The maritime sector is extremely important to the Scottish economy as it is responsible for the movement of goods to and from Scotland. This sector takes advantage of the excellent communication links as well as the variety of quality suppliers on the doorstep. Cruise vessels can either berth alongside or alternatively anchor and have a tendered visit. A major attraction of a tendered visit is the opportunity for passengers to see and experience the famous Moray Firth Dolphins, a major tourist attraction.

What are your main responsibilities as Chief Executive of the Port of Inverness?

I head up the Executive Team at the port to oversee all aspects of its operation. I sit on the board in an executive capacity and am also responsible for ensuring that we meet all our statutory obligations. The Port of Inverness is run as a Trust Port and its enabling legislation was laid down by an Act of Parliament in 1847, although we can trace our records back to the 12th Century. This makes us one of the oldest businesses in the North of Scotland and I am conscious of the heritage and reputation that the port has built up over centuries.

I am also responsible for our main business development activities, seeking out new opportunities to expand the port’s business whether working with existing port users or seeking to attract new opportunities. There is a board of eight non-executive Trustees who meet regularly throughout the year and are responsible for setting out the strategic direction of the port.

What is your port’s main trades?

Main trades include the import of fuel – Inverness is the main distribution centre for fuel in the Highlands and the fuel is offloaded from coastal tankers to the adjacent depot for onward delivery to sites. We also handle the export of wood pellets and Sterling Board as well as other specific one-off project cargoes. Agricultural products are also handled, typically grain and barley.

Being the Capital City of the Highlands, Inverness is a popular destination for cruise vessels. This year, 2019, we are due to welcome over 400 passengers to the Highlands via cruise ships. The port is not only well-placed for access to all the main tourist attractions – it is the closest port to Loch Ness & Urquhart Castle as well as Cader Castle and the Speyside Distilleries. The world-famous Castle Stuart Golf Links is within 20 minutes’ drive from the port. This year we will also be used as a turnaround port where the cruise company can use the Inverness Firth and tender their passengers ashore.

What role does technology play in port operations?

Technology is playing an increasing role in port operations. We have a safety management system that was introduced three years ago which has been a considerable benefit. We are currently looking at other such technological advances across both our maritime and non-maritime operations.

Please talk to us about the importance of the maritime sector and the Scottish economy:

The maritime sector is extremely important to the Scottish economy as it is responsible for the movement of goods to and from Scotland. On a wider basis, an economic impact study showed that collectively the industry employs 301,000 people, handles almost 500 million tonnes of freight and contributes £17.3 billion to the economy. In total UK ports handle 95% of all UK trade. The Port of Inverness is also a 50% stakeholder in Inverness Marina, a purpose built 147 berth marina that has been full since it first opened in 2010. The marina offers comprehensive facilities not only for berth holders but also visiting craft. Overall the marine leisure industry is a significant activity at several UK ports and smaller harbours. The sector has a revenue of over £35 million and over 1.1 million marine leisure craft, with over half privately owned by individuals. It is also estimated that each year over 14 million people participate in yachting and marine leisure activities.

What are your thoughts on Brexit and the potential impact on the import/export of goods?

Brexit is in everyone’s thoughts currently. The position seems to change daily and until we get clarity then we will have to plan accordingly. Speaking to a wide range of businesses it would appear that there will be opportunities for some whilst others are uncertain as to how it will impact upon their businesses. The major ports on the south coast will be impacted though measures are being to be put in place to mitigate any delays and impacts. With just over a month to go to the withdrawal date businesses are seriously considering the impact of a ‘no deal’ scenario. Our senior executive team are meeting regularly to monitor developments.