within the local area 1 in 6 people are employed in port-related activity.

Referencing oil and gas rig activity within the Cromarty Firth, including anchoring, servicing and inspection, repair & maintenance (IRM) operations, this is a critical service offered to the industry and a major source of employment for the local and regional workforce. Major local employers such as Global Energy Group (based at Nigg, adjacent to Cromarty) and SEMCO Maritime (based at Invergordon), rely heavily on this rig activity. PoCF therefore has a responsibility to optimise utilisation of the Cromarty Firth for use by customers and stakeholders.

Local community interests are always considered by PoCF to help achieve a 'common good' for all stakeholders and, subject to availability, the Port limits the use of anchorage locations adjacent to the Cromarty Firth's communities for warm-stacked rigs and those undertaking major work scopes. Unfortunately on occasions, a rig's specific requirements or work scope, or the lack of available alternative anchorages, determines that these near-shore anchorages are the only suitable locations. Whilst the rigs are moored in the Cromarty Firth, PoCF requests that measures are put in place to mitigate against excessive noise being created so far as is reasonably practicable. The 'Modern Trust Ports for Scotland: Guidance for Good Governance' notes that stakeholders (including local communities), while articulating their concerns and holding ports to account, must also consider the interests of the port as a whole.

PoCF operates a policy of open engagement and dialogue. We work closely with all our stakeholder groups, including the nine communities that border the Cromarty Firth. We undertake an extensive programme of engagement to understand the interests and requirements of our stakeholders, which is used to inform the Port's decision making process, commercial objectives and operating strategy. The table below outlines some of the stakeholder engagement activities which were completed by PoCF in 2020.

Stakeholder Engagement Activity	Occurrence
Joint Community Council Meetings (held with representatives from the nine community councils which surround the Cromarty Firth, including Cromarty).	Held Quarterly. In 2020, six meetings were held.
Port User Update Meetings (attended by local supply chain businesses and port users).	Held Quarterly.
Annual Public Meeting (coinciding with the publication of the PoCF Annual Review - available online).	Held Annually (October).
Invergordon Cruise Infrastructure Workshops (attended by PoCF, The Highland Council, Police Scotland, Stagecoach, Invergordon Community Council, Invergordon Development Trust and Local Tour Operators).	Four workshops held in total - three in 2020.
PoCF Newsletter (featured on the PoCF website, published in local newspapers and emailed directly to a number of stakeholder groups).	Spring, Summer & Winter editions published.
Briefing to constituency MP's and MSP's on major projects, news and developments.	Throughout the year.

The above table clearly illustrates engagement and public consultation activities which PoCF completes with its stakeholders. From a community perspective, clear and regular channels of communication have been established with the nine communities that surround the Cromarty Firth through their respective Community Councils. PoCF have convened the Joint Community Council meetings for five years and these meetings provide an opportunity to give updates on current Port activities, sectoral developments and future strategy. These meetings also allow participants to express any concerns and ask questions to PoCF on behalf of their community.

Regarding Cromarty Rising, it has been intimated that PoCF have failed to sufficiently communicate and respond to the group. It is important to note that over the last 12 months PoCF has not received any direct communication from Cromarty Rising. We have been made aware of letters which have been sent directly to representatives of the Scottish Government, the Highland Council and local newspapers, regarding PoCF activities and related issues, however these were not sent to the Port.

The Committee also highlighted a protest group which has been set-up in Invergordon focused on the cruise industry and claimed that there has been a lack of community engagement on this activity. In December 2019 and throughout 2020, a series of collaborative workshops regarding Invergordon cruise infrastructure were organised by PoCF and held with a range of representatives including Invergordon Community Council and Invergordon Development Trust, to identify the key problems affecting the town and agree on solutions which would improve the management of cruise traffic and passengers. This consultation was very positive and proactive, with a range of potential options and solutions identified which are expected to be actioned ahead of the 2021 cruise season - this is of course subject to COVID-19 developments.

PoCF also convenes a 'Cruise Stakeholder Group', which has been in place for over 3 years and features community and business representatives who are provided with industry updates and a platform to discuss issues and developments with the Port. PoCF are unaware of the "second protest group" which was referenced by the committee and would greatly appreciate further information about this group so that engagement can take place accordingly.