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28<sup>th</sup> October 2022

**Re: Submission to the Preparation of the Port of Cork Masterplan 2050**

A Chara,

Further to your correspondence of 5<sup>th</sup> October 2022, please find attached a submission from the Southern Regional Assembly.

The SRA commend the public consultation initiative and welcome the opportunity to input to the framework for the Port's sustainable growth to 2050.

This submission sets out an introduction and seven recommendations under the following:

- 1) Port of Cork as a National and Regional Economic Driver for Growth
- 2) Deliver on Sectoral Policies for Ports under the National Marine Planning Framework
- 3) The Port as a Key Stakeholder for Future Designated Maritime Area Plans
- 4) Offshore Renewable Energy Potential
- 5) Eco and Smart Ports
- 6) Land Use Planning and Strengthened Regional Connectivity
- 7) Regional Ports and Harbour Strategy

**Introduction**

This submission supports the Port of Cork Development Company in the preparation of the Port of Cork Masterplan 2050. For this stage of the process, our submission is high level and reinforces the important role the Port, and its activities, plays in achieving the objectives of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region.

As an overall observation, the proposed elements of the Masterplan are well explained. The SRA support a holistic framework to be developed, which balances multiple uses, environmental protection and the sustainable growth of the Port. The SRA endorse the Port's commitment to continue working with local communities, to protect and strengthen natural habitats and the biodiversity of the marine environment and to protect and promote the heritage, recreation and tourism potential of the Cork Harbour area.

## 1) Port of Cork as a National and Regional Economic Driver for Growth

A strategic goal of the Masterplan 2050 should be to fulfil the potential of the Port of Cork as a driver of economic growth for the State and Region under the National Planning Framework (NPF) and RSES. The Port of Cork should seek actions on Regional infrastructure delivery that enables it to fulfil this role, as supported in the NPF National Policy Objective 40<sup>1</sup>. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030 identifies the Port of Cork as a strategic investment priority and in the absence of direct Exchequer funding, is supported by investment in regional connectivity (road and rail) to improve port access and in supporting EU funding paths.

The RSES sets out a 12-year strategic planning and economic development framework for future economic, spatial, and social development of Southern Region. The Region is targeted with an additional population of 380,000 by 2040 bringing the population of the region to almost two million with an additional 225,000 people in employment (880,000 in total). Growth in the Cork Metropolitan Area alone targets approximately 105,000 additional population and approximately 65,000 jobs to 2031<sup>2</sup>.

These growth rates will generate additional trade, supply chains, require renewable energy services, all linked to the Port's existing and future activities. The realisation of the Region's growth targets is therefore inextricably linked to the sustainable growth of our ports.

Regional Policy Objectives of the RSES give direct regional level support to the role of the Port in (RPO 142 Ports, RPO 144 Port Infrastructure and RPO 147 Economic Opportunities of Ports). In addition, the Cork Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) identifies the Port as a strategic employment location, with Objective 13 "Port of Cork" promoting its role as a Tier 1 International Port and driver for the metropolitan, regional and state economy.

The Masterplan should harness this national and regional mandate, setting confident goals and actions that fulfil this economic driver role for the State and Region.

- **Recommendation 1:** Set strategic goals and actions that deliver on the national and regional policy support for the role of the Port of Cork as a driver of economic growth for the local area, metropolitan area, region and State. Continue to collaborate with key stakeholders across the local, regional and national level to fulfil this potential.

## 2) Deliver on Sectoral Policies for Ports under the National Marine Planning Framework

The National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF)<sup>3</sup> sets strategic objectives for the sustainable development of the ports sector and to safeguard the operation of ports as key actors in the economic wellbeing of the State, and in turn our Region. The provision of adequate capacity to meet present and future demand and to adapt to the consequences of climate change are also objectives.

Ports, Harbours and Shipping Policies 1-10 provide for current port activity and future opportunities. The Masterplan 2050 can demonstrate how these strategic objectives and policies will be met.

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<sup>1</sup> National Policy Objective 40 states "ensure the strategic development requirements of Tier 1 and Tier 2 Ports are addressed as part of the RSES, metropolitan area and city/county development plans, to ensure the effective growth and sustainable development of the city regions, regions and rural areas".

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.southernassembly.ie/regional-planning/rses>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/60e57-national-marine-planning-framework/>

- **Recommendation 2:** Set strategic goals and actions that deliver on the objectives and Ports, Harbours and Shipping Policies of the National Marine Planning Framework to safeguard the operation of ports as key actors in the economic wellbeing of the State and Region.

### 3) The Port as a Key Stakeholder for Future Designated Maritime Area Plans

Under Part 2 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021, the new planning system for Marine Spatial Planning will make provision for forward planning in our maritime area, for sectoral activities and for certain sub regional marine areas (such as harbours) through the making of Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPS) by designated authorities. The Port of Cork will be a key stakeholder in these processes, as will the SRA and coastal Local Authorities.

RSES Objective 79 promotes integrated framework planning for harbours and estuaries including Cork Harbour. Cork MASP Objective 3 seeks a specific planning framework initiative to guide the sustainable future management of different uses in the Cork Harbour Area. It is also an objective of both the Cork City Council Development Plan (Objective 7.38 Cork Harbour Planning Framework) and Cork County Development Plan (Objective EX:8-1 Cork Harbour) to support forward planning initiatives in Cork Harbour. The new Marine Spatial Planning system will require such a framework initiative to follow the DMAP process.

The opportunities for the Port of Cork to engage with new DMAPs as a key stakeholder should be a key objective for the Port's path to 2050.

- **Recommendation 3:** Support a key role for the Port of Cork as a stakeholder in forward planning initiatives for the maritime area, specifically for future sectoral and location specific Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPS) under the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021, which are of strategic interest to the existing and future operations of the Port. A framework initiative for the Cork Harbour Area, which will follow a DMAP process for the maritime area, is supported by Regional, Cork City and Cork County Objectives, and is an opportunity for the Port to be reflected in the Masterplan.

### 4) Offshore Renewable Energy Potential

The SRA welcome the strong emphasis placed on developing the Port as a Renewable Energy Hub and developing capabilities to deliver Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE). In the context of the National Climate Action Plan (Actions 114-121), development of the new Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan II and ambitious targets to harness renewable energy from our marine resources (5GW by 2030), it is critical that Port assets in the Southern Region position themselves to be first movers for ORE sector.

National Policy has identified the South West coast as pivotal in the delivery of ORE post 2030, for floating turbines and green hydrogen generation especially. This is an opportunity that the Port of Cork has recognised and will prioritise. The RSES supports this position, under the objectives for the Port cited above and through RPOs in support of renewable energy generation<sup>4</sup>

The Masterplan should set actions to tackle the challenges in meeting our ORE targets to 2030 and beyond 2030 such as the lead in time to develop ORE infrastructure, enterprise and the skills ecosystem to operate in the sector inter alia.

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<sup>4</sup> RPO's 87 Low Carbon Future, RPOs 95-103 Renewable Electricity and Wind Energy, RPOs 219-224 Renewable Energy Transmission Networks

The Masterplan should in addition address the recommendations and funding options for the Ports to harness opportunities of the ORE sector as identified in the Department of Transport's Policy Statement on the facilitation of Offshore Renewable Energy by Commercial Ports in Ireland (December 2021)<sup>5</sup>.

- **Recommendation 4:** Position the Port of Cork to have a leading role in the Offshore Renewable Energy Sector (ORE). The Masterplan should respond to the Department of Transport's Policy Statement on the facilitation of Offshore Renewable Energy by Commercial Ports in Ireland in this regard.

## 5) Eco and Smart Ports

Actions for the Port to transition to an Eco Port and implement a Port of Cork Energy Plan are important priorities for the Masterplan and are welcomed. The SRA support a Smart Southern Region<sup>6</sup>, with the integration of digitalisation, technology innovation, access to data and analytics working in harmony with the low carbon ambition for the Port of Cork.

The SRA support raising the ambition for smart technology use, collaborating with other Irish Ports, and with EU partners to transfer best practices and pilot innovation. The SRA will support project collaborations on these themes which will assist the Ports in making the business case to invest in digital, smart and low carbon technologies.

The SRA also support the integration of Nature Based Design Solutions and integration of Blue and Green Infrastructure which assists low carbon planning, sustainable project designs and support greater biodiversity. The SRA with ARUP have produced a framework and good practice toolkit to guide our stakeholders in implementing these themes, which should guide the Masterplan<sup>7</sup>.

The Port and SRA were both recent stakeholders for the Sustainable and Holistic Management of Irish Ports Project (SHIP)<sup>8</sup>. This project is exploring how Irish Ports can facilitate growth in maritime trade and transport, become catalysts for sustainable hinterland development and be compliant with Climate Change and Environmental Policy under the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Masterplan should integrate the recommendations from the SHIP project once published.

- **Recommendation 5:** The Port of Cork is commended for setting a vision and actions to become a low carbon Eco Port. In line with the SRA's objectives to develop as a Smart Southern Region, the Masterplan should raise the ambition to integrate digitalisation, pilot smart technologies and nature-based design solutions and collaborate on Irish, EU and International best practice projects on these themes. This will strengthen the business case for smart and low carbon port projects. Implementing the recommendations from the final report of the Sustainable and Holistic Management of Irish Ports Project (SHIP) is also a key opportunity.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/d746b-government-sets-policy-for-irelands-commercial-ports-to-develop-infrastructure-to-support-offshore-renewable-energy/>

<sup>6</sup> RSES RPOs 133 and 134 for Smart Cities and a Smart Region

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.southernassembly.ie/eu-projects/blue-green-city/blue-green-city-other-publications>

<sup>8</sup> This project is an initiative of Queens University Belfast, EPA and the Marine Institute

## 6) Land Use Planning and Strengthened Regional Connectivity

The SRA welcome the commitment to support implementation of the Cork City Development Plan 2022 – 2028 for sustainable, people-centered city neighbourhoods by enabling the regeneration of Cork City Docklands and Tivoli. Progressing the necessary infrastructure that allows the relocation of existing port activities in the city to the new port facilities in Ringaskiddy and for dockland regeneration to advance is a priority for the RSES.

The SRA support strengthened international and regional connectivity to the Region, the Cork Metropolitan Area and Port of Cork<sup>9</sup>. The Assembly are consistent in advocating to Central Government the imperative to deliver the necessary capital investment and infrastructure to underpin balanced regional development. This includes the strategic transport projects identified as part of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), RSES, Cork MASP, Cork Metropolitan Transport Strategy (CMATS), which service the Port of Cork. The SRA therefore support the identification of necessary enabling connectivity infrastructure, including the upgrade of the N28 to become the M28 and R624 Cobh Road to Marino Point.

The Masterplan is also an opportunity to make a strong business case in collaboration with Irish Rail for the opening of a rail service to Marino Point, a business case that can align with the ambition for an Eco Port and contribute to more efficient, multi-modal freight distribution networks serving the Region, Cork Metropolitan Area and Port.

- **Recommendation 6:**

- The SRA support the Port of Cork in enabling the urban regeneration of the Cork Docklands and Tivoli and to reflect this priority in the Masterplan.
- The SRA support the Port of Cork is seeking investment for improved regional, metropolitan and local transport connectivity (multi-modal connectivity to service port locations) and support engagement through the Masterplan to deliver transport objectives under the RSES, Cork MASP, Cork Metropolitan Transport Strategy (CMATS).

## 7) Regional Ports and Harbour Strategy

Under RPO 145 of the RSES, the SRA are advancing work on preparing a Ports and Harbour Strategy for the Southern Region and have prepared a draft Project Charter to guide the scope and objectives of this strategy.

It will aim to provide a set of researched, evidence-based recommendations to Government to inform the development of new national ports policy, communicate the needs and opportunities for the sector and encourage strengthened national policy prioritisation for our ports. The individual and combined strength of our port assets (Tier 1, Tier 2 and Regional Ports) is a significant proposition for national and regional growth, which we will seek to convey to assist the work of our Ports.

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<sup>9</sup> RSES RPOs 140 International Connectivity, RPO 146 High Quality International Connectivity -Ports, RPO 166 Investment in Strategic Inter-Regional Multi Modal Connectivity to Metropolitan Areas and Economic Corridors, RPO 167 National Road Projects, RPO 168 Investment in Regional and Local Roads, RPO 170 Rail, RPO 171 Bus, Cork MASP Policy Objectives 4 Cork Metropolitan Area Regional Interactions, Objective 8 Key Transport Objectives of XMATS, Objective 9 Strategic Road Network Improvements and Objective 13 Port of Cork.

The SRA will welcome close engagement with the Port of Cork on the development of the Regional Ports and Harbours Strategy over 2023 which will complement the implementation of the Cork Masterplan 2050.

- **Recommendation 7:** The SRA will welcome further engagement with the Port of Cork as a key stakeholder in the preparation of a Regional Ports and Harbour Strategy over 2023 and in providing a series of impactful, evidence based regional level recommendations back to Central Government on how to strengthen national prioritisation and support to enable the opportunities for our Ports.

## Conclusion

The SRA welcome this opportunity to consult with the Port of Cork and support the development of the Port of Cork Masterplan 2050. Our observation has provided seven recommendations for consideration.

We expect these recommendations will assist the preparation of the Masterplan, integrate Regional priorities and support the Port's sustainable growth and transition as an Eco Port and Smart Port in the years ahead.

As stated at the introduction, it is essential that the growth of the Port and consideration of recommendations to the Masterplan is balanced with the Port's strong commitment to engage successfully with local communities, protect and strengthen the natural environment and ecology of Cork Harbour and marine environment and protect and strengthen its heritage and tourism potential.

The SRA will welcome a follow up consultation to discuss this submission and look forward to further engagement on the preparation of our Regional Ports and Harbour Strategy.

Mise le meas,



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David Kelly  
Director