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New pontoon at Cruise Loch Ness Ltd, Fort Augustus

1. INTRODUCTION

This document provides supporting information for a Scheduled Monument Consent which will be lodged by Cruise Loch Ness Ltd.

Scottish Canals fully support this application and believe that the provision of a new and smaller pontoon to replace the current pontoon is a positive addition to the canal because of the associated commercial benefits to Cruise Loch Ness Ltd and their customer experience and numbers. The addition of a new vessel with a greater passenger capacity will also bring more activity to the canal.

By reducing the width of the current pontoon and repositioning it nearer to the canal bank, as proposed in this application, will allow the berthing of a wider beamed boat, whilst not impacting on the navigation of other craft.

Scottish Canals have undertaken an Environmental and Heritage Impact Assessment on behalf of Cruise Loch Ness Ltd which is appended to this document.

2. Appendix A. Environmental Assessment for New Moorings at Fort Augustus.

There are no designated sites at Fort Augustus, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Areas (SPA) or Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). There will be European protected species in the area, in particular, otter and bats. Otter have territories that range from 20km of watercourse for females to 30km or more for male otters. Within their territories they have several resting places and holts. These resting places tend to be in quiet areas where the animals would not be disturbed. The current site is in the centre of Fort Augustus in an area popular with dog walkers. The canal embankment is also regularly mown which provides no cover for otter. Whilst otter will use this area of the canal for feeding potentially, the work on the pontoon and piling will not have an impact on them as the work will be restricted to day time working and will not affect their nocturnal activity.

As with the otter, bats are nocturnal and will not be affected by the proposed pontoon work. No trees that may be used as a roost site would be affected. All work on the site will be completed during daylight hours before the bats start to forage.

If the existing pontoon is to be removed during the nesting season, it will be checked for nesting activity before any work is undertaken.

The operator of Loch Ness Cruisers has been advised that SEPA has produced guidance on Engineering in Artificial Inland Surface Waters (WAT-PS-07-03), which includes canals. Section 3.3.7. Construction of New Structures, Bank and Bed Reinforcement on Artificial Inland Surface Waters sets out the criteria for determining whether an authorisation is required. The guidance states that if the engineering activity impacts on the bed of the Artificial Inland Surface Water then an authorisation under the engineering regime will NOT normally be required. If the Artificial Inland Surface Water has identified ecological value which the structure could significantly impact, then SEPA may wish to authorise the activity to protect any established ecology. There are no protected species present in the watercourse that would be affected by the sediment management or piling work required for the pontoon, so no authorisation should be required from SEPA.

3. Appendix B Heritage Impact Assessment

Setting

There is currently a 2m pontoon at this location. The proposal is to replace this pontoon with a 1.5m pontoon. This reduction in the pontoon width, and the installation of the reduced sized pontoon will have a negligible effect on the setting of the canal. Pontoons are an established feature of the Canal, as are the variety of cruise boats that work along the canal.

Physical Impact

The physical impact on the canal is minimal, being restricted to six new hollow steel piles, of circa 150mm diameter, driven into the canal bank at the interface between the water and the dry embankment. There will also be some sediment management along 30 % of the line of the new pontoon, to create an appropriate depth of water to allow the new pontoon to float. This work will not alter the line or profile of the embankment.