

## **Prospects for Hunterston as Container Hub**

*Statement from **Bill Burns**, Hunterston Project Director, Clydeport*

Clydeport, in partnership with Scottish Enterprise and North Ayrshire Council, has embarked on a consultation process to assess the viability of building a major international container transshipment terminal at the Hunterston deep water site. If given the go-ahead, the terminal would bring a substantial number of jobs to the area, serve major trade routes to Europe, Asia and include transatlantic crossings, effectively seeing Hunterston act as a gateway port for all of the UK and Northern Europe. The facility would also be a Northern European hub, providing fast and lower cost connections with virtually all of the world's major economies.

Bill Burns, a Scot who was previously commercial director of the leading Middle East container transshipment hub at Salalah in Oman, has been appointed managing director of the project and is heading up the vital consultation process. Peter Lawwell, commercial director of Clydeport, said: "Hunterston has the natural advantage of having one of the deepest sea entrance channels in northern Europe, which lends itself perfectly to the development of an offshore hub. Unlike other UK ports, it does not need to be dredged on an annual basis, and is flexible enough to cope with the continued increase in the size of container vessels. Therefore, it has both cost, capacity and environmental advantages."

Two-thirds of world trade is now transported in containers and the rapid growth in trade, largely fuelled by industry globalisation, has resulted in the continued growth in container traffic, significant increases in ship size, and the development of hub and spoke systems based on transshipment. Hunterston is a brownfield site with planning safeguards for future port development dependant on deep draft access. It is capable of generating substantial economic benefits for Scotland, the UK and Northern Europe.

Bill Burns said: "Hunterston Container Hub has the opportunity to serve all of the UK and the North West Continent including Scandinavia. It is generally acknowledged within the industry that demand will continue to be strong while capacity will be a constraint given the current growth levels. With growth rates in North European ports averaging close to 10% in the first half of 2002, and with these ports facing major environmental, dredging and land use issues, Hunterston is in an ideal situation to answer the capacity issue with its natural deep water adjacent to a brownfield site."

New port capacity is urgently required at UK and continental ports to cope with constant container traffic growth. The terminal will initially be expected to bring 200-250 jobs to North Ayrshire, with the actual construction of the site requiring more manpower in an area which currently has a shortage of skilled and semi-skilled employment opportunities.

Clydeport is confident that transshipment of container traffic via Hunterston will help lower carrier cost and reduce environmental damage at overcrowded port locations, whilst maintaining quality of service for shippers. In addition, a move towards transshipment will result in far less transport movement overall, with subsequent reductions in vessel emissions and fuel consumption.

Additionally, the rail access from Hunterston will readily serve the Midlands and other key UK markets compared with congested rail networks in the South of England.