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UK Major Ports Group response to the Committee for Infrastructure Call for Evidence on Harbours Bill

About UK Major Ports Group (UKMPG)

UKMPG represents nine of the United Kingdom's ten largest port operators (see appendix 1), collectively handling more than 75% of all UK port tonnage. Our members are major employers in coastal communities and operate critical national infrastructure that facilitates trade, supports economic growth, strengthens supply chains and enables the UK's clean energy ambitions. Our members include Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

Our members invest more than £800 million of private capital annually in port infrastructure and surrounding coastal areas. As operators of many of the UK's largest and busiest ports, our members rely upon a highly skilled maritime workforce, including marine pilots, to ensure the safe and efficient movement of vessels and cargoes that underpin the national economy.

As gateways to the world, major ports are a crucial enabler of strategic supply chains for the UK – allowing industries to thrive both here and abroad and bringing in goods that we all depend on in our daily lives. The ports sector is also a significant driver in promoting investment and employment in regions facing significant socio-economic challenges.

Response to the Call for Evidence.

UKMPG welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the call for evidence on the Harbours Bill to help inform the Committee Stage. We previously prepared a submission to the public consultation on the review of trust ports where we outlined our support for the removal of 'Indicators of Control' to allow Belfast Harbour to prudently borrow without impacting public expenditure. This can ultimately be delivered through the process of ONS reclassification. We note the significant progress made since this initial consultation and the need to complete legislative passage of the Bill as efficiently as possible.

We support the ambitions and aspirations outlined by each of the trust ports in Northern Ireland as to how the additional financial flexibility provided by ONS reclassification will help them to invest in their assets and safeguard critical port infrastructure for future generations.

We would also highlight that the Belfast Harbour 2025–50 Masterplan document, which outlines up to £1.3 billion of port infrastructure investment, is clear that ONS reclassification is vital:

“Without reclassification, we can still deliver – but we will face harder choices about pace and scope. With reclassification, we can go further – investing to prepare for the scale the economy demands and that our customers and stakeholders deserve.”

The Harbours Bill as drafted removes two of the three ‘indicators of control’ which ONS will consider during the reclassification process with the third to be removed through individual Harbour Orders.

Having considered the Bill as drafted, UKMPG remains firmly supportive of the objectives of the legislation and request that the primary legislation, as well as Harbour Orders, are completed during this Assembly term.

Yours sincerely

Alex Pepper

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Policy Director

Appendix 1 – UK Major Ports Group Members

