



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Katy Clark MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for West Scotland Region

31st March 2022

Rt Hon Grant Shapps
Secretary of State
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
London
SW1P 4DR

Our reference: POL-JR

P&O Licencing

Dear Mr Shapps,

I am writing regarding the issue of licencing at P&O Ferries following letters from concerned West Scotland constituents, whom I represent in the Scottish Parliament.

I was absolutely appalled by the shameful sacking of 800 workers by ferry operator P&O earlier this month. The RMT trade union accurately described the move as “one of the most shameful acts in the history of British industrial relations”, with staff told via a Zoom video call having received no prior notice. P&O has now admitted it broke the law by not consulting staff on the cuts. Its reputation lies in tatters and I would strongly urge you to take steps to nationalise P&O’s routes, reinstate the illegally sacked workers, terminate all existing contracts and remove owner DP World from all Freeport projects.

However, I also wanted to raise the issue of licencing. As you will know, the Cairnryan-Larne route, which connects South West Scotland with Northern Ireland, is operated by two vessels, one of which has been suspended by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA). Both vessels – the MV European Causeway and MV European Highlander – are registered to the Bahamas, making them the flag state. In total, 39 of the recently sacked workers are based in Scotland, but the Scottish Government is unable to take direct action in this area. The UK is the port state for foreign registered ships berthed in UK ports, and so port state control is exercised through the MCA. The decision to strip P&O’s licence to operate on this route – and other routes – lies with the UK Government.

As the MCA has acknowledged, there are numerous safety concerns on this route. In fact, P&O’s existing track record in this area was already poor. Professor Andy Smith of Cardiff University’s work on occupational stress and fatigue in the maritime industry, for example, which has been supported by the Health & Safety Executive, IOSH, MCA and the EU, has shown the clear link between fatigue and reduced operational performance and safety. At P&O specifically, these issues have been repeatedly raised: a survey his team [carried out](#) as early as 2012 found almost half of all staff on the Dover-Calais crossing felt their working hours posed a danger to them or their ship. The new agency crew that has been brought in to replace the sacked workforce are reported to be on even longer hours, working a seven-



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day week for a continuous eight-week period.

P&O's actions not only demonstrate poor working practice – the company's appalling treatment of workers is putting the safety of travellers on these routes at risk. I would strongly urge you to inform the Scottish Government of your intention to permanently suspend P&O from the Cairnyan-Larne route and take steps to immediately revoke all of P&O's licences in British waters henceforth.

I look forward to hearing your response.

Yours sincerely,

Katy Clark MSP
West Scotland Region