# Scottish cruise industry warns levy risks deterring millions in tourism revenue



The Scottish cruise industry is voicing strong opposition to the government's proposed cruise ship levy, fearing that the measures could discourage cruise lines from visiting Scotland's picturesque ports. In an announcement made earlier this year, the Scottish Government revealed plans to enable local authorities to implement a visitor levy on ships docking in their jurisdictions. This move, while part of a wider strategy, has raised alarms among key stakeholders in the industry.

Cruise Scotland, an organisation representing major players in the cruise sector, has formally submitted concerns to the government during the ongoing consultation process. Rob Mason, the chair of Cruise Scotland, articulated the potential repercussions of this levy, emphasising the significant £130 million injection that cruise tourism brings to the Scottish economy annually. He described the levy as a possible deterrent that could adversely affect jobs and economic stability in remote areas reliant on cruise tourism. “Scotland must decide whether it wants to attract or deter a sector that delivers over £130 million annually to the national economy,” he stated.

The ambiguity surrounding the proposed levy is also troubling for industry operators, who feel that such uncertainty hampers their ability to make strategic decisions. Cruise Scotland warned that devolving the authority to local councils might create competition among regions, complicating operations and potentially requiring port authorities to act as tax collectors. “This is a movable market that does not need to come to Scotland,” Mason added, highlighting the competitive landscape with neighbouring regions in Northern Europe likely to benefit from any decline in Scottish cruise visits.

Conversely, proponents of the levy, including the Scottish Greens, argue that it could be beneficial for both environmental and community objectives. Co-leader Lorna Slater pointed out that a typical cruise ship emits as much carbon as 12,000 cars and suggested that the levy would help generate necessary funds for local infrastructure, encouraging cruise operators to transition toward zero-emission vessels. Scottish Green MSP Ariane Burgess echoed these sentiments, calling the initiative a crucial step towards sustainable tourism, designed to benefit port communities from Ullapool to Edinburgh.

However, opposition to the levy is not limited to the cruise sector. The Scottish Passenger Agents’ Association has also raised concerns, with President Mike Tibbert indicating that such a tax could hinder Scotland's capacity to attract cruise tourism. The group is actively lobbying the government to reconsider the implications of the proposal. Similarly, the British Ports Association has highlighted the lack of clear objectives behind the levy, arguing that it could stifle not only tourism but also essential investments in infrastructure.

Concerns have also been voiced by leaders in local authorities, particularly within the Shetland Islands, where Chief Executive Calum Grains noted that a visitor levy could compromise the region's competitiveness as a tourist destination. He stressed the importance of a clear reinvestment strategy to ensure that any funds generated from such a levy are directly channelled back into supporting the tourism sector.

The consultation period for the proposed levy has now concluded, and responses will be evaluated over the summer to shape the government's next steps. As stakeholders await the outcome, the contrasting perspectives on the levy encapsulate the ongoing tension between economic growth, environmental sustainability, and local community needs.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/cruise-scotland-levy-government-b2765069.html), [[4]](https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2024/01/18/visitor-levy-cruise-ships-visitors/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/cruise-scotland-levy-government-b2765069.html), [[3]](https://travelweekly.co.uk/news/tour-operators/spaa-to-challenge-detrimental-cruise-ship-tax), [[5]](https://greens.scot/news/cruise-ship-levy-an-important-step-for-climate-and-local-services)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://greens.scot/news/emissions-busting-cruise-ship-levy-announced-by-scottish-greens), [[6]](https://www.britishports.org.uk/aimless-cruise-levy-will-harm-scottish-tourism-and-infrastructure-investment/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/cruise-scotland-levy-government-b2765069.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://greens.scot/news/emissions-busting-cruise-ship-levy-announced-by-scottish-greens> - In October 2023, the Scottish Greens announced plans to introduce a cruise ship levy aimed at reducing harmful emissions and supporting local communities. The proposed levy would empower local councils to charge visiting cruise ships, generating funds for infrastructure and services. Co-leader Lorna Slater highlighted the environmental benefits, noting that a typical cruise ship emits as much carbon as 12,000 cars. The initiative also seeks to encourage cruise operators to adopt zero-emission vessels, aligning with Scotland's climate goals.
3. <https://travelweekly.co.uk/news/tour-operators/spaa-to-challenge-detrimental-cruise-ship-tax> - The Scottish Passenger Agents’ Association (SPAA) has expressed strong opposition to the proposed cruise ship levy introduced by the Scottish Greens. SPAA president Mike Tibbert criticised the levy, stating it could negatively impact Scotland's ability to attract cruise tourism. The association is actively lobbying the government, emphasising the potential detrimental effects on the industry and the broader tourism sector.
4. <https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2024/01/18/visitor-levy-cruise-ships-visitors/> - Lerwick Port Authority has raised concerns about the potential introduction of a visitor levy on cruise ship passengers. Chief Executive Calum Grains warned that such a tax could harm Shetland's competitiveness as a tourist destination. The authority emphasised the significant economic contribution of cruise tourism and called for a clear reinvestment strategy if a levy were implemented, ensuring benefits directly support the tourism industry.
5. <https://greens.scot/news/cruise-ship-levy-an-important-step-for-climate-and-local-services> - Scottish Green MSP Ariane Burgess has endorsed the proposed cruise ship levy, describing it as a crucial step for both environmental and local community benefits. The levy aims to reduce emissions from cruise ships and provide additional funding for local councils to support infrastructure and services. Burgess highlighted the positive impact on port communities across Scotland, from Ullapool to Edinburgh, and stressed the importance of empowering councils to implement such measures.
6. <https://www.britishports.org.uk/aimless-cruise-levy-will-harm-scottish-tourism-and-infrastructure-investment/> - The British Ports Association (BPA) has cautioned against the proposed cruise ship levy, arguing it could harm Scottish tourism and deter infrastructure investment. The BPA's Scottish Ports Group expressed concerns that the levy lacks clear objectives and could raise only modest sums for local authorities. They emphasised the need for collaboration with the cruise industry to promote sustainable growth and warned that the levy might reduce the number of cruise calls to Scottish ports.
7. <https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2025/02/28/cruise-levy-consultation-welcomed-amid/> - The Scottish Government has initiated a consultation on granting local councils the authority to impose a levy on visiting cruise ships. The consultation seeks feedback on the practicalities of such a levy, its potential market implications, and effects on local economies and communities. Shetland Islands Council leader Emma Macdonald welcomed the opportunity for public input but noted there are still many unanswered questions regarding the implementation and impact of the proposed levy.