

The Langdale dock—community access is at risk...

BC Ferries Corporation (BCFerries) has announced their intention of closing off public access to the only floating dock at Langdale Terminal on 15 October 2009. This small boat drop-off & pick-up float has been open to the public for more than 50 years. Its closure will cause hardships for boat owners in West Howe Sound and the Sunshine Coast – especially summer-camp operators and those with water-access-only properties in this scenic island vacation area near Vancouver, BC, Canada.

First and foremost, our communities want to keep the dock open beyond 15 October 2009.

Why is this dock so important to Howe Sound communities?

This floating dock belongs to BCFerries. It is used by MV Stormaway III, between 7am and 7pm only, on BC Ferry Route 13, serving one point on Gambier Island and two points on Keats Island. Neither island has connecting roads between all its communities. Because of this, many island residents do not have access to the ferry landings on their islands.

The long-existing additional public access to one side of this floating dock provides:

1. Ability for private boats and water taxis to deliver to, or meet passengers from, the much larger, Route 3 (Langdale-Horseshoe Bay) ferry service connecting Vancouver to the Sunshine Coast:
 - for islanders who are not served by the Stormaway III's itinerary, such as those owning water-access-only properties such as Melody Point on Keats and in Centre Bay on Gambier
 - for all islanders, when Stormaway III schedules do not match Route 3 schedules.
2. Ability to drop off or meet passengers from the Sunshine Coast bus stop in Langdale Terminal in similar circumstances to those listed above. This bus connects to Gibsons--the location of shops, schools, and other local services for islanders.
3. Ability to pick up and deliver service personnel (e.g., contractors, building inspectors) and to transport tools/goods/fuel not permitted on the BCFerries Stormaway III to Gambier and Keats Islands.
4. Access before and after Stormaway III-service hours to vehicles parked in the BCFerries Langdale Parking Lot – the only long-term parking lot in the area and a critical amenity for island residents.

Why does BCFerries want to close the dock?

Safety

BCFerries fears that small boats moving in close proximity to the stern of the ferry in Langdale may cause "interference with the ship." Several near-misses have been alluded to, even though there have been no accidents reported in over 50 years.

We disagree with their solution to this issue. Many other harbours with passenger drop-off and pick-up docks operate successfully along the BC coast, side-by-side with BCFerries, in configurations as close-quartered as the one at Langdale.

One concern of our communities is that closure of the Langdale float to local boats will actually increase overall risk by forcing private boats into taking longer trips: exposing passengers to worse weather conditions and adding to congestion in Horseshoe Bay and Gibsons Landing.

We, the island boating communities, need to try to help reduce small-vessel traffic around the Queen of Surrey while the ferry is arriving/departing her berth. We propose taking the initiative by making a commitment to BCFerries to help reduce this practice through articles in local newsletters and by posting notices. We hope to work with local BCFerries personnel to notify the community each time an infraction is noted. In many cases, we in the community can use social pressure to reduce the practice. With everyone recognizing that not all offenders will be in our communities, it will not be a 100% solution – but it will an improvement all the same.

To further help improve safety, we urge BCFerries to mark a small-boat channel in the Langdale Terminal approaches. A further enhancement would be to add a dolphin (piling) to the north of the last dolphin in place now. Floating logs could then be strung end-to-end between all the dolphins to eliminate ferry-path crossover attempts by small boats.

Liability

BCFerries believes that allowing public use of the Langdale small-vessel dock places the corporation in a position of liability.

We disagree. Given the lack of an accident record and no history of lawsuits arising from safety incidents over at least 50 years at Langdale terminal, we suggest that the safety precautions currently in place, with appropriate liability insurance as exists now, provide BCFerries with adequate protection against potential liability.

Security

BCFerries has made reference to the presence of private vessels at the Route 13 dock as presenting a security threat.

We disagree. Private boats at this dock presumably present a lower level of risk than is assumed by BCFerries when a vehicle is loaded on a car ferry.

The new federal Marine Security Act requires that a MARSEC “secure zone” be established to contain the Queen of Surrey (BC Ferry Route #3) fare-paid/boarding pass holder area of the terminal. This means that boats and water taxis (and the BCFerries-operated Stormaway III itself!) will arrive at the Route 13 dock “outside the secure zone.” (This is similar to a car depositing passengers in the adjacent non-secure parking lot.)

Passengers using the Langdale dock will walk up the ramps to the covered walkway leading to the parking lot without passing through the secure zone. (A new gate now marks the position of a new terminal building planned to be built at the end of this walkway and that is where foot passengers to/from Horseshoe Bay will enter/leave the secure zone.) All users of the Langdale dock will have to enter the secure zone at the gated point if they need to board the Route 3 ferry, just like everyone else.

What happens next?

Our communities hope that our arguments, plus public sentiment, will convince BCFerries to re-think their unfortunate decision to close the Langdale dock to public access.

- Our local government, the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD), understands the importance of this access to our island communities and supports our position.
- We are asking the provincial ministry that oversees BCFerries to convince the corporation to keep the dock open.
- We are currently communicating with our federal representative, Conservative MP John Weston, on the critical importance of this issue.

Please help keep the BCFerries Langdale Route 13 dock open for public use by signing our petition at <http://www.gopetition.com/online/28104.html>

Who we are: **The West Howe Sound – Langdale Access Working Group**

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