



RE: 294704 - Crewing Levels / Followed by Pilot: Texada-Comox

August 7, 2020

Dear Minister Trevena,

Thank you very much for responding to the Texada Island Chamber of Commerce's letter regarding residents' concerns about the crewing level of the newest vessel in the BC Ferries fleet—the Island Discovery.

On the surface, your response sounds adequate to your jurisdiction. We can agree that BC Ferries operates at arms-length from the province and that it makes its staffing decisions.

You said that you take "the safety of our transportation network very seriously" but how did you take this particular situation seriously? When 200 residents responded to a survey in 6 days and 87% said "unsafe with 5 crew" and 92% said they "want more crew", the level of concern in the community appears greater than the action we saw that you took (stating 'not my jurisdiction').

If there was only one company that operated a new vehicle bought, in part, by BC taxpayers, that took all British Columbians and tourists on the Coquihalla Highway, and people were telling you that the vehicle was not crewed adequately and they feared for their safety, what would you do as BC's Minister of Transportation? Would you say, "I don't have responsibility to look more deeply into issues being raised about safety, so I'll leave it up to the company, the union, and the feds to figure this out"? Your ministry does get involved in vehicle safety issues that operate on BC highways, such as tire chain-ups and commercial vehicle load restrictions.

While the Chamber doesn't have marine safety expertise, a layperson could understand that: crewed with 5, if someone falls over the side, a rescue can be compromised due to insufficient crew. With the Captain steering the ship and communicating with both crew and the Coast Guard, the Chief Engineer in the Control Room, the Mate launching the rescue Zodiac boat and two deckhands descending into the rescue boat, no one is operating the searchlight to follow the person who's gone overboard with binoculars in the initial precious minutes while the person is drifting away in the currents. There's no lookout. Also, crewing is insufficient to execute basic pandemic cleaning of the upper open-air deck, where some walk-on passengers would feel safer to physically distance themselves from those who decide not to wear masks in a closed space. They're opening only half the boat because of insufficient crew to clean.

Our waters, between Texada Island and Powell River, have dangers just like the Coquihalla Highway does, except that we can't pull our vehicles off to the side of the road if there's trouble. For us, it's 'into the water' as the escape plan, hopefully into a life raft. That water is so deep and swift that animals like bears or wolves can't swim across it to settle onto our island. It's estimated that it would take about 4 minutes in the water to become hypothermic. Given these special parameters of our marine highway, we have two 'asks' of you.

- 1) Please review the dozens of concerns alerts that the crew have reported to BC Ferries regarding their issues with just 5 crew. The BCFMW Union President, Graeme Johnston, is available to brief you on safety concerns.
- 2) Then, please consider asking Minister Garneau to review the crew of five decision. It would show that you have an understanding of concerns, and took an action to the edge of your responsibility to care about BC residents and tourists on our marine highway, while respecting Transport Canada's jurisdiction on the Salish Sea.



294704 - PILOT: TEXADA - COMOX

August 7, 2020

Dear Minister Trevena,

Thank you for your response about the suspension of the Texada-Comox Pilot.

In your response, you stated that “BC Ferries has temporarily suspended its pilot project for direct sailings between Texada Island and Comox as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in fewer runs for the route.” I don’t think that you have fully understood it.

Texada residents don’t just have “fewer” we have zero runs on the Texada-Comox route. One of our current Ferry Advisory Committee representatives submitted this route request to the FAC nine years ago. It’s been almost a decade waiting to open up this commercial, medical, and tourism route. I have personally only been making speeches, presentations, and writing letters on this issue for the past three years. How many more ways and times can we articulate our needs for this route? We are dismayed to see the rest of the province zooming along with reopening ferry routes, while Texada residents are left behind, yet again.

The province seems to have few direct program levers to help our rural/remote community thrive. For example, the BC Rural Dividend Fund was closed to us, as funds were diverted to help people in forestry. There are provincial initiatives for individuals trying to survive economically through the pandemic, which – kudos to you for those! However, Texada desperately needs this logjam un-jammed. We really need provincial support with respect to opening our marine highway to Vancouver Island via Comox, for all the reasons that I articulated to you in my previous letter.

At one point, three years ago, some residents had asked the Chamber to suggest using our own Texada ferry to get to Comox and we wrote to BC Ferries about it. We had referred to it as the ‘Turn Left’ campaign (turning left to Comox, rather than driving straight ahead to Powell River).

Perhaps BC Ferries could survey Texada residents about using our new Island Discovery vessel to do a couple of times-a-week run to Comox. The Chamber has not conducted an island-wide survey on the use of our vehicle. The Island Class vessel can navigate waters to Comox. It would be cheaper for BC Ferries to use than using the Salish Class (less crew, less fuel, no catering).

I would suggest that any new survey would need to be accompanied by a clearly-stated BCF-proposed plan so that residents could understand what kinds of impacts that might have on their familiar runs to Powell River. For many, the run to Powell River is required for jobs, supplies, some medical appointments, shopping, as well as significant family and friend connections. It could be distressing for people to lose any runs to Powell River.

Perhaps if the Island Discovery were operating both the Texada-Powell River, and the Texada-Comox routes, there would be enough of an impact on labour hours that a larger complement of crew, that we feel is required for safety anyway, could be retained.



Please consider, once again, whether there is anything proactive that you can do, other than simply 'putting the ball back in BC Ferries' court.' As you suggested, though, we do anticipate a response from Mark Collins, CEO, BC Ferries. Hopefully he will propose a workable solution to reinstitute the Pilot, perhaps at your request.

Sincerest regards,
Cindy Babyn
President
Texada Island Chamber of Commerce

EMAIL FROM MINISTER CLAIRE TREVENA

"Cindy Babyn, President
Texada Island Chamber of Commerce
cbabyn@gmail.com

294704 - Crewing Levels

Dear Ms. Babyn,

Thank you for your emails regarding crewing levels on the new Island Discovery vessel and BC Ferries' pilot project for direct sailings between Texada Island and Comox. I am also responding on behalf of my colleague the Honourable Harry Bains, Minister of Labour.

The provincial government takes the safety of our transportation network very seriously, and I appreciated the opportunity to review your comments. Since BC Ferries is operated independently, however, it is responsible for staffing. The provincial government is not involved in the discussions between BC Ferries, Transport Canada and the Marine Workers Union regarding the crewing levels. I understand this work is still ongoing.

As you know, BC Ferries has temporarily suspended its pilot project for direct sailings between Texada Island and Comox as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in fewer runs for the route. I know how important this service was to Texada

Islanders, so I am pleased that you have also addressed your correspondence to BC Ferries' CEO Mark Collins, so that he is aware of your comments and suggestions.

Thank you again for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely,
Claire Trevena
Minister

Copy to: Premier John Horgan, Honourable Harry Bains, Minister of Labour
MLA, Surrey-Newton, Nicholas Simons, MLA, Powell River-Sunshine Coast,
Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer, Mark Collins, President and CEO
BC Ferries"