

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

## AN COMHCHOISTE UM IOMPAR, TURASÓIREACHT AGUS SPÓRT

### JOINT COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT, TOURISM AND SPORT

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*Dé Céadaoin, 29 Bealtaine 2019*

*Wednesday, 29 May 2019*

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Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 1.30 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 1.30 p.m.

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Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Imelda Munster,	Mark Daly,
Catherine Murphy,	John O'Mahony,
Kevin O'Keeffe,	Pádraig Ó Céidigh.
Robert Troy.	

Teachta / Deputy Fergus O'Dowd sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

## **Business of Joint Committee**

**Chairman:** I remind members to turn off their mobile phones completely as they interfere with the recording equipment. Are there matters that members wish to discuss in private session? I wish to raise one matter. I propose we go into private session. Is that agreed? Agreed.

*The joint committee went into private session at 1.39 p.m. and resumed in public session at 1.59 p.m.*

**Chairman:** I wish to turn to some housekeeping matters. The minutes of the meeting of 15 May have been circulated. As there are no matters arising, are they agreed? Agreed.

We will now deal with correspondence. No. 2019/465 is from Deputy Munster.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** I wish to confirm that we have agreed to include Irish athletes in the work programme. An invitation had been sent out and there seems to have been some confusion subsequently. I want to confirm that they will appear before the committee and agree a date.

**Chairman:** Is the Deputy proposing that?

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** I propose that.

**Chairman:** That is agreed unanimously.

No. 2019/466a is an email from Jennifer Cullen, Minister's office, Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, attaching No. 2019/466b, a briefing document on State funding to the FAI. It is proposed to note the correspondence. Is that agreed? Agreed.

No. 2019/467 is an email from Chris Smith, Minister's office, Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, declining the invitation for the Minister to appear before the committee on 29 May 2019 to report on accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities and indicating that he would not be available to update the committee until the end of June at the earliest.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I am concerned regarding the Minister's correspondence. The committee did excellent work compiling a report on what needs to be done to make the public transport system more accessible to people with disabilities and mobility issues. The Minister gave a clear commitment when he came to the launch of that report that in order to ensure the recommendations were implemented in an efficient and timely manner that we would set in stone dates for when he would appear before the committee and answer questions on the implementation of the recommendations. He agreed to that and now the only reason he is not accepting the invitation to be here today is because there is no progress and he has nothing to update us on. He is seeking an extra month in order to buy himself time. Great credit is due to all the committee members who played a full part in producing that report and also all the stakeholders who took time out and the advocates for people with disabilities who appeared before the committee and participated in this process. It is very wrong for the Minister not to have accepted the invitation to appear today. We should write back to him outlining my concern over his non-appearance today.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** I agree with Deputy Troy that we should write to the Minister. After all the work that had been put in reaching out to and liaising with the various groups, we

published a very detailed report. When we expressed the importance of continuous follow-up, the Minister gave a commitment to examine the progress made. It sends the wrong signal when the Minister does not prioritise giving this committee a progress update on accessibility in our public transport system for persons with disabilities. The committee needs to make clear to him that it is the wrong signal. Given the commitment he gave, we should ask him if possible to rearrange his diary and give this matter priority.

**Chairman:** The bush telegraph must be working because I have been informed by the clerk that the Minister has just emailed to say he is available to attend here on 26 June. We have dealt with that issue.

No. 2019/468a is an email from Colm McGinty, Sport Ireland, dated 29 April 2019, attaching two additional information documents requested by the committee: No. 2019/468b FAI governance review group approved terms of reference; and No. 2019/468c additional information as requested by committee. This was circulated to members for the meeting on 15 May and is being recirculated as some people may not have received it. Is that agreed? Agreed.

No. 2019/469 is an email received Josie Briody, clerk to the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine, forwarding an email received from Shane Corr on procurement of Coast Guard services. It is proposed to note the correspondence. Is that agreed? Agreed.

No. 2019/470 is an email from Senator Ó Céidigh, dated 16 May 2019, suggesting that the joint committee invite both the FAI and Sport Ireland on separate dates to attend the joint committee before the summer recess. Senator Ó Céidigh has left the room. I stated that I was in contact with Sport Ireland just before the meeting. I asked for an update on its forensic audit proposals. It has been circulated. We just got it today. Every member will have it. I appreciate that people may not yet have had the time to read it properly because it runs to three or four pages. In the absence of Senator Ó Céidigh what proposals do we have?

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** There are concerns. We should try to prioritise and agree a date for representatives of Sport Ireland and the FAI to appear before the committee.

**Chairman:** They need to update us as soon as possible. The Minister is also holding a conference on the issue in the Mansion House on Friday. We do not seem to have received any invitation to attend.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** We received individual invitations.

**Chairman:** Fair enough. That is good. If members wish to attend, they should.

No. 2019/471a is an email from Shane Conneely, Chambers Ireland, attaching No. 2019/471b the Chambers Ireland local government manifesto. It is proposed to note the correspondence. Is that agreed? Agreed.

### **All-Ireland Cruise Ship Action Group: Discussion**

**Chairman:** I again remind Members, witnesses and those in the Public Gallery to turn off their mobile phones completely as they interfere with the recording equipment.

We are joined by Mr. Lorcan O’Connor, managing director of Carroll’s Ireland; Mr. Richard Guiney, chief executive of Dublin Town; Ms Niamh McCarthy, managing director of Excur-

sions Ireland; and Mr. Bryan Rankin, head of public affairs, Retail Excellence Ireland. They are all very welcome.

Before we commence, and in accordance with procedure I am required to read the following notice. By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the evidence you are to give to the committee. However, if you are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence in relation to a particular matter and you continue to do so, you are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of your evidence. You are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and you are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, you should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. Members are reminded of the long standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against either a person outside the Houses, or an official, either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I now invite Mr. Lorcan O'Connor to make his opening statement.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** I thank the committee for inviting the All-Ireland Cruise Ship Action Group here to discuss the very serious concerns we have about the Dublin Port Company's severe restrictions on cruise ships entering the port from 2021. The All-Ireland Cruise Ship Action Group was formed by a group of businesses in Dublin, Cork and Waterford which will be severely impacted by the Dublin Port Company's decision to severely reduce the numbers of cruise ships entering Dublin Port from 2021. Our members include Ireland's leading and iconic retailers, tourist attractions, transport operators, hotels, restaurants and other businesses impacted by Dublin Port's decision. A number of trade associations, including Dublin Town, Retail Excellence Ireland and the Restaurants Association of Ireland are also members of the All-Ireland Cruise Ship Action Group.

My name is Lorcan O'Connor, managing director of Carroll's, and I am joined by other members of our group: Richard Guiney, chief executive of Dublin Town representing 2,500 businesses in Dublin city centre; Niamh McCarthy, managing director of Excursions Ireland, which is on the front line of the cruise industry at Dublin Port; and Bryan Rankin from Retail Excellence Ireland. I will begin by providing a broad background to the issue and I will then pass over to my colleagues, who will go into more depth about how Dublin Port Company's decision will impact on business and tourism, not just in Dublin city but also in Belfast, Cobh, Waterford and the wider tourism industry in Ireland.

For the past 15 years, Dublin Port Company, along with many stakeholders, State bodies, trade associations and the wider tourism sector have been actively promoting Dublin as an international cruise ship destination. Thanks to this hard work and dedication by many people over the past 15 years, the promotion of Dublin and Ireland as a cruise destination has been an outstanding success. Countless individuals have devoted themselves to this cause in the hope of building the cruise industry in Ireland and Dublin Port Company has been central to this. In 2019, 175 cruise ships will pass through Dublin Port, bringing almost 500,000 tourists into Dublin city, generating more than €50 million for the local economy. Next year, even more cruise ships will visit Dublin, with even more cruise passengers. However, in 2021, the hard work and the stunning growth of the past 15 years will be wiped out by the actions of the port company

Earlier this year, the port company announced, without prior warning, that from 2021 it will

restrict the number of cruise ships entering Dublin Port to 80. Most of these 80 cruise ships will be small vessels carrying between 250 and 400 passengers. Only 35 will be the large cruise ships we have become accustomed to seeing in the port. Dublin Port Company announced its decision effectively to destroy the cruise industry without prior warning, consultation or engagement with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, this committee, local businesses, Dublin City Council or the other Irish ports, namely Belfast, Waterford and Cobh, which will be severely impacted by this decision.

The cruise companies market Ireland as a destination, and in addition to Dublin the cruise ships stop at Belfast, Waterford and Cobh. Without access to Dublin Port, cruise companies will no longer stop in other Irish ports and will take their business to other European destinations. Dublin Port Company completely failed to communicate its decision or the flawed rationale behind it to any of the local, national or international stakeholders involved. Furthermore, the company immediately disbanded Cruise Dublin and withdrew from a number of cruise trade associations, namely, Cruise Ireland, Seatrade Cruise Global and Cruise Europe. This will have a dramatic impact on its chances of persuading cruise companies to return to Ireland in the future. The reaction of the international cruise industry community to this has been total shock, and many have commented on how badly Ireland's reputation has been damaged. This will have a dramatic knock-on effect for years to come. Many cruise companies have said they will never return to Ireland. Furthermore, Dublin Port's decision sends out a signal to the tourism industry across the world that tourists are not welcome in Ireland. I thank the committee for allowing us to come before it to make this presentation.

**Chairman:** Before I open it to questions from committee members would any of the other witnesses like to make additional comments?

**Mr. Richard Guiney:** Mr. O'Connor has given a very good outline of the situation. The most significant aspect for us with regard to Dublin town is the engagement by cruise tourists with the independent retail sector in the city centre. We have a visitor assistance team that visits each of the ships that comes in so we have a good handle on what people do when they arrive here. Approximately half go on pre-organised excursions throughout the country and Ms McCarthy will be able to provide more detail on this. The other half spends its time in Dublin city centre. The tourists take the hop-on hop-off tours. They spend quite liberally and very much engage with independent retailers. They have a strong interest in buying Irish designed products. They buy a lot of crafts, art, jewellery and Irish manufactured fashion. Their spend is significant and certainly the feedback we have received is that this type of tourist turning up and spending kept many businesses in business during the dark days of recession. Their spend of several thousand euro was the make or break for quite a number of businesses and for the sources of their products. From our perspective, the spend is significant and we believe that at a time retail is challenged by online competition, losing it could lead to closures in the independent sector.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** As Mr. O'Connor mentioned, we are at the forefront. We are the people who deal with the cruise lines directly. I have been in the business for 25 years and I have seen it grow. I did the very first call in Belfast in 1996 when there was one and this year we have 150 calls. It is the same in all of the other ports. I have taken great pride in being part of growing the business and creating jobs, as Mr. Guiney has said, and building a strong economy through the cruise industry.

I find the way it was handled and communicated to us and our clients disappointing. We heard it second hand as did our clients. Our clients have invested a lot of time and money in

this country. They have favoured Ireland over other regions. We must remember that cruising is a movable asset. The ships can go where they want. Ireland is popular and all of the cruises to here are sold out. While the companies want to sell all of Ireland, Dublin is the number one attraction. If Dublin is not on an itinerary the ships will not call to the other ports. It is like going to France and not visiting Paris or going to the UK and not visiting London. Dublin is the seller. It is the marquee port.

From our point of view, as Mr. Guiney touched on, during the recession this was the one part of the tourism industry that continued to grow. It still is the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry in the world. We only have to look at the order books. More than 100 ships are on order until 2026. Cruising is huge for Ireland. The guests love Ireland. This land of the céad míle fáilte is closing the door at a time there is uncertainty with Brexit. I do not mean to bring up Brexit but, let us be honest, who knows where we will be after it. Dublin Port feels it is in a position to stay “No” to a sure thing and, from our point of view, this is not acceptable. We need to try to find a way for cargo and tourism to live alongside each other and flourish and grow. We are an island and we have ports north, south, east and west. Cargo can go anywhere but guests want to see our capital city. They want to spend. They want to go to the Guinness Storehouse and the stores. They want to go to Carroll’s and Brown Thomas. They want to see Trinity. It does not matter where cargo comes in. We need to find a way for all of our industries to flourish and grow together.

**Mr. Bryan Rankin:** I represent Retail Excellent Ireland, which means I represent 2,000 retailers throughout the country. It is important to talk about the unseen hand and the unseen damage this unilateral move by Dublin Port, without consultation, will have, should it go through, in every town on the tourism trail, which are in every county in Ireland. My colleagues agree this has been a fast growing business and trade. It has grown quickly since 2012 and employment has grown with it. Tens of thousands of our employees are sustained by the cruise ship industry. This move will do away with them.

Ms McCarthy will outline the details later but the importance of this is that the cruise industry depends on certainty and being able to book some years in advance. What this move has done is remove this certainty. It means the cruise industry is unable to plan ahead and, therefore, must look at alternatives. The damage it is doing to the Irish tourism brand is scary and, if we are not careful, irreparable.

It is useful to look at the arguments Dublin Port has put forward in support of the decision. When pushed, it talks about the importance of freight to the port to the exclusion of everything else. Retailers, better than anybody else, appreciate the importance of freight but it is simply untenable to do away with cruise ships coming in to Dublin. The two must coalesce, as they do in every major port and city in Europe.

Another motivation put forward was Brexit. When this was first mooted and put forward we were right in the crosshairs of Brexit. Now, frankly, 31 October is a date that is coming at us but no one knows what it will entail. We are seeing some concrete and damaging moves being made by Dublin Port without the consultation required. This is a national strategic utility and there must be the consultation required.

In media commentary on this issue Dublin Port was big on describing the importance of Brexit and how the port needed to prepare for it, rightly so. Port representatives talked about some of the huge vessels that were being brought in, so-called Brexit busters. What was not talked about was the damage being done to our vital tourism industry. In the course of the

“Morning Ireland” interview I recall hearing that they admitted that the use of space in Dublin Port was perhaps less than optimal. They were frank about it. I suggest the use of space be looked at carefully and that every unit of space be looked at for freight before such a drastic decision is made.

There is a certain type or profile of tourist cruise ships bring here as opposed to those who come on a flight. Needless to say, they are high net worth individuals with dollars and euro to spend. For members of my group, this is exactly the type or profile of visitor and tourist we need to bring to the country. Instead, it seems we are making a decision that is diametrically opposed to it. This is the time to act and we look to the Houses to assist in that regard.

**Chairman:** We said at a previous committee meeting that we would visit Dublin Port. I have seen the issues and will address them, but the members who are speaking will be putting the points made to Dublin Port. Has the All-Ireland Cruise Ship Action Group met port representatives? Have they shown it the issues as they see them?

**Mr. Bryan Rankin:** The short answer is yes. We met them as this issue emerged. We had a one and a half hour discussion to tease it out. It is clear-----

**Chairman:** The group visited the port and saw the new facilities, including those for customs, agriculture and so on. Is that correct?

**Mr. Bryan Rankin:** We visited the offices. My colleagues were given a tour.

**Chairman:** That is fair enough.

**Senator John O’Mahony:** I thank the All-Ireland Cruise Ship Action Group for its presentation. I do not have the in-depth knowledge given of the group’s representatives, but I did hear the news that the port was to restrict cruise traffic. On the face of it, something does not add up. That was my initial impression when I heard the news through the media. The group’s representatives mentioned Brexit and the increased cargo. It is a great problem to have overall. It seems Dublin Port can cherry-pick whatever business it wants to have. That is what seems to be happening.

The important question is where we go from here. I know that it has been mentioned, but when the recession hit, tourism was the saviour of the economy. When I was Chairman of this committee, several groups appeared before it to provide welcome news. They talked about trying at every level to increase cruise traffic into Ireland. The group seems to be suggesting it has become a matter of cargo versus cruise traffic and that cargo has won out. From a Dublin Port perspective, is it more profitable?

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Yes.

**Senator John O’Mahony:** That is a major factor.

**Mr. Lorcan O’Connor:** It is more profitable to Dublin Port but not to the economy.

**Senator John O’Mahony:** Yes; that is the point.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Yes.

**Mr. Lorcan O’Connor:** Port representatives use the argument that the port makes more money out of tonnage. The point is that what a ship weighs and its cargo are worth a great deal

of money to the port. However, port representatives have admitted in their briefing documents to the Minister that they appreciate our sector is more profitable for the wider economy. Before Dublin Port officials closed their social media channels, they were trumpeting how much came through and how good it was for the local economy in Dublin. As part of this process they closed their social media channels because we were retweeting the positive stuff they had put up about it and they did not particularly like it. They had told everyone that they had grown the sector, that they were marvellous, that it was worth €50 million to Dublin and that it would be worth far more. They then had to take down those messages because the view had changed.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** Since the announcement, what engagements have taken place? Was there just one meeting?

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** We have not actually met the chief executive officer, Eamonn O'Reilly. We have written to him and requested a meeting with him. We have also written to the Minister and requested a meeting with him, but we have not had a meeting with him yet either. We did have a meeting with the Lord Mayor who said he would facilitate a meeting with port representatives - he is admiral of the port - but it never materialised.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** The group is stating there was no consultation in advance and that there is no explanation. Is that correct?

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** It came as a complete shock to us. Ms McCarthy and I would have attended different events and award ceremonies where the port won an award.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Dublin Port was named port of the year at the searade cruise awards in September last year.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** What connection is there with the cruise industry? How many ships come to Dublin and then travel on to Belfast?

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Probably up to 80% will visit all ports. I am one of the founder members of Cruise Ireland. We say there is always a port before and a port after. Dublin is the marquee port.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** What are the other ports?

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** The other main ports are Cobh and Belfast. There are also the ports in Waterford, Foynes, Killibegs and Galway. There was a ship in Sneem the other day. There is Bantry, too. There are outlying ports, but they are the three main ports.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** Are all of the ports in unison with the action group's view on what is happening?

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Yes. None of the ports was consulted in advance. Obviously, this decision will also affect their business, but none of them was asked. Cruise Ireland members jointly and collectively advertise Ireland as a cruise destination, but none of them was told in advance. None of us was consulted. As business people, we all appreciate that the port makes more money from cargo. However, I have worked on cruise ships throughout the world and it is the same in every port, but they still manage to increase both alongside each other. That is the issue. Why does Dublin Port not recognise this? Last year it was still selling Dublin as the premier destination. If that was the case, from where is all of this coming? Why has it stopped suddenly? Brexit has been many years in the making. Port officials have known about it.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** What is the average spend?

**Mr. Richard Guiney:** The figures vary significantly. Port figures show a sum of approximately €250 per head each day. However, we are aware of significant spending, running to tens of thousands of euro, by some cruise passengers, especially from some ships such as *MS The World*. In such cases we are dealing with extremely high-end or high-worth individuals. They will go to the likes of Powerscourt Townhouse Centre and South William Street where they may spend several thousand euro. We are looking at an average sum of €250 or €300 per head, but some will spend a great deal more.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** I am rushing because I am conscious of the time. Do I have another minute or two?

**Chairman:** The Deputy does, but other members will be getting restless.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** Is the turnaround time two or three days?

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** They are here for one day and that is the point we really need to highlight. Ireland has become what is called a turnaround port or home port. Cruises now start and end in Dublin. That is a different kettle of fish because people fly in.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** How many people are involved?

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** I looked after the turnaround arrangements for a Celebrity cruise ship the other day. A total of 3,260 passengers were on board, all of whom had flown in through Dublin Airport and stayed in hotels in Dublin or elsewhere in Ireland prior to embarking. They joined the ship and another 3,200 disembarked and did the same. There are five this year. There will be ten next year and we are planning to have 20 in the following year. That is with one company only. There are other corporations seeking to use Dublin as a home port. It is major money because the airport is also making money, with hotels and everything else.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** I have one final question and thank the Chairman for his indulgence. Is there a solution to meet the port's ambitions? Is a compromise possible? Is it a case of one side or the other winning the day? Is there any middle ground?

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** We would like to think that Ireland could win rather than-----

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Yes.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** I agree.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** It is first a question of engaging with the stakeholders, be they cruise ships or the business groups in the country. The problem is that we keep getting conflicting documents. The port put out a document in March stating that it would not take any turnarounds from 2021 on. It is probably the most lucrative business, but it will be gone. When briefing the Minister a couple of weeks later, however, the port pointed out how valuable the turnaround business is. It is telling people that it will not take such business on the one hand and, on the other, it is briefing the Minister and saying that the business is valuable. This is all vague. The port claims that there will be 80 ships, but when one looks into that number, some of them will only have 100 or 150 people and will put in at berths on Sir John Rogerson's Quay. Those are small ships. Where larger ships are concerned, the port is stating that it will have a capacity of approximately 36. The problem is that it will only accept those ships on three days. When companies seek to book, they are told that they can only pick two of those three days just

in case the port, which is looking at this a couple of years out, needs the third for freight. Since Dublin Port is tidal, there are restrictions on when ships can come in.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Which has a knock-on effect because ships would have to skip other ports.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** We would like honest answers.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I welcome our guests. I am surprised and disappointed to hear that they have not had a meeting with the Minister. On the floor of the Dáil, he gave a clear commitment to meet them. I followed that commitment up with correspondence to his office, which confirmed that he would meet them.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** He met the Cruise Ireland members and the ports, but has not met with the group collectively. He met all of the ports, including Belfast and Cobh, and Fáilte Ireland. The issue is that he has not met the members of the All-Ireland Cruise Ship Action Group collectively.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** Who does the group represent?

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** If one takes Retail Excellence Ireland with an all-Ireland-----

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I know Mr. Guiney and Retail Excellence Ireland, but who does the overarching group represent?

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** We represent everybody involved in cruises, for example, all of the coach companies that provide transportation and all of the guiding organisations that provide guide services on the day.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** All of the cruise operators.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Yes, and all of the visitor attractions. Cruise is the number one income for St. Patrick's Cathedral, for example. Cruises give it the most business. We represent all of these interests.

**Mr. Richard Guiney:** We are representing the people whose livelihoods depend on cruise.

**Mr. Bryan Rankin:** On the national issue, it is important to state that we represent people right across the country.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Yes.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I am just trying to put on record exactly who the group represents. All of the operators of the 150 cruise ships that arrive each year are signed up to the group, as are various tourist attractions, Retail Excellence Ireland, etc. Our committee should follow up on this meeting and make a request of the Minister to fulfil the promise he made on the floor of the Dáil, and subsequently to me, to meet this group.

**Chairman:** On that point, has the group requested separately to meet the Minister?

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** Yes.

**Chairman:** While he has met other groups, he has not met this one.

**Mr. Bryan Rankin:** I contacted his office just before Easter, when the response was that the

office just needed to wait until Easter was out of the way. It is now almost June.

**Chairman:** It is implicit that he will meet the group.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** He must take longer Easter holidays than the rest of us.

**Chairman:** Maybe he is eating his Easter egg.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** We received a briefing document from the Department. In the context of the independence of Dublin Port, it is clear regarding how the port makes decisions on its operations. According to the briefing, although the Department's officials continue to monitor developments at the port in respect of its cruise ship business and capacity, these are operational matters and commercial decisions for the board and management of the Dublin Port Company, which is an independent commercial operation in respect of which the Minister has no day-to-day role.

**Mr. Bryan Rankin:** I might respond on that point. In making our submission on this issue, I consulted Dublin Port's annual report. It is clear from the back of the report that the Minister is on the board and is in a position of influence over matters of such national importance. It is for that reason that we want to meet him and ask him to intercede. It is frustrating for my members to see a response like the one the Deputy cited. It is like the Department is washing its hands of the issue.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** The port is a piece of major infrastructure for the whole of Ireland. From what we have seen, there is plenty of freight capacity at the other ports. To some degree, however, Dublin Port feels that it can suck in all of that more profitable freight business. It is setting up a cost-benefit analysis on a cruise terminal that will cost €100 million. It states that it makes €2 million per year on a season that is relatively short, lasting only a couple of months. The cost-benefit analysis is set up to fail. It is never going to show that Dublin Port Company should build a port terminal. Dublin Port has sought central government funding for this infrastructure, but there is an idea that the report will be considered once it is published. We are being told that there will be cruise business for two years, it will decline for two years while the works are under way and it will then be grown again. If so, why then would the company leave Cruise Ireland, Cruise Europe and the other cruise groups and close its social media accounts? The company has stated that there will be no turnarounds after 2021. In the briefing document supplied, the Minister was vague. Terms such as "We might", "We will" and "We would like to" are used. Those are the kinds of answer we are getting. We would love to get Mr. Eamonn O'Reilly into a committee meeting like this so that people could ask him hard questions, including about his intentions. Everything is always "We might need" or-----

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I understand, but my concern is that, while an economic cost-benefit analysis has been commissioned, the port has taken a decision that precedes its publication.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Yes.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** What if that reports and, as Mr. O'Connor mentioned, does not show the positive-----

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** It is set up to fail.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** None of us needs it. We already know that the economic return for the port is minute. That is the same in every port around the world. Instead, this is a question

of the greater economy. As Mr. O'Connor stated, the port is a facilitator of bringing tourists to our country. If Dublin Airport decided that it would be cheaper or easier to bring in cargo planes than to look at every passport, would we just accept that? It is the same issue, only on a smaller, but growing, scale. How can one of our largest pieces of infrastructure make this decision, given that doing so will affect so many people country-wide? I do not understand how we can sit back and say that, because the port is a commercial company that makes money, we will let this go and hope that everything will be okay. It is not okay. If it happened at the airport, it would not be okay.

**Mr. Bryan Rankin:** Ms McCarthy is well placed to discuss the urgency of this issue. She is closely-----

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** I have been out to Miami and LA. I was called out urgently. They will make a decision on the turnarounds by August. If this decision is not overturned, they will relocate their ships to Amsterdam and the business will be gone. Every time a turnaround is planned, a company invests five years' worth of advertising and marketing. One can imagine the money that goes into that. These ships are full and 3,500 people fly in to join the cruises. That is a great deal of marketing in the US. If that business moves to Amsterdam, it is gone. Why would it come back once Dublin Port says that it has room for it? It will not come back. With those companies go all the other cruise lines. That is what happens - they are like sheep, so they will all go. We need answers now. Everyone says that this is still two years away, but it is not. The companies will make the decision now.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I accept that there is a long lead-in time.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Yes. They have to-----

**Deputy Robert Troy:** Regarding the reduction, the current number of cruises is 150 or so.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** It will be 172 this year.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** The proposal is to reduce that to 80.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Thirty-five large ones.

**Mr. Richard Guiney:** Yes. There is a-----

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I am conscious that I have to be concise because I have colleagues who wish to contribute. The witnesses are saying the loss to the economy is currently €50 million per annum. Have they quantified what the loss to the general economy will be per annum?

**Mr. Richard Guiney:** The numbers suggest it is probably between €30 million and €35 million. It concerns fewer than 30 ships with a capacity of 3,500. As Mr. O'Connor pointed out, the rest are carrying about 200, which is a long way short of 3,500. One is looking at bringing the figure down to one fifth or one sixth of the number. Therefore, the loss to Dublin alone is €35 million or maybe up to €40 million. If the boats do not come to Dublin, they will not be going to Cobh and Belfast.

This is one of the issues that has really given rise to concern among us. We are given numbers but as soon as the surface is scratched, it is found that the position is quite nebulous. The committee also needs to take into account that Ireland is suffering reputational damage. As Ms McCarthy stated, the large cruise liners made a decision to use Dublin as a home port and believed that if they could grow it in that context, it would become a major hub. When they made

that decision, they started spending a lot of their money marketing Ireland to tourists in America and elsewhere. Within a number of months, without consulting the companies, the decision was made by the port to cease the trade. The companies spent money in good faith marketing Ireland to very wealthy tourists and then found the decision had basically been reversed. We have had some contact with and anecdotal evidence from people who are active in the market, particularly the North American market, suggesting there is a lot of upset within the tourism industry there. Basically, the question being asked concerns what is going on not in Dublin or Dublin Port but in Ireland. Therefore, we need to consider reputational damage.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I am focusing on the briefing document we got because I want to give our guests an opportunity to answer some of the questions put to us. On the meeting between the Minister and Dublin Port Company on 20 March 2019, it appears that part of the suggested solution to what is proposed is additional capacity, working with the ports in Cork and Belfast with a view to their taking on some of the additional business. It is stated that the Department officials are maintaining contact with Belfast Harbour with a view to supporting efforts to retain cruise tourism on the island of Ireland and maximise any additional opportunities arising.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** They have. I am aware that they have because I am associated with Cruise Ireland. I know the Department has written to those concerned saying it will support them. Ultimately, we and the ports themselves are very aware of the fact that Dublin cannot be replaced. Tourists want to visit Dublin. Ultimately, that is the issue. With regard to turn business, Dublin has the international airport. Dublin was chosen because of the proximity of its airport to the port, pre-clearance at Dublin Airport and the significant airlift between North America and Dublin. While the work of the ports in Belfast and Cork is amazing, both are undergoing development, which is a little ironic considering they were not aware of Dublin's stance. The authorities are investing money in their ports but they may be or will be losing. If we believed they would take all the business, it would be great but, ultimately, the cruise guests want to see Dublin. It was said to me in March that if one cruise line can get one of the two days and another cannot, guests will pick the ship going to Dublin. As a result, a cruise line is losing out on this valuable revenue. Dublin is the top seller. All the cruise lines will state that.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I accept that. Is there capacity to use Dún Laoghaire?

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** There is actually a meeting there today with Princess Cruises.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** The problem is that the guests have to be brought in on tenders.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** We cannot use it.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I accept that but-----

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** It could never be a turnaround port.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** One is not going to put people on a tender, bobbing up and down, to bring them in. That would be like going back to the days of the *Titanic*.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** It will not solve the turnaround issue.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** Again, the turnaround is where the money is.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** They cannot bring in all the luggage.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** The witnesses' solution is to try to divert some of the freight away

from Dublin Port to the other ports.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Yes, to Greenore, Drogheda or Rosslare. We have had communication from Rosslare. I am not sure what I can do as a tour operator. The port officials contacted us seeking to find out how they could help with this issue. I told them to contact who they need to. Greenore and Drogheda ports have space whereas the cruise ships have to come to Dublin. They are only here for a day so it is really not an option for them to drive passengers from Rosslare to Dublin for a day tour. That is the issue. The other ports are willing to take the extra business but they are also very aware that this is a dark cloud hanging over their business.

**Mr. Bryan Rankin:** Potentially, there is a silver lining here for ports that might have been marginalised in the past. I happen to know Drogheda port a little better than the others. There are fantastic facilities there that could afford a solution for freight and really help the surroundings. Let us face the fact that the tourists want to come into the capital city. It is one of the real advantages we have in addition to sea and mountains. We are all set up for cruise ships. We just want the trade to continue. That is all we ask for.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** The freight business is not guaranteed. The briefing documents given to the Minister indicated this. We are going to turn away the tourism business and cruise business in case we need the facilities for freight. Guaranteed money is being turned away in case the capacity is needed. That is in the ports' own documents. It is not a case of having to have the space but of needing it just in case it is required. The three days became two days because it was believed the third day might be needed for freight.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** When the Coach Tourism & Transport Council of Ireland met the port officials, an operator asked very specifically why the third day could not be had at the start. The answer was that the third day needed to be kept on the off chance that there was freight. The port official was asked why, if the port were guaranteed a booking two years in advance by a cruise ship, the ship would be refused on the off chance that the space may be needed for freight in two years. The answer was that the port needs the space for freight. A definite issue needs to be addressed. Questions have to be asked about the management of the space in the ports. I am no expert but if we could visit that it would be very valuable. We should not have to choose between cargo and freight and tourism. In a few years, and if there is a recession, if the cargo ships are not coming in, the cruise ships will not be doing so either. They will be in Amsterdam — they are movable assets. We need to be very mindful that the current stance is very short-sighted and characteristic of tunnel vision.

**Chairman:** I am trying to understand a point Deputy Troy made about Dún Laoghaire. For centuries, the port has been used as a passenger port.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** The ships are too big. Their draughts are too large and this prevents them coming into the harbour.

**Chairman:** The boats that brought generations of people away from our coast-----

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** They are baby ships.

**Chairman:** They might be baby ships but they were at the port. Does Ms McCarthy envisage any solution for any of the ships, regardless of their size, in Dún Laoghaire?

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** There are some using the port. Apparently, there are 45 ships using it but they are much smaller. Also, they are susceptible to the weather. If there is strong wind

or bad weather, the call gets aborted. That is not good for the guests; they do not make it into Dublin.

**Chairman:** I just do not understand why Dún Laoghaire would not be an obvious place.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** It is an obvious place but the ships cannot dock. They have to anchor and then, as Mr. O'Connor said, the passengers have to take the little boats, the tenders, to the shore. It is a very slow process.

**Chairman:** Maybe it has changed since I went over.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** With 3,500 people on board, it takes a long time.

**Chairman:** Craft of different sizes are being introduced. Some of them would be suitable.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Absolutely. They are going in.

**Chairman:** That is quantified as-----

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** There are currently 45-----

**Chairman:** Is that 45 out of the 175?

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** No, it is in addition to the 175.

**Chairman:** I have visited Dublin Port and I realise the massive stress it is under in the context of Brexit. I was shown the new areas for-----

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Yes, terminal 7.

**Chairman:** I ask Ms McCarthy to allow me to finish my point. There are new areas for customs and excise and agriculture. In addition, the port now has a huge inland port near Dublin Airport. To say that no efforts are being made to remove activity from the port is not correct. Very significant efforts are being made. Representatives of the port explained to me that the dock is needed when cargo comes in because people and industries depend on those goods. They cannot tie up the berth for cruise ships forever. That is their problem. They would love to do so, but the economy is their priority. I hear what the witnesses are saying and I acknowledge the great importance of the cruise ship industry. There is a significant need for them to meet the key decision makers in the port to get clarity on all of these issues. If the committee can facilitate that, it should do so.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** Ms McCarthy stated that representatives of Cruise Ireland met the Minister, Deputy Ross. What was his stance on this issue? Ms McCarthy outlined that alternative ports such as Drogheda, Greenore and so on could be used. Did the Minister commit to examining those options? What liaison did he have on the issue? Although Dublin Port is State-owned, we seem to have very little input into it. I acknowledge it is an independent commercial business, but tourism and the need to build on tourism are also at stake here. Most of the witnesses learned of the decision second hand.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Yes.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** That does not seem right because it is a decision that will have significant implications in the next couple of years. Did the Minister give a commitment on the matter? Mr. O'Connor indicated that members of the action group have not met the CEO of

Dublin Port, although it requested such a meeting.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** The Minister met the CEO of Dublin Port, representatives of Belfast Harbour, the CEO of Tourism Ireland and the chairman of Cruise Ireland, who is also the commercial director of the Port of Cork. Some of these issues were discussed and the Minister promised to revert to those in attendance. As far as I am aware, that process is ongoing. I did not attend the meeting and am not aware of what occurred. That was the role of the chairman of Cruise Ireland in addition to his role at the Port of Cork. Apparently, they are still in discussions. I am unsure whether other ports have been contacted to see how they could help with freight. Obviously, we have connections in those ports and we have not heard of such inquiries being made. We need to stress the urgency of this matter. If we do not get it looked at now, it will be too late. I am in the port every day - I am known as the harbour queen - and I see the constraints and how busy it is. Nobody is denying that. We need cargo; we all avail of everything that is brought into the port. We understand that and nobody is questioning it. However, consideration should be given to how the cargo could be distributed to other ports such as Rosslare, Greenore and Drogheda rather than only Belfast and Cork. I acknowledge that Dublin Port is under significant constraints - I have seen the evidence of that, such as terminal 7 which will be used for Brexit inspections. Nobody has sat down with representatives of the other ports to see whether there is anything we can do.

*Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe took the Chair.*

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** That is the point I was making. If the other ports come back to say it would be totally impractical and would not be fit for purpose and so on, so be it, but the lack of engagement or investigation to ascertain the options is worrying. That should be the fore in this process in which the witnesses have not been included.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Exactly. We also want answers in respect of rejoining the tourism organisations. If the intention was for the port to come back stronger and provide more berths, why did it pull out of the advertising organisations? It should have been on the front line reassuring its clients that this is for the greater good, that investment is being made in the port and that a new terminal will be built. Why is the Dublin Port Company not telling its clients that? Something does not add up here.

**Mr. Lorcan O’Connor:** It comes back to potential business. Dublin Port is not guaranteed any freight business. The CEO of the port, Eamonn O’Reilly, is saying that it will not take the cruise business, but it is hoping to get certain freight business and is taking certain actions to prepare for that. I refer to a statement by Mr. O’Reilly on 11 April following discussion of the pressure on land at Dublin Port. He stated: “Our container terminals are operating at half of the target land utilisation we set for them in our Franchise Policy in 2014.” He continued: “One of the impacts of Brexit is that we have to achieve these targets sooner. The Dublin Port Dwell Time Initiative provides essential financial incentives to move cargo through the port more quickly.” Basically, people were able to store rusty containers at the port for a year without being charged. Five years ago, the port company set out a policy document stating that it needed to utilise its land better and would begin charging for container storage. It is only starting to do so now. This was identified as a problem five years ago in the context of a lack of space but the port still has not done anything about it and is only now starting to consider it. The temporary solution to a lack of space in the port, particularly for the turnarounds, is a marquee measuring several hundred thousand square feet which operates somewhat like an airport check-in area - people arrive, go through a security scanner, check in their baggage and get bused to the ship. In the case of turnarounds, that is paid for by the cruise companies. To address a possible lack

of usable land, people should be charged for the storage of empty rusty containers, which would free up a significant amount of land. That space could be used to house a marquee, which would keep the turnarounds going.

**Mr. Bryan Rankin:** Mr. O'Connor is correct. This is a business decision. It is a business strategy that has been outlined by Dublin Port, which has every right to so do, but the knock-on effect on a national basis is such that we cannot allow it to happen.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** Tourism is of paramount importance, particularly in light of Brexit and so on. Although I have never been on a cruise, more and more people are going on them. In the document furnished to the committee, Dublin Port argues that new berths would have to be constructed at the North Wall quay extension to cater for large numbers of cruise ships, such as more than 200. That would require co-financing and-or long-term financial guarantees from cruise lines. Has that been formally put to the witnesses in any shape or form? What are their thoughts on it?

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** It is referred to in the briefing document to the Minister but many of the details are left vague. Initially, we were told that the number of cruise ships would be cut back for two years and the port would then start building up the business again. However, the document indicates that the intention for 2024 to 2025 is to increase the business towards 150 ships. I do not know whether that will be done incrementally from 30 to 35 to 40 and so on. Increasing the number of ships towards 150 means nothing. There is no timescale for getting to 150 ships and there is no commitment to get back to current levels. We are now at 175 ships but the port company is talking about moving towards 150 ships. We do not know what that means. The development of a new terminal would depend on the Government committing money to the project as a piece of infrastructure for the country similar to Luas cross-city or metro north.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** Is Mr. O'Connor's overall fear that if the port persists down this road between 2021 and 2023, there is no guarantee that it will get back to the current volume of cruise ship business, let alone increase it?

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** It is difficult when one is talking to other people. Carroll's Ireland operates in Cork, Dublin and Belfast and, as such, we get three bites of the cherry. We get the ship at Cork, Dublin and Belfast, which is hugely beneficial. We talk to local people in Cork and Belfast and there is a feeling that because ships have always stopped at Cobh and Belfast, they will continue to do so. We will be as happy as anybody else if we could keep the same amount of business in Cork and Belfast. The reality, however, is that the cruise companies are saying that Dublin is where it is at. People have to fly into an international airport. If they fly from the United States into Dublin Airport, using the port tunnel they can be in the port and checking in to board the ship within 20 minutes. This is a huge selling point for cruise companies. People flying into London, for example, have a two-hour train or bus journey down to Southampton.

We need honest answers. If the company is saying it wants to actively grow the cruise business, why close down all the cruise social media and leave all of the cruise organisations? It is like when someone renovates a shop and does not want to annoy the store's customers. The owner will want to keep them on board and ensure they come back to the business. In this case, one would expect someone from Dublin Port to fly out to talk to the cruise companies face to face. My understanding, however, is that the cruise companies got an email stating the new position and informing them that their costs would be doubled for the next two years.

*Deputy O'Dowd resumed the Chair.*

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** Given the unanswered questions and the importance of this issue and everything that is at stake and in light of the fact that the Minister is on the board of the Dublin Port Company, I suggest that the committee write to the Minister requesting that he ask the CEO of Dublin Port to meet the action group, which is representative of all of the affected parties. I also suggest that the committee ask that the feasibility of possible alternatives be examined. If there are alternatives which would prevent the scenario described and address the concerns raised, these should be examined. I propose that the committee write to the Minister seeking clarity and answers and requesting that he examine all the alternatives. These may not be feasible or practical but they should be examined with the CEO of Dublin Port. There does not appear to be any engagement with this group.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I second that proposal.

**Chairman:** I also agree with the Deputy's suggestion.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** I have to leave for another meeting.

**Deputy Catherine Murphy:** All of our guests are very welcome. During the local elections, I was in the proud county of Cork which sees itself as the real capital. It is rare to hear people in Cork advocating for something in Dublin. That message was heard loud and clear on this issue, however, because people know what impact this decision will have on Cobh, Cork and south. That was very noticeable.

What I am hearing here is that a balance needs to be struck. A silo-type approach is being taken. We cannot afford to be in that frame of mind given the risks arising from Brexit. The Port of Dublin has taken Brexit very seriously and that must be acknowledged. We must also question why Rosslare was given such a low priority in the national development plan. Given the port's capacity, relieving some of the congestion in Dublin would seem to be logical. There is a bigger picture to be looked at in this. The Minister clearly has influence on Dublin Port. There is a difference between influence and power but this influence is important for the overall economy. Other matters also need to be considered. Given the role Cobh played historically, it would be an important story to see people wanting to come back to the town as opposed to seeing it as a port of emigration.

On the issue of Belfast and the North, given the concentration on the Border and Brexit, it is impossible not to see that other practical matters will be important in looking at the all-Ireland economy post Brexit. From that point of view, the Port of Belfast is an intangible positive which we must ensure we do not lose. Rather than considering this matter from a purely Dublin Port point of view, we must put other issues into the mix.

Dublin Port must also look at its business case. We should meet the Minister, Deputy Ross, to argue that this business case must be recognised and that some means must be found to be fair and balanced. We will not find a balance without looking at the business aspect of Dublin Port. Writing to a Minister whom we could bump into in a corridor seems like a circuitous way of getting to speak to him. We can speak to him individually to press home the point that is being made about the timing, urgency and importance of this issue.

Wider issues also need to be considered. I had an opportunity to speak to individuals involved in the coach industry. Certainty in respect of cruise traffic creates a different dynamic for that industry. This is important from the point of view of both the operators and those who

work in the coach sector, which is also a good area of employment.

We have heard the views of the witnesses loud and clear and we know what we have to do. It is important to understand that we must find a balance by recognising that Dublin Port has been proactive in looking at the challenges of Brexit while also acknowledging that, within those challenges, we cannot leave behind a sector of an extremely important industry. This is what we need to do.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** Returning to the original point, we said that Dublin Port grew this business from nothing. It recognised at that time of recession that there was not much freight and that cruise ships were an area of growth from which it could make money. It also had space to do so. We believe business and retail are at the top of the economic curve. Given that freight is determined by need in the economy, our worry is that when we hit the next recession and find that we do not need as much space for freight as we thought we would, we will at that stage have told the cruise companies they were not welcome and we no longer wanted them. If we ask them to remember us and say we would love to have their business back, the concern is that they will say they are sorry but they have moved on to somewhere else. In that scenario, it would take us years to get back to where we are now.

**Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe:** This is another example of what happens when Dublin sneezes, the rest of the country gets a cold. I welcome the opportunity for this informed discussion with the witnesses. When the news was breaking, I thought the problem was that there was only one access route to Cobh, namely, the Fota Road. It was a matter of concern for a former county council colleague, John Mulvihill. Now we see what the problem is and the impact it will have. I have been to Cobh when some of the big cruise liners came to Cork. It is remarkable, spreading good news to the hinterland and towns such as Blarney and Midleton. The coaches can canvas for the passengers to travel on and they venture out to the historic sites and the distilleries.

Most of my questions have been answered. I can safely say from what I have heard that Dublin Port reacted too late to the threat of Brexit. We saw the Government fast-track emergency legislation through the Dáil last March, on foot of the prospect of a no-deal Brexit. I understand the witnesses had not been forewarned about the expansion programme in Dublin Port. We can safely say that Brexit is being used as the issue. If there is a proper Brexit deal, we might keep the cruise ships performing. I think they can work hand in hand.

What is the health and safety record of the cruise liners coming into Dublin Port? Have there been major incidents with cargo ships? Must the cruise liners vacate their location to facilitate the roll-on-roll-off ferries to get the cargo from Dublin straight down to mainland Europe? Other Deputies have mentioned that Rosslare Europort should have been upgraded. I see that the Port of Cork is opening up access from Cork to Santander in Spain. My concern is that when Dublin is in trouble, we all suffer. I am sorry to see that happening. I had hoped that Cobh would get extra cruise liners when Dublin Port was not able to facilitate them.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** I would love Cobh to get extra cruise liners. I would love Belfast also to get cruise liners. We are trading in both locations and know the situation. The worry for us is that Cork and Belfast are very small tight knit cities, so when a cruise ship comes in with 3,500 people and they arrive into the middle of Cork, or Belfast it is significant, whereas the passengers arriving in Dublin are dispersed so it is not as obvious when a cruise ship arrives in port. It is substantial business in Dublin but I would definitely say that in Cork and Belfast businesses will close once this happens because it is such a game changer when a ship comes in. It is 3,500 people arriving on your doorstep and in the smaller cities it will have a much

greater impact.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** Let me say well done to Ms Niamh McCarthy from Excursions Ireland on what she has done, but she should get the DAA on board with her.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** I have written to it but I have not received a reply.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** I did not realise that she is filling the cruise liners on this island.

**Mr. Lorcan O’Connor:** We have had comments from other semi-State companies that they cannot be seen to go against the numbers. I cannot say which companies are very much on board the campaign and attended the first series of meetings. They went back and their chief executive officer told them that they cannot get involved in a conflict with another semi-State company. I would imagine the DAA would probably be in the same position in the sense that it has to be able to run its own business without criticism from another semi-State company.

**Mr. Bryan Rankin:** It does beg the question of where our tourist agencies are on this topic. They have been conspicuous by their silence.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** For the record I have written to the DAA three times, with no response.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** Chairman, I support the proposal that we write to the Minister.

**Chairman:** Of course.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** He is good at looking from the outside on other issues. He could get involved here, Chairman.

**Chairman:** That is agreed. I think everybody recognises the importance of the cruise ship business, the employment and its significance for the growing economy, while at the same time everybody realises that Dublin Port must primarily deal with exports and imports and the landbridge is hugely important to our economy. Having been there recently and looked at it in some detail, the actual difficulty for the port is that if Brexit is harder than any of us would like, and none wants it at all, it will mean delays to inward and outward movement of goods. They are talking about trying to restrict delays to a maximum of 30 seconds per vehicle. That might sound like nothing but it is a major problem. One could have significant congestion in the port and in the city.

I realise that one has to see the operation to believe it. I have been to Holyhead to look at how the port facilities are dealing with Brexit and to Dublin Port. Dublin Port is doing a fantastic job to protect our economy and that is absolutely crystal clear to me. I am sure it will be clear to members when we see that. Second, the additionality of extra space that Dublin Port requires, which the witnesses say they have seen, is very visible. There are acres upon acres of new facilities for vehicles to back up, if they have to and for inspection of cargoes and separately for agricultural commodities. As I said earlier, the port has an inland port up at the airport. They are all elements that are of major importance and must come first. We must find a way of meeting the needs of the witnesses as well. I think it is done by constructive engagement. I would not accept that Bord Fáilte would not or could not express its view. We live in a democracy. If it has a view, it should be expressed. There is no hidden agenda from anybody in getting at the facts. The facts are that cruise liners are a very important business and we must support it if we can find a way to do so, but there is a priority in Dublin Port. Dublin Port has

plans and is saying that it has and will be providing extra facilities for cruise ships from the year 2025, I think and will -----

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** Dublin Port is saying that potentially we could have a new terminal in 2026.

**Chairman:** I think it is our job to see whether that could be delivered earlier.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** That is subject to -----

**Chairman:** I have listened to the witnesses and respect what they say, but let me get my points across. I will be happy to debate them with the witnesses.

To say that Dublin Port is not concerned is not true. To say that it is not trying to find an alternative for the cruise liners is also not true, because it is. The question is whether we can make that work faster. Dublin Port is saying that it has to provide new facilities at North Wall and so on and it would require co-financing or long-term financial guarantees from cruise lines. That is an indicator of looking for business commitments from your colleagues to develop this facility.

I want to make the point that Dublin Port is doing a great deal of good and has been very productive to help the cruise liner business.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** On the last point the Chairman made, we set up our campaign before Mr. Eamonn O'Reilly met the Minister. We hit out fairly hard and he had this opportunity going into the meeting with the Minister to come up with a briefing document. This was not out before. The decision had been made. It is easy to put something down after the fact and say this is what we hope to do, and this is what we plan on doing, but this was not a strategy before he cancelled the cruise ships going forward.

**Chairman:** Sure.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** In regard to Fáilte Ireland, I have been working in Carrolls for 30 years and I go back to the days of Frank Magee, Dublin Tourism and Bord Fáilte. The bodies were primarily set up by hoteliers. They only count tourists who stay in hotels. A tourist who comes in and buys a cup of coffee or a gift from any of their members is not valued in the Fáilte Ireland or Dublin Tourism figures, which basically look at bed nights and so on. The turnaround business is where we could prove that these are people who will stay but if they are in Dublin for a day, they are only here for eight hours. They will not stay in a hotel or wherever but they will shop for a gift, buy a cup of coffee or whatever. I am part of the Dublin Town initiative, and I was part of the Dublin City Business Association before that, and we criticised the tourism authority for not taking that into account. We need to get out of the hotel bedroom mentality and look at tourists coming in for a day on cruise ships or on ferries from the UK. That is all part of the tourism offering. There is still the mentality within Fáilte Ireland that unless it is a hotel bed night, it is not a proper tourist but these people are contributing a huge amount to the economy.

**Chairman:** There is no doubt about that, and that is because of the good efforts of the witnesses. What the witnesses need is constructive engagement, by which I mean a plan to which everybody signs up. They need a timeline that suits them. If we can facilitate or put together, and they are the people who can do that, the guarantees from cruise liners and so on that they spoke about-----

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** If we got those guarantees-----

**Chairman:** If I can make this point, our role as an Oireachtas committee is to assist in that and tell Dublin Port, Bord Fáilte or whoever to get this issue sorted out. We will do everything we can to assist that.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** If I genuinely believed that Dublin Port wanted to stick to that plan and go for it, I would not be here. The problem is that there are conflicting documents coming from Dublin Port. They can be downloaded from the website; they are public documents. Dublin Port has come up with conflicting reports and it has given vague answers such as “We might”, “We hope to” or “We will try”. We are looking for a commitment. It would be one thing if Dublin Port is saying it will never go for cruise ships again. It is saying that it wants the cruise business but everything it is doing behind the scenes suggests it does not want the cruise business. It should be honest and tell the truth.

**Chairman:** The committee did not talk about the cruise ships when we met Dublin Port’s representatives; we were looking at the Brexit issue. However, they showed me the properties they had identified that are currently occupied by private entities, which were port-owned properties. They are ceasing their leases and putting out people who have other activities in the port. They just want 100% port-related activities run by them, because they need all that space. However, Mr. O’Connor’s point is right. We will do our best. Following this meeting I will make it my business to contact the port authority to get a meeting between the witnesses and it. We will then visit the port as soon as possible.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** Are we writing to the Minister also?

**Chairman:** Yes, of course, but it is a commercial company and it is in black and white that the Minister has no role in the day-to-day operation of the port. However, he may have a role in finding funding. That is the point.

**Mr. Bryan Rankin:** He has influence-----

**Chairman:** Of course he has.

**Mr. Bryan Rankin:** -----and this is such an important decision. That is why we have gone down the political route. We believe it is strategically important.

**Chairman:** In terms of comparing port to port, I was in a privileged position to look at two big ports - one in Britain and one here - and Dublin Port is miles ahead.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Yes. The Chairman mentioned Holyhead as the other port he-----

**Chairman:** That is where the-----

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** They are worlds apart. Holyhead probably has 20 cruise calls a year. With all due respect to Holyhead, everybody wants to go to Dublin.

**Chairman:** I was looking at the export-import issues.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** From the Brexit point of view.

**Chairman:** That is what we were looking at but the guys in Dublin are way ahead of the curve-----

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** They are-----

**Chairman:** -----and they are protecting our economy.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** -----and none of us are denying that.

**Chairman:** They have to help the witnesses more.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** We all accept that but for how many years have we known about Brexit?

**Chairman:** We do not know.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** To a degree, we have known that we would have to have this structure put in place. Everybody knows that, although not all the intricate details, yet it was only actioned this year. I would imagine that has been in the planning so why have the companies been told this when they have invested in their turnarounds here? That is our question. As I stated at the outset, I have been doing this for 25 years. It concerns my reputation as well. I have gone out there, through my own company funding, to promote Ireland when Fáilte Ireland was not a member. When it did not give me or any of my colleagues sitting beside me any funding, I went out and promoted Ireland. I did not do that single-handedly but, together with the ports and my colleagues, we have created this industry in Ireland. Fáilte Ireland has never given us funding. We have never been recognised because, as Mr. O'Connor said, we do not offer bed nights. I take it personally that somebody has that power to turn away an industry that we worked so hard to grow and that is growing across the world. Ports are crying out for these ships and they will be gone in a heartbeat because when we do not want them, Lisbon and Amsterdam will take them. That is my concern.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** We are not blind to the freight issue.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** No.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** We have 18 stores or whatever on the island. If we do not have stock there is no point bringing in a lot of people on cruise ships.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** To buy the stock.

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** We understand the importance of freight. This is not a freight versus cruise ship issue. We are saying we can have both. We probably need investment in other ports across the country that handle freight. Freight is coming into Dublin that is driven from Dublin to Cork, Waterford or wherever.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Animal feeds that-----

**Mr. Lorcan O'Connor:** We are saying we can have both. Freight is very important to the country and to Mr. Guiney's 2,500 members and Mr. Rankin's 2,000 members. Nobody is being naive and is thinking that we do not need to-----

**Mr. Richard Guiney:** We need to look at this in an all-island way because there is under-utilised capacity in some ports and over-utilised capacity in Dublin. Can we not just look at the entire country on an all-island basis?

**Chairman:** It has been a very productive two hours.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** We are trying to get a happy medium.

**Chairman:** I reiterate that the committee will write to Dublin Port asking its representatives to engage urgently with the witnesses. We will write to the Minister also. We will also communicate through our secretariat to ensure we make the arguments the witnesses want us to articulate.

**Mr. Lorcan O’Connor:** Thank you.

**Ms Niamh McCarthy:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

**Chairman:** I thank the witnesses.

The joint committee adjourned at 3.27 p.m. until 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 12 June 2019.