

Our Ref: 2434  
26<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Dean Lockhart MSP  
Convener  
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee  
c/o Clerk to the Committee  
Room T3.40  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

Sent via email to: [netzero.committee@Parliament.Scot](mailto:netzero.committee@Parliament.Scot)

Dear Mr Lockhart

## SEPA Survey Vessel

### ***Regarding your letter of 25<sup>th</sup> March 2022 on behalf of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee regarding the activities of our coastal water survey vessel, the Sir John Murray***

The Sir John Murray, at 24 metres in length is our largest survey vessel and can work anywhere around Scotland's coastline. On multi-day surveys, it normally operates with a crew of 5 and has sufficient accommodation to carry up to 12 people.

SEPA's coastal water survey fleet also includes a 7.8 m catamaran (Kelpie), a 7.8 m mono hull (Iona) and a 5.4 m RIB (Tern). These vessels can be towed on land and then deployed to carry out inshore coastal water surveys or be towed to survey locations by the Sir John Murray.

For some surveys, we use small boats rather than the Sir John Murray and, where we deploy the Sir John Murray, we often use one of the small boats in conjunction with it to enable us to access parts of survey areas in which, because of its size, the Sir John Murray cannot easily and safely operate.

### **Use of Sir John Murray since December 2019**

You asked about the use of the Sir John Murray since December 2019. The table below summarises the main work undertaken from the Sir John Murray and our other survey vessels between January 2020 and April 2022.

The focus of our survey work during this period was to:

- Support our regulation of marine finfish farms.
- Maintain our network of monitoring buoys used to collect environmental monitoring data in the Firth of Clyde area and the Firth of Forth.

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Date	Activity	Location	Vessel
January/February 2020	Monitoring buoy work	Firth of Forth & Firth of Clyde	Sir John Murray & Kelpie
May 2020	Monitoring buoy work	Loch Long	Tern
July 2020	Monitoring buoy work	Loch Long	Tern
August 2020	Monitoring buoy work	Loch Long	Tern
October 2020	Monitoring buoy work	Loch Long	Sir John Murray
November 2020	Monitoring buoy work	Firth of Clyde	Sir John Murray
December 2020	Marine finfish farm compliance verification survey (seabed monitoring)	Loch Striven	Sir John Murray
July 2021	On-site, marine finfish farm regulatory inspections	Kirkwall area, Orkney	Tern
July 2021	On-site, marine finfish farm regulatory inspections	Scapa Flow, Orkney	Tern
September 2021	Marine finfish farm compliance verification surveys (seabed monitoring)	Scapa Flow, Orkney	Kelpie
September 2021	Marine finfish farm compliance verification surveys (seabed monitoring)	Kirkwall area, Orkney	Kelpie
October 2021	Marine finfish farm compliance verification survey (seabed monitoring)	Kingairloch	Kelpie
February 2022	Monitoring buoy work	Firth of Forth	Kelpie
April 2022	Marine finfish farm compliance verification surveys (seabed monitoring)	Loch Striven	Sir John Murray & Iona

During the period, the Sir John Murray underwent a major re-fit. Over the last 2 months, we have also deployed our vessels for the purposes of testing survey equipment and providing re-fresher training to our science staff to maintain high levels of competency in safety protocols and in specialist, environmental survey techniques. These activities are summarised below.

Date	Activity	Location	Vessel
August – September 2020	Re-fit	Fraserburgh	Sir John Murray
March 2022	Equipment testing (underwater camera)	Irvine Bay	Sir John Murray
March 2022	Staff competency re-fresher training (grab sampling)	Irvine Bay	Iona
April 2022	Staff specialist training (underwater camera)	Irvine bay	Sir John Murray

#### **Reasons for reduced use of survey vessels in 2020 and 2021**

You asked for the reasons for reduced usage of the Sir John Murray since December 2019 compared with previous usage.

The normal operation of our coastal water survey fleet during 2020 and 2021 was significantly disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the overriding importance of protecting our staff and the wider community from the virus, including by adhering to relevant Scottish Government policy and guidance.

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The disruption was further compounded in 2021 because of the effects of the significant cyber-attack SEPA suffered in December 2020. This resulted in a loss of access to IT systems and data on which the planning and operation of our coastal surveys rely.

#### **Use of the Sir John Murray by other persons**

You asked if persons other than SEPA are currently using the vessel or have done so recently.

Since the disruption caused by the pandemic, no other organisation has requested use of, or used, the Sir John Murray. Prior to the pandemic, the vessel was used regularly to help deliver survey work for partner public bodies, Marine Scotland and NatureScot.

If work requested by another body can be built into one of our planned surveys, scientists from that body join the vessel during the relevant survey. If this is not the case, the other body will use the vessel at times when we do not require it for our work. We provide the crew for such surveys.

#### **Future use of the Sir John Murray**

You asked about our plans for the use of the Sir John Murray.

The evidence that coastal water surveys provide underpins our work to protect Scotland's seas. A key focus for surveys in the years ahead will continue to be to support regulation of marine finfish farms and, therefore, surveys will be concentrated around the West Coast, Western Isles and Northern Isles.

We plan to conduct the surveys using our fleet of survey vessels. The choice of which vessel or vessels we deploy, how we plan and design surveys and where we locate vessels during each year will depend on the evidence we are seeking to gather and consideration of how best to minimise our carbon emissions.

Reflecting the importance of a healthy marine environment and changes in how we regulate marine finfish farms, we are planning to carry out more survey work than we did pre-pandemic. A key focus for 2022 is on building the capacity and capability to do so.

#### **Plans for staffing**

You asked about our plans for staffing to manage and operate the vessel.

Our aim is to continue to manage and operate our coastal survey vessels using an in-house crew. However, to provide necessary resilience, where for any reason a crew member is unavailable for a particular planned survey or we need additional crew because of the scale of the work planned, we will recruit appropriately qualified seafarers on a temporary basis using specialist recruitment agencies.

I trust this information is helpful to the Committee. If you require anything further, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

**Jo Green**  
**Acting Chief Executive**