

Demand for In Depth and Public Incident Investigation of Industrial Vessels out of Control at Peel Ports Hunterston Jetty

From Friends of the Firth of Clyde

07Feb21

Dear Sir / Madam,

We are writing in representation of the Friends of the Firth of Clyde regarding the recent serious incident on Tuesday 2nd Feb at the Peel Ports Hunterston Terminal. It is clear this incident was averted from serious accident by a number of chance circumstances and the swift action of our emergency services. Should this not have occurred, there could have been a dual ship-wreck, with likely high environmental damage and potential loss of life. We demand a full and public incident investigation in order to prevent reoccurrence and to guarantee that any proposals for future use of the terminal will be fully scrutinised in light of the this investigation.

As concerned members of the local community we have a number of questions that must be included that are outlined below:

Background:

The deep-sea port of Hunterston has been relatively dormant since 2016, prior to this it was used for coal import to feed Longannet. With the closure of Scottish coal fired power stations, the owners, Clydeport, a section of Peel Ports, who are also part of the wider Peel Group, are now seeking alternative industrial use for the port, including the adjacent construction area, and proposed a number of uses in the 'Hunterston Master Plan' that they published in May 2019. These uses include decommissioning of oil-rigs and a Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) Terminal, both of which would include use of the jetty, where this serious incident with the drill ships has occurred.

Clydeport have a well documented poor safety record at this site, with a number of reportable serious accidents, including fatalities at this site.

As well as being the private commercial organisation who own Hunterston Terminal, in 1992 Clydeport became the Clyde Port Authority, which means they have legal responsibility and statutory powers for marine regulation for the Firth of Clyde – including enforcement of safety and environmental standards.

The two oil drillings ships - Valaris DS4 and DS8 arrived from Africa via the Canaries for berthing on 27Dec20. It is understood the owners Valaris are in financial difficulty, having declared bankruptcy in August 2020. Both the DS4 and DS8 are approx. 250m long. It is understood that the storage of these vessels was under 'warm stacking conditions' with a skeleton crew of 8 between the ships.

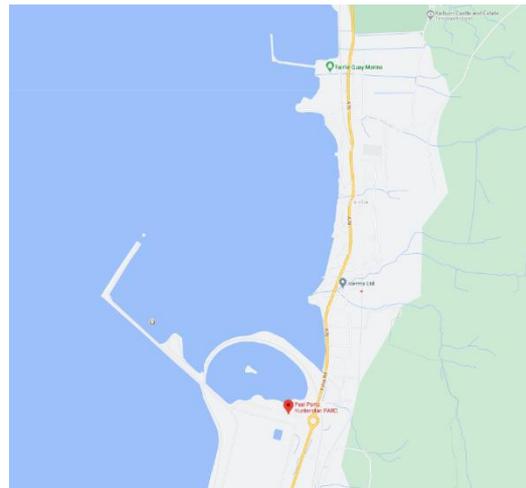
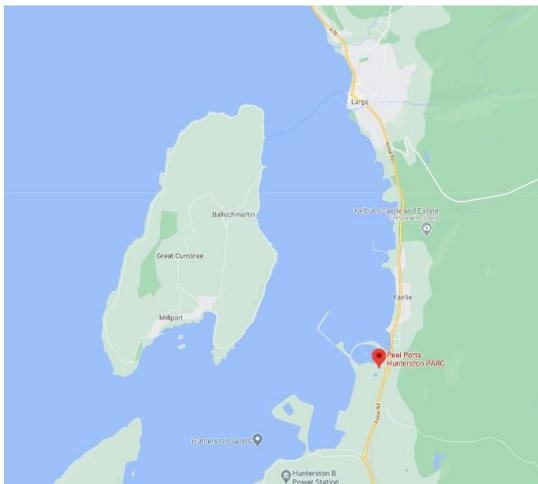
The Jetty sits approximately 1km from land and is approximately 400m long for berthing. As this was shorter than the 2 vessels, DS4 was berthed half on half off the jetty with the anchor deployed in an attempt to secure the bow. The windage, i.e. the side of each boat above the water line subject to wind is approximately 8,800m².



The End of the Jetty

Katabatic winds are well known area and wind speeds exceeding 80mph are seen frequently in the area.

The area around Hunterston is of high environmental value and has been designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) as well as MPA (Marine Protected Area) and a rare ecosystem of endangered species protected under OSPAR and the Nature Conservation Act.



Our Understanding of The Incident:

- On the evening of Tuesday 2nd Feb at approx. 19:20 DS4 broke its moorings and issued a Mayday call to the coastguard. The weather conditions were very poor with Easterly winds of >40mph and heavy waves.
- The Coastguard, RNLi and Clydeport tug boats were scrambled from Girvan to Greenock to assist along with helicopter support.
- DS4 had become completely detached from the jetty and was halfway between the jetty and Cumbrae. Had it not been for the unorthodox mooring arrangement with the anchor already deployed in the Fairlie Bay - given the winds and the tides, this vessel would have become shipwrecked on the Isle of Cumbrae
- It is understood that the crew on board were unable to start the engines when requested to do so by the coast guard.
- As the emergency assistance arrived DS8 also broke its moorings and detached from the jetty. As this vessel had no anchor deployed the emergency boats were

directed to shunt this vessel back towards the jetty. It is unknown if any crew were on this ship.

- The failure of the moorings is speculated to be from the mooring lines as well as the bollards on the jetty.
- The incident risked loss of life to the crew and emergency support.
- A shipwreck of 2 vessels of this magnitude of this nature would almost certainly resulted in a serious environmental disaster.
- Operators routinely observed on the jetty undertaking risky work without any lifejackets.



Issues That Require Urgent Independent Investigation:

We are extremely concerned that it is unsustainable and dangerous for the Clyde Port Authority, responsible for enforcement of marine regulation and safety enforcement, to also be the largest commercial organisation on the Clyde. This presents a significant conflict of interest, rendering controls impossible.

We demand that investigation must be fully independent and transparently address the risks and conflicts of interest that will inevitably arise from the commercial organisation, which decides on the use and management of Hunterston terminal being the same organisation that has responsibility for health and safety standards.

Having assured us that the investigation will be independent and fully transparent we want answers to the following questions:

- Who authorised the use of the jetty for 2 vessels, where the length significantly exceeded the length of the jetty?
- What detailed analysis was undertaken, and is this documented in a full risk assessment? What formal authorisation processes were put in place by ClydePort?
- What decision making process was undertaken to allow vessels of this windage to anchor at this exposed site in winter, with regular katabatic winds and winds in excess of 80mph? For example, at Faslane, which is a very sheltered port operated by the Navy under the Queen's Harbourmaster, they allow conventional ships in berths 1 and 2. Any vessels with a windage of >3,500m² must move off the jetty in sustained winds of >35kts. Compare this to the Hunterston scenario:
 - Vessels with a windage of 8,800m²
 - Hunterston Port is significantly more exposed than Faslane.
 - The forecast conditions and worse must have been anticipated in planning this winter berthing. The weather conditions last week were also forecast well in advance.

- What risk assessment was undertaken regarding complete breaking of moorings with the following factors:
 - Only a skeleton crew of 8 who were unable to operate the engines, being in charge of the vessels.
 - The potential impact on Hunterston Nuclear Power inlet and outlet had the wind been northerly.
- Are there clear enough lines of responsibility for oversight of the whole operation when, as in this circumstance, there are many subcontractors involved in the berthing arrangements.
- The suitability of the jetty which is 52 years old, and not designed for this activity – what are the implications for similar activities promoted by Clydeport / Peel Ports.
- What is the impact of there being no wind disrupting structures on the jetty an longer since the removal of the cranes.
- What on-going monitoring of the conditions did Clydeport / Peelports have in place at the jetty - it is understood that they may not have any wind anemometer on the jetty.
- Who is paying for this investigation and emergency response? It was easily predicable and should not be covered from the public purse.
- Have these vessels been deregistered as ships and re-registered as barges to reduce the minimum crew requirements of a ship? Certainly the crew aboard appeared to be totally inadequate.
- What type of antifouling is used by these vessels and has this been risk assessed for long lay up?
- What are the implications for the planning permissions that are currently in place for operation at this jetty and should they be reassessed in light of this incident and a tightening of the operational scope should be imposed.

The incident is the latest in a long line of industrial incident and accidents that have taken place at Hunterston terminal under the stewardship of Clydeport / Peel Ports. We urgently request that all governing authorities and representatives direct for a public enquiry with attention to the serious issues we raise.

We also ask North Ayrshire Planning and Marine Scotland, to recognise that this incident highlights the unsuitability of many activities proposed in the 'Hunterston Master Plan' and that the scope of allowable operation needs to be assessed in light of the findings of this investigation.

Yours faithfully

On behalf of Friends of the Firth of Clyde

Caroline, Clare, Jackie, Cyndy, Rosie, Paul, Elizabeth, David, Rita