

Support regional exporting, says Port of Cork

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One of the Port of Cork's most senior figures has blasted multinationals and the export industry for failing to support the regions in exporting goods to the UK and continental Europe.



Commercial manager at the port, Captain Michael McCarthy, said it made “absolutely no sense” for exporters to drive from Cork and Kerry to Dublin or Belfast to transfer their goods to the UK or Europe, when regional ports, such as Cork, could be used.

Mr McCarthy, who was speaking following a seminar hosted by the Irish Exporters' Association (IEA), in Cork, warned that the Government would be left with massive regional imbalance post-Brexit, unless the issue was tackled.

He said the Port of Cork had received great support from load-on, load-off (LoLo) cargo transporters, but that it needed to be replicated by roll-on, roll-off (RoRo) transporters. LoLo uses cranes to load and unload cargo, while RoRo uses ships with in-built ramps.

McCarthy said: “The Government is going to have to take a serious look at it, because it will become a huge issue post-Brexit. Our LoLo partners have been excellent — Cork has a strong LoLo service offering, growing at 6.5% in the first quarter of 2017, with exports up 8.5% — but RoRo exporters are just not looking outside of Dublin. It is because they are too satisfied with the status quo. They are consolidating, rather than innovating.”

He said major supermarket chains, and other multinationals, were ignoring the benefits of regional ports. They preferred the traditional method of driving to Dublin or Belfast and ferrying goods to the UK and Europe. “Logistics are most efficient in a direct straight line — the shortest route. There are major opportunities for ferries from Cork bypassing the UK and direct to continental Europe. Why is this not being debated by the IEA? Why is this not being debated by Irish business interests? Why is this not being debated by multinational companies, who are facing major compliance with environmental

footprint? Why is this not being debated by the Irish Government, who are not pressuring industry to have a regional balance for our imports-exports? This un-balancing of regional distribution is undermining the viability of our Irish ports, with the exception of Dublin and Belfast,” he said.

Dublin and Belfast had major growth, leading to more facilities for exporters, which was a “chicken and egg” situation for regional ports, Mr McCarthy added. The Port of Cork will invest €80m to realise its potential by 2040 and that commitment had to be matched, he said.

“We could be second to none, if we had the same enthusiasm and commitment. To debate why cargo has to travel from Cork and Kerry, the full length of Ireland, to Warrenpoint and Belfast, to be carried across the Irish Sea to the UK, and onwards to the Continent, makes absolute no sense,” he said.

The challenges of Brexit were also debated at the seminar. General manager of Midleton Distillery, Paul Wickham, said the burgeoning global demand for Irish whiskey had to be protected.

“Irish whiskey comprises 28% of Ireland’s beverage exports, making it one of Ireland’s fastest-growing export sectors. Ensuring that we maintain access to existing markets and open up access to new markets, particularly in the Brexit context, should be a priority in furthering the global Irish whiskey renaissance,” he said.