

PE1693/J

Inland Waterways Association submission of 21 May 2019

SCOTTISH CANALS – CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER – CATHERINE TOPLEY

The Inland Waterways Association is the membership charity that works to protect and restore the 6,500 miles of canals and rivers in England, Scotland and Wales. IWA has a network of volunteers and branches who deploy their expertise and knowledge to work constructively with navigation authorities, government and other organisations. The Association also provides practical and technical support to waterway restoration projects through its Restoration Hub.

You will recall that we submitted evidence, at the Petitions Committee's request, in October 2018, to Petition PE1693 calling for a waterway ombudsman for Scotland.

Since we submitted our evidence, the new Chief Executive Officer of Scottish Canals has made a tremendous start in turning the situation around, re-establishing trust, harmony and communication, and once more bringing integrity to Scottish Canals' relationship with its customers. Well-attended user-group meetings are now the norm and the atmosphere is positive and exchanges constructive and informative.

When Catherine Topley was initially appointed in 2018 we understood that it was a permanent appointment. We had a mutually constructive meeting with her in March, and as a result have started to build a good relationship with Scottish Canals with close co-operation on a number of issues.

We were therefore extremely alarmed to learn that Catherine's secondment from the Prison Service is to be terminated at the end of this year, due to a contractual anomaly, when there is still much by way of consolidation to do despite her great start. To have to start again building relationships with a new chief executive officer so soon will demoralise all the organisations that are currently feeling so much more positive since she took on the role.