

Item:  
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## **Report to Partnership Meeting 23 April 2021**

### **RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY**

#### **Opportunity Cromarty Firth**

Opportunity Cromarty Firth is an ambitious and collaborative initiative, exploring the opportunity for the Cromarty Firth to become a 'Free Trade Zone', as part of the UK Government's post-Brexit economic growth strategy.

The creation of a free trade zone in the Cromarty Firth will help secure a sustainable 50-year pipeline of supply chain opportunities, primarily in the offshore renewable energy sector.

The ambitions of the project are to stimulate economic activity and employment, attract inward investment in innovative renewable energy technologies of the future and equip local people and businesses with skills in these sectors to bring transformational regeneration to the Highlands.

Opportunity Cromarty Firth is a partnership of organisations exploring the opportunity for the Cromarty Firth to become a 'Free Trade Zone'.

Partners of the project include the Port of Cromarty Firth and Global Energy Group, as well as other regional businesses, academia and the public sector.

The primary objective of Opportunity Cromarty Firth is to maximise the local benefits from a pipeline of renewable energy projects which will create business opportunities and employment, attract inward investment, research and development, and position the Highlands at the heart of the country's commitment to becoming a net-zero economy.

The creation of 'Free Trade Zones', also referred to as a 'Free Ports', is part of the UK Government's post-Brexit economic growth strategy. Plans are in place to create up to 10 Free Ports across the UK which will have unique operational, regulatory and customs rules.

UK Government has chosen the English freeports following a competition. Discussions between DfT and Scottish Government on the selection process for the Scottish - which wishes to brand them 'Greenports' with an emphasis on sustainability and fair work- are stalled during the election period.

Whether Freeport/Greenport is achieved or not, conditions for the Firth to play a major role in the creation of floating offshore wind sites look very favourable., with the majority of the sites in the current ScotWind leasing round accessible from Invergordon for construction and operation. Large scale electricity production will landfall in the Firth,

with at scale green hydrogen production likely, with supply to distilleries, industrial processes, the gas grid, aquaculture, agriculture, transport and export in bulk.

### **HITRANS role**

HITRANS is a funding partner in the consortium. HITRANS interest is in port logistics, and connections to the hinterland- road, rail, pipeline and cable. The availability of green hydrogen offers a real possibility for transport decarbonisation of rail, bus and HGV. With COP26 as a springboard we are beginning to see how trials could be developed.

### **RISK REGISTER**

#### RTS Delivery

Impact – Economy, regional competitiveness

#### Policy

Impact – Decarbonisation of transport

#### Financial

Impact – Minor

#### Equality

Impact – n/a

### **Recommendation**

1. Members are asked to approve the report.

**Report by:** Frank Roach  
**Designation:** Partnership Manager  
**Date:** 13<sup>th</sup> April 2021

## Invergordon Greenport



- ▶ Excess of 100% renewable electricity
- ▶ Electrolyse on brownfield site to produce H2
- ▶ H2 Hub now not contingent on freeport status with demand also from gas grid, industrial processes, aquaculture, fertiliser, export, manufacturing and transport – rail bus and HGV

