

3 January 2018

British Ports Association looking to shape the agenda in 2018

The Chief Executive of the British Ports Association (BPA), Richard Ballantyne, has outlined the Association's key priorities for 2018. These include continued interaction and influencing on the **Brexit discussions**, promotion of **planning and freight policy reform**, calls for **increased transport connectivity investment** and the rectification of the **'definition of a ship' legal anomaly**.

Discussions with the various parts of Westminster and the Devolved Governments on Brexit will continue to be a major feature for the ports industry this year. Outlining the BPA's 2018 aims, Ballantyne said:

"2018 will be a critical for UK ports as by the end of the year we should know what Brexit will look like. We will continue ensure that as important international gateways, the ports industry features in the Government's Brexit planning, particularly in relation to any new customs and environmental arrangements. A number of ports, particularly the UK's network of Roll-on Roll-off ferry ports, are concerned that following the UK's departure from the Customs Union and the Single Market, new bureaucratic border checks could slow down trade. As Phase 2 of the Brexit negotiations begin, we will be pressing the UK Government to ensure that trade facilitation is given a much higher prominence in the discussions."

The BPA will continue to push for areas around ports to be classified with a special planning and consenting status to help stimulate port development and growth. Many of the rules in relation to environmental legislation stems from the EU and the BPA is encouraging policy makers to ensure that port activity and development are not negatively impacted by onerous consenting conditions and marine protection designations. Ballantyne continued:

"Of course there will be opportunities post Brexit but from our perspective the Government appears to have has lost sight of many of these. We have been particularly disappointed at the muted response the Government has given in respect of the industries' suggested planning reforms to fast track planning and consenting in port areas. Indeed, we also now understand that a 'free ports' policy is, for the time being at least, 'off the agenda' and that the UK ports industry will have to prepare for the introduction of the bureaucratic EU Port Services Regulation before Brexit."

The BPA will also be promoting the case for increased road and rail infrastructure investment to better connect UK ports. This will keep the sector competitive, reducing costs for the freight and logistics industry. Ballantyne highlighted the opportunity this presents, saying:

“Ports rely on good hinterland connections but in recent years much of the public investment in transport has been allocated to passenger schemes. We have called for a new UK freight strategy and will be pressing the Government to examine the options. As we near the publication of the results of the Department for Transport’s recent Port Connectivity Study we will be pressing the Government to prioritise freight transport infrastructure and particular challenges such as ‘last mile’ connections to ports. It will be important that the Study highlights the importance of the sector so that ports feature when spending decisions are made on future rounds of, for example, the Road Investment Strategy. There will also be opportunities to reinforce these messages in the forthcoming National Infrastructure Commission’s Freight Assessment and the Scottish National Transport Strategy Review. Separately, we will also be pushing Government for a re-think on its non-existent coastal shipping policy.”

In terms of maritime safety, Ballantyne is hopeful that 2018 will finally see some progress in relation to overcoming the ‘definition of a ship’ legal irregularity. Following a review in 2016 the Government has made some sympathetic statements in respect of updating UK harbour and shipping legislation:

“Legislative updates would enable ports to enforce important port safety rules against certain leisure craft such as jet skis, which are currently not classified as a ‘ship’ under UK law. Rectifying the ‘definition of a ship’ legal anomaly would be an important step forward to help marine safety in a wide variety of ports and across British waters. Alongside this we will also be calling for the end of the exemption for drink drive alcohol limits for non-professional mariners. It is staggering that in this day and age this legal loophole still exists.”

The BPA will also continue to focus its attention on working with the various governments within the UK. This will include Northern Irish issues in relation to Brexit, new ports ‘Good Governance Guidelines’ in England and Wales, lobbying on environmental matters in Scotland as well as discussions in respect of the imminent devolution of most ports policy functions to the Welsh Government.

As air quality continues to rise up the political agenda, the Association will play a leading role in making the case to the UK and devolved Governments for a sensible policy approach based on robust and reliable evidence. Fishing will be another area of policy where there will be intense scrutiny as the Government introduces its own fisheries management regime early in 2018. The Association represents the vast majority of the UK’s top fishing ports and will continue to push for better management led by strong evidence and research, an increased economic link between fishing and fishing communities through landings and a fresh look at fishing port infrastructure needs.

As well as the continued policy and lobbying activity the BPA will further roll-out governance and duty holder training on issues such as safety and strategy for all types of ports as well as supporting internal industry benchmarking initiatives and developing a network for port security professionals. The BPA will be developing a new membership development strategy, not only in respect of ports but also for other connected industry organisations. The aim is to help grow and develop the Association's national profile and reach. Further details are at: www.britishports.org.uk/join

Finally, the Association is also very much looking forward to this year's Annual BPA Conference, which will be hosted by the Port of Tyne on 10th & 11th October 2018. This is the BPA's showpiece event and an unrivalled occasion when the UK's diverse range of ports comes together.

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General notes

- The British Ports Association represents the interests of over 100 port members, covering more than 350 ports, terminal operators and port facilities.
- The UK ports industry plays a key role in the country's economy as 95% of the UK's international trade – imports and exports – is carried through British ports.
- UK ports also handle more than 60 million international and domestic passenger journeys each year.
- The UK port industry is the second largest in Europe, handling around 500 million tonnes of freight each year.
- UK ports directly employ around 101,000 people.
- The British Ports Association enjoys an excellent working relationship with Ministers and officials in the various tiers of government around the UK and the Association will continue to provide a key national interface and focal point for the collective ports sector.
- Ports are vital gateways for the economy and the BPA is keen to work with government to help improve the growth opportunities for the industry. The UK ports industry depends on a stable and supportive policy framework and ahead of Brexit it will be vital to promote these to the various tiers of government around the UK.

Contact the BPA:

If you would like any more information on the above briefing or to discuss any of the issues raised please contact:

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