



Hina Bokhari AM OBE & Cllr Rachel Bentley

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The Rt Hon Steve Reed MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
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United Kingdom
[BY EMAIL]

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to you regarding the pending Harbour Revision Order, currently subject to a Public Inquiry from the Maritime Management Organisation, and wider issues relating to the Port of London Authority (PLA).

This inquiry has brought to light significant concerns about the PLA's outdated practices, lack of accountability, and the financial harm it is causing to residents along the Thames.

The PLA, established in 1908 to manage the working ports of the Thames, now operates in a context where the river's use has fundamentally changed. Inner London docks are largely residential, yet the PLA continues to impose arbitrary Riverworks Licence (RWL) charges on residents for features such as balconies, using opaque and unjust methodologies. The original purpose of these RWLs was to manage industrial and commercial activity such as winching – not residential balconies. Indeed for some residents, charges have increased by £10,000 over a 10 year period.

This practice has been characterised by some as “paying for air”, and echoes some of the issues that are facing leaseholders that is being addressed by forthcoming reform in that space.

These issues are exacerbated by the PLA's lack of transparency and accountability. As a public trust port, it is not subject to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests or oversight by an ombudsman. Furthermore, the

pending Harbour Revision Order (HRO) due to be introduced via secondary legislation risks granting the PLA even greater powers.

The HRO has been amended since its initial submission, but still contains concerning measures such as ceasing annual reporting to Parliament and further powers to increase its charging regime.

It should also be noted, as it has been in the inquiry's proceeding, that the issues relating to the PLA extend beyond this issue of balcony charges and the HRO – the inquiry has acted as a lightning rod for these, and requires attention that falls outside of the scope of the public inquiry.

The management of the Thames' environment, commercial tourist and leisure activity (such as the Oceandiva "party boat"), and heritage all fall under the purview of the PLA. These are all areas that should sit within the competency of a public body with full democratic accountability and transparency, not a public trust port that effectively acts as a private entity.

The outcome of the Public Inquiry may yet yield a positive result, but we are nonetheless urging you your intervention in the following areas:

- **Ensure the HRO is not approved**
- **Make the PLA subject to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.**
- **Establish an ombudsman to oversee its activities.**
- **Consider, in the longer term, transferring the PLA's powers to the Greater London Authority (GLA), or turn it into a conventional, modern public agency subject to transparency and accountability mechanisms**

We urge you to act swiftly to address these issues and ensure the PLA operates in the public interest. We would invite you to meet with us and the residents concerned to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,



Hina Bokhari AM

Liberal Democrat London Assembly Member



Cllr Rachel Bentley

Deputy Leader of the opposition, Southwark Council, North Bermondsey Ward