



**ADDRESSED TO**

Mark Collins, CEO, BC Ferries

Hon. John Horgan, Premier of British Columbia

Hon. Claire Trevena, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, Government of BC

Hon. Harry Bains, Minister of Labour, Government of BC

Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer, Government of BC (COVID-19 concerns)

Hon. Marc Garneau, Minister of Transportation (Transport Canada), Government of Canada

Cc: Nicholas Simons, Member of the Legislative Assembly, Govt. of BC

Cc: Rachel Blaney, Member of Parliament, House of Commons, Canada

Cc: Graeme Johnston, President, BC Ferry & Marine Workers' Union

Cc: Dan Kimmerly, Ships' Officers' Component President, BC Ferry & Marine Workers' Union

Cc: Darin Guenette, Strategy and Community Engagement, BC Ferries

Cc: Kim Barton-Bridges, Chair, Northern Sunshine Coast Ferry Advisory Committee

June 22, 2020

Dear Mr. Collins, Hon. John Horgan, Hon. Claire Trevena, Hon. Henry Bains,  
Dr. Bonnie Henry, and Hon. Marc Garneau,

On behalf of the Texada Island Chamber of Commerce and the residents of Texada Island, I'm writing you a letter in support of workers' conditions and public safety concerns (including health/COVID-19 safety) regarding the new Island Discovery ferry, which came into service on June 10, 2020. Its route is between Texada Island and Powell River, BC.

First, I congratulate BC Ferries on the acquisition of this beautiful new Island Discovery vessel. As you can imagine, over the past 59-year period that we enjoyed the North Island Princess, many Texada residents have been ferry workers. Marine transportation has been, and continues to be, an important source of jobs on our island. Given this, there is tremendous collective knowledge and expertise within our community about marine operations and safety. People are speaking up about what they find wrong and/or concerning about crewing the new and very large Island Discovery with just 5 people.

The Chamber began seeing residents' concerns about potential BC Ferries job cuts and workers' conditions on the new vessel via Texada social media pages. We gathered some of these comments and on June 17, 2020 we asked BCF's Darin Guenette, Strategy and Community Engagement, to respond. Mr. Guenette provided a response that same day and the Chamber shared his response with residents via our community's Facebook pages.

To summarize, BCF explained that 'the innovations of this new vessel can safely replace crew, and Transport Canada told us we could crew it with 5'. Many residents found this response to be 'out-of-touch' with reality. It simply wasn't perceived to address the root issues of concern.

Some thought the response inferred that the crew were ‘just going to have to get better at their jobs’ to make up for the crew license awarded by Transport Canada. We don’t see our ferry workers as people who ‘just need to figure out how to do their jobs with greater efficiency on a bigger vessel.’ They take their jobs seriously and serve passengers with pride, making sure that our residents are safe and well-served. They safely onboard as many vehicles as possible (maximizing efficiency and revenue), and they even coming in after-shift to get emergency night runs in for people who need to go off-island to get hospital services.

The Chamber acquired more information from the BC Ferries and Marine Workers’ Union as well, as we do not have expertise in marine safety and we could not fully comprehend the situation without hearing their expert perspective. We also did basic online research of publicly-available information (regarding vessel sizes, passenger capacity, etc.).

The Chamber learned that on February 17, 2020, the Transport Canada (TC) inspector was present during training drills with 7 crew members. Following that, however, TC approved a Safe Manning Certificate for just 5 crew. Afterwards, when Transport Canada was not present, some teams drilled with 5 and they failed their drills because they could not be completed with so few crew. Given that drills haven’t been successfully completed with 5, the Island Discovery, at this staffing level, should be considered unsafe for both public and crew. It was just one day before the Island Discovery came into service, that some BCF crew were actually informed that they would have to operate the vessel with just 5 crew. This decision was reportedly shocking to staff and to the Union. It is not apparent that BCF has appropriately or sufficiently responded to alerts regarding crews’ concerns.

**Passenger Capacity:** When the Chamber Googled information about the Island Discovery, we saw on the BC Ferries Wikipedia page that that it was built to carry 300 to 450 souls (passengers & crew). See the online image below.

Current vessels [ edit ]

Name	Class	Year built (Rebuilt)	Auto capacity	Passenger capacity
MV Island Aurora	Island	2017-2019	47	300-450
MV <b>Island Discovery</b>	Island	2017-2019	47	300-450

Now, for some reason, Transport Canada has certified / licensed the vessel for just 150 passengers. Why would a company, whose aim it is to make a profit, choose to suppress potential ticketing revenue to half when, apparently, the vessel could carry more? That’s perplexing.

**Comparing Vessels:** The physical size of the Island Discovery vessel seems to closely compare to the Malaspina Sky, which serves the Saltery Bay-Earls Cove route. That vessel is only 21 metres (68 feet) longer than the Discovery but they have 12 crew. If their catering staff were removed from consideration, they would have 9 crew.

The workload seems imbalanced for Texada ferry workers operating a similar physical-sized vessel with just 5 on the Island Discovery. In addition to the Malaspina Sky, I have sailed on the Salish Orca, the new vessel serving Powell River-Comox. Its B license allows it to carry 400 people, and at that level, it's licensed to be crewed by 14. Texada's Island Discovery is only 86 feet shorter and 21 feet narrower than the Salish Orca, but licensed to be crewed by 5. In my layperson's experience, the surface area of the Orca does not seem 3 times bigger than the Island Discovery. It's hard for me to grasp why our ferry should be crewed with about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> the staff of the Orca or about 1/2 the staff of the Malaspina Sky. Something just doesn't seem right to us about staffing levels.

**Customer Service:** Should a passenger in a wheelchair wish to visit the upper lounge, it will require one crew member to operate the mechanized chairlift, taking up several additional minutes of their time within the voyage. It should not be the case that the vessel is too poorly staffed for crew to have time to offer this opportunity to less-abled passengers. It's got to be a real, available offer that can be serviced. Crew are also the only front-line customer service representatives, fielding questions about washroom or pet room locations, vending machines, etc.

**Crew Fatigue / Labour Safety:** As mentioned above, when comparing physical vessel sizes, there's a lot of ground to cover on the Island Discovery vessel with so few crew, even in routine, optimal non-emergency situations. It's estimated that crew are now walking an average of 13,000 steps daily, compared to between 6-8,000 in the past on our previous vessel. (Note that's potentially more than double the walking requirements now, per shift.) They're also having to climb an average of 42 flights of stairs per shift, compared to low 30s in the past on the NIP. (It's even more for the engineers.) Crews work 8 days on, and 4 days off. The cumulative impact of 8 days of increased physical requirements, such as these, should not go unacknowledged. It is reasonable to imagine that this level of increased physical exertion requirement could lead to exhaustion, more sick days, injury, and burnout. This could result in insufficient available staff to service scheduled runs. The Deckhands are also not properly trained to connect shore power. It may be the case that they do not have the WorkSafe required Canadian Standards Association-approved work boots for working around high voltage.

**Tasks & Breaks:** Given the vessel size, and a crew constraint of just 5, it does not appear that the crew can be accorded the full Canadian labour-code standard break allotments in their shifts. It's a 35-minute run between Texada and Powell River, so there is little time between onboarding and offloading passengers for the crew to complete housekeeping and safety check tasks. Texada crew are additionally required to clean the on-land, 'unmanned' ferry terminal during their shifts. In the winter, there's snow shoveling to clear the path as well at that location, and salting/shoveling on the vessel – for example on the 1/2 deck sloped car ramp. Given the scope of tasks, it seems there may be little time available for crew to take washroom breaks, have actual sit-down breaks, and eat their meals. Conditions such as those will undoubtedly lead to crew fatigue, making them less capable of managing emergency situations.



The Captain is now also taking on the role of Principal Communicator even though it is supposed to be a function performed by a separate individual. This expectation is in contravention of current marine regulations in force.

**Safety Concerns:** While the Island Discovery vessel may be innovative, we've also learned that there is no automatic fire suppression system in the passenger lounges. Those systems could have given the crew even just a slightly better chance of manually fighting a fire. Five crew also seems to be too few to direct stressed-out, possibly frail passengers, safely into the life rafts. The crewing math doesn't seem to add up. Training and drills are proving they can't successfully operate the vessel just 5 people. This must be reviewed by Transport Canada in Ottawa.

**COVID-19 Pandemic Cleaning:** With a crew of 5 it seems hard to imagine that basic housekeeping cleaning on a vessel of this size could be achievable, among all other routine tasks. Besides the bathrooms, there are rail handles, door buttons, vending machines, and now even desk work areas that passengers are touching. BCF has launched this vessel, closing the upper decks to passengers because they know they don't have the staff to clean it. It's being described as – closed to minimize COVID -19 cleaning. It should not be a stretch for officials to concur that cleaning is a basic and vitally important health requirement for passenger and crew safety, especially during a pandemic. Once pandemic concerns have subsided, that area that is now closed will require cleaning. It's doubtful they'll be able to add that additional duty.

### **Jobs and Salary Losses to Texada Island**

It's anticipated that BCF crewing the Island Discovery with 5, rather than at least maintaining the previous crew level of 7, would mean job and family-supporting salary losses of well more than \$300,000 per year (this is regular jobs, plus casuals' salaries), compared to past years when we had the North Island Princess ferry. That may not sound like much money to any of you living in a large city, but it means a lot to us. Ferry workers are also typically younger residents on this island, some of whom are supporting families with children. We need those families to keep the number of kids in our on-island school. We need people with healthy salaries to keep spending money in our local economy. We need the young working people to support their aging relatives to stay at home for as long as possible, since we don't have a seniors' residence on the island. Many of these families have just displaced themselves to move here for these ferry jobs. They've invested into our community. Some have just entered rental housing leases or bought houses here because they were promised these jobs.

Although you may not understand that annual dollar loss to our community, when Texada residents listen to people in far-away places like Victoria or Ottawa explain job cuts as 'operational efficiencies on an innovative vessel,' it rings to some Texada residents as being completely tone-deaf to basic vessel marine operations crewing needs, passenger safety, and community needs. It sounds like you're trying to make shortcuts 'the easy way' from an ivory tower, but we feel that it's short-sighted on many levels.



Premier Horgan, you've heard from the Texada Island Chamber of Commerce before about our community's strengths, issues, and concerns. We don't have a lobbying budget like an organization such as the Canadian Ferry Association might have. We can only use our words in this letter to share the general concern that it appears as though this new Island Class vessel is operating in BC's waters with an unsafe crewing level.

Due to the pandemic, we understand that there are significant budget pressures everywhere. We have heard that BCF may be facing a projected \$200 million shortfall. We understand that 'you can't get blood from a stone' or 'wave a magic wand' to pay for everyone's wishes. But, basic safety and community concerns out on our Salish Sea need to be carefully reviewed because it seems unduly short-sighted to shave off a few salary dollars that could lead to an unsafe workplace and on-sea fatalities. We don't want another BCF Queen of the North situation, wherein 2 passengers died in 2006 when the crew couldn't fully check the vessel, and they went down with the ship. Rest their souls.

Premier, you're an islander yourself. You understand that BCF is not operating a private luxury travel cruise line service, and we can tell you that that's not what we're looking for. This is our marine highway and the BCF vessels on it must be run according to appropriately-safe service standards. We wanted you to be aware of our concerns and for you to be a part of reviewing this Transport Canada certification.

Premier, we don't want it to be the case that you tacitly agree with the low certified crew numbers for the Island Discovery ferry that your provincial constituency feels is unsafe, simply because you may not have been appropriately briefed. It is likely not safe to cut a financial corner here, to offset financial constraints.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this letter, the Texada Island Chamber of Commerce is not an organization that has in-depth knowledge of marine safety. However, we have tried our best to appropriately convey our community's concerns about pending BCF job losses, the impacts they could have on our community, a possible inability for BCF as an employer to meet basic labour standards (sufficient breaks), and a likely inability to meet general public safety standards (health standards and evacuations) during routine and emergency operations, with only 5 crew on this Island Discovery vessel. We support the Union's call for a judicial review of the Transport Canada-approved five-crew plan.

The Chamber would greatly appreciate hearing a response from all recipients of this letter, according to your area(s) of purview, in response to our concerns.

Thank you,  
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