

PE1693/S

Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity submission of 28 January 2020

Thank you for your letter of 12 December relating to the closed petition PE1693 and which contained some residual concerns which the Committee wished to raise.

In response to concerns about the priority given to the operability of the canal network in Scottish Canals Asset Management Strategy, as stated in my previous response, the Scottish Government will continue to be in regular contact with Scottish Canals to discuss the opportunities and the challenges around maintaining the historic assets on the canal network. Scottish Canals' position on prioritising the safety of the general public, its staff and the surrounding environment does not conflict with its core and statutory responsibilities ensuring that the canals can continue to be enjoyed by a wide range of users.

In recognition of the challenges involved in maintaining and operating the canal network, Scottish Canals' grant in aid was raised from £11.6m in 2018/19 to £15m in 2019/20. This is a significant uplift at a time of sustained pressure on Scotland's settlement from the UK Government and shows our commitment to Scotland's canals.

With regard to the concerns about anti-social behaviour, the Scottish Government is committed to tackling all forms of antisocial behaviour and recognises that this can blight people's lives.

Local authorities, in conjunction with Police Scotland, lead on preventing and tackling antisocial behaviour within the geographical areas they cover. This reflects the belief that those with such local knowledge are best placed to understand the issues the communities they work with are facing and which need to be addressed.

The primary role of the Scottish Government is to work with partner organisations, including local authorities and the police, to ensure they have the powers and tools required to address these issues.

As Scotland's canals become increasingly popular and attract a growing number of users all wanting to enjoy a diverse range of activities on the canals, there are occasionally incidents of anti-social behaviour on or next to the water. Scottish Canals works with partners in the public, private and third sectors to encourage considerate usage. Scottish Canals also engage Police Scotland to ensure cases of anti-social behaviour are reported to the police accurately and in a timely manner so they can be dealt with appropriately.

All vessels using the canal network must adhere to Scottish Canals' terms and conditions, as set out in their 'Boating on Scotland's Canals - Terms and Conditions' document. This clearly states that Scottish Canals have the ability to request vessels to move if there are ongoing issues, maintenance required or in emergencies. As such, Scottish Canals can ensure that vessels are using the canals in a responsible manner. Where vessel owners refuse to comply with the terms and conditions set out, Scottish Canals can ask them to vacate the canal altogether. However, this occurs very rarely as the vast majority of canal users, both on and off the water, behave considerately when out enjoying all that Scotland's canals have to offer.