

Committee for Infrastructure Call for Evidence on Harbours Bill Response

August 2026

Dear Michael Potter,

Harbours Bill: NI Chamber response to the Call for Evidence

With 1,000 members representing over 105,000 employees, Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NI Chamber) has supported the development of the economy for almost 240 years and is 100% funded by the private sector. We work across all of Northern Ireland, helping SMEs to grow and export, and larger firms to thrive. Our membership spans manufacturing, construction, professional services and a broad range of wider services, and we consult our members regularly on the issues they face in doing business locally, nationally and internationally.

Our team of technical experts provides specialist support for firms trading internationally, including the processing of export documentation.

NI Chamber is the only British Chambers of Commerce accredited Chamber in Northern Ireland, which makes us part of a wider network representing 104,000 business members employing almost five million people. We are also active members of the Chambers Ireland network.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this Call for Evidence. Our ports and harbours are essential to the efficient operation of supply chains and to the ability of local businesses to export.

We recognise the aim of the legislation to update the regulatory and governance framework for Trust Ports in Northern Ireland. Addressing these governance considerations is a necessary step towards a future review by the Office for National Statistics of the classification of NI Trust Ports.

A change in this classification would provide greater flexibility to borrow to invest while not impacting the overall Trust Port model. NI Chamber recognises the success of the Trust Port model in ensuring that any surplus made by our ports continues to be re-invested. Consequently, we would be supportive of the Harbours Bill and the potential change of the ONS classification of our Trust Ports from Public to Private Non-Financial Corporations, as we believe this classification would be the most suitable to ensure continued investment in the years to come. The Harbours Bill as currently proposed lays the foundation for this to take place in future and we are supportive of this objective.

We appreciate the significant investments our Trust Ports make, which contribute significantly to trade and economic growth across the regions. We also note Belfast Harbour's Advance Regional Prosperity Strategy 2025-2029

with £208m to be invested in the port itself - a vital economic asset for the region which handles most of NI's external sales.

Warrenpoint Port and Foyle Port are also strategic gateways for regional and cross border trade, handling trade valued estimated at £4 Billion and supporting tens of thousands of jobs across Northern Ireland. Both are also investing in infrastructure and trade connectivity, strengthening supply chains across the island of Ireland and to Great Britain.

Providing greater flexibility will facilitate further investment in our Trust Ports to deliver on the ambition of their masterplans and strategic ambitions, including building on our much-needed logistics capacity and greater integration of renewable energy and new renewable enabling technologies, which our organisation would be fully supportive of.

We would encourage the Bill and the associated Harbour Orders to be progressed as efficiently as possible to ensure it is passed within the current Assembly mandate, so that our Trust Ports across the region can continue to serve as hubs for growth.

Yours sincerely,

Stuart Anderson
Director of Public Affairs and International Relations
NI Chamber