

Tourism Minister challenges UK government on new immigration procedures at ports

SNP MSP WELCOMES SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

Warnings from the cruise industry of the chaos being caused by the UK Border Force's new procedures – which have so far fallen on deaf ears – are being reinforced by the Scottish Government to in the form a letter to the UK minister of state for immigration.

The agency's new interpretation of the rules is causing significant problems to the industry, with every cruise ship passenger now subject to a face to face interview upon arriving in anywhere in the UK.

Previously cruise ship passengers and crews were cleared in advance with manifests checked via agents.

With large cruise ships potentially carrying thousands of passengers at a time, the delays and increased costs associated with the move are causing fears that operators will become increasingly reluctant to visit Scotland, reversing the rapid growth that the industry has seen in recent years.

Last year visitors to Scotland from cruise ships were estimated to have generated £41 million for Scotland's economy.

Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism Fergus Ewing MSP wrote: -“This is very damaging: it reduces the length of time available on-shore and makes cruise companies less inclined to call at UK ports – both are highly detrimental to local

economies.

“We believe it is also functionally redundant as these checks duplicate the rigorous controls performed at the port of embarkation when passengers initially check-in for cruise embarkation.”

Stuart McMillan MSP wrote to the Westminster Government in early December highlighting the problems that the new approach, but received no reply. Mr McMillan, who convenes the Cross Party Group on Recreational Boating and Marine Tourism, also spoke with Cruise Scotland Chairman Richard Alexander who is equally concerned about the changes.

Mr McMillan said:-“The cruise ship sector is increasingly important to Scotland’s economy, with passenger numbers growing rapidly as more and more people visit our shores via cruise ship. I am delighted that Fergus Ewing has made contact with the UK government – they can no longer stay silent on this issue which has a profound impact on Scotland’s economy.

“We should be doing everything we can to boost and support the tourism sector, not putting ill-considered obstacles in its path as Westminster seems determined to do. It is completely unacceptable for Westminster to simply ignore the repeated warnings that the cruise industry has given them. These latest calls must act as a wakeup call to Westminster that can no longer simply be brushed aside.

“Instead of continuing to put the arbitrary goals of the Tories ahead of the needs of this multi-million pound sector of the tourism industry, Westminster must listen to the evidence and bring an end to this chaotic new approach as a matter of urgency.”

[Letter From Scot Govt to Min for State for Immigration – Passport Checks – 28th March 13](#)