

Dear Clerk to the Committee,

Harbours Bill (NIA Bill 37/22-27) — Call for Evidence: individual submission

I am writing as a resident of Warrenpoint to submit my own views on the Harbours Bill ahead of the Committee's Call for Evidence closing on 2 September 2026, and to ask the Committee to take the following points into account.

The power the Minister already has, and has not used

1. Clause 2 of the Bill removes the Department's power to direct a harbour authority under Article 4 of the Harbours (Northern Ireland) Order 2002. This is the power that could require the removal of waste storage and the odour it causes from Warrenpoint Port. The Minister has confirmed in writing (AQW 48755/22-27, 30 June 2026) that she still holds this power. I ask the Committee: why remove a power that is needed, rather than requiring it to be used?

2. I have not seen the Minister use this power on our behalf. Residents have been told repeatedly that nothing can be done at departmental level, while the Bill before the Committee would abolish the very power created to enable it. Rather than being weakened, I believe this power should be strengthened and made subject to a clear duty to act when a community's health and environment are affected.

A pattern of public controversy, not an isolated complaint

3. This is not a new or passing concern. Over the last three years, Warrenpoint Port has been the subject of repeated, well-publicised controversy: board resignations, contested public statements, and coverage by the Irish News, UTV, Armagh I, the Newry Reporter and others. I ask the Committee to treat this history as relevant background to the powers it is being asked to remove.

4. In July 2025, two council members of the Board, along with the Sinn Féin MLA Sinéad Ennis, resigned or spoke out publicly, with Ms Ennis stating that party representatives had been "gaslighted" at the Port. Those board vacancies remained unfilled for a year and were only raised again when residents asked about them directly at the 2026 AGM.

5. In September 2025, a WHA board member, Jarlath Tinnelly, told BBC News that the Port had gone "from 20,000 tonnes of RDF storage to zero in just over a year." That claim has never been withdrawn. Yet this week, photographic evidence taken at the Port shows two visibly different types of baled waste still in open storage, consistent with earlier NIEA inspection findings that recorded RDF and SRF bales side by side, distinguished only by the colour of their wrapping. Mr Tinnelly remains on the Board.

6. This is part of a wider pattern in which WHA's public reassurances are made, challenged with evidence, and then followed by an apology rather than a correction of the underlying practice — as happened when the Chair apologised for his own conduct on social media towards residents raising overnight noise. I do not think a Board that repeatedly has to apologise once it is caught out can be trusted to regulate itself, or to be the primary channel through which this community's concerns are heard.

Engagement that does not amount to accountability

7. I do not consider that occasional payments to local community groups, such as those made around Christmas, amount to genuine engagement with this community. Money handed out to community groups is not the same as listening to residents — it looks to me like an attempt to buy quiet acceptance rather than to address the cause of our complaints.

8. Nor do I consider the Community Forum set up by Warrenpoint Harbour Authority, or WHA's Annual General Meeting, to be an adequate way of dealing with community

concerns. The AGM at which residents can question the Board in public lasts around thirty minutes and is held behind closed doors, online, with no live follow-up and no full public minutes. Board members have publicly resigned over the very issues residents raise at it. A body that cannot show what was discussed, or retain its own members' confidence, cannot reasonably be relied upon as the community's voice.

What I am asking the Committee to do

9. I ask the Committee to reject the removal of the Article 4 power, to call the Minister to account for her engagement with this community, and to ensure that any reformed system of trust port governance gives residents a genuine, transparent and enforceable means of holding the Port to account — not fewer powers and a public relations exercise in their place.

I would be grateful if the Committee would take this submission into account as part of its Committee Stage scrutiny of the Bill

Therese Dodds