



EARTH DAY 2021: SUSTAINABILITY FOR ALL



As an island nation, the UK's ports have traditionally acted not only as the predominant hubs for trade but our windows onto the world. This is as true today as it has ever been. However, the industry now faces the same existential crisis threatening us all – climate change.

Ports and maritime transport have been and are intrinsic to the sustainable movement of freight. Moving goods by water is hugely better for the environment in terms of emissions intensity than other forms of freight transport – at least 9x better than by truck and nearly 100x better than by air. Yet the ports sector still has a role to play in tackling climate change. The UK, already a world leader in offshore renewable energy generation, has established ambitious targets for further growth and Boris Johnson's Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution includes quadrupling the country's offshore wind turbine power generation to 40GW by 2030.

Development is currently underway to harness the UK's vast reserves of potential renewable energy in coastal regions in the form of wave and tidal power. In addition to this, carbon capture and storage – A key part of the net zero solution for some of the hardest sectors to decarbonise - will rely largely on undersea transport and storage from coastal nodes.

What unites these ambitious targets is the central role that is required from the nations' ports, who are beginning to demonstrate their willingness and capability to also support the development of sustainable technologies. This is either through investment in new sources of energy, as locations for manufacturing and assembly of turbine blades, the landside centres for energy contractors, or as areas to safely demobilise and recycle materials at the end of their operational lives.

This vital role in sustainable energy and decarbonisation has the additional benefit of encouraging economic growth in some of the UK's most



disadvantaged communities clustered on the coast. The introduction of local, well-paid jobs, coupled with additional investment in infrastructure, can reinvigorate communities. This has already been witnessed in areas which have experienced a decline in traditional maritime professions such as fishing or shipbuilding. With sufficient policy focus, the Government's growth ambition should act a powerful stimulus for similar emission and opportunity transformations across the UK.

As well as acting as bases for the offshore renewable energy boom, ports are also striving to change their own role in emissions reduction. For example, electric vehicles and the installation of solar panels and wind turbines on site are some of the more immediate measures ports have taken, with investments being made in potent, renewable sources such as hydrogen. Hand in hand with new technology comes new ways of working, where smarter energy usage and collaborating with supply chain partners can prove extremely effective at reducing emissions and improving air quality.

An important part of this, which all port operators want to increase, is taking freight off the road and moving it by other modes. There is demand, currently constrained by network availability, to double the amount of shipping containers moved by rail. There are also smaller but nevertheless important opportunities to move more freight by water, both around the UK's coast and along its main inland waterways.

But true environmental sustainability is not just about emissions reduction, vital as it is. It must also be about nature recovery – for example biodiversity, habitat maintenance and regeneration. Here too ports are playing their role as custodians of their surroundings and exploring ways to increase this contribution, such as through the beneficial use of dredged materials and working with other partners in local environmental management groups.

So yes, ports already play a role in sustainable energy and climate control, however there is always more to do. Continued progress relies not just on operators but the Government's willingness to establish policies and regulatory frameworks that encourage better environmental initiatives as well as increased prosperity for coastal communities. None of this is easy, however the cost to benefit ratio is worth the effort. The ports sector is ready to play its part, and we look forward to working in partnership with the Government in securing a more sustainable future.

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