

## Ferry price hikes 'ill-advised', calls for protests and boycotts against Fullers

Fullers' decision to hike ticket prices from 1 November has brought with it a deluge of criticism from users and local politicians.

The ferry company announced on Monday that adult commuter fares will increase by up to two percent and visitor fares will increase by five percent.

Newly re-elected board member Cath Handley had campaigned on the promise to push for "fairer ferry fares" and says she's dismayed by not only the price hike,

but its timing and the lax way the ferry company informed key stakeholders. Ms Handley wasn't contacted directly but heard the news via the media.

"I'm writing a letter to Fullers on behalf of the board, this is unacceptable in terms of informing the board, I will also raise the impacts of increasing ticket prices.

"There are also impacts in terms of family visitors; we all have people wanting to visit us, but they would have to spend

well over \$100 just to get here."

Ms Handley says that in the context of what has gone on over the past year, Fullers should have dealt with the situation very differently.

"The community has been so vocal and organized at explaining issues around fares, delays and cancellations. This is ill-timed and ill-advised."

Mayor Phil Goff reiterated to *Gulf News* this week that he has made the case to government that Fullers' exempt status should be removed to allow services to fall under Auckland Transport's oversight.

"The government has agreed to review the model. That work is underway, and I look forward to seeing progress as quickly as possible."

Fullers ticket pricing has been in the public spotlight throughout 2019.

This time last year Fullers CEO Mike Horne said the 2018 price hikes (an adult 40-pass went up from \$475 to \$520, and has now increased again to \$530, while the monthly pass went from \$325 to \$365 last year and is now due to increase to \$372) was because the company was "in the last place we wanted to be".

And at a meeting last month Councillor Chris Darby told *Gulf News* that the deadline for integrated bus, rail and ferry ticketing for the Waiheke run was 7 February. "I am hopeful we can resolve this through good negotiation with Fullers by 7 February and hopefully have that for the Waiheke run as well".

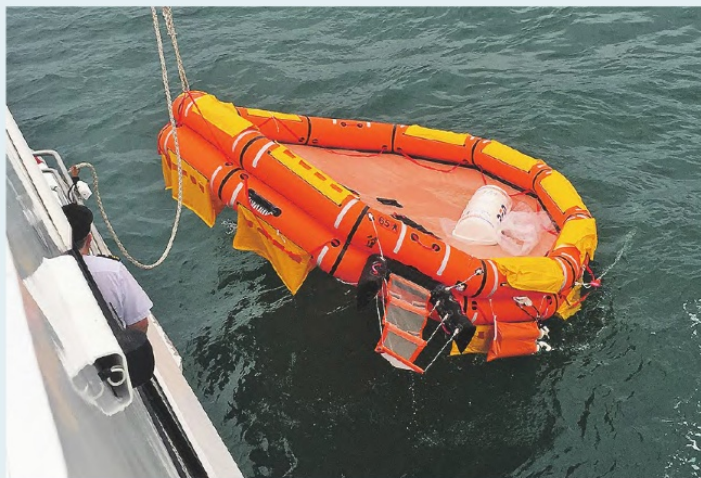
But Ingrid Leary, Chair of the Waiheke branch of the Labour Party, was fuming saying the raise was outrageous and demonstrates an "obsession with profit over service".

"Fullers' attempt to justify the new prices on extra services is farcical. There is no indication that the prices will drop after the summer season, which is further evidence of the offshore owner's blatant exploitation of his company's monopolistic position."

Ms Leary says personal and political pressure is needed and that community action could include boycotting onboard food and beverages, wearing anti-Fullers T-shirts and protesting at Matiatia.

"We will need to think outside the square if the usual mechanisms for advocacy are not working. There is enough people power in our community to cause significant disruption. Enough is enough."

• *Sophie Boladeras*



Life raft goes overboard during *Kororā's* rush-hour sailing.

### Cruise ships and life rafts cause consternation

The start of the cruise ship season has already seen two Waiheke ferry cancellations.

Fullers confirmed the 6.45am Auckland to Waiheke trip and the 7.30am Waiheke to Auckland trip on 9 October were cancelled after an "arriving cruise ship took longer than expected to berth, approximately 45 minutes".

A Fullers spokesperson told *Gulf News* the company was "currently working with Auckland Transport to improve communications to customers when services may be disrupted due to cruise ship movements".

The Auckland Harbourmaster Captain Andrew Hayton, however, stated that cruise ships are adhering to Ports of Auckland regulations and sticking to schedule and the cruise ship had "entered

the ferry basin at 6.32am and was all fast with tugs clear at 6.53am".

"Together with the extensive improvement work in the ferry basin, there will undoubtedly be times when for safety reasons there is minor disruption to schedules as vessels manoeuvre," says Mr Hayton.

Also last week, on Friday 11 October a life raft on the *Kororā* came unattached shortly after the 8.30am service departed Waiheke and it took 30 minutes to retrieve it.

"We can confirm that a check of *Kororā's* life rafts was completed two days prior, and the shackles were reported in working order," said a Fullers spokesperson. "The vessel is now with maintenance so we can investigate the cause."

• *Sophie Boladeras*