



PORT OF
**CROMARTY
FIRTH**

pocf.co.uk

ANNUAL **REVIEW 2023**

A STRATEGIC NATIONAL ASSET





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Port of Cromarty Firth provides critical infrastructure and heavy engineering support to the UK's energy industry, and is an integral part of the Inverness & Cromarty Firth Green Freeport.

Green Freeport Success for the Highlands

“In extending the benefits of freeports to Scotland, we are unleashing the potential of the Firth of Forth and Inverness and Cromarty Firth – backing the delivery of thousands of high-quality green jobs for future generations, as we continue to make gains on our commitments to transition to net zero.”

These were the historic words spoken by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak last January when he made a special visit to Port of Cromarty Firth to announce the location of Scotland’s two Green Freeports.

The visit – covered by the world’s media who jostled for position alongside the deep, sheltered waters of the Firth as Mr Sunak made his speech – marked a famous triumph not only for Port of Cromarty Firth, but also the organisation now known as Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF).

It was also a hugely significant political and economic victory for the region, the benefits of which were outlined by the Prime Minister himself – with new industries poised to transform the Highland economy and help Scotland and the UK accelerate the shift to net zero and a clean energy economy.

And it represented the successful conclusion of three years of planning by ICFGF’s predecessor Opportunity Cromarty Firth (OCF). OCF was a unique organisation uniting more than 30 public and private businesses and bodies with no previous history of working together.

Port of Cromarty Firth was the driving force behind OCF, created in 2020, and gathered more than £1m in private funding to back the campaign for Green Freeport status. Other members included

the Ports of Nigg and Inverness, Inverness Airport, Inverness Chamber of Commerce and more than a dozen businesses, as well as public sector organisations, The Highland Council, Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE), and the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI).

OCF’s goal was achieving Green Freeport status, built on firm plans to ‘level up’ the Highlands, reverse years of population decline, and create thousands of quality green jobs, delivering energy and net-zero ambitions.

Its argument was a compelling one, but it was up against stiff competition. However, OCF received heavyweight support from the likes of The Lord Dunlop, member of the House of Lords, as well as leading industry bodies and international offshore wind developers.

A new independent report, commissioned by the Scottish Offshore Wind Energy Council (SOWEC) also named Cromarty Firth as the prime location in Scotland for the formation of an offshore wind port cluster capable of delivering the net zero and renewables ambitions set out in the UK Government’s Energy Security Strategy.

It was a hugely compelling argument which won the day when the Scottish and UK Governments awarded it Green Freeport status.

But what of the future now the victory was sealed? OCF became ICFGF, an independent company with its own board, and Calum Macpherson was named as its first CEO in May. Its 30 organisations became consortium members, offering further funding, and Highland Council was the accountable body for any public money.



Offshore wind and hydrogen developers, as well as the local supply chain and public sector, all continued to work together for the benefit of the Highland region and the wider country.

By October, ICFGF set out its outline business case. It identified locations totalling around 550 hectares, to become “tax sites”, where businesses can benefit from a range of incentives. In total the land, which includes areas on the shores of the Cromarty Firth, in the Highland capital and at Ardersier, amount to the largest green energy development site in Europe.

Independent specialists, who interviewed landowners and potential investors for the outline business case forecast that, if tax site designation is granted for the minimum five years available, their development will lead to the creation of 10,250 new jobs in the Highlands over the next 25 years and a total of 16,500 across the UK.

Indeed ICFGF is confident that, with broader initiatives in the area connected with the growth of green energy, the levels of job creation will be even higher.

Following the ScotWind leasing round announcement two years ago, 20 offshore wind developments, representing a combined investment of almost £30bn, are currently being planned, with the majority of them close to our region.

Green Freeport status for the area, which has been supported from the outset by the green energy industry, now presents the Highlands with the opportunity to maximise the lasting benefits to the region, Scotland and the UK from these huge, long-term projects.

It will accelerate economic growth and innovation, as well as growing and decarbonising the offshore energy industry.

Skilled employment opportunities will also be filled by local people, with ICFGF earmarking training and workforce development through The PowerHouse.

The PowerHouse was established to support ICFGF in co-ordinating and raising the profile of regional training and skills providers, as well as pathways and opportunities for our future workforce.

While all these major benefits to the region will take a number of years to build, the impact of Green Freeport status is already evident.

The Highland Council approved plans by Japanese company Sumitomo to develop a cable manufacturing plant beside Nigg. Meanwhile jobs have already been created by ambitious Inverness-based company Aurora Energy Services and a proposal has been announced by Associated British Ports to explore additional infrastructure to support the offshore wind industry. The fresh interest in the Highlands



from the international energy industry is also clear from the number of inquiries and fact-finding visits that members of ICFGF have had from companies around the world.

It now means that Port of Cromarty Firth and its fellow ICFGF consortium members have real and achievable means to address the damaging decline in the working-age population of the Highlands, which most recent Census figures again underlined.

As offshore wind fields will take much longer to build, so the opportunity has greater potential to create employment that will span generations and establish the region as a global player.

Outgoing Port of Cromarty Firth Chief Executive Bob Buskie says: "The Cromarty Firth is going to be at the very heart of the UK's energy production map for many decades to come, in the way former coal mining areas were in the past and the north-east of Scotland has been with its key geographical role in the North Sea oil and gas industry.

"We worked very closely for three years as OCF with the supply chain, renewables developers, and many other stakeholders to examine in detail what can be achieved locally and nationally through Green Freeport status in the Highlands. Now we have become a Green Freeport, those visions can become reality."

Green Freeport status presents the Highlands with the opportunity to maximise the lasting benefits to the region, Scotland and the UK from a multi-decade pipeline of clean energy projects.

INCREASE IN TURNOVER

£16.4M

From £9.8M in 2022



CRUISE SHIP ARRIVALS

129



SHIPPING TONNAGE

13M GT



SHIPPING ARRIVALS

465

ACTS OF PILOTAGE

846

OUR STAFF

45 FTE



REVENUE BY SECTOR

Oil & Gas
21.6%

Cruise
26.95%

Renewables
42.61%

Other
8.84%

LONGEST
SHIP

333m

CCTV
ENHANCEMENTS

£21.1K

RESURFACING



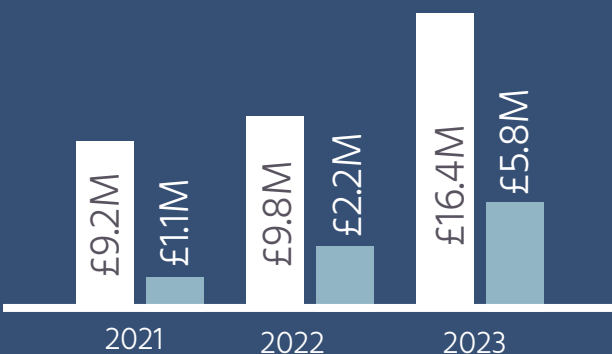
£117.7K

HEAVIEST
SHIP

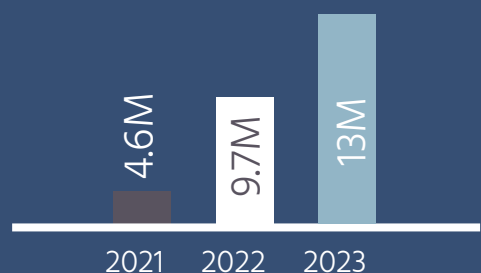
143,730GT



FINANCIAL RESULTS
(TURNOVER VS PRE-TAX SURPLUS)



VESSEL TONNAGE / GT



Meet Ikenna Okere - Engineering & Maintenance Manager

Our People



Ikenna joined Port of Cromarty Firth in January 2023 and is in charge of maintaining all the Port's fixed assets.

These are significant in number and include Quay West, one of the largest port laydown facilities of its kind in the UK with two berths, offering a 372m quayside and an open laydown area of over 80,000sqm. It is a hugely varied, challenging but enjoyable role for Ikenna, due to the sheer depth of all the fixed assets both on land and in the Firth itself.

"The Port has nine classes of fixed assets," he said. "They include onshore buildings and warehouses, of which there are five and nine respectively, plus roads, tanks, walls – even down to columns, lighting, and light fittings.

"Then there are the quayside assets, such as a 1km long pier that reaches out into the Firth. We inspect all the fixed assets on that, such as buoys, ladders and fenders. So it's a real mix."

In charge of a team of three, Ikenna defines his work as falling under three streams of maintenance – routine, remedial and capital.

"Routine maintenance is preventative and conducted either in-house or by specialist contractors. My team has a schedule each week to inspect our assets, assess their condition, and then carry out minor repairs and servicing of assets.

"For instance, at Quay West the pumps need to be serviced annually and that comes under routine maintenance – we need to prevent them breaking down.

"The second is remedial or reactive – that is repairing something if it breaks. Due to the sheer number of fixed assets, it's a case of filtering and prioritising what needs dealt with first. This can be anything from a faulty light fitting in one of our buildings to something far bigger.

"The last stream is capital, where we need to involve replacing or upgrading assets when they reach the end of their life."

Ikenna finds his role extremely busy but highly rewarding: "There are so many assets and it's interesting learning about different types of structures. I had a lot of experience of offshore structures previously, having worked with Scottish Canals for several years, and before that I worked in Qatar, leading a team of engineers, modellers and technicians to complete key water drainage projects for the FIFA 2022 World Cup.

"But you are never too old or experienced enough to learn and pick new things up, and that's definitely the case here."

While working life is based at the Port in Invergordon, Ikenna lives with his wife and twin boys, aged 15, in Inverness. His hobbies include swimming, watching football, reading and also walking.

"The countryside is wonderful here, especially the Fort Augustus side of Inverness. We often head off into the hills and the past few years – especially during the COVID lockdowns – we found some amazing new places.

"I love walking on the beach and particular favourites are Lossiemouth and Nairn. I also enjoy walking parts of Loch Ness. The countryside cannot be beaten here."



"You are never too old or experienced enough to learn and pick new things up, and that's definitely the case here"
- Ikenna Okere

Port of Cromarty Firth Board Members

The Port board consists of the following eight members appointed by an open and transparent process. The board and executive management are the joint focus for the accountability of the Trust Port in the conduct of the Port's business.

The Port's board meets regularly to review the Port's business and future plans. They are not owners or shareholders; they manage the Trust Port which reinvests all its profits into the development of the Port.

Their duty is to safeguard the valuable assets of the Port and hand them on in the same or better condition to future generations.



Hugh Mitchell
Chair

Hugh Mitchell worked for Royal Dutch Shell for more than 37 years, the last 11 of which were served as Chief HR and Corporate Officer. As a member of Shell's Global Executive Committee, Hugh commanded extensive experience in all sectors of the oil and gas industry. He is currently Vice Chairman of Edinburgh Business School and is a visiting lecturer at London Business School and the University of Edinburgh.



Alex Campbell
Chief Executive

Alex Campbell – a business leader with extensive experience in the renewables, oil and gas, marine and environmental sectors – joined Port of Cromarty Firth as Chief Executive in 2024. Alex joined the Port from environmental and geospatial consultancy APEM Ltd, where he was Managing Director, based in Aberdeen. He has previously held similar positions at survival and safety solutions company Survitec Group, and James Fisher and Sons Plc, a provider of specialist services to the marine, oil and gas, renewables and other global, high assurance industries. His experience also includes an eight-year spell at multi-national engineering firm Atkins, where he was Managing Director, Oil and Gas.





Robert McCaig
Board Member

Robert McCaig is a Chartered Engineer with 40 years of professional experience and is a Fellow of The Institute of Marine Engineering, Science & Technology. He is also a Fellow of The Institution of Mechanical Engineers with voluntary roles of Membership Advisor and Professional Review Interviewer. He has good knowledge of the Cromarty Firth area and valuable experience in ports, offshore energy, and onshore support services.



Amanda Bryan
Board Member

Based in the Highlands, Amanda Bryan has over 30 years' experience working in rural development, land and asset management. She holds a portfolio of roles including lecturing at the Scottish School of Inverness, non exec advisor to a forestry investment fund and undertaking consultancy work with a wide range of clients in the land-based sectors. During her time as Chair of the Board of Crown Estate Scotland (2017-2023) she was responsible for leading the ScotWind and INTOG offshore wind leasing rounds. An experienced non-executive, in addition to her time at Crown Estate Scotland, Amanda has held previous board positions with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Community Energy Scotland, Forestry Commission, Scottish Natural Heritage, BBC, Ofcom and the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust.



Rhona Harper
Board Member

Rhona Harper is a procurement law specialist and a qualified solicitor with 24 years of experience. A partner of Shepherd and Wedderburn LLP for 18 years, Rhona led the firm's Government and Public Sector Group. Her work has included advising the Ministry of Defence, Highways Management Scotland, and the City of Edinburgh Council. Rhona was appointed chair of Volunteer Scotland in 2017. She is currently the legal secretary for the Water Industry Commission for Scotland.



Dr Derek McGlashan
Board Member

Derek McGlashan has held senior roles in a number of organisations across the port industry including Aberdeen Harbour Board, Forth Ports and Port of London Authority. Holding a Ph.D. in Geomorphology and Law, Derek has held ultimate responsibility for counter terrorist security, environment, safety, sustainability and ESG reporting. Beyond ports his involvement has included energy networks, renewables, property, retail, waste and recycling.



David Bell, CBE
Board Member

David Bell is a Professor of Economics at the University of Stirling. He is also a Visiting Professor at the Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh and an Honorary Professor at the Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow. Over the course of his career, he has advised governments on a wide variety of economic, fiscal, demographic and health-related issues. Dr Elaine Douglas and he are the principal investigators of the Healthy Ageing In Scotland (HAGIS). A fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, he was made a CBE for his services to economics and public policy in 2018.



Fiona Larg, MBE
Board Member

A former Chief Executive of Inverness and Nairn Enterprise Fiona has also held senior management positions with Cap Gemini, Vertex Data Science Ltd and played a formative role in the creation of the University of the Highlands and Islands as Chief Operating Officer and Secretary receiving an MBE in 2017 for services to higher education in Scotland. Fiona has held non-executive board positions with Council of the Law Society of Scotland, SCDI, Robertson Trust and Highland Tourism Community Interest Company.

Chair's Report

Port of Cromarty Firth continued to make excellent progress during 2023.

We led the team that secured the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport for the Highland region; a culmination of three years' work. The initiative is expected to create over 10,000 jobs and raise £3.2bn in private investment. The first shoots of this planned growth have already started with the announcement of the Sumitomo cable factory at Nigg.

The Port is ideally located to support the next generation of offshore wind developments, carrying out the manufacture, assembly, integration and storage of offshore fixed and floating wind farm structures and components. This activity is crucial to delivering jobs and business opportunities to the Highlands, and in delivering the country's net zero obligations and energy security plans.

Our recent investments in quaysides and laydown infrastructure continue to position the Port and its supply chain extremely well to deliver future growth from this market segment. Our strategic aim remains true to our role as a Trust Port, progressing further investment in the Port to ensure the Cromarty Firth becomes the strategic national Scottish renewable energy hub, and delivering projects that create jobs and opportunities not just in Scotland but internationally.

As the size of wind farm components continues to increase, Scotland must expand its port capacity to continue to construct these projects and maximise local content. The Port's planned Phase 5 expansion is intended to help ensure we can achieve this and secure a long-term (30-50 year)

pipeline of projects and well-paid, green jobs.

During 2023, the Port invested over £3m to undertake seabed tests for this potential development and ascertain the ground conditions beneath the seabed. This will allow the piles, dredging, revetments and land reclamation to be suitably designed. We also completed surveys and submitted our scoping report for the necessary environmental impact assessment.

I am delighted to report that in 2023 the Port achieved its highest turnover to date at £16,393,169m, returning a surplus (profit before tax) figure of £5,782,957m. Delivering a surplus once again allows us to continue our journey of reinvestment and development, benefiting local stakeholders and the regional economy.

Our board also continues to evolve. I would like to thank Stewart Ralston who completed his tenure on the board after six years' service, and to welcome our new board member Amanda Bryan, whose experience complements that of the existing board. We look forward to working with her.

In 2023, Chief Executive Bob Buskie has once again been the driving-force behind the Port's performance, leading the team by demonstrating a professional and pragmatic approach, making sure that essential operations take place safely, and supporting the Port's customers, contractors and stakeholders.

Bob announced his intention to retire during 2023, after 11 years at the helm.

In that time he has overseen:

- Doubling of cruise visits, with the Port now welcoming more passengers than any other in Scotland
- Doubling the number of staff employed, and improving staff welfare through health and safety, training and developments
- Securing funding to develop a record £31m quayside and laydown expansion
- Doubling turnover during his tenure, from 2015 to 2023.

I would like to express my thanks to all of Port of Cromarty Firth's stakeholders, staff, Port users, local communities, regional businesses and my fellow board members for their support, professionalism, and dedication, without which the achievements of 2023 would not have been possible.



Hugh Mitchell
Chair

Chief Executive's Report

2023 saw the continuation of the Port's transformational journey to position our business at the forefront of the country's energy transition.

After several years of planning and collaboration, it was great to host Prime Minister Rishi Sunak – with Secretary of State for Scotland, Alister Jack – at Port of Cromarty Firth, to announce our winning bid for Green Freeport status during his first visit to Scotland. This was a major coup for the Port, our consortium partners, and the Highland region as a whole.

This win provides a once-in-several-generations opportunity to reverse the population and economic decline that the Highlands has experienced for too long, and will help to shift the national economy's centre of gravity.

We are proud to have led this initiative from conception to completion. Throughout 2023 and into 2024 work will continue finalising the governance procedures, the outline business case, tax site legislation, customs site authorisation, and the full business case.

Securing Green Freeport status was a part of this, and we are now building on that to ensure we maximise the local jobs and provide local people, especially children, with the choice to remain in the Highlands and have an exciting, sustainable career delivering the country's net zero ambitions.

Port of Cromarty Firth has been identified internationally as a key strategic locational asset in the delivery of 35GW+ of offshore renewable energy projects and, to accommodate this opportunity, the Port has embarked upon the ambitious next phase of Port infrastructure development: our Phase 5 expansion project. The

Port has commenced the process of funding, design, costing, and consenting to have the infrastructure available by 2028, and is considering several options of the development, ranging from a capital expenditure between £111m to £330m.

Safety underpins our growth ambitions and everything we do across the whole of the Cromarty Firth, together with our environmental work, will ensure the Port operates at the highest level possible as we manage our custodianship of the Cromarty Firth. We are delighted to have been recognised with a Gold Award from RoSPA in 2023, in respect of this continuous focus on HSEQ.

Following on from earlier successes in the offshore renewable market, the Port won another significant contract for both the organisation and the supply chain in the area when Ocean Winds chose Port of Cromarty Firth's Invergordon Service Base as the marshalling facility for the Moray West offshore windfarm XL monopiles. The multi-million-pound contract was the first scope of work of this scale to use the whole of the Port's extensive new Quay West facility. The monopiles are the third largest in the world to be used in the offshore wind sector and are the largest in Europe to date, weighing in at up to 2,000 tonnes each.

The North Sea oil and gas market continues to decline and, as the economy moves towards net zero, this trend is forecast to continue.

The Cruise market continues to grow, however, and the season performed strongly, continuing to bounce back from COVID during

2023 with a record breaking 129 ship calls to Invergordon, carrying over 221,793 passengers. Cruise remains an integral part of the business and forward bookings are already being taken for the 2025/26 seasons.

Our financial performance during 2023 was another record breaking one. We generated £16,393,159m turnover with an operating profit of £6,109,715m, which is the best return the Port has achieved since becoming a Trust Port in 1973.

As an independent statutory body and UK Trust Port, Port of Cromarty Firth is governed by an independent board that provides strategic guidance and direction to ensure best use of our assets and infrastructure. Our objectives as a Trust Port are to develop, improve and safeguard the Port and to enable economic activity. We are achieving this by ensuring that we are primed and ready to take advantage of future opportunities that renewable energy markets can bring to the area, including jobs and business opportunities.

I would like to add my thanks to those of our Chair for the commitment, diligence and resilience demonstrated by our team, board, Port users, customers, and wider stakeholder groups throughout 2023 and look forward to continuing those relationships into 2024 and beyond as we strive to provide world-class infrastructure and facilities for the future.



Alex Campbell
Chief Executive

Annual Accounts

Statement of Comprehensive Income For the Year Ended 31 December 2023

	2023 £	2022 £
Turnover	16,393,169	9,847,564
Cost of sales	(7,994,049)	(6,715,281)
Gross Profit	8,399,120	3,132,283
Administrative Expenses	(2,289,405)	(2,368,993)
Other operating income	-	2,000,000
Operating profit	6,109,715	2,763,290
Interest receivable and similar income	248,520	16,923
Interest payable and similar expenses	(516,278)	(488,702)
Other finance costs	(59,000)	(64,000)
Profit before taxation	5,782,957	2,227,511
Tax on profit	(1,586,250)	(630,535)
Profit for the financial year	4,196,707	1,596,976
Other comprehensive income		
Actuarial gain on defined benefit pension schemes	26,000	3,866,000
Tax relating to other comprehensive income	-	(966,500)
Total comprehensive income for the year	4,222,707	4,496,476

Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2023

	2023 £	2022 £
Fixed assets		
Tangible assets	61,097,115	60,167,644
Investments	50	50
	61,097,165	60,167,694
Current assets		
Stocks	11,683	11,683
Debtors	4,301,675	1,331,420
Investments	5,000,000	-
Cash at bank and in hand	5,423,700	8,227,121
	14,737,058	9,570,224
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(6,974,806)	(3,568,555)
Net current assets	7,762,252	6,001,669
Total assets less current liabilities	68,859,417	66,169,363
Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year	(24,094,351)	(25,663,182)
Provisions for liabilities		
Deferred tax liability	833,740	797,562
	(833,740)	(797,562)
Net assets	43,931,326	39,708,619
Capital and reserves		
Profit and loss reserves	43,931,326	39,708,619

Hugh Mitchell
Chair

HSEQ in numbers

SITE
SAFETY INDUCTIONS

1611

EMPLOYEE
INDUCTIONS

8

TOOLBOX
TALKS

27

12

PERMIT
CHECKS

STAFF
TRAINING COURSES

38

WORKPLACE
INSPECTIONS

23

RISK
ASSESSMENT REVIEWS

31

SAFETY
FORUMS

33

(Internal Departments)

CONTRACTOR
REVIEWS

15

INTERNAL
AUDITS

6

HSEQ
MEETINGS

46



RoSPA Gold Award



In 2023, Port of Cromarty Firth won a RoSPA Gold Health and Safety Award – one of the most sought-after achievement awards for the health and safety industry.

Awarded by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), the accolade demonstrates the Port's dedication to ensuring staff, customers, clients and contractors get home safely at the end of every working day.

The achievement built on the Silver Award received in 2022, highlighting the efforts that have gone into improving the Port's already-strong health and safety processes and procedures.

Julia Small, RoSPA's Achievements Director, said: "Accidents at work and work-related ill health don't just have huge financial implications or cause major disruption – they significantly impact an individual's quality of life. That's why good safety performance deserves to be recognised and rewarded.

"We are thrilled that Port of Cromarty Firth has won a RoSPA Award and would like to congratulate them on showing an unwavering commitment to keeping their employees, clients and customers safe from accidental harm and injury."

The RoSPA Health and Safety Awards is the largest occupational health and safety awards programme in the UK, attracting almost 2,000 entries every year, covering nearly 50 countries and a reach of over seven million employees.

The programme recognises organisations' commitment to continuous improvement in the prevention of accidents and ill health at work, looking at entrants' overarching health and safety management systems, including practices such as leadership and workforce involvement.

Cromarty Firth is the beating heart of the renewables industry

The UK is a world leader in offshore wind. Second only to China, it accounts for roughly 20 per cent of global offshore wind capacity according to latest figures.

This capacity is set to increase by more than 30GW, thanks to the pipeline of projects currently earmarked for construction under the latest ScotWind leasing round.

The volume of parts and equipment needed to fulfil such a huge programme of construction requires very large construction and marshalling sites with sufficient capacity to realise the size and scale of these new renewable projects. Port of Cromarty Firth is one of the two prime sites in the country for these work scopes.

The Cromarty Firth is the beating heart of this industry, and the Port continues to work tirelessly towards achieving a golden economic future for the Highlands, Scotland and the UK to build on renewable energy and net zero ambitions.

The Port already has a substantial track record of success in renewables in the North Sea – and the pipeline of work it will bring to the Port, Invergordon and the Highlands in terms of quality jobs is on a scale not seen since the oil boom of the 1970s.

Port of Cromarty Firth has supported the move to renewables through the £2.5bn 588MW Beatrice and £2.6bn 1GW Moray East offshore windfarms, the Seagreen Project, and most recently the marshalling of the Moray West monopiles, which are the largest in Europe at up to 2,000 tonnes.



Port's cruise season brings record numbers and £20m boost to Highland economy

Port of Cromarty Firth welcomed record numbers of passengers and ships during the 2023 cruise liner season.

The first ship to arrive was Ambassador Cruises' Ambience on April 1, with 1,700 passengers and 600 crew onboard.

There followed 128 more between April and mid-October, with a mammoth 221,793 seaborne tourists in total arriving at the Port over that period – 23% up on 2022 and the highest passenger figures in Scotland.

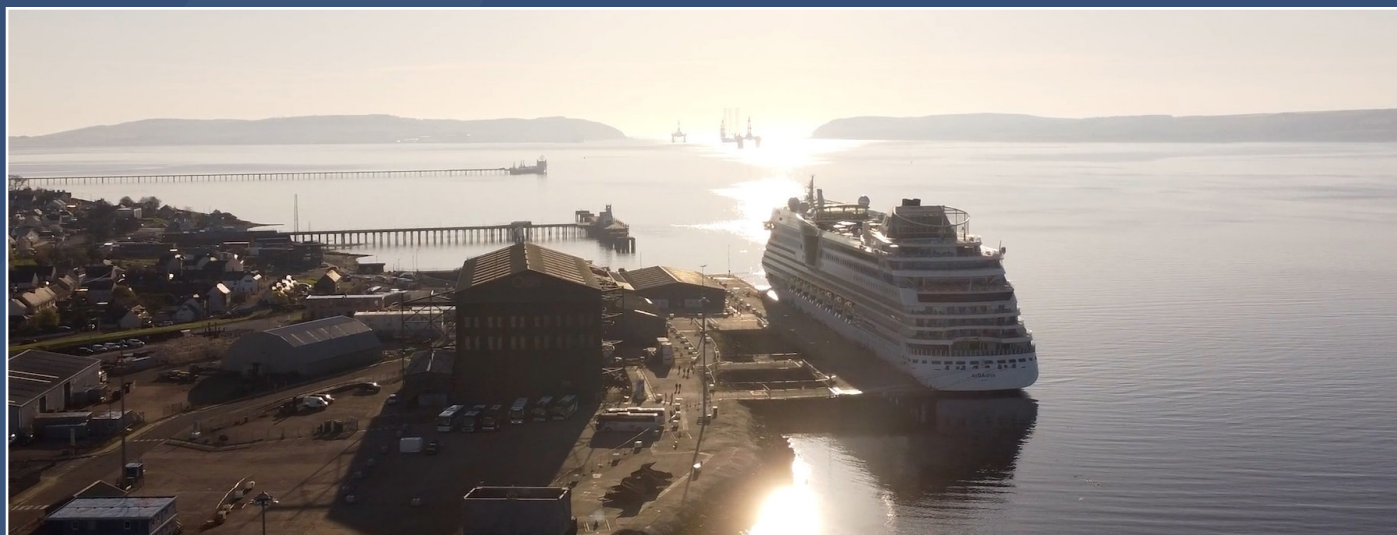
In total, the gross tonnage of cruise vessels which arrived in the Firth in 2023 amounted to 9,278,064 GT.

It means that Cromarty Firth's deep sheltered waters continue to attract the biggest and best ocean going vessels to the Port, bringing with them a boost of around £20m to the local economy.

As a gateway port to the Highlands, Port of Cromarty Firth worked in tandem with local tourism operators to offer visitors from around the world the chance to further explore the Highlands' famous landmarks, scenery and history - including the ever-popular Loch Ness and Urquhart Castle.

Since 2018, cruise growth for the Port has averaged 9% per annum. This growth is set to continue for the foreseeable future, with the Port playing its part in the Highland tourism industry thanks to continuing investment in its facilities.

The Port will be perfectly positioned to take advantage of the current global growth of cruise, with capacity forecast to increase by nearly 20% by 2025 – with 31 new ships launched in 2024 and 2025, and new-to-cruise passengers set to hit four million.



Port benefits from new rounds of oil and gas

Port of Cromarty Firth continued to maintain its position in 2023 as one of Europe's premier port facilities for oil and gas works.

The year saw an upsurge in work for its skilled labour force and established supply chains, both highly experienced in inspecting, repairing and maintaining – as well as decommissioning – the largest offshore production platforms and subsea structures.

The 33rd Oil and Gas Licensing Round, which closed in January 2023 after three months, received the highest number of applications since 2016/17, with 115 applications received from 756 companies for 258 of the 931 blocks offered.

Twenty-seven licences were offered in the first batch to support energy security, while more blocks were merged into five existing licences.



Community Support

A number of organisations and projects have benefited from funding from Port's Community Sponsorship Programme, which aims to safeguard and develop Cromarty Firth communities for the benefit of local people.

Over £50,000 has been awarded over the past 12 months, and here is what some of the recipients had to say...

Blooming Gardeners

"The support that Blooming Gardeners has received from Port of Cromarty Firth enables us to continue to provide meaningful work for our gardeners."

"We are delighted to play our part in providing beautiful planters to enhance our local environment for both tourists and residents. We look forward to a long-lasting relationship with Port of Cromarty Firth."

- **Fiona Sim, Chairperson**

Ross County Women and Girls FC

"We are hugely grateful for the donation made to Ross County Girls & Women FC. As a charity we rely heavily on community support and this donation will make a huge difference to enabling us to expand and offer more girls the opportunity to take part in football."

- **Iain MacIver, Ross County Girls and Women FC Chairman**

Alness Taekwondo Academy

"On behalf of the Academy, I would like to thank Port of Cromarty Firth for their significant contribution which will go towards team tracksuits and travel costs. We are all very grateful and delighted to receive this funding, it's great to see local business supporting local community-based clubs and has boosted our team spirit in the club."

"Our Academy gives the local community an opportunity to develop valuable life skills through martial arts training which improves physical and mental health. We are proud to provide martial training to 17 talented students and we hope to continue growing over the coming months."

- **Andrew O'Hare, Alness Taekwondo Academy Founder**



Protecting Our Environment

Each year, hundreds of common and Arctic terns travel incredible distances to nest around Port of Cromarty Firth.

Arriving in May or early June, 300 pairs of nesting terns call the Cromarty Firth – between Alness and Nigg – their home over the summer months.

While once the terns used to try and nest in the Port's working areas and in close proximity to workers and visitors, the Port now annually deploys a tern raft. This is a man-made island habitat designed to attract the terns to a safer location, away from people and activity.

Since its initial deployment, the raft has been modified to protect terns from predation – with the aim of improving the number of chicks that survive.



The Port advises mariners and anyone operating within the Port to give the raft a wide berth to avoid disturbing any nesting birds – and works with the RSPB and Marine Scotland to ensure they are safe.

In 2023, terns built 110 nests on the raft, which is covered in crushed scallop shells (the terns' nesting material of choice).

Terns are small to medium sized migratory seabirds that are often found in Africa, South America and south-east Asia in the winter, and the UK in the summer. They're typically drawn to the north and west coasts, especially in Scotland and Ireland, including the waters of the Cromarty Firth. Terns can live up to 30 years old, and Arctic terns hold the record for the longest migration of all bird species.





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