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Commentary by Priscilla Ewbank

Highway or a Dead End? Time to Take a Stand on Ferry Service

I wish to share my views on BC Ferries' change to the Friday evening departure time from Tsawwassen to Saturna, Mayne and Pender from 6:30pm to 4:10pm for the next three months. First, I'd like to start by sharing my experience.

I have sailed on BC Ferries ships ever since I arrived on Saturna Island from Vancouver in May 1970—almost 38 years. Jon Guy and I brought our youngest daughter, Jesse, home the day after she was born aboard the *Mayne Queen*. For two years I made the weekly freight run from Saturna leaving at 6:30am to Vancouver and back on the Friday night boat, traveling home with Saturna's weekend population.

Jon and I have economic interests which provide many services on our small Island. We know our operations will be strongly affected by this schedule change. Jon hauls freight and does pickups for our Saturna General Store and for our Haggis Farm Bakery from Vancouver regularly. We also believe that Saturna community as well as our sister communities of the Outer Islands will suffer.

Weekenders and spring and fall B&B guests are vital to our economy and our community life—many of them participate in all our doings and can hardly wait until they move here full-time. Weekenders shop, hire contractors, support Island events and community projects—they are an integral part of our community.

There is no option to connect via Swartz Bay. Many B&B customers will not be coming for the weekend. Families who own cabins and cottages on Mayne, Pender and Saturna and work a normal 5-day week or who have children in school will not be coming to their Island homes from Easter until June 29, and possibly for six weeks in fall, if BCFS decides that this schedule solves its problems.

All this constitutes an undeniable *reduction in service*, something the ferry corporation is not allowed to do lightly.

Three months of lost business is a lot, three months of not using your Island home and investment is a lot, three months of having no B&B bookings from the Mainland is a lot. Financial damage is already beginning to affect the fragile economies of Saturna Island, Mayne Island and the segment of businesses on Pender Island that are dependent on weekend visitors from the Mainland (see Letters, page 5 for an alternative suggestion).

Islands are not merely inconvenienced, they are threatened—economically and as communities. What do you say to the institution that has been given the mandate to be your highway and is now disrupting people's ways of life and investments?

It is quite apparent that BC Ferries management has failed to comprehend the fragile nature of Island economies and our traditional reliance on ferries for access.

Legal Action

Saturna Islanders will, and have, shifted and changed with revised schedules, but the Friday night boat and the Sunday return are not up for bargaining. Accordingly, a group of us are now exploring legal action against BC Ferries. The office of the BC Ferries Commission has confirmed that it has not received an application from BC Ferries for a reduction in service. This is but one of a number of potential legal issues being explored.

In taking these steps I should emphasize that Saturna Islanders are very satisfied with the quality of service provided by the ferry personnel with whom we deal on a day-to-day basis.

Any businesses, individual residents or weekenders who would like to join or support our group or would like to understand our position more fully should email haggisfarm@saturnacan.net as soon as possible. ☞

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Island Tides, Box 55, Pender Island, BC, Canada.
Email: islandtides@islandtides.com.

Phone: 250-629-3660. Fax: 250-629-3838.
Website: <http://www.islandtides.com>