Shannon Chamber
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Draft National Ports Policy July 2026 Public Consultation

Shannon Chamber Submission
August 2026

Summary of Key Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The final National Ports Policy should establish a clear framework for State co-investment in strategically important port infrastructure where significant national, regional, energy-security, climate or economic benefits can be demonstrated.

This should include infrastructure required for offshore renewable energy, hinterland connectivity, energy and alternative-fuel infrastructure and climate resilience.

Recommendation 2

The final policy should clearly recognise Shannon Foynes Port and the Shannon Estuary as a key location for offshore renewable energy, including floating offshore wind, and for the jobs and businesses that can grow around it.

Investment in the port should also be linked with wider business and enterprise policy. The aim should be to make sure that Ireland gains as many of the jobs, manufacturing and business opportunities as possible, rather than mainly importing equipment and moving it through the port.

Recommendation 3

National Ports Policy should require greater coordination between port development and national and regional policies relating to enterprise, energy, transport, skills and spatial development.

For Shannon Foynes Port, this should support the development of an integrated Shannon Estuary economic cluster rather than viewing port investment as a standalone transport intervention.

Recommendation 4

National Ports Policy should ensure that port development is planned together with policies for business, energy, transport, skills and regional development.

For Shannon Foynes Port, this means looking at the port as part of the wider Shannon Estuary economy, rather than as a transport project on its own.

Recommendation 5

Before major public investment decisions are made concerning entirely new national port capacity, Government should undertake a transparent assessment of the additional capacity that could be created through investment in existing Ports of National Significance and their hinterland connections.

This assessment should include economic, environmental, resilience and regional-development benefits rather than relying principally on existing cargo volumes.

Recommendation 6

Government should support the development of a Mid-West maritime, offshore renewable energy and logistics skills initiative involving industry, Shannon Foynes Port Company, education and training providers and relevant State agencies.

Skills planning should anticipate demand in areas including engineering, logistics, marine operations, offshore wind construction and maintenance, electrical systems, digitalisation and supply-chain management.

Recommendation 7

The Government's work on alternative maritime fuels should specifically assess the potential for Shannon Foynes Port and the Shannon Estuary to become a location for the production, storage, bunkering and distribution/export of renewable fuels.

The necessary port, energy and industrial infrastructure should be considered together.

1. Introduction

Shannon Chamber welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on the revision of Ireland's National Ports Policy. Although we did not participate in the earlier consultation on the thematic *Issues Paper*, which informed the review of the National Ports Policy 2013 and the preparation of this draft policy, we are pleased to provide our commentary at this stage.

We are particularly pleased to note that the content of this draft has been compiled 'to address 'the new realities, challenges, and opportunities presented by decarbonisation, renewable energy, digitalisation, and technological innovation and to ensure that our ports continue to develop the infrastructure required to support Ireland's trade and sustainability goals into the future'. As stated in the draft policy, ports of national significance are key to ensuring more balanced regional development - not only economically, but also as centres of marine-related amenity and tourism activities.

We welcome the direction of the draft policy, in particular, the recognition of all five Ports of National Significance on an equal basis. From a Mid-West regional perspective, we particularly welcome the fact that Shannon Foynes Port Company is recognised as both a Port of National Significance and one of Ireland's TEN-T core ports.

As a business representative organisation of over 350 member companies, we regard the future development of Shannon Foynes as intrinsically connected to Ireland's future energy security, international connectivity, industrial development, supply-chain resilience and the objective of achieving balanced regional development.

Shannon Chamber believes the final National Ports Policy should do more than simply recognise the importance of Shannon Foynes Port. It should set out clearly how that strategic importance will lead to real investment in the port, better rail and road connections, offshore renewable energy infrastructure, skills development and stronger local and regional supply chains.

Our main recommendation is that Shannon Foynes Port be recognised as an important national asset that can support jobs, industry and renewable energy development across the Shannon Estuary and the wider Mid-West.

2. Matching national importance with national investment

The Chamber believes, however, that designation as a Port of National Significance must be accompanied by a corresponding approach to infrastructure investment.

The draft policy represents an important change from the previous position whereby port infrastructure was generally expected to be financed without Exchequer support. It now recognises that the increasing demands being placed on State-owned commercial ports justify a modified approach and provides for potential State investment relating to climate resilience, decarbonisation, trade and international connectivity, and offshore renewable energy.

Shannon Chamber strongly supports this change.

However, the final policy should go further than simply leaving State investment as an option. Projects that are important to the country can bring wider benefits to the economy and the region, even if those benefits do not directly generate income for the port itself.

Recommendation 1

The final National Ports Policy should establish a clear framework for State co-investment in strategically important port infrastructure where significant national, regional, energy-security, climate or economic benefits can be demonstrated.

This should include infrastructure required for offshore renewable energy, hinterland connectivity, energy and alternative-fuel infrastructure and climate resilience.

3. Shannon Foynes Port as a centre for offshore renewable energy

As Shannon Chamber has stated in its many submissions to Government, Ireland's plans for offshore renewable energy could bring major benefits to the Shannon Estuary and the wider Mid-West.

The draft policy recognises the potential of floating offshore wind off Ireland's west and south-west coasts. It also recognises that Shannon Foynes Port could play an important role by providing the port space and facilities needed to support this industry.

Shannon Chamber supports the idea of using several Irish ports to support offshore renewable energy. It is also important that this investment creates jobs, supports local businesses and builds a strong supply chain around the ports involved.

The opportunity is about much more than building port facilities. Investment in Shannon Foynes Port could support jobs and business activity in engineering, manufacturing, transport, construction, marine services, professional services, renewable fuels, research and other areas.

Recommendation 2

The final policy should clearly recognise Shannon Foynes Port and the Shannon Estuary as a key location for offshore renewable energy, including floating offshore wind, and for the jobs and businesses that can grow around it.

Investment in the port should also be linked with wider business and enterprise policy. The aim should be to make sure that Ireland gains as many of the jobs, manufacturing and business opportunities as possible, rather than mainly importing equipment and moving it through the port.

4. Develop an integrated Shannon Estuary industrial and logistics cluster

National Ports Policy should recognise that successful ports do not operate in isolation from their hinterlands.

The draft itself acknowledges that building additional port capacity will not safeguard Ireland's economic growth unless the necessary hinterland connections are also provided.

Shannon Chamber believes this principle should be extended beyond transport infrastructure.

The development of Shannon Foynes Port should be coordinated with the wider development of the Shannon Estuary and Mid-West economy, including energy and grid infrastructure, industrial land, transport, planning, enterprise development and skills.

This presents an opportunity to develop a highly competitive Shannon Estuary industrial, energy and logistics cluster, leveraging the port alongside the wider economic capabilities of the region.

Recommendation 3

National Ports Policy should require greater coordination between port development and national and regional policies relating to enterprise, energy, transport, skills and spatial development.

For Shannon Foynes Port, this should support the development of an integrated Shannon Estuary economic cluster rather than viewing port investment as a standalone transport intervention.

5. Linking the port with the wider region

National Ports Policy should recognise that ports work best when they are well connected to the areas around them.

The draft policy already says that extra port capacity will only support economic growth if the right road and rail links are also in place.

Shannon Chamber believes this should go further. The development of Shannon Foynes Port should be planned alongside the wider needs of the Shannon Estuary and the Mid-West, including energy, electricity grid capacity, industrial land, transport, planning, business development and skills.

This would help create a strong Shannon Estuary industry, energy and transport hub, with the port at the centre of wider economic growth in the region.

Recommendation 4

National Ports Policy should ensure that port development is planned together with policies for business, energy, transport, skills and regional development.

For Shannon Foynes Port, this means looking at the port as part of the wider Shannon Estuary economy, rather than as a transport project on its own.

6. Maximise existing national port capacity

Shannon Chamber recognises the challenges associated with long-term growth in Irish port volumes and the potential requirement for significant additional capacity.

However, an important principle should underpin future investment decisions: Ireland should first maximise the strategic potential of its existing Ports of National Significance and their associated transport networks.

This is particularly important in the context of balanced regional development.

Investment in hinterland connectivity and port capacity outside the Greater Dublin Area can simultaneously increase national maritime capacity, improve supply-chain resilience and support greater regional distribution of economic activity.

Shannon Chamber therefore supports an approach under which the utilisation of Shannon Foynes Port and other existing nationally significant assets forms an integral part of Ireland's response to future capacity requirements.

Recommendation 5

Before major public investment decisions are made concerning entirely new national port capacity, Government should undertake a transparent assessment of the additional capacity that could be created through investment in existing Ports of National Significance and their hinterland connections.

This assessment should include economic, environmental, resilience and regional-development benefits rather than relying principally on existing cargo volumes.

7. Build the Mid-West maritime, logistics and renewable-energy skills base

Infrastructure investment alone will not deliver the full economic benefits from the changes taking place in Ireland's maritime and energy sectors.

Shannon Chamber notes the proposal to expand the role of the Irish Maritime Development Office to include innovation and the development of skills for the ports and logistics sectors. Any expansion should be assessed in the context of benefits and cost.

The draft policy lacks sufficient detail on the rationale for change and on the governance of a standalone IMDO vis a vis board composition and skills. It would be imperative that ports be represented on such a board so that regional perspectives are taken into account.

There is also an opportunity to position the Mid-West as a centre for the skills needed to support the growing offshore energy and maritime sectors.

Recommendation 6

Government should support the development of a Mid-West maritime, offshore renewable energy and logistics skills initiative involving industry, Shannon Foynes Port Company, education and training providers and relevant State agencies.

Skills planning should anticipate demand in areas including engineering, logistics, marine operations, offshore wind construction and maintenance, electrical systems, digitalisation and supply-chain management.

8. Position Shannon Foynes Port for the future green-fuels economy

The move to low- and zero-carbon fuels for shipping will require major new infrastructure at European ports.

Shannon Chamber believes this should be seen not only as a requirement that ports must meet, but also as an economic opportunity for the Shannon Estuary.

The draft policy recognises the need for infrastructure to support alternative fuels and proposes that the Irish Maritime Development Office carry out research into how this could be developed at Ireland's commercial State ports.

The West and South-West also have significant offshore renewable energy potential. In the longer term, this could support the development of green hydrogen and other renewable fuels. The draft policy itself identifies green hydrogen as one of the opportunities that could arise from offshore wind.

Recommendation 7

The Government's work on alternative maritime fuels should specifically assess the potential for Shannon Foynes Port and the Shannon Estuary to become a location for the production, storage, bunkering and distribution/export of renewable fuels.

The necessary port, energy and industrial infrastructure should be considered together.

9. Measure ports by their wider economic contribution

Shannon Chamber welcomes the proposal to introduce a national port performance measurement system.

The draft correctly acknowledges that performance measures must take account of the individual characteristics of each port.

This is important. Throughput alone cannot capture the strategic contribution of a port supporting offshore renewable energy, national energy security or regional industrial development

Recommendation 8

The proposed port performance framework should include indicators covering wider economic contribution, supply-chain resilience, regional employment and investment, decarbonisation, rail-freight utilisation, renewable-energy enablement and private investment leveraged, alongside conventional measures such as cargo throughput and financial performance.

Conclusion

Shannon Chamber supports the ambition to establish a modern National Ports Policy capable of responding to fundamental changes in trade, energy, climate and supply chains.

The revised policy provides an important opportunity to recognise the role Ireland's ports can play not only in moving goods, but in shaping the location and nature of future economic activity. For the Shannon region, that opportunity is particularly significant.

Shannon Foynes Port combines the attributes of a Port of National Significance and TEN-T core port with proximity to substantial offshore renewable resources and the potential to support new industrial and energy activity.

Realising that opportunity will require more than port development alone. It will require coordinated investment in port capacity, rail and road connectivity, energy infrastructure, skills, industrial development and regional supply chains.

Shannon Chamber therefore asks Government to ensure that the final National Ports Policy:

1. establishes a clear framework for State co-investment in nationally strategic port infrastructure;
2. recognises Shannon Foynes Port and the Shannon Estuary as a strategic offshore renewable energy and industrial-development location;
3. coordinates port investment with wider enterprise, energy and regional-development policy;
4. maximises existing Ports of National Significance before committing to major new capacity;
5. develops a Mid-West maritime, logistics and offshore-renewable skills pipeline;
6. evaluates the Shannon Estuary's potential as a renewable-fuels production, storage and distribution hub; and
7. measures port performance according to wider national and regional economic outcomes as well as throughput.

The Chamber's overarching message is that investment in Shannon Foynes Port should be viewed as investment in Ireland's future productive capacity—not simply investment in a port.

Submitted by:
Shannon Chamber
Suite 14, Shannon Airport House
Shannon
Co Clare
V14 E370
www.shannonchamber.ie
Tel: 061 475854
email: hdownes@shannonchamber.ie