

I thank the Chairman and members of the Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport for inviting me here today. I will start, as requested, by introducing myself and setting out my background as it relates to the role of Chairman of Drogheda Port Company.

I live within the hinterland of the port in County Meath, although a product of Dublin 12 and an alumnus of Drimnagh Castle CBS.

My first permanent job was in Dublin Port and Docks Board in 1980 and I have been in or associated with the port industry ever since. I spent 30 years in what is now Dublin Port Company in a variety of roles including as Head of Internal Audit and later as Finance Manager.

One of the more interesting projects I had the good fortune to be involved with was an Irish Aid funded training project in partnership with other Irish ports and with the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

I left Dublin Port Company in 2010 and took up a scholarship in a doctoral programme in the School of Law and Government in Dublin City University. My research interests were in the field of comparative political economy and my case work focussed on policy making across international container ports.

I completed my PhD in 2014 and continued to work with UNCTAD as an instructor on their port manager training programme and as a consultant in their port performance benchmarking project across their member ports. This opportunity to engage with port managers across many cultural, historical, political and economic contexts gave me a basis to critically examine how we in Ireland approach the port sector as managers and policy makers.

This comparative information remains a key resource for me in facing into the challenges for Drogheda Port and Harbour in the coming years.

I would like to take the remainder of my time to set out my thoughts on the role of Chairman in Drogheda Port Company.

My experience with Drogheda Port Company since 2013 is a very positive one.

The economic downturn of 2008 had a significant impact on the port finances and I would like to give credit here to the staff and management of the Company who took radical measures to survive as a commercial entity. The fruits of those actions have matured and the business is now trading at prudent profit levels consistent with continuous investment in port infrastructure.

Comparing the financial performance with similar ports internationally it stands quite well. While the operating margin is on an upward trend on a turnover of €3.8m it is still below the average for its peers and this reflects the recovery position of the business.

The question of economic sustainability is critical to regional ports. The commercial port is at an environmentally important location 7kms west of the river Boyne entrance. This is a port with an annual volume of more than 1.2m tonnes trading within the Drogheda Harbour. To do so in a manner that is sensitive to the environment, and the community we work in, requires imagination and consultation.

The port itself supports around 1,000 jobs and is home to several industries that rely on the port for raw material imports and for their exports. Therefore, balanced and considered planning are required in how the commercial port evolves.

My personal goal here is to engage actively in the consultative process we will launch shortly to develop a sustainable Master Plan. This plan will set out the long-term vision for the development of the commercial port within Drogheda Harbour, including its relationship with the town.

I sincerely hope that this two way communication will stand to all of us associated with the region in the years ahead.

One of the early priorities during my time on the board has been on the transition from State ownership to Local Authority ownership, and I participated in that process as Chairman of an ad-hoc committee. The Company has engaged with the Department and the Council management to undertake the due diligence required of an effective share transfer. We have finished our work and await the completion of the necessary transfer documentation. We will continue to work constructively with the current and future shareholders to bring this matter to an early conclusion. This matter is not in our hands presently as there are other ports in our category that are also working through the Ports' policy impacts.

Good Governance is a topic that I have worked on with colleagues in many international settings. My goal here is to support the continued efforts by the Board and management to function in a manner appropriate to a state-owned enterprise, no matter the level of the state owning institution.

I am honoured to sit here in this setting as Chairman designate of Drogheda Port Company. I will do my utmost to meet the obligations of the role and to make the best of the experiences I have of the industry internationally.

I thank you for your time and I hope my comments have helped the Committee. I am of course more than willing to answer any questions you may have.