

For immediate release: March 31, 2014

Sir Ben Ainslie opens the UK's newest container berth



Sir Ben flying the British flag on board the CMA CGM Marco Polo at DP World Southampton

Please note more pictures of the loading of the gold container and Sir Ben Ainslie driving a container crane are available at www.dropbox.com

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Sir Ben Ainslie, Britain's greatest ever Olympic sailor, ordered the loading of a giant golden container on to one of the world's biggest ships to open the UK's newest container handling facility today.

The ceremony with the four-times Olympic gold medallist and the 16,000 teu CMA CGM *Marco Polo* marked the official opening of DP World Southampton's £100 million new berth.

It also brought to an end one of the biggest engineering projects in the south of the country; building a new 500metre quay designed to handle the largest and deepest container vessels afloat and on order.

The port hosted a day of celebrations, which saw more than 300 guests drawn from the global shipping industry, local community and port staff entertained by BBC South Today's Sally Taylor holding a live question and answer session with the America's Cup winning sailor.

Themed on the gold standard, the event highlighted DP World Southampton's status as the UK's no.1 performing container terminal, turning vessels around faster than any other UK port.

DP World Southampton Managing Director, Chris Lewis said: "The opening is a momentous day in the history of the port, with the 500m long new quay, the first for

nearly 20 years, designed to ensure DP World Southampton can continue to handle the very biggest container ships long into the future.

"This new facility is a major investment in the future of Southampton's container operations and a huge vote of confidence in the team we have here to continue to deliver UK leading performance."

James Cooper, Chief Executive of Associated British Ports, which funded the £100m project, said: "Ben's talent, hard work and unwavering commitment to delivering the very highest level of performance makes him the perfect person to start operations here. He's an inspiration to the team here who have also been defining what the gold standard means in our industry.

"The Port of Southampton supports some 14,730 jobs and contributes around £1 billion to the economy every year. This new quay is vital to safeguard that and allow us to grow the business."

Sir Ben Ainslie said: "As someone who lives here in Hampshire, I know how the port is at the centre of the region's life and economy. So I'm proud to be part of something that has such a big role to play in its future.

"Whether in sport or in business you can't sit on your laurels. Success is hard won and competition is fierce. That's why this new facility is so impressive. It's a bid to stay ahead of the competition and I can relate to that."

The new berth, called SCT 5, is designed to handle the largest and deepest vessels in the world, including the new 18,000-teu ships that are currently coming into service. It is equipped with four new Liebherr super post panamax cranes, capable of reaching across ships 24 containers wide. A fifth Liebherr crane has been relocated from elsewhere in the terminal to ensure the new berth has the capability to turn ships around quickly and efficiently. While the new berth has a depth alongside of 16 metres, it can be deepened to 17 metres to cater for any future growth in vessel size.

Southampton's ability to cater for the largest container ships afloat is being further boosted by an ongoing dredging programme designed to deepen the main approach channel giving greater access and flexibility all year round.

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