

Petitioner submission of 4 August 2023

PE2029/B: Nationalise Clydeport to bring the ports and harbours on the river Clyde into public ownership

The Campaign to Save Inchgreen Drydock was created in 2017, shortly after Peel Ports had the crange at Inchgreen demolished. Many feared Peel would fill in Inchgreen to create more building land as they had done this previously with Scott Lithgow wet dock. Ferguson Marine is now the sole remaining shipbuilder in Inverclyde, where it is shoehorned into a site that prevents expansion.

The Peel Groups' successful business model is to purchase old industrial facilities and clear them to create brownfield sites where houses, retail and business parks can be built. A successful shipbuilder based at Inchgreen would be competing with the Peel Group assets elsewhere, so there was never any incentive to bring Inchgreen back into commercial shipbuilding or repair use. Instead, for the Peel Group, Inchgreen has more value as a brownfield site.

In 2018, the Campaign raised a 3500 signature petition calling for the regeneration of Inchgreen and presented it to Inverclyde Council and Scottish Government Minister, Keith Brown. Inverclyde Council passed a motion supporting the petition and forwarded it to Holyrood, but nothing developed.

With no incentive for the Peel Group to see a successful operational Inchgreen, the drydock was left to deteriorate through lack of care and maintenance. Meanwhile many CalMac ferries were sailing past Inchgreen on their way to the River Mersey for maintenance and servicing. With Peel's greenwashing target of being net zero by 2040, and CalMac ferries being maintained on the Mersey, how many excess tons of CO₂ will be generated transiting back and forth in the meantime?

Approaches were made to Peel Group's Chairman and owner John Whitaker to invest and return Inchgreen to a fully operational marine facility. He sent a delegation to meet the Campaign in May 2018 and promises and assurances were made, but nothing further happened. However, they used the campaign on their application for the Certificate of Lawfulness for Existing Use.

Peel has received millions in state aid and is currently benefiting from £10m for Hunterston, £9m for the Greenock Ocean Terminal, £10.6m for Inchgreen and £5m for Glasgow Harbour, plus £1.5m from the Dunard Trust. They are awaiting further funds for Ardrossan Harbour and Greenock Ocean Terminal. Peel has only 100 direct employees in Scotland as the river is controlled from Merseyside like many of their operations. Greenock Ocean Terminal had 15 redundancies in 2021 leaving a head count of 74.

Inverclyde's ports have been successfully trading since 1775, 228 years prior to Peel Ports arrival and will continue to be successful when they've gone. Our ports made Glasgow the second city of the Empire and Newark was honoured by being renamed, Port of Glasgow.

91 cruise ships will visit the Greenock terminal this year, earning Peel approximately £10m from those visits, yet Inverclyde will receive nothing other than the exhaust fumes from those ships and the hundreds of buses and taxis taking passengers to other places.

The Peel Group uses hundreds of companies to move money around and uses tax havens to avoid paying tax and contributing to public services, yet they attract millions in state aid. How much more revenue could be generated for the public purse by a commercially successful shipbuilding and repair facility at Inchgreen creating hundreds of well-paid skilled jobs?

It has taken 5 years for the Ardrossan Harbour project to be agreed as Peel were holding out for more public funds. A frustrated former Transport Minister (Jenny Gilruth) [stated](#), "the legal and commercial arrangements for investment at this third party owned harbour have been challenging", adding that "can substantially slow progress in relation to improvements" and comes at a cost to the public purse.

Ayrshire councillors and local residents have continually raised concerns over the management of Peel's deep-water terminal at Hunterston regarding their operations, safety and environmental damage. Adjacent to Hunterston lies Southannan Sands, where Scottish National Heritage identified "highly productive ecosystems", "nationally scarce species", "priority habitats" and SSSIs, which are protected by law.

There appears to be a lack of will to monitor what's happening around this area. For example, the Maritime Investigation Branch refused to investigate when two drill ships broke away from their moorings during

severe weather. Two weeks prior to the incident Peel had been warned about these dangers but they were ignored; residents and many councillors don't trust anything said by Peel.

Inverclyde has struggled since the demise of shipbuilding, marine engineering, and manufacturing. There are large areas of deprivation, poverty, and no prospects to work our way out of this situation. Our communities don't want to rely on handouts, food banks or well-meaning charity. Inverclyde's people demand that prime industrial facilities are used to their full potential. Our industrial revival is being strangled in favour of protecting an offshore company's assets on Merseyside, Tyneside and Teeside.

Two major companies offered to lease Inchgreen dry dock, and one even offered to buy it. Instead, Peel gave a 10-year lease to a start-up company formed in August 2021 to decommission ships, but none have arrived. Recently 3 of the 4 directors have resigned from the company and the remaining one has changed the company name, but still no ships. It's a disgrace to turn the largest dry dock in Britain into a scrapyards. We stated from the outset this was a ruse to divert attention from Peel's anti-competitive practices.

The campaign has suggested ways to develop Inchgreen, including the plan to build a new catamaran Scottish ferry fleet. Only one former minister (Kate Forbes) took the time to discuss these opportunities and costings and was keen to follow up. However, she went on maternity leave and, after the change of First Minister, interest evaporated.

The Campaign's history is available on our Facebook page, with copies of letters, papers, and reports available on request, including: 'Clydeport charges schedule for cruise ships'; 'UK's Dysfunctional Private Equity Ownership and Regulation Model'; Peel and the Liverpool City Region report on tax avoidance.

We look forward to the Committee's consideration of our petition.