

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on PE2029, Nationalise Clydeport to bring the ports and harbours on the river Clyde into public ownership, submitted by Robert Buirds on behalf of the Campaign to Save Inchgreen Dry Dock

Background

Clydeport: The Clyde Port Authority, the forerunner to [Clydeport](#), was established in 1966 through the merger of the Clyde Navigation Trust, the Greenock Harbour Trust, and the Clyde Lighthouses Trust.

The Clyde Port Authority was a trust port, a type of port management organisation operating under unique, local legislation and managed by an independent board. Trust ports have no shareholders or owners and are required to reinvest any profits back into the port for the benefit of its stakeholders. Trust ports operate in a commercial environment with no direct public funding and compete in the market with private and local authority ports as well as other trust ports.

The Clyde Port Authority was privatised under the provisions of the Clyde Port Authority Scheme 1991 Confirmation Order 1992. This transferred the ownership of port infrastructure and wider harbour authority responsibilities to Clydeport Limited, a subsidiary of the Clyde Port Authority. This subsidiary was the subject of a management and employee buy-out in March 1992, with the company name changing to Clydeport Holdings Ltd. This company was floated on the London stock exchange in December 1994, as Clydeport plc. Clydeport plc was acquired by UK and Irish port operator [Peel Ports](#) in 2003, which remain its owners.

Clydeport owns and manages several port and harbour facilities, including:

- Greenock ocean terminal
- King George V dock (Glasgow)
- Hunterston PARC
- Ardrossan harbour
- Greenock cruise terminal
- Inchgreen dry dock

Clydeport is also the harbour authority for the river Clyde and its estuary, managing an area of 450 square miles. It is responsible for maintaining the navigable channel, lighting, and buoyage as well as the provision of harbour facilities.

Legislation: The petitioners mention two Acts, these are:

1. **Harbours Act 1964**, Section 15 grants Scottish Ministers powers to reconstitute a harbour authority by means of a [Harbour Revision Order](#). Section 17A allows Scottish Ministers to make a [Harbour Closure Order](#), which relieves a harbour authority of its statutory powers – meaning it would no longer be classed as a harbour authority. Harbour Closure Orders can only be made on the application of the harbour authority, with the consent of the harbour authority or where Ministers have consulted the authority and are satisfied they are unlikely to object.
2. **Marine Navigation Act 2013**, Section 1 allows Scottish Ministers, by Order, to remove a harbour authority's [pilotage](#) duties¹, as set out in the Pilotage Act 1987. Section 6 inserted Section 17A into the Harbours Act 1964, as described above.

Compulsory purchase of Inchgreen Dry Dock: The petitioners have asked that the Scottish Government compulsorily purchase Inchgreen Dry Dock, which is in Greenock and is the UK's largest dry dock². Any decision to proceed with such action would be a matter for Scottish Ministers, taking account of factors including the legislation under which the harbour authority operates, the legislation being used to secure compulsory purchase, the reason for the compulsory purchase and its likely impact on service provision by the harbour authority.

Scottish Government Action

The Scottish Government has not previously considered the nationalisation of Clydeport.

Scottish Parliament Action

The Scottish Parliament has not previously considered the nationalisation of Clydeport.

Alan Rehfisch
Senior Researcher
24 August 2023

¹ Pilots are specialised seafarers with detailed knowledge of the approaches to specific ports and harbours. They are normally employed by harbour authorities to guide vessels safely in and out of port – particularly where the master is unfamiliar with the area.

² A “dry dock” is a man-made basin that fronts onto water that can be flooded to allow a vessel to float in, then drained to allow the vessel to come to rest on a dry platform – allowing maintenance to be carried out on parts of the vessel normally underwater. They can also be used in vessel construction and decommissioning.

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