

Irish Charter Skippers Association

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February 2021

I am writing to you as Chairman of the Irish Charter Skippers Association, which represents the majority of Licensed Charter Boat operators on the Irish Coast.

We bring tourists from all over Ireland and overseas who avail of our boats to go Sea Angling, Whale and Dolphin watching and sightseeing. Our Licensed boats are also used in sea angling competitions by angling clubs all around the coast. Our members are vastly experienced, with many years of seafaring experience behind them. I cannot emphasise enough that our members are an invaluable resource, and a vital part of the Coastal Tourism Sector, bringing visitors and business opportunities to often remote and marginalised areas of the coast. A study done in 2018 for the Minister of State Fergus O Dowd stated that Sea Angling and Charter tourism generated 750 million Euro turnover for the Irish Coastal community.

We operate at Sea, in the hostile Marine environment, to safely service a public need. The main charter season is from about April to October each year. Costs for each season are committed to up front, in order to be ready for the beginning of season at Sea. We cannot skimp on Safety.

In 2020 and again this year, costs for the Season were paid up front. All licensed Charter Skippers will have to pay expenses such as boat insurance, public liability cover, engine maintenance, paint, servicing, berthage, cleaning, temporary storage, marina fees, and a biannual survey by the Marine Survey Office. In certain areas skippers could incur significant other expenses depending on their circumstances. By the start of the annual season, typical expenses could amount to between 8,500 Euro and 10,000 Euro per boat.

Observance of Covid restrictions cost the Charters Skippers dearly, as they are not able to recoup these expenses, not to mention making a living. I fear for the future of our members, who have abided with all the lockdown restrictions since the beginning of the pandemic, to their detriment.



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These Skippers are now in the invidious position of facing heavy losses, in some cases even going broke, through no fault of their own. Many skippers are crippled with debt and face the prospect of going out of business. The loss of these experienced skippers with their licensed boats will set back the Angling Charter business for years, and it may never recover.

I have been trying over the past year to get information as to what funding is available or may be available for our members and I am basically not getting the answers I need.

The Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, and also communications from Failte Ireland give no information as to where to seek funding to remain in business. There is no provision for our member's circumstances. What little help is available has so many strings and criteria attached (VAT registered? Rates? Property Tax? Minimum 50,000 euro?), that it is of little use to us. Yes, there are loans we can apply for, but how will our members be able to earn an income to pay them back?

The Minister for Tourism, and Failte Ireland, must be asked why the plight of Irish Charter Skippers Association members is being ignored. Why has marine tourism been continually excluded from all Covid-19 schemes? We need funding now, and lacking this assistance, the result will be the certain loss of experienced charter skippers, which will also mean a loss in revenue to the hard pressed coastal communities .

Yours sincerely,

Donal Kennedy

Chairman
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