

Speech: Address by the International Trade Secretary to the British Ports Association

Thank you Lord Berkely. I am delighted to join you today – and to see so many people from across the ports and related industries here.

It demonstrates the diversity of this sector which is so important to our international trade performance and Britain's future as a great maritime nation.

Ports are a vital part of this country's economy.

Not only are they important economic entities in their own right – acting as hubs for jobs, industry and innovation across industries far broader than just the maritime sector – but they also play a vital role in facilitating imports and exports – moving 95% of our trade in goods – and in maintaining our international competitiveness as a global trading hub.

They handle almost 500 million tonnes of freight each year – an £8 billion contribution in Gross Value Added to the UK economy.

They employ more than 100,000 people, supporting families across the country.

Ports are, quite simply, Britain's gateway to the world.

And they have a brilliant future at the forefront of our global economic ambitions as Britain leaves the European Union.

We know how important it will be to preserve vital existing trading links with our current partners in the EU.

And for the first time in four decades, we will determine our own independent trade policy, able to seize the opportunity to establish new economic relationships across the globe.

Our experts in the Department for International Trade are working hard preparing for negotiations on new trade agreements with key partners including the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

We are also considering the potential of new regional partnerships such as accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, which would allow the UK to further establish its presence in the world's fastest growing regions.

Boosting our international trade will bring jobs and prosperity to not only the places where goods are loaded and unloaded, but to the wider economy too.

And to make sure this happens it is vital that our ports can match the best

facilities in the world and adapt to new trends and technologies.

I know that you have invested significantly to improve capacity and capabilities and will continue to do so.

But this is only one piece of the puzzle – the cost of exports and imports is also influenced by the effectiveness of inland transport networks.

That is why I was pleased to see the Department for Transport publish a study of port connectivity earlier this year.

This study firmly made the case for investment in effective freight transport links as an enabler of economic growth and trade and that this should be a default factor in infrastructure investment decisions.

It was also a timely reminder of the importance of the ports and maritime sector in our fortunes.

And I look forward to taking discussions with the sector forward as the Government develops its five-year maritime strategy.

But for now, I'd like to thank Richard Ballantyne for supporting the Ports for International Trade Campaign. The BPA is a founding member and has been integral to its development.

This campaign will promote the essential point I referred to earlier – that ports play a vital role in our international trade as the gateway to the UK, facilitating and promoting our vibrant export sectors.

And it will make the case for the huge opportunities that are out there – not just to port towns and cities, but to all regions of the UK to grow high quality jobs and improve living standards.

This is a very important mission. We think it is essential to work with industry to make this case clearly to the public.

Because Government can't do this alone. It will be your efforts in the ports industry that will be vital to its success. I know that some of you have already given your support to the campaign, and we're hoping others amongst you will join in the days ahead.

And I am looking forward to speaking at its official launch event in October.

I understand invitations are on their way – so if you can bear listening to me again I hope you will attend!