

# It's Just a Boat & Other FAQ

## 1. It's just a boat!

It's not - it's an Australian icon - more like the San Francisco trams or London buses. A trip on the classic Manly Ferry is a huge tourist draw card in its own right. It's always rated one of the top ten ferry trips in the world! It's not the same experience crossing the harbour in a standard commuter ferry.

## 2. They are already saved.

We wish they were! Out of four Freshwater class ferries, the Government has only committed to saving one, with no certainty on its long term future. A second ferry may be saved as well, but it's not enough. We need all four to have a viable, ongoing Freshwater class ferry service from Circular Quay to Manly. They are needed for the busy weekends, for tourists on weekdays, and when one is undergoing maintenance. Saving one or two as token Manly ferries, is like saving one sail of the Opera House. And it's the thin edge of the wedge to scrapping them all.

## 3. What's the difference between the two ferries?

The Freshwater-class ferries hold 1100 people. They were built in Australia specifically for the Manly run. They are purpose-built ocean-going vessels, capable of cutting through the big waves often experienced at the Heads. They have lots of outdoor space including outdoors under cover; lots of inside floor space for prams and wheelchairs; and easily accessible bike racks. They are double ended, so they slip into and out of wharves easily without the need to turn around. They are double-decker and have special wide gang planks on both levels for quick and easy access for everyone. The extra space is great during COVID-19, with room for 450 socially-distanced passengers.

The new Emerald-class ferries hold 400 people. They are made in China and were originally intended for an inner harbour run. They have been modified to cross the heads, but not yet tested. They have outdoor space, but none of it under cover; not much spare inside floor space; and difficult-to-use bike storage hooks. They are catamarans and need to back out and turn around each time they leave a wharf. This will cause congestion, especially at the Circular Quay end, where Sydney Cove is already crowded. They load and unload from one level only with a much narrower gang plank. During COVID they can only take 200 people.

## 4. It's too late to change anything.

No it's not! Last year, all four ferries were going to be scrapped. Now, with community pressure, one, and perhaps two may be saved - but only temporarily. It's true that three 'replacement' ferries have arrived from China. But these inner-harbour boats were not ordered for the Manly run in the first place. So they can probably be used for the route that they were originally ordered for. Or for the Manly run at times when there is little commuter demand, or at peak hour when a frequent, fast service is the popular choice. We have a Parliamentary Petition that, if it reaches 20,000 signatures, will force the ferry issue to be tabled and debated in Parliament. The economic case for keeping them is overwhelmingly strong. We just need to be able to get the facts out there.

## 5. They're expensive and inefficient.

We agree that it's a waste of money to run a big ferry when a small one would do. We suggest the Government run the smaller ferries in the early morning and late evening, as well as in peak hour for commuters who want a fast and frequent service. At other times during the week and on weekends, the classic ferries are the most cost-effective choice.

On weekends it's so busy, that even the 1100 seat Freshwater ferries can't cope. The little 400-seat ferries would have to make almost three trips for every one on the big ferry. It's not an efficient solution. The tourist economy is worth \$500M a year to Manly and the Northern Beaches, and accounts for 12% of local jobs. (NB Council figures). Huge numbers of these tourists come by ferry, and the ride on the beautiful big ferry is often a highlight of the whole trip. That's a ridiculous amount to put at risk, for an estimated \$6M a year savings in maintenance costs.

The \$6M a year in maintenance savings, will not go to the public purse anyway. It's going straight to Transdev, the multinational company contracted to run the Sydney Harbour ferry fleet.

## 6. The Freshwater ferries are dirty.

Both the classic Freshwater and the new Emerald ferries have diesel engines. We agree that Sydney deserves a cleaner ferry fleet. There are three options which could achieve this:

1. modifying the existing engines to run on bio fuel
2. retrofitting the ferries with new electric engines

3. a longer term plan to build new, clean, large, double ended ferries here in Australia  
For now we can minimise pollution by using the appropriate ferry for the job, such as one 1100-seat ferry, rather than three trips by a 400-seater.

### **7. It's what people want.**

Commuters and tourists have different needs and different travel patterns. Manly commuters want a fast, frequent service and that's exactly what they already have with the enormously-popular Manly Fast Ferry. It takes 20 minutes and runs every 10 minutes in peak hour. A Government-run fast ferry service would do well in peak hour.

Tourists, however, and many Manly locals, love the stately, slower trip on the classic boat. They don't want a quick trip - they want to soak in our magnificent harbour as it glides by. That's why the classic Manly Ferry trip is always rated one of the best in the world!

### **8. Show me the money.**

The Government says changing to Emerald class ferries would save \$6M each year in maintenance costs. But none of that would go to the public. It would all go to Transdev, the international company contracted to run the Sydney Harbour ferry fleet.

\$6M savings a year is not much compared with the estimated \$500M a year put at risk by undermining the tourist economy for Manly and the Northern Beaches.

\$6M savings a year is also not much compared with Transdev's overall budget - \$1.3B over 9 years. Or compared to the State Government's annual public transport budget of over \$12 billion.

Transdev is paid for each ferry trip it runs, whether the ferry is empty or full! The more trips, the more money they make. This is a bad contract as there's absolutely no incentive to increase passenger numbers. But there is an incentive to run more ferries.

### **9. I already signed a petition.**

The official NSW Parliamentary Petition is the only one that counts! That's because it guarantees a debate in Parliament on Manly Ferry options if...we reach 20,000 signatures. It will be a chance to present the compelling economic and heritage case to keep the Freshwater ferries in service. The petition is at [www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/la/Pages/ePetition-details.aspx?q=PLwaYIPOpNZgoD+UtJZMOA==](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/la/Pages/ePetition-details.aspx?q=PLwaYIPOpNZgoD+UtJZMOA==)

### **10. Are ferry numbers going down?**

It's not clear. The figures from Transport NSW say there has been a decrease in ferry usage. But the figures do not include the Manly Fast Ferry service, which carries 47% of the entire passenger load! Patronage on the Manly Barangaroo route is also not included in the Transport NSW numbers. It's hard to put much faith in figures that only count 4.4M trips a year, when the real figure is over 8M.

Huge numbers of people come to Manly on weekends when fares are low. Passenger trips on buses and trains are heavily subsidised, ferry travel should be too. The more people on the Manly Ferry, the less in cars on the road.

### **11. What's wrong with just keeping two boats, and running them on the weekends?**

Mechanically, it doesn't make sense. The large diesel ferry engines do best when they run on a daily basis. They can't be left idle during the week and expected to run without problems on the weekends.

Also, tourists don't just come to Manly on the weekends. They also visit Sydney during the week, and want the experience of riding the famous Manly Ferry. Our tourist economy is worth \$500M to Manly and the Northern Beaches every year. Why put it at risk?

Manly attracts huge crowds on weekends, public holidays and school holidays in Summer, when the full fleet of four Manly Ferries carry capacity loads all day. Two ferries isn't enough. And sometimes it will be just one, as one will be in service. Then we suspect it will be none at all, as the State Government scraps the ferries by stealth.

### **12. Local MP James Griffin says there will be 300 more services per week.**

That's about 42 extra services a day, but no proposed timetables have been released. How have these figures been calculated and can they be justified from an environmental perspective? Will all these extra ferries create

congestion at Circular Quay and Sydney Cove as each one has to back out and turn around – unlike the double-ended Freshwater ferries that slip straight in and out of wharfs. Do more ferries mean more patronage? What steps is the State Government taking to increase passenger numbers. We think reducing fares would be a great start.

We agree that more frequent services are good at peak hour and late at night. Transdev, however, are being paid per ferry trip - regardless of whether the ferry is empty or full, so they have an incentive to run as many ferries as they can.

### 13. The ferries are at the end of their life.

No they're not. Ferry experts say they have another 40 years of active life.

Freshwater ferries have extensive service and maintenance work every five years. Each service takes three months to complete and costs \$5M, with ferries emerging 'as good as new'. This level of detail is necessary as they are listed on Lloyd's Register. They are the only ferries in the harbour to make it onto this list, kept by the London-based Independent risk management and classification society, and set up to ensure 'quality construction and operation of critical infrastructure'. Extremely high maintenance standards (such as X-raying the hull of each boat and replacing steel plates if required) must, and have been met for the ferries to keep their Lloyd's Register listing.

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