



15 July 2020

Kelly Tolhurst MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London, SW1P 4DR

Dear Minister

NHS Test & Trace and key workers at UK ports

On behalf of the UK ports industry can we thank you for the work of your Department during what has been a period of extraordinary challenge for the UK. The support and efforts that have been provided by you and your officials during the recent months as we have collectively sought to safely maintain the flow of vital supplies through the UK's ports have been very much appreciated by the sector. We write to you on a key topic of concern for the industry on maintaining resilience in ports operation.

This is a joint letter from Port Skills and Safety, UK Major Ports Group, British Ports Association and UK Harbour Masters' Association, who represent the vast majority of the UK ports sector. As we move out of lockdown, port workers remain essential in terms of keeping our supermarket shelves stocked and providing medical supplies across all regions, as we are sure you will appreciate.

Port operators have put in place since week one of the COVID-19 crisis rigorous programmes of workplace and operational infection risk minimisation and mitigation measures. Isolating key teams and professionals, splitting teams into different cells or bubbles, changing or staggering operational practices and implementing social distancing regimes, including where a 2 metres distance is not feasible. These efforts have resulted not only in the continued operation of ports throughout the COVID-19 outbreak but very low absence rates amongst staff – testament as well to the efforts and professionalism of the vast majority of port workers.

However, we are concerned that an unintended consequence of the necessary NHS Test and Trace initiative could be to impact operational resilience in our sector and jeopardise the flow of goods in and out of the UK. As the process is designed, it could mean that key staff (both employed by the port directly or contracted by the port) in particular 'pinch point' roles may be forced to isolate for a period of 14 days if they may have been in contact with someone suffering from COVID-19. Such roles include marine pilots, pilot cutter crew, VTS operations staff and particular operations staff such as lock gate operators. This could create significant challenges in terms of maintaining port and shipping services and resilience if a person is contacted via Test and Trace.

Recognising both the robust measures put in place by port operators for minimising transmission and the essential 'pinch point' risk to essential UK supply chains we would

therefore request a special dispensation granted by the Government for key workers, in specific agreed roles, such as the ones highlighted above, from the mandatory requirement for 14 day self isolation. Instead we would propose that individuals in such roles, if contacted by NHS Track and Trace, are subject to specific risk assessment rather than the generic 'all population' approach. Part of such an approach would include even those who do not have symptoms being fast tracked for testing at their relevant local facilities. This would ensure that key workers contacted by Track and Trace that do not have Coronavirus, are able to return to work safely and swiftly with regular enhanced monitoring and keep our country supplied. We are sure you would agree that such key workers are key to the continued economic recovery and help the country remain open for business.

As ever we would welcome a discussion with you or your officials and we look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience, noting the potential for relatively small numbers involved and the hugely disproportionate and potentially rapid impact of them being absent from work for the UK

Yours sincerely



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Port Skills and Safety



Tim Morris
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Ashley Nicholson
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