

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Maritime 2050: implementation, objectives and effects](#), HC 160

Wednesday 22 June 2022

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 22 June 2022.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Huw Merriman (Chair); Mr Ben Bradshaw; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith; Christian Wakeford.

Questions 221–278

Witnesses

[II](#): Robert Courts MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Maritime, Department for Transport; Petra Wilkinson, Director of Maritime, Department for Transport; and Ian Blair, Deputy Director UK Maritime Services, Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Department for Transport](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Robert Courts, Petra Wilkinson and Ian Blair.

Q221 **Chair:** This is our very last evidence panel session. We are delighted to have the team from the Department for Transport, including the Minister. I will ask the Minister to start by introducing himself.

Robert Courts: I am Robert Courts, the Maritime Minister.

Petra Wilkinson: Good morning. I am Petra Wilkinson. I am maritime director at the Department for Transport.

Ian Blair: Good morning. I am Ian Blair, deputy director for UK maritime services at the Maritime Coastguard Agency.

Q222 **Chair:** Good morning to all three of you. We have just had Maritime UK give evidence. All the way through this we have been looking at Maritime 2050 by addressing each of the seven themes: UK competitive advantage, technology, people, environment, infrastructure, trade and security. We will do exactly the same now. Members will take each section.

Perhaps I could ask a brief opener, if I may. With those seven themes and how Maritime 2050 is progressing, are there some themes that are progressing very well and others where there is perhaps a bit more development to keep pace?

Robert Courts: Thank you, Chair. Probably the first thing to say is that we are very proud of Maritime 2050 as a document and as a philosophical way of approaching policy. I am quite keen to emphasise that it is not something that the Department has created; it was done very much in partnership with industry. I think you probably heard that from the witness today. It is a document that is overarching. It is a document that is constantly under review, but it informs quite a different way of approaching policy than perhaps has been the case in the past. It is done very much in partnership with industry and with a feeling of joint ownership.

We are progressing well with it. We would say that, of the 118 recommendations, approximately 91 are either complete or in progress. Clearly, there are some areas where we have had to go slower than we would have liked for the very obvious reason that we have had to deal with the Covid reaction work. That is the reality of the situation. We have had to make sure that resources were given to that. None the less, despite the fact that most of everything we have done under Maritime 2050 has been done during the pandemic, I think we have a very good story to tell on the progress we have made.

We can look at things like freeports and the work we have done to restart crews. I am going to dwell on that for a second because it is quite important in the way that Maritime 2050 works; it is that co-operative



HOUSE OF COMMONS

relationship. One of the points that is mentioned in Maritime 2050 is growing a closer relationship. As a microcosm, in the way we have worked with the cruise sector—an incredibly important sector to the UK economy, where approximately £2.5 million per port call is brought in every time a cruise ship docks—we have formed a very close relationship through the Covid pandemic. That was obviously important for the purposes of response, but it is also something about the way that Maritime 2050 works, which is us working in partnership. We will look to maintain that to make sure the close working relationships that we have established of necessity through Covid are ones that we continue going forward. We will touch on some of these areas later. For example, something like the national freight plan, which we will come to later, is another thing we are looking to work very closely on with the sector. I hope that is quite a good idea of how we see this working in a co-operative way.

There are a number of things that we have achieved. I have talked about cruise as a microcosm. We have funded the Maritime UK skills and diversity post, which of course is critical. We have set up the Diversity in Maritime Taskforce. We have done a great deal of work around seafarers' welfare—I know we will come to that later—both during the pandemic and ongoing, and on UK SHORE and the clean maritime demonstration competition. UK SHORE itself has £206 million of research and development—the biggest amount that has gone into research in maritime ever, I think I am right in saying—and a regulatory approach. As well as that, we have delivered COP26 with two key maritime announcements in that, and London international shipping week.

I hope that quick canter gives you an idea that we are very much working at great pace. This document remains central to everything that we do. There are some areas where, yes, we have had to go slightly slower than we would have liked because of the pandemic, but we are absolutely committed to redoubling our efforts now.

Chair: I am not going to come back to you on any of those parts because they relate very much to the seven themes Members will take forward. The first will be competitive advantage. Grahame is also going to ask about cross-departmental working.

Q223 Grahame Morris: Thanks, Chair. Good morning, Minister and witnesses. In the first panel, we had Ben Murray from Maritime UK. I want to ask you a similar question, Minister. How do you work with other Departments to co-ordinate the Government's approach to the maritime sector? The reason I am asking that, to supplement the answer you gave earlier, is that in our recent Committee visit to the port of Southampton there were a number of issues flagged up with the Committee that perhaps do not come directly under the purview of the Department for Transport, such as issues around the availability of onshore power.

You mentioned the expansion in the cruise ship sector and issues around decarbonisation, critical infrastructure for ports and port connectivity and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

issues that were holding back port developments in terms of the planning framework. How do you, as the Minister for Shipping and Maritime, co-ordinate with other Departments and other Ministers to make sure that these issues are being addressed?

Robert Courts: You are absolutely right, of course, but it is the case that many areas of policy do not touch just one Department. Maritime touches so many things that the UK does, because of the importance of freight, in particular. Of course, that involves a number of other Departments.

In terms of Maritime 2050, there are a lot of ongoing informal meetings between us and the sector. That is something that we use to co-operate and understand the areas where we need to take action. I would be seen, as I think most Ministers and junior Ministers in my position would be seen, as a standard bearer and spokesperson for maritime. I then go forward to Government and make the case or the argument, or seek the co-operation that is needed. We do that on a routine basis anyway.

Perhaps I can give some microcosm examples of the way we would approach this. I mentioned cruise earlier. When we were looking to restart cruise, we had a small ministerial working group which worked very clearly on that. Did you ask me a question?

Q224 **Grahame Morris:** You said you would give an example, Minister, which would be very useful for our evidence. An issue that has come up consistently is delay in the planning process. In Southampton in particular, they indicated that even for a relatively straightforward extension of an existing berth it would take two years to progress it.

Robert Courts: I will address that directly in just a second. I have given the example of the work that we did to restart cruise, which was particularly important. The reforms around tonnage tax were particularly key as well.

Grahame Morris: I will come back to that as well.

Robert Courts: We will come back to that, but I will give a very quick example. A lot of research work went in with the sector and with the MCA to build a package. We then went forward to Treasury and explained what was important about it and why it mattered so much. Then, of course, the Chancellor mentioned it in his Budget statement. The group that I worked on to talk about restarting cruise involved FCDO and Health. We have things like the shipping concierge, which we may come to later, which is intended to be a one-stop shop for those who need to contact part of Government. We tell them where to go and we help them, if they are in the sector, to find the right place.

To address directly your point around planning, last week we published the future of freight document—it was published in June 2022, as you may well have seen. The ministerial foreword in that addresses a number of points that the Committee may be interested in. I refer to point 1 on page 5: “We will identify a National Freight Network...across road, rail,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

maritime, aviation, inland waterway and warehouse infrastructure. Our long-term aim will be to remove the barriers which prevent the seamless flow of freight." That is underpinned by a dedicated freight team within the Department for Transport. Point 3: "We will also undertake a planning call for evidence to explore planning reform opportunities." I hope that deals with both parts of your question.

Q225 **Chair:** Minister, the issue is that the MMO is actually accountable to DEFRA. While you may be doing that in the Department for Transport, how can you ensure that it is delivered, because another Department has responsibility for the MMO, which is responsible for the timelines that Grahame talked about.

Robert Courts: MMO answers to DEFRA and of course DLUHC will have a big part in some of the other sides of things from a planning perspective and for infrastructure onshore. If you are dealing with a freeport, you would have Treasury input as well. This is perfectly normal. The reason why I referred to that document in detail is because of what this is enabling us to do. The national freight network, for example, will enable us to understand how freight moves around the country and where the blockages and the problems are. We then go off as a Department and as a ministerial team and a team of officials and deal with whichever Department, where there may be an issue.

Q226 **Chair:** My point is that, if there needs to be a bit of a culture change, wouldn't it make sense to say, "Right, there is co-sponsorship, so on the environment side, tick, it's DEFRA; on the trade and infrastructure and allowing it to expand, that is the Department for Transport, tick"? It is co-sponsors rather than just one Department. Has that been thought about?

Robert Courts: I do not follow exactly, Chair. Do you mean so that there is joint ministerial responsibility across Departments?

Q227 **Chair:** Yes, for an agency like that. You then demonstrate that it also has to deliver as well as protect and preserve.

Robert Courts: That may be something that is considered as a result of the call for evidence that we are looking at as part of the freight strategy that I have referred to. We have not yet got to the stage where that is necessary. I would just dwell on the fact that it is perfectly normal to have to involve different Departments within Government. I have given a couple of examples of where we have had to do that. I would not necessarily be disturbed by the fact that one Department has a lead on a specific policy area. We make absolutely sure that our voice is heard.

The tonnage tax is a classic example. This is a technical shipping-related measure which the Treasury have taken forward, having listened to representations from the DFT and the MCA.

Chair: It was just the timelines that disturbed me. Apologies, comrade. Back to you.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q228 Grahame Morris: No, that is helpful. I want to come back to the issue of tonnage tax. In relation to Maritime 2050, there are opportunities for improving employment opportunities with well-paid, skilled UK-based employment opportunities, with more ratings and more officers. The tonnage tax is really a misnomer. It is a tonnage tax break really. It is an incentive to shipowners to participate in the scheme.

How are we going to get more British flagged ships as a result of Maritime 2050? We had the Secretary of State at the Committee on 27 April and I asked him this particular question. It was in the aftermath of 900 members of the RMT being sacked by P&O—summarily dismissed. It would be fair to say, Minister, that you were incandescent at the time.

Robert Courts: I was, and I still am.

Q229 Grahame Morris: Various promises were made, including by the Secretary of State, to remove the tonnage tax break from P&O Ferries and to seek the repayment of furlough moneys. Whatever happened to that?

Robert Courts: There are a number of questions there, so let me address them in turn. I will deal with the tonnage tax, then the flag, and then I will come back to P&O in a second. Remind me if I miss anything out.

Tonnage tax and the flag are separate. You do not have to be on the flag to pay tonnage tax. You can buy in to pay tonnage tax, so they are slightly separate things, although they are both hugely beneficial. Let me deal with the flag first. We want to grow the flag. The UK flag—the red ensign that I am proud to wear—is a quality mark. You know that, if you fly it, you are signing up to a set of standards and a level of quality for which the UK maritime sector has been world-famous for decades and continues to be seen so at present.

It has a number of advantages. If you are flying the UK flag, employment rights are those that appertain in the UK. Clearly, from a perspective of seafarer protection that is advantageous. It is also advantageous in growing UK trade and in growing UK presence in the world. I am very keen on increasing the number on the UK shipping register because of the advantages that has. It has advantages for the customer, too. It has things like a 24/7 presence. It means that if something like Covid happens, or if you run into trouble somewhere in the world and you are UK flagged, you will get assistance from the MCA. You will be assisted. That is not always the case with other flags. We want to grow that.

How are we doing that? There are a number of ways in which we are doing it. Like the shipping concierge service that we launched last year that I just referred to as a one-stop shop, we are illustrating the benefits you have if you are under the UK flag. We have outreach. For example, last week I was at Posidonia, the Greek shipping conference and one of the biggest events in the world—it is the equivalent of London international shipping week. We have a flag team based there, and I met



HOUSE OF COMMONS

them. What they are doing is explaining the benefits of the British flag. There are benefits to the shipping lines, as I have explained. You have quality and you get assistance. There are benefits for seafarers as well.

Q230 Grahame Morris: Thanks, Minister. If a particular employer or operator abuses that, as P&O Ferries did, what actions are taken against them? There are many benefits, as you have outlined, including access to Maritime UK and the British Chamber of Shipping, influencing discussions on policy and on the framework around the harbours Bill and so on. Surely, when someone is so flagrantly in breach of the law—you were very furious at the time—there should be some action to say, “Look, this is a good operator and this is a bad operator”.

Robert Courts: I will come to that separately in a second because there is the nine-point plan with regard to P&O. I will go through it.

Chair: I understand, but this is not a P&O session as well. We have a section on people, but I know that Grahame wants to get some colour from you.

Robert Courts: I have dealt with the flag. I will deal with tonnage tax very quickly because it is important. You do not have to fly the flag in order to buy into tonnage tax, but buying into tonnage tax has a number of aspects. Crucially, it has a training link, which is one of the only ones in the world, I believe, that has that. We are going to expand it. The Chancellor has explained some of the changes we are making to tonnage tax, which are quite technical, but they are intended to get more people into tonnage tax. One of the things we are going to review is the training link and whether it still works, both for cadets and for ratings, and whether there needs to be a change to it. That is something that is active. It is also in the nine-point plan that we have with regards to seafarers.

Very quickly, this is not a P&O session, but there is progress being made on that as well. Growing the UK flag is a part of that because the more people who are under the UK flag, the more protections they have. We also have things like the fair ferries framework, which we are progressing in consultation with unions and industry, as an example.

The specific P&O issue is addressed by a number of factors. The harbours Bill that we are bringing in deals with the national minimum wage point, extending it to those who regularly work in and visit UK ports and not just those working in UK waters, to whom it already applies. There are a number of other factors as well which are not legislative but are none the less equally important.

Q231 Grahame Morris: The Secretary of State gave certain undertakings to the Committee on 27 April that do not seem to have been followed up, particularly in relation to furlough payments and other issues that were raised on that occasion. I wonder if you might look into that.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Robert Courts: I am happy to go back and look at it. There are certain realms of the possible around things like furlough payments, for example. We have been absolutely clear, and you are right that I was incandescent—I am still incandescent—about the way P&O treated their workers. The nine-point plan that we have, starting with some legislation but by no means limited to it, is intended to boost the way that seafarers are treated to make it absolutely clear that that is not the way we treat people in this country.

Q232 **Chair:** Grahame, you are right to raise it. All the witnesses we have spoken to, particularly new entrants, are really concerned about what the P&O issue does for reputation, and attracting recruits to the market as well.

Robert Courts: I am happy to address that too, unless you are going to come back to it.

Chair: We will no doubt reference it in our report, but we want to touch on trade, our second theme. I will ask Greg Smith to lead us through.

Q233 **Greg Smith:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning to our witnesses. I have a quick question first—I hope. When will the recovery route map be published?

Petra Wilkinson: Very, very soon.

Robert Courts: It is extremely soon, if not tomorrow, but I am expecting it to be tomorrow.

Q234 **Greg Smith:** Fantastic. Can you give us insight into the major things that the sector have told you they need in that route map? Is it all going to be there?

Robert Courts: It builds on the work that we are doing with Maritime 2050, so it is in the same spirit that has been constructed in partnership with the sector. I am keen to emphasise that. This is not the Government or the DFT doing things to the sector; it is worked out in consultation with the sector. We are helping and giving them what they need. It will include things like revolutionising tech, building back greener and the decarbonisation piece that I know you have spoken to. It will include opportunities for jobs in coastal communities and levelling up. It will address all of those factors, but it has commitments on both sides, not just us but industry, too. I am keen to emphasise that because this is a privately run and privately funded industry and it runs very well like that.

Q235 **Greg Smith:** One of the things on my mind about the recovery plan is that we have heard evidence from previous witnesses that certainly some supply chains will never recover or will never be the same as they were pre-pandemic. There is going to be a new normal. How much of the recovery plan—I appreciate it is being published tomorrow and you cannot pre-release it—is specific to what we have been through in the last couple of years rather than a broader resilience point, were



something else to pop up unexpectedly in the way that Covid-19 did?

Robert Courts: It is broader because it will cover things like tech and decarbonisation, for example. If you are specifically referring to supply chains and freight resilience, that is where I would refer you back to the freight plan that I referred to earlier. I am very keen that we learn lessons from the pandemic and look at whether we can avoid anything that happened happening again and how we could cope better. Certainly, trade resilience is something that is of concern and of interest to people across Government to make sure that we have what we need.

To a certain extent, some of that sits with trade and domestic production rather than with me. My concern, of course, is transporting things. We are in any event living in a globalised world and one in which we are going to have to have a lot of movement of goods and people. We have to continue to make sure that is the case. That piece around the national freight framework will look at things like resilience and planning. That is slightly separate from the recovery plan.

Q236 **Greg Smith:** Yes. Let's specifically think about the supply chain element of the recovery that is required. Clearly, the world has changed for us. Having left the European Union, we are signing new trade deals all around the world. The Department for International Trade is out there drumming up big business for the UK. How locked in is the DFT with the Department for International Trade when it comes to our ability to actually get goods from the new trade deals that are happening? Australia and New Zealand are some distance away. It is going to have to come on the water. How locked in are the two Departments on making sure that as trade deals are signed—

Robert Courts: We are a part of it, so very, in short. Petra will want to come in in a second, and I will give way to her to give a little bit more detail. For example, I met my New Zealand opposite number last week, and that is of course one of the issues we are working on very closely. I mentioned that I was out in Greece last week at Posidonia, and we were out there with a DIT presence as well. I have referred to the shipping concierge document, which is a co-DIT publication, and it is great. It is between us and them and is very much a piece that is joint work. From a personal perspective, I am particularly interested in this because not only did I have the honour to be on the Transport Select Committee, but I was on the International Trade Select Committee, so I take my interest and my expertise from both of those. I am absolutely clear on the perspective that we are there to facilitate and to support our global trade policy.

Petra Wilkinson: To give reassurance, the expertise in the trade team is coming from my team in maritime. We worked very closely on the Australian and the New Zealand trade agreements. We are currently working on India, Canada, Mexico and Gibraltar, and then there is some more work with the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

We are trying to share our knowledge as well so that it is not always just our team doing this. Much of what we do within maritime is to try to maximise the resource we have and share our knowledge so that more people understand it and it is not reliant on the same few people going to the meetings and dealing with it. The start was always my team, with trade, with the detail.

There are some very specific technical things that have to go in there to make sure that there isn't discrimination in ports overseas and to make sure we get our containers of wheat—your supply chain—and to make sure that there are no protectionist measures. They are quite technical and specific things, which is why we supply the information and the expertise.

Q237 **Greg Smith:** That is very helpful. Do you want to come back, Minister?

Robert Courts: Yes. It is important that we move things from the DFT, but there are also services. The UK is a world leader in maritime services such as legal expertise, brokering and all of that. That is critically important from a trade perspective as well. It is not just the movement of goods; it is the intellectual property side of things and the services as well. We are world leaders in that.

Q238 **Greg Smith:** That is really helpful. I want to switch topics very briefly slightly more to coastal shipping and inland waterways, which there is very little mention of in Maritime 2050. Is that deliberate or an oversight? Where do the Government see the role of coastal shipping and the use of inland waterways going forward?

Robert Courts: It is a fair point. There is not a lot about it in Maritime 2050, that is true, but it is something we are considering. We will start looking at it as part of the recovery work, particularly as part of the greener shipping work that we are doing. I am very aware of that from a coastal perspective and that, as we sit on the banks of the Thames, the Port of London Authority is doing a lot of great work on freight on the Thames, where there is real potential. Chair, you mentioned DEFRA and there is an element of their involvement as well.

Q239 **Greg Smith:** My final question is this. We have had a lot of evidence, including in the previous session this morning, about the grants for mode shift and waterborne freight being of limited use to the industry, with comparatively short investment periods and restrictions to revenue costs. Is that something the Government are working on with industry to try to address?

Robert Courts: Yes. We have been taking care to make sure that we have heard the views that industry has on this. Clearly, it will be a matter for Treasury to reshape, but of course we will take forward those points to make sure that they are as helpful as possible.

Chair: Thank you very much. The next two sections are infrastructure and environment. Gavin is going to take both of those. We are conscious



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that infrastructure keeps coming up as an area. It is one of the seven themes that perhaps needs a bit more work.

Q240 Gavin Newlands: As you may have heard from the first session, from Maritime UK, infrastructure is probably the main one where we have seen less progress compared with some of the others. Would you agree with that?

Robert Courts: Not really. Infrastructure by its nature takes longer. It depends on what kind of infrastructure you are talking about, but if you are talking about large capital projects they, by their nature, take a while to plan, finance and build. I am not using Covid as an excuse, but there is a reality that we have had to have some resources dealing with the immediate response there.

The big document is the freight plan. I am very keen to draw your attention to that again, simply because it has a joined-up approach to where freight goes. The data point is key. We need to understand, for example, where freight flows into the country and where it ends up going in order to understand what infrastructure would be of the most assistance.

We have made progress in areas where we are able to do so on a quicker basis. The shore power consultation that we have carried out, and which has closed and we are now considering, is a good example.

Q241 Gavin Newlands: When I asked the Maritime UK witness about key asks and immediate priorities, and comparisons with EU competitors in ports across Europe, he mentioned that one thing they are better at in many EU countries is having a national freight network or route. In an earlier response to Grahame Morris, you mentioned that that is in the works. When do you think we can expect to see that come to fruition?

Robert Courts: It is point 1 in the ministerial foreword on page 5 of the freight plan. What Ben Murray talked about is what we are doing. That is the national freight framework across road, rail, and so on that I referred to. I cannot give you a specific timescale as to when you will see it because, as you know, these things require consultation and policy work. What I can say is that we are very aware of the importance of that. We have listened to the feedback from the sector and we have laid out our plan there to deliver just that.

Q242 Gavin Newlands: Another issue that was brought up was port connectivity. What plans, if any, do you have to follow up on the 2018 port connectivity study?

Robert Courts: The port connectivity study fed into the freight plan that I have just referred to. That is a key part of it, so we are following it up through that document. Again, it is the freight network that I have referred to that ensures that we have not just the infrastructure to offload things from ships, which to a certain extent will be the port's responsibility and they will finance it themselves. It is also looking at



HOUSE OF COMMONS

what is more the Government's responsibility, which is getting it flowing from the ports to wherever it needs to go.

- Q243 **Gavin Newlands:** I accept that at the moment, right across the DFT, there are many plans and policy changes, particularly regarding decarbonisation and looking to 2050. In this case, it is in terms of maritime but some of these reports will get swallowed up by different reports. Will we have an infrastructure route map for Maritime 2050?

Robert Courts: The route maps that are relevant for this purpose are the freight plan that I have referred to and the recovery plan. They may not necessarily be called route maps—they are not always—but those will be the relevant ones. Did I understand the question correctly?

- Q244 **Gavin Newlands:** Yes, that is what I thought you would say. Do you have any plans to revise the national policy statement for ports?

Robert Courts: That refers back to the point around the call for evidence, which is point 3 of the ministerial foreword about calling for evidence on planning. Once we have heard the evidence, we can consider that point. We have to build an evidence case before we go ahead and do anything like that.

- Q245 **Gavin Newlands:** I appreciate that. The MMO has already been brought up and there are issues with regard to timescales. Again, I accept some of the points that you made previously, but could I ask if you could get in touch with your colleagues at DEFRA to give us some figures in terms of average time for applications to MMO? It would be useful to find out how long they are taking and if further resource needs to be put into MMO to accelerate that.

A lot of the infrastructure that is required is looking ahead to decarbonisation and the likes of shore power. What plans do the Government have in that regard? We have heard from Maritime UK and many others. Indeed, I was in a port in Romania just a couple of weeks ago where they have a couple of projects to update the electrics and put shore power in, at a cost of well over €100 million for the project. Most of the funding comes from the EU. Mr Murray said that in many other countries there is a lot of funding from Government for these types of projects. While there is funding from the UK Government, and that is welcome, it pales into insignificance compared to some of the funding available elsewhere. What plans do you have in that regard?

Robert Courts: There are several points. On your DEFRA point, yes, of course I will go away and ask that question. I do not have those figures myself. It will probably form part of the call for evidence that I have referred to already, but I am happy to go away and do that.

With regards to funding of infrastructure, there is a difference in set-up and structure between us and continental Europe. I am generalising, but continental European ports tend to be larger and state run, and ours tend to be smaller and privately run. That is why things like the port services



HOUSE OF COMMONS

regulations, which we have said we are going to repeal, do not work for our ports in the way that they are designed for European ports. You would expect to see a difference in approach.

Q246 Gavin Newlands: Just to be clear, I am not arguing for nationalising the ports.

Robert Courts: I know you are not, but none the less if there is greater state involvement anyway you would expect to see more state money going in. The ports sector is privately run and privately financed. They are very good at raising finance. I should say that this is a principle they support. There is a reason for that, and it is one that has worked very well for our ports sector and not one that the Government should be trampling over. None the less, we will help where appropriate.

I have already talked about shore power and about the consultation that has taken place. There will be further steps arising from that, but obviously I cannot say what those are until we have properly analysed the consultation response.

To look at two of the things that we announced in COP26, for example, we have the Clydebank declaration for green shipping corridors, where we have 24 countries signed up. We are pushing that forward. The idea is that if I run one port and you run another port, we decide between us how we are going to decarbonise that port. How do we fund it? That is where the UK SHORE and the clean maritime demonstration competition work comes in. Underneath that there will be vehicles for some of the greener decarb solutions that would look to decarbonise those green shipping corridors.

The second COP26 project was Operation Zero, which is offshore windfarms. If you are using electric workboats, for example, you will need electric bunkering facilities, which again is the shore power consultation that we have already started on.

I hope that is not too long-winded an answer, but there is a philosophical difference in approach between our ports and the continental approach. What the Government is doing is making sure that it brings emerging technology to market, and we are doing that through UK SHORE.

Q247 Gavin Newlands: While I fully accept the point you are making, there are a couple of issues from our visits. A lot of these private sector companies are trying to invest in infrastructure, but the MMO and the slow progress is holding back or delaying a lot of that investment.

The other issue is that shore power and putting in infrastructure costs a substantial amount of money. I cannot remember if it was sensitive information so I will not share the number, but for one berth it is many millions of pounds just to put shore power in. Realistically, if we want to have shore power across all ports to decarbonise for 2050, the sector is not going to be able to find all of that money itself; it will need some further support.



Robert Courts: Let me address those points while they are in my mind. On the planning point, the MMO point, I have referred to the freight framework where we will be looking at that, and we are looking at it. In any event, we have these conversations with other Departments in Government. That is routine.

With regard to the second point, the way that the UK SHORE and CMDC—clean maritime demonstration competition—is set up is intended to unlock private financing. The Government help to identify, not by us picking winners but by us providing some seed corn money which enables some of the technology to be brought along. That unlocks public and private finance, which is exactly what I would expect to see.

UK SHORE is a three-year programme that is now a multi-year CMDC programme. What will happen after that? The short answer is that I do not know because we are not yet there. That is why things like the call for evidence and the shore power consultation are important. It is us working with the sector to understand what they need. There might be some further Government involvement in due course, or there might not—I simply do not know at this stage. What I can do is show the way that we are approaching this. I think it is the right approach.

Q248 **Gavin Newlands:** The IMO, which we visited at the start of this inquiry, is reviewing its emission targets in 2023. What would you like to see in the new targets?

Robert Courts: We are very proud of the IMO. It is, of course, literally out of the window—we can see it over the water. We are very proud of it being a UN agency here, and the UK has a very leading role in it. It is one that the Department has a very close relationship with. It is a very constructive relationship, and we are a leading voice within the IMO.

In the short term what we are pushing for is greater ambition. We will be looking for a zero-emission shipping target for 2050. That is what we are pushing for. Above all, and perhaps one thing we have not particularly touched on here, is that so much of this is an international issue because it is an international industry. Building consensus at the IMO is one of our chief targets.

Q249 **Gavin Newlands:** It is also rather difficult.

Robert Courts: There is no getting away from it; it is a global challenge. It is one we have to do, but certainly others are more forward leaning.

Q250 **Gavin Newlands:** Another issue that was highlighted in the earlier session was investor confidence in financing greener maritime and greener vessels. When asked, the witness said that the Government were probably not doing enough to help in that regard. What are the Government doing to try to assist and provide assurance to financiers that they can invest in green shipping? It is a very immature market.



Robert Courts: It is, absolutely; you are quite right. It is an exciting market where there are huge technological opportunities for the UK, as well as commercial opportunities. It is an emerging market that we want the UK to have a part of. There is a lot happening.

For example, you have things like the national shipbuilding strategy. That is another example of cross-government working. That brings us in with the MOD, Education, DEFRA and others. It has things like a skills taskforce—we will probably come on to that in due course—and the National Shipbuilding Office. That addresses the skills and the technology thing that is a part of shipbuilding. Of course, shipbuilding is not just the hulls; it is the systems that go into the hulls, and the propulsion system is a big part of that. We have that happening.

I will just say a word or two more about UK SHORE—UK Shipping Office for Reducing Emissions is what it stands for—if I may. It is £206 million, which is the biggest investment into research and development that we have seen in UK maritime, which, essentially, unlocks private finance for emerging shipping. That helps with investor confidence.

There are two pillars to it. There is the R&D pillar, and the second pillar is the regulation side of things. It also provides investors with confidence, because by working very closely, obviously, with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and through IMO we will ensure that we have the regulatory framework that means people can invest with confidence. I hope that makes it clear. There are two pillars, both of which help with investor confidence and will unlock private finance.

Q251 **Gavin Newlands:** This is the last question from me. You mentioned propulsion. In what form will that be in terms of the fuel that drives the propulsion? The industry is still hedging its bets and the Government are agnostic on the fuel that may be used. The industry seems to be heading to hydrogen and perhaps not ammonia, but that is still unclear. Are the Government ready to throw their weight behind hydrogen rather than to be agnostic?

Robert Courts: It is a great question because which of these is one of the great issues of our time—it is a big chicken-and-egg case. When we had these great technology changes in the past—when we went from sail to steam, for example—it was able to happen incrementally. It happened for cost reasons. It did not happen because there was an environmental imperative. This is different.

The Government are agnostic as to technology. The Government are not disinterested. I think it is right that the sector figure out what will work for them. If you are talking about workboats, you may well be talking about electric and battery. We may well see those. We do, in fact, already see them on the Thames and around our coasts. I do not think the Government ought to be saying, "It's going to be this." I think the sector has to work that out. That is why, although we are technology-



HOUSE OF COMMONS

agnostic, we are providing the money and the regulatory framework for the sector to understand what that will be.

You referred specifically to hydrogen. We have across Government a hydrogen strategy around how we are going to be providing green hydrogen. We have, for example, also given £1.3 million to MarRI-UK, which is Maritime Research and Innovation UK, to build a hydrogen network. Hydrogen is clearly likely to be important across Government and transport in one way or another. It may well play a big part in shipping, but the sector has to decide that and then we will come in behind that.

Q252 Gavin Newlands: I lied previously—I am a politician—and I have one last question. You mentioned the Clydebank declaration, although perhaps not by name, and the green shipping corridors. What progress has there been in that regard?

Robert Courts: There is a lot. It was announced and it was a major part of COP26. We were in partnership with major partners like the United States, for example, and many other partners who share our view of the need to be ambitious on this. We have those 24 countries now signed up. A couple more have joined since COP26. We are now having official-level meetings with our partners in order to take it forward. Of course, if I have a bilateral meeting as I did, for example, with my New Zealand counterpart last week, it is something we bring up as well. Work is progressing as to how we develop that. From our perspective, we would then be looking at things like the clean maritime demonstration competition and UK SHORE to unlock the funding to start making those things a reality.

Q253 Gavin Newlands: Do you have any sense of timescales?

Robert Courts: I cannot give you a timescale, simply because the work is ongoing. It is at a fairly early stage, it is fair to say. The reason why I say that is that it is a big generational project. Decarbonising shipping is the same as it is for decarbonising the whole of the transport sector and the economy generally. It will not be fixed within the next few months. This is a generational shift.

Chair: Thank you. I was going to ask Ian if he wanted to come in at any point, but we are going to look at technology now. I believe the first question from Christian Wakeford may well be right up your alley, Ian.

Q254 Christian Wakeford: I want to make sure that Gavin has not inadvertently misled the Committee in those final questions.

Minister and Ian, in your role as director for technical operations for the MCA, can you update us on the work that has been done in regards to regulation for surface autonomous shipping?

Robert Courts: Who would you like to answer?

Christian Wakeford: I am happy for you both to jump in.



Robert Courts: Let me go first and then I will hand over. With regard to maritime autonomous shipping, back in November 2021 we concluded the consultation on our proposals to legislate for maritime autonomous shipping. The reason why this is important is that currently, when the Maritime and Coastguard Agency certify a ship, they have to do so under the load line regulations. It has to be done on a case-by-case risk basis, which clearly is going to be slow.

What we are going to do is to legislate, and I would expect that to be through the future of transport Bill, which of course is very soon to be before the House. That will help provide a quicker way for what will be a critically important part of the sector. We are hoping that the market share will be about 10% of global autonomous shipping. It will be worth £110 billion by 2030, so it is very much something that we are extremely interested in.

Ian Blair: The other bit of work that has gone on as well is recognising that quite a lot of autonomy is in the smaller vessel sector. We are looking to rewrite the workboat code to include specifically an annex on remote operations for that sector. That should help to alleviate some of the issues, but there is no way we can step away from case by case because the technology is still very new and therefore it will be as it will be.

Q255 **Christian Wakeford:** Minister, you mentioned the transport Bill. Obviously, I am a big fan of spoilers. Is there anything we can expect to be coming forward in the transport Bill with regard to the point on regulation?

Robert Courts: Unfortunately, it is not generally the best approach for Ministers to give spoilers on what is likely to be in there, but you can expect to see something on the future of autonomous shipping in the transport Bill. I had better not go into more detail on that.

Q256 **Christian Wakeford:** Thank you. During a previous session Professor John Hudson mentioned that there was too much regulation and that it was a hindrance to innovation. We then heard the contrary argument from Huw Gullick that there is a lack of regulation and that is beneficial to the sector. Where do you think the balance is with regard to regulation? Have we got it right? Is regulation lagging in terms of our capabilities and our ability to innovate?

Robert Courts: The great question is where you draw the line on this. It is not uncommon across Government generally to have views that differ within a sector, and maritime is no different because people have different views depending on their own circumstances.

I think the job that we have is to make sure that we create a benign regulatory environment so that innovation can thrive. That informs the approach that we have taken to everything I have referred to a number of times already, around things like the centre for smart shipping and UK



HOUSE OF COMMONS

SHORE. It is making sure that we are sponsoring and bringing things along without smothering them with too much Government intervention. Clearly, you have to make sure, as Ian said, that safety is paramount. That is clearly going to be the case for the MCA and for maritime in any event. We have to have regulation sufficient to ensure safety but not so much that it is slow and everything takes a great deal of time.

In answer to your question on whether I think that regulation is lagging behind, no, I do not. We are taking steps now to address the regulatory framework through a centre for smart shipping from an autonomous perspective, and through UK SHORE from a decarbonisation perspective. We are starting the process of legislating. The consultation has happened. That is then feeding into the legislation in the future transport Bill.

Q257 Christian Wakeford: We had earlier questions from Grahame about cross-departmental working. To what extent is the Department working with both BEIS and the Treasury in trying to bring forward some of this innovation, similar to the super deduction, and with regard to BEIS to make sure that the regulatory framework is the right kind of equilibrium so that it is not hindering safety but also promoting a firmer format?

Robert Courts: This is routine; it is not unusual for us to do this. It goes back to the Chair's first question, in fact. Maritime is one of those things that touches all parts of the country and the economy. We routinely work with other Departments. The classic example, as I have referred to already, is the tonnage tax from the point of view of Treasury. From a regulatory perspective, equally, we tend to lead on this, but clearly BEIS have an input on that as well, as do others, like the Department for Education. For example, we have a shipbuilding skills taskforce with the Department for Education. We work closely with them because the people side of it is important, as I am sure we will come to in due course.

Q258 Christian Wakeford: I may try to speak to you then with my other hat on as chair of the APPG on T-levels, from that perspective.

Moving to a different topic in regard to the centre for smart shipping, will it be focusing on new innovations or will it be enabling the sector to scale up existing tech that has already been developed? In the last session, we were talking about coming to a fork in the road, with the difference being Betamax or VHS. To what extent are we going down one avenue or the other? If it is the latter, will it be enough to actually remain a global leader?

Robert Courts: The purpose of the centre for smart shipping is to help new and emerging technology come to market. It depends on the definition as to whether you mean existing or emerging, but it is new technology that we are seeking to focus on. Again, I refer back to the point that I have already made. You are quite right to point out the VHS/Betamax thing. What we do not want the Government to do is to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

throw their weight behind Betamax. We want the sector to decide which of those it is going to use, and then we will continue to do that.

The centre for smart shipping will work, for example, with clusters. You referred to some of the academics you have heard from. We have some fantastic clusters that are really making progress on this. Mersey Maritime is a very good example. There is also Maritime UK South West, which is excellent. I have been down to see them. The partnership work they have there with the local universities, industry and tech is very impressive indeed. That is the sort of thing the centre for smart shipping will be looking to bring on in partnership.

Q259 Christian Wakeford: I have a final, brief question on a similar tack. You mentioned just last month that the plan for the centre for smart shipping will be produced later this year. Is there any timescale that we are working to with regard to that?

Robert Courts: I cannot be any more precise than later this year, I am afraid. I am sorry.

Christian Wakeford: Thank you.

Q260 Chair: We visited the National Oceanography Centre in Southampton. They are absolutely fantastic and amazing innovators who are really working together. They are focused on the fact that we need to hear more about marine as opposed to maritime. It struck us that they were able to do their work because they did not have overarching regulation stopping them. The gliders that go down to the ocean surface and can do incredible things that would take people a lot longer to do if they were diving down there are clearly the future. Are they going to be working with you to ensure that any regulations, as well-meaning as they are, do not actually hamper their ability to innovate and deliver for UK plc?

Robert Courts: Precisely what we are seeking to achieve is the world that you describe. Innovators coming out with great ideas and being able to bring them along is exactly what we want. What we do not want is Government smothering that. It is a delicate balance for us. We have to work together with the sector and, of course, with the MCA to make sure that the regulations are in the right place and that safety is addressed, but it is not so restrictive that innovation is smothered. Yes, that is everything we are trying to do with the centre for smart shipping and with Maritime 2050 generally. It is that working in partnership.

Chair: I should call them the NOC in future; it is easier. Let's move on to people. We have touched on this a little, but Ben Bradshaw will go into the detail.

Q261 Mr Bradshaw: We heard from a trainee cadet in Southampton last week that this industry was a hidden secret and they have terrible difficulty attracting recruits. What are the Government doing to get the word out there?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Robert Courts: I have heard that point made as well. Clearly, it is something we have to address. There is this concept of sea blindness that is referred to sometimes. People do not realise that we are a maritime nation. That is the case now, as it always has been. As you know, 95% of our trade comes in by sea. It is all the things that we rely on for food and for consumables. It is absolutely vital. Perhaps if there is any one good thing that comes out of Covid, it might be greater awareness by people of where things come from and how interconnected we are as a society and as a world. That is absolutely something we have to address.

There is a number of things. It is critically important that you have awareness. Things like the 1851 Trust, which works to inspire STEM skills among children, are critically important. It is very important that we continue to work on diversity. We funded the Maritime UK diversity post that you heard referred to by your last witness. Clearly, we have to make sure that we have the entire talent pool accessing and coming into the market.

I have referred to the careers taskforce in partnership with the Department for Education. Then there are partnerships that we have with other close partners like the MCA, as well as those that are either arm's length bodies or independent, to make sure the incredible value and reward of a career in maritime or indeed, as you put it, Chair, marine is realised for everybody.

Q262 **Mr Bradshaw:** It can be hard to improve diversity, particularly with regard to gender, when, as we heard in written evidence, only 4% of ships have PPE and protective footwear to fit women's bodies and shoe sizes. Is that not something you could mandate?

Robert Courts: The IMO is doing a lot of work on this, and is, I think, imminently about to announce something on it. If you will permit me, I will write to give you the details, but I think the IMO is working on this imminently.

You are quite right to raise the point. It really will be a burden, but it also highlights the way in which a lot of the work that we have to do has to be done internationally, for the obvious reason that the seafarer who may be working in our waters may or may not be British. It may or may not be a British-flagged ship, so we will have to work internationally in many cases.

Q263 **Mr Bradshaw:** Training and apprenticeship is another area where we heard concerns about weaknesses and gaps in the system. What discussions have you had with your colleagues in the Department for Education as to how they can improve provision for the skills that are relevant to this sector?

Robert Courts: I referred to the taskforce that we have jointly with the Department for Education. It is run as part of the national shipbuilding work that we are doing. There is the National Shipbuilding Office and the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

shipbuilding strategy that I know you are familiar with. Clearly, a big part of that is skills and availability. It is all very well wanting to be a shipbuilding leader, but you have to have the people to do so.

One thing I have not referred to yet, but which is very important, is the Maritime Skills Commission. It was set up as a result of Maritime 2050, which we are discussing. They produced a review of cadet training a couple of years ago. I have asked them to look at that again to make sure that it is where we need it to be. That is a piece of work that is ongoing, but the skills commission is looking at things like apprenticeships, which are key there as well.

Q264 **Mr Bradshaw:** A review is all very well, but we heard that the number of apprenticeships for ratings, for example, is only 40 nationally and it has gone down a third since 2018, so it is going in the wrong direction. You need to do something quite urgently and quite quickly to reverse that, Minister, don't you?

Robert Courts: Yes, there is more to be done, certainly. There are apprenticeships available in able seafarer, maritime electrical and mechanic and maritime caterer, for example. In England, those are offered. In Scotland, there is deck rating, engine room rating and hospitality with maritime enhancements. Those are available. I agree that there is more to be done on this. Although it tends to be seen in a context of P&O, as was talked about earlier, the nine-point plan includes a lot of work about really enhancing Maritime 2050 work, enhancing the skills and enhancing the seafarers. You are absolutely right that there is more to be done, but I think there is already quite a good story to be told.

Q265 **Mr Bradshaw:** I will come back to the implications of the P&O case in a second. One of the risks that we heard from both employers and unions in terms of training was about the rapid development of new technology and the need for transitional training. What priority have you asked the commission to give to transitional training?

Robert Courts: Essentially, it is the review that I referred you to a moment ago. It is how fit it is.

Q266 **Mr Bradshaw:** What is the timeframe for that review?

Robert Courts: Off the top of my head, I am afraid I cannot remember what I asked when I wrote to the chair of the Maritime Skills Commission. It may be best if I write to give you the detail on that. It is something I expect to be over the course of months rather than years.

Q267 **Mr Bradshaw:** On funding training, the employers and the unions were united in suggesting that you would actually recoup the costs of fully funding training in this sector. Is that something the Government might consider? I think you fund about half of the costs at the moment.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Robert Courts: Clearly, that will be a discussion we would have to have with Treasury. I am happy to listen to the views of the sector and take those forward.

Q268 **Mr Bradshaw:** Have you made that case, or would you make that case?

Robert Courts: I am happy to consider it certainly, but I think we need to see the review first around the adequacy of the training requirement.

Q269 **Mr Bradshaw:** How much damage do you think the P&O case has done to the attractiveness of the industry? We heard again from cadets in Southampton that it was a scary experience for them because they feel that they might be recipients of the same kind of treatment.

Robert Courts: It has done huge damage to P&O's reputation for sure. With regard to the maritime sector, I am furious about the way P&O has behaved for a number of reasons. I am furious about—

Q270 **Mr Bradshaw:** It is more about the impact on the attractiveness—

Robert Courts: It is partly because of those individuals and partly because of the effect it has on maritime generally. The Bill that we are bringing forward on the national minimum wage is not everything we are doing. That is the bit that requires legislation, but there are many other things we are doing as well. We are still working this up at the moment, albeit as fast as we can in the circumstances. It is things like looking at tonnage tax, including the training link and growing the attractiveness of the UK flag, growing all of the Maritime 2050 recommendations that we have, and the fair ferries framework. I hope that, as the message gets out about all of the stuff we are doing as part of the nine-point plan, it will reassure people that the Government do not just view the way P&O behaved as unacceptable, although we absolutely do, but are taking steps to stop it happening again.

Q271 **Mr Bradshaw:** One of the points in the nine-point plan is in the Bill, but what exact progress have you made on the other eight?

Robert Courts: There is a lot of progress with a number of those. For example, we are considering the legislation I have referred to already. We have already engaged with ports, as part of the consultation, on the approach they will take. We are looking at wage corridors. We have engaged bilaterally with all of the key partner countries that you would expect us to. Those conversations are ongoing so I cannot go into more detail, but that is happening as we speak.

We have spoken with HMRC. MCA enforcement vis-à-vis safety has been a big part of the work we have done. We have engaged with BEIS around some of the wider employment ramifications, and that work continues. I have talked about the flag. I have talked about some of the wider work on Maritime 2050.

The thing I have not mentioned is seafarer welfare, which is also continuing, partly through the International Labour Organisation and



partly through some of the welfare initiatives that we can run ourselves. It is a big package of measures. There is a lot in it, and I am hoping to address precisely the point that you raised, having heard from that cadet.

Mr Bradshaw: It looks like you might have one of those handy tables that I remember as a Minister, with red, amber and green. I do not know whether you would be prepared to send a copy of that to the Committee. It would make our lives a lot easier when we come to write our report. Thank you, Chair.

Q272 **Chair:** The final theme is security and resilience. On the security side, are there any parts of the security theme or Maritime 2050 as a whole that you will need to revisit and redraft in light of recent global events?

Robert Courts: First, Maritime 2050 is not a static document; it is an ongoing thing in consultation with industry, so that happens in and of itself in any event. Clearly, resilience will be a part of it. I do not envisage us having to take Maritime 2050 as a whole and strike bits out of it or replace them. We will continue to look at the impact of recent events, of course, as we develop policy.

Petra Wilkinson: One of the things we were doing in any case was looking at the national maritime security strategy. That will be published shortly. It refreshes the one that you already have access to but picks up some of the recent events that I think you were referring to—particularly the wider events both domestically and overseas.

Q273 **Chair:** We look forward to taking a look at that. On the resilience side, when we met the port team at the port of Southampton, they told us that 30% of all their freight goes on rail, which is very welcome as we look to decarbonise and make the most of the railways. They were talking about the strike. They will probably be able to manage this week, but they said that, if it goes on, it is not as if there is a ready-made supply of HGV drivers—that has been a problem as well. We could then be looking at the situation of a ship stuck out of port because, while they can unload things, they cannot actually get them to the rest of the country. What is being done to ensure that if the strikes continue, rail freight will get priority, I am sorry to say, over passengers? Otherwise, everybody is impacted if we cannot get the goods that we need.

Robert Courts: You are absolutely right, of course. That is why we take the view that we do about the strikes. It is perhaps another matter and not one to get into, but my view on that will not surprise you. We will continue to work with our sectors to ensure that there is resilience and contingency planning wherever possible.

One of the things that is wonderful about the maritime sector is how resilient it is in and of itself. It is used to dealing with disruption because you have strikes in other countries, you have natural disasters and you have pandemics, all of which it has to learn to cope with. Despite the fact that they have seen huge stresses over the last couple of years, the system has continued to function. I pay tribute to every single individual



HOUSE OF COMMONS

who has made that happen. The sector is resilient in and of itself, and obviously we will continue to listen to them to do whatever we can to assist.

Q274 Chair: In normal times, which we hope we will get back to with rail, there is also the suggestion that there are some obvious wins in terms of electrification to the ports. Felixstowe is a good example. If you just electrified the final 15 miles, you would see rail freight used a lot more because it would be a lot more efficient to deliver it out.

Does rail freight get a big enough focus and prioritisation? We are spending £96 billion on the integrated rail plan which connects people and cities, but why wouldn't we put rail freight connections into ports right at the very top of the list?

Robert Courts: You are absolutely right, Chair. I think we are. I have been to Felixstowe, of course, and seen it. I have had meetings locally not only with the port but with the lines and other interested partners like the logistics sector. I know how strongly they feel about this. Listening to those sorts of representations has fed into the plan, which I am sorry to have mentioned a number of times, but it is important because that is us looking holistically across the entirety of the transport sector, including rail freight. Felixstowe is a good example, and I have seen the same thing happening in Southampton where you see vast trains shipping freight out, without which it would not be possible to supply the country efficiently.

Q275 Chair: When do you think the electrification of the last 15 miles into Felixstowe is likely to be delivered by?

Robert Courts: You tempt me to give an answer that would be beyond my knowledge to do at the moment. Clearly, it is something we will keep looking at.

Q276 Chair: In the integrated rail plan we have dates for when we are going to deliver the line between Manchester and Leeds, but we do not have a date on freight. In a way, that symbolises to me that freight does not feel as if it gets a big enough share compared with passenger.

Robert Courts: That is the point of the freight network, which is point 1 in the ministerial foreword that I referred to earlier. It is very much understood by Government. That work is continuing, but we do not yet know what evidence will come in around how freight flows in and out of the country. Some of it will of course be fairly straightforward. We know that Felixstowe will be significant. Then we will have to look at that evidence, look at the network and decide after that.

Q277 Chair: My final question relates to Department for Transport personnel. We have heard there is a very lean number when it comes to maritime inside the Department for Transport. Do you have plans to upscale the numbers? We are also talking about reducing civil service numbers, and it strikes us from the evidence that the Department might already be lean



enough as it is, so it might be a question of adding more maritime specialists to the Department rather than taking them away.

Robert Courts: There is an overall question around the numbers and the resource that we have across Government, for obvious reasons of efficiency, that it is best that others comment on rather than me. Clearly, within the DFT we will be understanding where our most important sectors are and will apportion the resource correctly. What I would say—I think it came across from Maritime UK earlier—and am proud to say, and I think the sector would agree, is that there is a very high level of co-operation and engagement from the team as it is. Obviously, I will be doing everything I can to make sure that that remains the case.

Q278 **Chair:** We have also heard that the role should be elevated to Minister of State, but I would not ask you to comment on that.

Robert Courts: That is way above my pay grade, Chair.

Chair: Indeed. Thank you very much, all three, for giving us evidence. That concludes our inquiry and we look forward to putting our report out with positive recommendations. It is quite clear to us that Maritime 2050 has been well received and is a great opportunity to collaborate. We will be interested to see if we can make—

Robert Courts: I look forward to seeing what the Committee has to say, Chair.

Chair: Thank you.