

Written evidence submitted by British Ports Association (EEE0017)

Inquiry into EU Entry/Exit and the UK border

Thank you for the opportunity to feed into the Committee's inquiry. The British Ports Association represents the overwhelming majority of ports in the UK including all our main ferry and cruise passenger gateways which typically handle over 20 million international passenger journeys each year. Almost all of these international journeys are between ports in the UK and the EU so we have a vested interest in Europe's plans for visitor immigration and visa arrangements, especially at the border.

We are not submitting a full submission or responding to all the Committee's questions but wanted to support and amplify messages from the Port of Dover and any other ports and operators feeding in evidence to the Committee.

Like Dover and others are concerned about the operational impact of the EU's new entry/exit scheme later this year on routes. The new arrangements could seriously impact UK-EU trade and must be taken seriously.

In terms of freight UK ports sector handles around 95% of the UK's seaborne trade as well as being the foundation of the wider marine economy, from offshore energy to leisure and fishing. Sizeable quantities of this freight are transported via roll-on roll-off maritime operations which can involve HGV drivers who are also subject to immigration rules and passport controls.

As has been articulated by the Port of Dover and others to the Committee previously, the Entry/Exit system will require new cross-border processes to be undertaken by travellers, and these could take time. Any checks and stoppages at ports can quickly escalate into queues and congestion as unlike the aviation environment almost all travellers are in a vehicle. Also, such delays can hit 'just in time' and other types of trade, which has business, local community, regional transport and economic costs. We think these potential impacts are not understood by policymakers and traders, both in Europe and also here in the UK.

We are particularly concerned for our members like Dover as owing to a UK and French government treaty, the ports of Dover, Calais and Dunkirk have juxtaposed immigration controls meaning the French passport checks are undertaken on passengers leaving the UK, on the arrival at the port, before sailing to Europe. This means therefore decisions and policies made by the EU can have a direct impact on port operations on UK soil, making it justified for the UK to seek assistance from the EU and France.

In particular, the UK Government needs to work with its French and European counterparts to examine the possibility of procedural exemptions and derogations for the UK, both at Dover but also elsewhere. Technology, visitor apps, remote submissions and potential implementation grace periods could all help greatly but political leverage and lobbying are needed to convince the EU these are needed.

In addition, whilst not potentially as acute as in Kent, we are also concerned that ferry travel on other routes could also face disruption on arrival into European ports, potentially impacting ferry sailing and therefore indirectly UK maritime operations.

All these issues have been known and understood for some time but the UK Government and Ministers have not necessarily prioritised the subject. It needs to do so urgently, now. As mentioned technological solutions such as apps and remote submissions could help overcome operational challenges and as the UK is also in the process of rolling out its own Electronic Travel Authorisation for inbound visitors it should be looking at solutions now, It is therefore essential the UK and EU work together to ensure systems are consistent, understood and user-friendly and this will also help the Government achieve its aspiration of a 'World Class Border'.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and as mentioned we urge the Committee to listen seriously to the concerns made by our members such as the Port of Dover, other port operators and carriers as well as pressing the UK Government to make this a priority issue. These organisations will be at the forefront of dealing with the new changes, potentially this autumn and need support.

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