

Clerk to the Committee for Infrastructure
Room 410
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Dear Sir/Madam,

Committee for Infrastructure Call for Evidence on Harbours Bill

The British Ports Association (BPA) is the national trade body for UK ports and terminals. We represent all the major trust ports across the UK, and importantly, all trusts ports in Northern Ireland. We facilitate a Northern Ireland Ports Committee which is comprised of Belfast, Coleraine, Foyle, Larne, Warrenpoint, and the Northern Irish Fisheries Harbour Authority.

We have over 50 trusts in our membership across the UK. We support the current mixed ports ownership model, which is underpinned by competition and enables almost all port operators to decide on their own corporate structure.

Different reviews at the UK Government level have highlighted that the trust model works well. However, various provisions have been made in Great Britain to help the sector function better. The trust port model has stood the test of time, with the sector going through a process of modernisation extending to boards, financial, and commercial structures. The result is a diverse and successful group of ports that is both popular with government, employees, stakeholders, and customers.

The Review of Trust Ports conducted by the Department for Infrastructure and concluded in March 2025 clearly demonstrated significant support for the reclassification of Trust Ports and the benefits which can be delivered as a result.

It is therefore welcome to see the progress made in introducing the Harbours Bill to the NI Assembly on 15th June 2026. The committee stage now provides the opportunity for further comment.

The BPA supports the general principles of the Bill which are to modernise the legislative and governance framework for Northern Ireland's Trust Ports. It is accepted that primary legislation is required to update the governance to address the Office for National Statistics (ONS) classification of Trust Ports.

Reclassification from public to private corporation will allow Trust Ports to prudently borrow from commercial lenders without negatively impacting the public sector balance sheet. It will facilitate investment by the Trust Ports which will safeguard these critical assets into the future. Importantly, the reclassification would not alter the Trust Port status in any way.

We are broadly supportive of the Bill. However, if there is scope for minor amendments, we would support replacing 'ship' with 'vessel' in the Harbour Directions provisions, better aligning with UK legislation and enabling ports to manage all types of craft. We would also support replacing the requirement to advertise directions in a 'shipping publication' with the more flexible 'suitable publication'.

We note that the board appointment process still requires amendment and that this can be included within Harbour Orders. Our preference is that this secondary legislation is also progressed during this Assembly mandate.

Our view is that the Harbours Bill has the potential to deliver a significant positive impact for the Northern Ireland economy. It will stimulate major investment from the ports, creating good jobs and strong economic growth. The changes proposed in the Bill will largely bring NI Trust Ports in line with GB Ports and will improve modernisation and competitiveness. We would also be happy to give further evidence on this matter.

Yours Sincerely,



Richard Ballantyne OBE

Chief Executive, British Ports Association