



CYNGOR SIR
YNYS MÔN
ISLE OF ANGLESEY
COUNTY COUNCIL

The Senedd's Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

Holyhead Port Storm Damage and Closure

Isle of Anglesey County Council Written Evidence

February 2025

Status: Official

1.0 Introduction to the Evidence

- 1.1 The Isle of Anglesey County Council (the Council) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the inquiry being conducted by the Senedd's Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee on the Holyhead Port Storm Damage and Closure.
- 1.2 This written evidence should be considered in conjunction with the oral evidence that the Council's Head of Service for Regulation and Economic Development will present to the Committee on the 6th of March 2025.
- 1.3 The Council notes the inquiry's Terms of Reference. Our evidence will focus on the impact of the Port's closure, as well as the extent and effectiveness of the steps being taken to mitigate the impact.

2.0 Socio-Economic Importance of Holyhead Port

- 2.1 The importance of the Port of Holyhead to the local and Welsh economy cannot be underestimated. It is the second largest roll-on roll-off port in the UK (after Dover). It is the main port for freight and sea passenger transport to Ireland, and as part of European Route E22, it provides a key connection in the "land bridge" from Ireland to the rest of Europe. It remains the fastest route across the Irish Sea despite an increase in the number of direct ferries from Rosslare to mainland Europe. Nearly 60% of goods carried on HGVs travelling between the Republic of Ireland and Europe pass through the Port of Holyhead. The Port also accounts for three quarters of passenger traffic between Wales and the Republic of Ireland¹.
- 2.2 Annual port traffic (freight and passenger cars combined) was circa 953,000 vehicles (all types) in 2019. Traffic numbers then declined, mainly due to the impact of the UK's exit from the European Union as well as the Covid-19 pandemic. A 38% recovery, however, took place between 2021 and 2022.
- 2.3 An economic impact study of the Port was undertaken by Royal Haskoning on behalf of the Welsh Government in 2021². It noted that:
 - a. The Port supported approximately 670 jobs locally (circa 580 Full Time Equivalents (FTE)).
 - b. The jobs available at the Port were equivalent to 21% of the total jobs available in the Holyhead and surrounding areas, and 3% of the Island's labour market.
 - c. The Port of Holyhead contributed an estimated £78.5 million per year to the local economy (6.9% of the Island's GVA in 2019).
 - d. The transport and storage sector ranked fourth largest for employment in Holyhead, accounting for 11.3% of jobs. This is a significantly higher proportion than for Anglesey (4.3%) and Wales (3.3%).
 - e. The annual in-direct economic impact of the Port and its supply chain was estimated to be between £25.9 million and £28.4 million. The induced job numbers were estimated to be between 990 and 1370 (or 860 and 1190 FTEs).

3.0 Storm Darragh

¹ IACC Report 'Improving reliability and resilience across the Menai Strait. Detailed evidence base'. June 2023

² Report for Welsh Government 'Port of Holyhead Strategic Economic Impact Study' July 2021

- 3.1 Storm Darragh was an extratropical cyclone which formed on the 5th of December 2024 and dissipated on 9 December 2024. The storm brought wind speeds more than 90mph, posing a risk to life.
- 3.2 The Storm affected the Island on Saturday, 7th December 2024 and Sunday, 8th December 2024.
- 3.3 The Storm had a significant impact on Anglesey, closing roads, causing damage to structures and properties and the loss of power supply. The Storm also forced the closure of Britannia Bridge (one of only two links from Anglesey across the Menai Strait) and the closure of Holyhead Port.
- 3.4 During this period the Council collaborated with partners, responded to issues and impacts, and ensured effective communication and information sharing with local residents. The following infographic summarises the Council's information sharing activity between the 4th and 9th of December.



- 3.5 The Port experienced a total closure to ferry traffic from the 7th of December 2024 to the 15th of January 2025 (a period of 40 days).
- 3.6 Given that the closure was initially expected to be for a short period of time, HGVs and trailers were seen to be parking throughout Holyhead, However, once it became clear that the closure would be for longer than anticipated, HGVs were rerouted by their operators to other routes along the west coast of the United Kingdom.
- 3.7 The December closure period (7th to 31st), saw 22,300 fewer HGV movements on the A55 and A5 (a reduction of 12.6% in eastbound HGVs and 13.7% westbound). The January closure (1st to 15th) saw 16,100 fewer HGVs (7.6% eastbound and 9.9% westbound).
- 3.8 The Port partially reopened on the 16th of January with one operational berth.

4.0 Council Response to the Closure of Holyhead Port

- 4.1 The Council was part of a multi-agency emergency response, collaborating through formal Strategic and Tactical Coordination Group structures. This enabled effective and timely communication, information sharing, and decision making. The Council was not the decision-making body in relation to the Port of Holyhead, but was part of the response arrangements to manage the impacts (i.e. HGVs not being able to travel across the Irish Sea). The Council engaged and collaborated with the Port Authority, Welsh Government and other partners throughout the closure period to manage the impacts and ensure information was shared with residents
- 4.2 In order to understand the impacts the closure had incurred upon Anglesey and Welsh businesses, the Council launched an online survey on the 8th of January. The Survey remained open until the 31st of January.
- 4.3 A total of 62 responses were received from a range of sectors:

Sector	Number of responses
Hospitality	24
Retail	16
Beauty	6
Services supporting logistics	5
Other	5
Logistics	3

Two responses were received from the West Midlands and one response was received from a business that was closed for the season. These responses are excluded from the figures.

- 4.4 A statistical analysis of the responses illustrates that:
- 92% of respondents were from Holyhead/ Holy Island.
 - 54% of respondents stated that jobs were at risk due to the closure of the Port.
 - Of the jobs at risk, 74% of these included permanent roles, with only 20% being zero-hour contracts.
 - 95% felt that a reduced number of sailings from the 16th of January would impact their businesses.
- 4.5 The qualitative responses demonstrated that:
- Businesses that support logistics providers (i.e. mechanics and hotels) were amongst the worst impacted financially, with losses in the several tens of thousands of pounds.
 - Many businesses in Holyhead are reliant on the footfall ferry traffic creates (passengers and crew).
 - The drop in footfall has negatively impacted a wide range of businesses.
 - Various businesses reporting trade down 90%.
 - Concerns remain that a reduced number of sailings would impact future revenue.
 - Fears exist that there will be less confidence in the viability and resilience of the Port.
- 4.6 The following are direct quotes as provided by respondents:

- a. A truck service garage based on the Island estimates “*the financial impact could be between £50,000 to £100,000*”.
 - b. A trucking agency staff provider stated “*December is the busiest time of year for our business transporting freight throughout the whole of the UK. As the Port is closed all the vacancies around Anglesey have been relocated to other areas of the UK, resulting in job losses. Companies will not pay the 4 hours round trip and 200 miles from Holyhead to Birkenhead so have relocated all their wagons to other ports.*”
 - c. A large hotelier said “*occupancy (had) gone from usually 70/80% this time of year to 15-20% causing many hours lost for housekeepers, kitchen and front of house staff*”.
 - d. Another small retailer stated “*we rely on the footfall which the port generates. Since its closure we have seen a significant fall in trade of roughly 60 to 70%. Not only from the passengers (but) the local who works at the port (too)*”
 - e. A small retailer specialising in gift hampers has seen a 95% reduction in revenue.
 - f. A local café said “*With lower footfall of people coming through the doors at the cafe, means we’re serving less people, we still have to staff the cafe regardless every day, and ultimately less footfall means less income generated. This poses a huge threat on job stability, given an already difficult period in hospitality anyway because of extraordinary high bills, staff wages; supplier costs etc, especially during the month of January. We rely on passing trade through the port to get us through quieter months. It has been considerably quieter during the closure. It definitely has posed risk of job losses.*”
- 4.7 Footfall data, provided by the SMART Cymru Programme, demonstrated a drastic decline in the number of people visiting Holyhead town centre. Footfall for December 2024 and January 2025 decreased by 36% and 33% respectively compared to the same period in 2023 and 2024.
- 4.8 Between the 6th of December 2024 and the 15th of January 2025, total high street footfall was 52,215 - a 37% decline from the 83,445 visitors recorded in the same period the previous year.
- 4.9 This decline aligns with the evidence provided in the responses to the Council’s business survey.

5.0 Summary of the Council’s Key Comments in Relation to the Inquiry

- 5.1 The Port of Holyhead is of significant economic and social value to Anglesey. It is intrinsically linked to local social, economic and community well-being, as well as identity and cultural heritage. Holyhead is a port town.
- 5.2 As the second largest roll-on roll-off port in the UK, it remains the principal port and fastest route for freight and passenger transfer to and from Ireland, handling approximately 1,500,000 passengers a year and approximately 4,000,000 tonnes of freight
- 5.3 The Port is a key employer on Anglesey, supporting hundreds of quality jobs. Many businesses benefit directly and in-directly from its operation.
- 5.4 Ensuring the prompt and safe reopening of the damaged berth must be a short-term priority - as is the need to provide support to local businesses that have been impacted by the closure of the Port.
- 5.5 The Council believes that the Welsh Government should provide additional financial support and practical measures to help mitigate negative impacts on local businesses (including transport, logistics, retail and hospitality).
- 5.6 Ensuring the long-term resilience and stability of the Port is critical to socio-economic growth and trade. The Port is critical to the vitality of the Anglesey, North Wales, Welsh, United Kingdom and Irish economies.

- 5.7 The effective operation of the Port is also directly reliant upon the resilience and reliability of the Menai Strait crossings. A symbiotic relationship exists between the infrastructure, where an issue at one location impacts the other, as well as surrounding communities and businesses. If resilience is not improved then the risk of failure will continue to increase over time.
- 5.8 Perceived and actual issues in terms of resilience and connectivity have a detrimental impact on the Island's ability to attract economic investment. This also impacts on image and profile.
- 5.9 The Port will be critical to the success of the Anglesey Freeport and the significant positive benefits which could be generated.
- 5.10 The Council welcomes the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales's announcement on the 7th of January 2025 regarding the establishment of a Task Force to deliver long-term stability for the Port. We are eager to better understand the purpose and scope of the Task Force, and how it will deliver tangible interventions to ensure the future of the Port.
- 5.11 The closure of the Port as a result of Storm Darragh has also demonstrated the lack of current and meaningful economic data. A new economic impact assessment to provide reliable and robust information to ensure informed, timely and appropriate decision making.