

PE1637/P

Port of Cromarty Firth submission of 14 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.

Freeport Proposal

Discussions took place by the committee on the topic of 'freeports' and referenced a project which PoCF is involved in, Opportunity Cromarty Firth (OCF). OCF is a dynamic partnership of private, public and academic organisations working together with a supply chain of world-class energy sector companies. There are twelve OCF partners, including four port facilities (two of which are Trust Ports), collaborating to provide a cluster of sites able to optimise local content, jobs and business opportunities from the significant offshore wind developments taking place off our shores.

The Cromarty Firth is uniquely positioned to capitalise on a 50-year pipeline of multi-billion pound offshore wind projects on its doorstep. The ambitions for OCF are centred around advanced manufacturing of steel components (e.g. turbine towers) and the serial production of floating offshore wind structures. These ambitions are complemented by the North of Scotland Hydrogen (NOSH) project, which is based in the Cromarty Firth and aims to produce green hydrogen from the wind energy, and the creation of an applied research, development and educational facility.

It is the views of OCF partners that establishing a freeport in the Cromarty Firth would assist in fully realising the potential benefits from these nationally significant projects. A freeport would ensure Scottish companies can remain competitive and are not disadvantaged against international competitors in the offshore wind sector.

The committee raised questions regarding the impacts which a freeport in the Cromarty Firth would have in terms of job creation, community benefits, environmental regulations, etc. as well as the consultation activities completed by OCF. A full socio-economic impact and skills assessment is being undertaken on the proposal, which will inform a number of the issues raised - these will be shared with the stakeholders in due course. There is also strict environmental legislation in place which must be adhered to for industrial activities in the Cromarty Firth and becoming a freeport would have no impact on these requirements.

With regards to public consultation, a major media campaign has been undertaken to raise awareness and seek feedback on OCF's proposals over the past six months, in addition to two public meetings, a stakeholder round table, a presentation to Inverness Chamber of Commerce members as well as multiple briefings and presentations to politicians, businesses, community councils, port users and other stakeholders.

Sincere apologies have been provided to Gail Ross MSP that a personal briefing was not provided ahead of the launch of OCF, as we believed her to be absent - a written briefing has subsequently been provided. It should be noted that attempts were made to brief PoCF's constituency MP, Jamie Stone, of the OCF proposal ahead of the public launch. Communication took place in June and July with a response eventually given on the 10th July. A personal briefing was agreed for the 3rd August which Jamie Stone did not attend. Briefings were offered to all of the Port's other constituency MPs and MSPs ahead of the public launch. A presentation to Highland Councillors was delivered on the evening of the 3rd August and the proposal was then made public.