

11 July 2025

MP Andy Foster
Chairperson, Transport and Infrastructure Select Committee
New Zealand Parliament

Inquiry into Ports and the Maritime Sector

I am making this submission on behalf of the Northland Regional Council (council) to the Transport and Infrastructure Select Committee's (Committee) Inquiry into Ports and the Maritime Sector (Inquiry) released 30 May 2025.

The following table contains council's comments on some of the areas for investigation as set out in the terms of reference for the Inquiry.

We understand that the Committee intends to meet with key players and interested parties across the sector and to undertake site visits as appropriate to further its understanding. Given council's significant ownership stake in Northport, we would like to invite the Committee to meet with council as part of the Inquiry. We are also happy to facilitate a visit to Northport. Please contact me to if you wish to accept this invitation.

Bruce Howse
Pou Taumatua – Group Manager Corporate Services
Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Inquiry area	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assessing the contribution of ports and maritime industries to trade, logistics, and both regional and national economic development. 	<p>It is important to consider a wide range of measures when assessing the contribution of ports to a local economy. For example, stevedoring and port and water transport terminal services contribute only 0.4% to Northland’s GDP but Northport is very important for the export of logs from the region. The region would face a large drop in returns from forestry if logs had to be transported south to be exported.</p> <p>Port facilities have also contributed to the development of a world-class marine engineering sector in Northland. It is for this reason, and the potential to build on this, that Marine manufacturing was identified as one of the key sectors in <i><u>Igniting Northland’s Potential</u></i>, the region’s Light-Touch Regional Deal Proposal submitted in February.</p> <p>One such opportunity is a proposal to renew the inshore commercial fishing fleet by developing a facility in Whangārei dedicated to building a new class of vessels designed for reduced carbon emissions and fuel consumption while creating high-paying jobs and training opportunities.</p> <p>Another aspect to consider is the contribution ports can make as a point of arrival for tourists. Northport is the newest addition to the New Zealand cruise itinerary contributing even further to the region’s economy by stimulating local tourism, hospitality, and retail sectors. Further, the establishment of a new 115-berth marina in Whangārei would expand the marine industries capacity to service the “white boat” fleet, attract tourism, and promote a vibrant marine-focused economy.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluating the adequacy of existing infrastructure and identifying key investment priorities to support future growth. 	<p>A crucial challenge to be aware of when identifying key investment priorities is the requirement to coordinate investment across several asset owners to maximise growth opportunities. This was a factor behind council’s recent decision to restructure Marsden Maritime Holdings and Northport into a single entity. The restructuring also provides an opportunity to improve port productivity and economic performance.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reviewing the interface between ports and the relevant parts of the land and maritime transport system. 	<p>The interface between ports and the land transport system is an essential factor to consider in the Inquiry. Improving the land transport linkages from Northport are critical to realising the full economic and resilience potential offered by the unique deepwater facility at Northport. This is an important reason why both the Northland Corridor and the Marsden Point Rail Link (MPRL) are committed to and funded as new infrastructure builds</p>

	<p>for the region. We understand that KiwiRail have submitted their business case for the MPRL to Ministers.</p> <p>Longer term, the development of an inland rail port north of Auckland, e.g., near Kumeu, would build on and enhance the viability of the MPRL.</p> <p>While the terms of reference for the Inquiry only refers to “land and maritime transport systems”, the Committee should also consider the contribution that ports can make to the air transport system. The Ocean Flyer project is being developed as an alternative form of freight and people movement by air that will typically operate port to port. https://www.oceanflyer.co.nz/</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Examining the current and potential role of coastal shipping within New Zealand’s broader transport network. 	<p>As part of this area of inquiry, the Committee should examine how the development of smaller port and wharf facilities around the coast can build community resilience, providing alternative transport routes in the event of land transport disruptions.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Looking into the adequacy and locations of drydock facilities. 	<p>Considerable work has already been done to examine the potential of a large-scale (250m long) drydock and associated marine maintenance facility at Northport. A high-level business case has been completed, and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) are actively seeking a partner with the capacity, capability, experience and project team that can deliver the project. The proposed facility would be a landmark project – large enough to service the bigger Royal New Zealand Navy ships, commercial vessels such as the Cook Strait ferries, as well as international flagged ships.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Examining the sector’s role in national security, emergency response, and supply chain continuity. 	<p>Northport offers several advantages from a national security perspective. It is strategically located outside the main centres and benefits from relative tectonic stability. Northport’s existing infrastructure/operations and planned developments strengthen the geographic diversity of New Zealand’s port network, reducing reliance on a small number of congested urban ports.</p>