

## Submission to Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee, Welsh Parliament by Stena Line Ports.

### Holyhead Port.

Stena Line Ports has owned Holyhead Port for over 30 years. During this period the port has grown to meet the needs of UK and Republic of Ireland trade. There has been continuous investment by the ferry operators in newer, larger ferries and, likewise, by the port in the infrastructure required to service them.

The port currently handles 1.8 million passengers, 400 cars and 400,000 freight units annually.

Holyhead Port has two Roll on Roll off ferry berths: Terminal 3 (T3) and Terminal 5 (T5).



The two berths are constructed from a series of steel monopiles which are secured into sockets in the seabed. There is a total of 20 steel monopiles in the associated structure, broadly arranged in three parallel rows. The outer rows are the berth faces, fitted with large wooden faced panels, against which the ferries berth. Between the wooden faced panels and the monopiles are large rubber fender cones which are designed to absorb contact energy of the vessel.

The monopiles are capped with steel reinforced concrete platforms. On top of these piles are mooring stations and hooks which take and hold the vessels mooring ropes.

The central spine of monopiles allows pedestrian access, via walkways for mooring teams to handle the mooring ropes. Some of these central monopiles are also fitted with mooring hooks.

These berths are used by two ferry companies, Stena Line Ferries and Irish Ferries, which each operate two large RoPax vessels to Dublin. The ferries vary in size but are approximately 200m long. They can carry up to 3,000 metres of freight/cars and 1,000+ passengers. The ferry crossing is approximately 3 hr 15min, with each ferry performing two round trips a day, seven days a week. In addition, Irish Ferries operates a seasonal fast craft during the summer months.

T3 is predominantly used by Irish Ferries. T5 is predominantly used by Stena Line.

**Causes:** *the factors contributing to the severity of the damage.*

On 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> December 2024, there were two berthing incidents, which rendered Terminal 3 berth unusable. Storm Darragh was forecast; however, these incidents immediately preceded the peak of the storm when the red weather alert was in place.

The berthing incidents involved two different vessels contacting monopile D2.2 on successive calls, resulting in a collapse of the monopile immediately following contact by the second vessel. The first incident was while manoeuvring on arrival at T3, the second contact was as the vessel departed the berth.

No person was injured during the berthing incidents or the subsequent collapse of the monopile.

Immediately after the collapse of the monopile the port was closed by the Harbour Master due to Storm Darragh and to allow time to assess the damage to the T3 berth.

The berths had to be inspected, including the underwater and intertidal sections which required divers. Storm Darragh and the subsequent poor sea conditions delayed the start of the diving operation until 10<sup>th</sup> December. Thereafter, the dive surveys suffered numerous delays either because sea conditions made it unsafe to dive or poor visibility meant the inspections had to be repeated.

Due to the interconnecting nature of the piles, we were advised by engineering advisors that it was necessary to check the complete structure, in order to properly satisfy ourselves as to the condition of the berths.

Only when all these inspections were completed could a programme to safely reopen T5 berth be developed.

The incidents and damage caused are now subject to an ongoing insurance claim and potential recovery action. As such no further details can be provided at this time so as not to prejudice this process.

**Communication:** *the approach to communication during and after the storm, including communication with port users, communities and businesses affected by the closure as well as between Governments*

Stena Line Ports had ongoing direct dialogue throughout with both ferry operators. The ferry operators have direct relationships with their freight and passenger customers who use Holyhead Port.

The initial closure after the incident was communicated to the ferry companies as is routine for weather disruption. At that time, while it was evident that T3 was damaged, the nature of incidents, the damage and the extent that safety checks would be required prior to resuming service could not be fully evaluated. Stena Line Ports fully appreciated the magnitude of the situation and the potential effect it could have on port users and associated parties. However, safety for those directly involved in the terminal operations was paramount throughout.

As more information became available, updates were communicated to both ferry operators and directly to political stakeholders, and media statements were released. Care was taken to ensure that everyone received these updates at the same time. This allowed the ferry companies to take appropriate measures and to clearly communicate to their customers.

However, there were occasions when individuals made speculative statements to the media which was very unhelpful. Where Stena Line Ports were given the opportunity by the media, we were able to correct these.

Throughout this time, there was an open dialogue with Welsh Government. On 13<sup>th</sup> December Stena Line and Irish Ferries were invited and attended a meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> December, hosted by Minister Skates with Minister Ryan and Minister of State, James Lawless of the Irish Government.

On 17<sup>th</sup> December Stena Line Ports had gained enough of an understanding from the inspection, dives and the engineering analysis undertaken to give an update on the closure. Stena Line Ports reported that the port would remain closed until at least the 15<sup>th</sup> of January for ferry traffic. Stena Line Ports informed both ferry operators and held a meeting with political stakeholders to directly relay this information and answer questions from interested parties.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of December, the expected opening date of 16<sup>th</sup> December was confirmed and reaffirmed again a week prior to opening. Ferry operators, political stakeholders and media were informed directly at each stage by Stena Line Ports.

Holyhead Port reopened the T5 berth on 16<sup>th</sup> January. The reopening has allowed both ferry operators to run a full schedule, with the same number of sailings and capacity as was previously operated. There are now departures every 3 hours.

Work continues to reopen T3 as soon as possible once it is safe to do so.

**Remediation:** *the speed of response in assessing and repairing the damage, including the support provided by Government.*

With the type of structure and nature of the damage, it was deemed prudent by engineering advisors to undertake a full inspection of all the piles and linking structures.

Due to the size of the task and the challenging sea conditions, additional diving teams were brought in for a 24/7 operation. However, throughout the weeks that followed the diving operation was hampered by a combination of rough seas (typical December / January weather) and accompanying poor underwater visibility. As the underwater sections were dived, structural engineers evaluated the findings.

Only when all were satisfied as to the structural integrity of the remaining piles were we able to plan the reopening of T5 berth safely. It was frustrating that this took so long but safety was of utmost importance throughout. Despite everyone's best efforts, there was also unavoidable delays due to availability of personnel and resources being impacted by the festive period.

Welsh Government support was offered but none was needed, as Stena Line had all the internal capability and external specialists required.

Support was sought and given by HMRC and Border Force when the ferry operators wished to move vessels to other ports, such as Fishguard, to create new temporary routes to Dublin. This allowed new routes for GVMS and for Border Force officers to be deployed as and when required.

There were regular meetings with Welsh Government on matters in Holyhead Port and related issues such as displacement of freight, rail passengers etc to other ports.

**Impact:** the impact of the closure, as well as the extent and effectiveness of the steps being taken to mitigate the impact.

Holyhead Port was closed to ferry traffic for a total of 40 days.

Both ferry companies quickly sought to relocate their Holyhead vessels to other ports. Stena Line Ports were able to accommodate 2 extra services to Dublin from Fishguard, one by Stena Line for

freight & passenger services, and another for Irish Ferries, who did not previously operate from the port. Similarly, one Stena Line vessel relocated to Birkenhead operating a service to Dublin.

This was only achievable by the goodwill of Holyhead staff who relocated to both ports to provide much needed resources and by Fishguard staff's flexibility with work patterns.

Both Fishguard Port and Birkenhead terminal were operating at freight maximum capacity throughout this period.

The Fishguard and Birkenhead ferry services to Dublin were double the distance and therefore only able to perform 1 round trip per day.

Stena Line Ferries utilised spare capacity on its services between UK and Northern Ireland and Fishguard to Rosslare. In addition, a vessel was chartered by Stena Line to operate a temporary service between Heysham and Dublin.