

Ten reasons why freeports are a bad idea

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I was asked yesterday if I might be available to discuss freeports on the media and what my 'top lines' would be if I did. These were what I suggested was wrong with them:

1) Freeports are bound to reduce the protection for workers. Light touch regulation always does in the end. Employers NIC is already going. Maybe it will be pensions next, and then what as desperate measures are taken to make this policy work. 2) Freeports increase the risk of criminals using the port, whether for drug or human trafficking, counterfeit goods or other illicit activity. 3) Having a border around the port will increase paperwork and costs for those using the port. Just look at Northern Ireland. 4) Regulation in freeports is going to be outsourced to the freeport operator. Really? Is that wise? Surely this creates the most massive conflicts of interest? Won't they turn a blind eye to deliver their own economic success? 5) Unless anyone knows what jobs are going to be created in a Freeport, why do it? What jobs are going to be created in each freeport rather than be shifted into them? 6) Freeport jobs are usually 'shed jobs' that usually attract fewer women. Is that the basis in which we wish to build economic development? 7) Freeports in the UK were abandoned in 2012 by David Cameron because they did not work. Why repeat the mistake now? 8) Jobs could simply be moved into the port with no real gain at all, and real losses in local areas that force employees to travel further to work. 9) It is still not clear how local authorities gain - and they may lose out from business rates cuts in freeports. 10) These are tax havens at the end of the day. The government will get less money - and when this government says that it needs to raise more tax that means someone else will pay. Why should we all subsidise those who want to free ride us by using a freeport?