**EMBARGOED UNTIL MIDNIGHT SUNDAY JANUARY 29th**

**Issued on behalf of Stena Line**

**Date: January 29th 2017**

**Stena Line hits half a million freight units in Belfast**

Leading ferry company Stena Line has posted a record year for freight traffic volumes on its Belfast Harbour routes in 2016.  For the first time in its history, Stena Line has carried over 500, 000 freight units through Belfast Harbour.

Stena Line operates three freight services from Belfast Harbour which provide up to 14 daily crossings options between its Cairnryan, Liverpool (Birkenhead) and Heysham services.

Paul Grant, Stena Line’s Trade Director (Irish Sea North) commented: “Despite operating in a highly competitive market, 2016 was a record year for Stena Line’s Northern Ireland operations.  To carry over 500 000 freight units is a fantastic achievement for the entire Stena Line team and one which also cements Belfast Harbour’s position as Northern Ireland leading freight hub.  In 2016 we also had record car and passenger volumes with almost 1.5 million passengers travelling with Stena Line, which represents a growth of 7% on the previous year.”

“Stena Line has invested heavily in its Belfast Harbour hub.  It’s reassuring to see that our vision and commitment to an expanding operation from Belfast Harbour has been rewarded.  Economic uncertainty is a concern for 2017, however, at Stena Line we remain focussed on providing our customers with the most frequent and reliable services into and out of Northern Ireland.  In the first quarter of 2017, we will be investing a further £7m locally with Harland & Wolff as we refit 9 of our Irish Sea ship fleet.”

Paul Grant concluded: “Whilst last year was a record year we cannot afford to be complacent, it’s vital that our investments in ships and ports is matched by infrastructure improvements to roads in Northern Ireland and Scotland particularly.  It’s also important that Belfast and Northern Ireland continues to invest in our growing tourism product.”

Joe O’Neill, Commercial Director, Belfast Harbour said: “Belfast Harbour is Northern Ireland’s principal maritime gateway with more than 70% of NI’s seaborne trade handled through the Port. This is supported by the record year Stena Line is reporting for 2016. We have been partners with them for more than 20 years and have seen their business here grow significantly during that time. This year alone they have increased the number of cars carried by 10% as well as grown passenger numbers by more than 95,000 and handled more than half a million freight vehicles with overall volumes growing almost 60% in the last 6 years. This is down to their hard work and adapting to the market and we look forward to continuing to support them and the growth of their business in the coming years.”

Stena Line is the largest ferry operator on the Irish Sea, offering the biggest fleet and the widest choice of routes between Britain to Ireland including Belfast to Liverpool and Heysham, Belfast to Cairnryan, Dublin to Holyhead and Rosslare to Fishguard routes, a total of 224 weekly sailing options between Britain and Ireland. Stena Line also offers a direct service from Rosslare to Cherbourg with three return crossings a week.

**NOTE TO EDITOR: For further information please contact Lawrence Duffy of Duffy Rafferty Communications on Belfast +44 (0) 28 9073 0880.**