



**BC Ferry Commission  
MEMORANDUM 40**

To: Mr. Rob Clarke  
Executive Vice President and  
Chief Financial Officer, BCFS

From: Sheldon Stoilen  
Deputy BC Ferries Commissioner

Date: January 31, 2011

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**Conditional Approval of Customer Complaints Process**

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**Jurisdiction**

Section 45.2 of the Coastal Ferry Act contains provisions for the commissioner to approve a ferry operator's process for handling customer complaints, as follows:

- (1) Each ferry operator must, within the period required by the commissioner,
  - (a) identify to the commissioner the process the ferry operator intends to use to deal with customer complaints,
  - (b) obtain the commissioner's approval of that process, and
  - (c) publish the approved customer complaints process in the manner required by the commissioner.
  
- (2) The complaints process referred to in subsection (1) must include a process by which the ferry operator will report on the number, nature and disposition of the customer complaints received in the reporting period.
  
- (3) The ferry operator may propose amendments to the complaints process approved under this section and may amend the complaints process in accordance with any such amendment that is approved by the commissioner.
  
- (4) The commissioner may order the ferry operator to amend its complaints process and, in that event, the ferry operator must, within the period required by the commissioner, provide the required amendments to the commissioner and obtain the commissioner's approval to the amended process.

(5) Each ferry operator must receive and process customer complaints in accordance with the complaints process approved by the commissioner under this section.

In regulating each ferry operator in relation to the core ferry services that are to be provided by that ferry operator and the tariffs, the commissioner, under s.38(2)(g), is to consider the interests of ferry users.

### **Background**

Under Memorandum 38 dated September 10, 2010 the commissioner requested BC Ferries to identify, by December 31 2010, the process that it intends to use to deal with customer complaints for the remainder of Performance Term Two.

The commissioner requested that the description of the process should cover:

- (a) the current complaint-handling process, together with
- (b) any changes intended to be made by the end of the performance term.

To obtain the commissioner's approval, Memorandum 38 set out the minimum requirements or functions, without limitation, that BC Ferries must identify in their complaints handling process that:

- provide easy avenues for customers to make a complaint;
- collect complaints, so they are not lost, whether or not customers use the intended avenues;
- produce individual, timely responses to complainants, by way of thanks, acknowledgement, explanation, compensation or refutation as appropriate;
- check its own performance such that, for example, if a complaint has not been resolved within a deadline it is automatically escalated for higher-level attention;
- identify systemic patterns and trends in customer complaints and learn from them;
- identify proposals for corrective actions to address frequent and /or significantly increasing causes of complaint, consistent with BCFS' customer service goals;
- report the number, nature and disposition of complaints (a) to the BCFS Board quarterly and (b) to the commissioner for each fiscal year in the statutory annual report to the commissioner due July 31 of each year;

Once approved by the commissioner, the customer complaints process, or a summary of it, should be published on BC Ferries' web site.

On December 15, 2010 BC Ferries identified to the commissioner the process they intend to use to deal with customer complaints. A summary of the process is attached to this memorandum for reference purposes.

## **Findings**

The commissioner is satisfied that the process outlined by BC Ferries meets the requirements set out in Memorandum 38. The process provides for all complaints to be responded to individually and courteously in a timely manner and will report on the number, nature and disposition of the customer complaints received in the reporting period. The commissioner is also satisfied with the manner in which BC Ferries intends to publish their process on their website.

While the commissioner finds that BC Ferries' process for handling customer complaints is sufficient, he is not satisfied that there is a process in place that would help to avoid disputes or complaints arising from a significant change to the tariff structure, a sailing schedule or a payment plan.

BC Ferries is aware that the commissioner had some reservations regarding the manner in which two tariff anomalies were handled in 2010. The commissioner has always taken the view that when the provincial legislature passed the Coastal Ferry Act, it intended that the commissioner should control the maximum average ferry fare by route group. Except in the case of unfair competitive advantage, it did not intend that the commissioner should dictate the detailed design of the tariff—i.e. what each individual traffic component is charged what fare, and under what terms and conditions. The commissioner is still of that view.

Furthermore, the commissioner recognizes and understands that, in any tariff as extensive and complex as that of BC Ferries, and with such a long history, there are likely to be inequities whose origins are difficult to explain—and which may not be easily or quickly corrected. The commissioner has refrained from taking any position on the fairness of the tariff design.

Nevertheless, in 2010 the commissioner was compelled to draw attention to two changes in the tariff structure which caused great consternation among customers. Several customers contacted the commissioner with well-argued complaints with some exasperation, even though the Commission's website clearly states that the Commission is not a complaints bureau.

The two changes were (1) the harmonization of overweight and underheight vehicles effective April 1, 2010 which dramatically increased the per-foot rate for low-height trailers and (2) the two year expiry of Assured Loading Tickets without transferability of balance.

It is not the commissioner's role to defend or justify to the public the features of BC Ferries' tariff, but when complaints are readily addressed through an explanation that makes sense to the commissioner, it is offered and it often appears to be accepted. However, in both these cases, the commissioner was unable to satisfy any of the complaints that were submitted to us.

Accordingly, the commissioner suggested to BC Ferries that it consider revising the tariff to address customer complaints but BC Ferries chose not to do so citing a declining number of complaints with the passage of time. In the commissioner's view, this was to be expected as eventually people will simply abandon efforts to seek a resolution when they perceive BC Ferries is simply not interested in reconsidering their position. The commissioner also believes that if BC Ferries was operating in a competitive environment its dismissal of such complaints may have been reconsidered.

In considering the interests of ferry users, the commissioner is of the view that BC Ferries' customer complaints process should include measures that would improve the communication and consultation prior to the implementation of a significant change to the tariff structure similar to the two previous examples, or changes to sailing schedules or payment plans.

### **Conditional Approval**

Accordingly, the customer complaints process attached hereto is approved for the balance of Performance Term Two and conditionally approved for Performance Term Three subject to BC Ferries implementing measures to improve the communication and consultation process with ferry users prior to significant changes in the tariff, sailing schedules or payment plans. Such measures must be approved by the commissioner for implementation prior to April 1, 2012.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S.T. Stoilen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "S" and "T".

S.T. Stoilen  
Deputy BC Ferries Commissioner

## **BRITISH COLUMBIA FERRY SERVICE INC. (BCFS) DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING COMPLAINTS PROCESS**

Coastal Ferry Act  
219 Section 45.2  
Complaints Process

- (1) Each ferry operator must, within the period required by the commissioner,
- (a) identify to the commissioner the process the ferry operator intends to use to deal with customer complaints,
  - (b) obtain the commissioner's approval of that process, and
  - (c) publish the approved customer complaints process in the manner required by the commissioner.
- (2) The complaints process referred to in subsection (1) must include a process by which the ferry operator will report on the number, nature and disposition of the customer complaints received in the reporting period.
- (3) The ferry operator may propose amendments to the complaint process approved under this section and may amend the complaints process in accordance with any such amendment that is approved by the commissioner.
- (4) The commissioner may order the ferry operator to amend its complaints process, and in that event, the ferry operator must, within the period required by the commissioner, provide required amendments to the commissioner and obtain the commissioner's approval to the amended process.
- (5) Each ferry operator must receive and process customer complaints in accordance with the complaints process approved by the commissioner under this section.

### **PROCESS OBJECTIVE**

The primary objective of the Customer Complaints Process, which has been in effect since 2005, is to support BC Ferries' Vision and Mission statement. Our definition of success is:

*"to provide to our customers integrated marine transportation services that are safe, reliable and continuously improving, while delivering best value for money and operating in a manner that preserves our financial integrity."*

The feedback received at BC Ferry Services Inc. ("BCFS" or the "Company"), is viewed as an opportunity to hear what the customers think about the services we provide. Hearing from our customers helps us to understand if we are meeting or exceeding their expectations, or conversely, what areas we need to focus on to support our Corporate Vision and Mission.

The secondary objectives of the Complaints Process are to:

- Respond to customer complaints at the first point of contact by providing tools and information to front-line staff to assist in immediate resolution, and when necessary escalate the complaint to Customer Relations;
- Ensure customers receive a timely response when complaints are escalated to Customer Relations, BC Ferries' Executive or the Board of Directors (response time target is 7 business days);
- Learn from our customers complaints and improve our services, where ever possible.

**BRITISH COLUMBIA FERRY SERVICE INC. (BCFS)**  
**DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING COMPLAINTS PROCESS (CONT'D)**

**COMPLAINT CHANNELS**

Front Line Staff - Customer complaints are received by BC Ferries' terminal and vessel staff on a daily basis, and for the most part, are resolved at the first point of contact and not formally recorded. The volume of this feedback is difficult to quantify.

Repetitive issues are raised by the staff to their local management for review. Both the terminal and vessel catering departments have a Director of Standards who is responsible for improving customer service, and procedures/policy for their respective lines of business.

If the staff member, or the customer, feels the concern can not be resolved at this first point of contact, the customer is provided a 'contact card' and asked to phone Customer Care.

The staff member sends an email to Customer Relations (a group within the Customer Care Department), noting the sequence number on the 'contact card'. The staff member briefly outlines the customer's concern, what steps were taken to resolve the issue, and any contact information provided by the customer. These concerns are documented by Customer Relations in the online correspondence database - ResponseTek.

More formal and documented channels include -

Phone: 1-888-BC FERRY (223-3779)  
Fax: (250) 978-1240  
Mobile: \*BCF (\*223) on Rogers or Telus Mobility networks  
TTY: TELUS Relay Services at either 711 or 1-800-972-6509

Online: [bcferries.com/contact\\_us/Interactive\\_Feedback.html](http://bcferries.com/contact_us/Interactive_Feedback.html)

Email: [customerservice@bcferries.com](mailto:customerservice@bcferries.com)

Letter: BC Ferries  
Customer Relations  
Suite 500  
1321 Blanshard Street,  
Victoria, BC V8W 0B7

Twitter: @BCFerries

Feedback received through these channels is entered into ResponseTek; a tool used to record, track, monitor and report on the customer information received.

Other venues BC Ferries uses to solicit feedback are:

Public Open Houses  
Ferry Advisory Committee meetings  
Customer Satisfaction Tracking Surveys (CST)

Community Consultation Meetings  
Annual General Meetings

**BRITISH COLUMBIA FERRY SERVICE INC. (BCFS)**  
**DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING COMPLAINTS PROCESS (CONT'D)**

**STATISTICS**

<b>Volumes</b>	<b>Fiscal 2009/10</b>	<b>Fiscal YTD 2010/11*</b>
Customer Service Centre Calls	456,107	331,244 (to Oct 31/10)
Comments Received	7,511	8,174
Received Via Online Feedback	3,550	2,996
Received Via Email/Letter/Phone	3,961	5,178
<i>*April 1, 2010 to November 25, 2010</i>		

The average number of complaints received varies by month. The majority of feedback is received between May-October with an average of *1129 comments per month*.

Customer complaints not handled at one of the first points of contact (vessel or terminal) are escalated to Customer Relations through the Customer Service Centre (CSC). Both Customer Relations and the CSC fall under the Customer Care Department umbrella.

The CSC handles inbound calls to 1-888-BC FERRY (223-3779), emails sent to [customerservice@bcferries.com](mailto:customerservice@bcferries.com), and manages the Twitter account. They receive general customer enquiries, reservations requests, vacation package sales/bookings, Film and Charter bookings, Stored Value Card enquiries and loading requests, and customer complaints. Consistent with the vessel and terminal process, general enquiries handled at this first point of contact in the CSC are not recorded in ResponseTek. All complaints/compliments and questions that need to be escalated to the Customer Relations group are entered into ResponseTek by the CSC staff. The number of staff involved in managing this workflow is as follows:

**STAFFING LEVELS**

<b>Customer Care Division</b>	<b>Customer Service Centre Staff</b>	<b>Customer Relations Staff</b>
<i>As of Fiscal 2010/11</i>	<i>Monthly Average</i>	<i>Annually</i>
January	6 day/4 evening	1 manager/3 Escalations Staff
April	17 day/6 evening	1 manager/3 Escalations Staff
July	20 day/7 evening	1 manager/3 Escalations Staff
August (peak)	24 day/7 evening	1 manager/3 Escalations Staff

**TOP FEEDBACK AREAS**

<b>Fiscal 2009/10</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Issues</b>
<i>Fares</i>	1,670	Coast/Experience Cards, Discounted Fares, Value for Fares Paid
<i>Sailings</i>	1,165	Delays/Cancellations and Sailing Frequency
<i>General</i>	1,153	Suggestions, Company Information, Compensation
<i>On the Ship</i>	819	Staff Helpfulness, Vessel Safety/Security, Loading/Unloading
<i>Inside Terminal</i>	566	Staff Helpfulness, Loading/Unloading

<b>Fiscal YTD 2010/11**</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Issues</b>
<i>Fares</i>	1,503	Coast/Experience Cards, Value for Fares Paid, Discounted Fares
<i>On the Web</i>	1,317	Login/Password, Design/Usability, Service Notice
<i>Reservations</i>	1,049	Online Reservations, Policies
<i>General</i>	874	Company Information, Suggestions
<i>Sailings</i>	790	Delays/Cancellations, Frequency
<i>On the Ship</i>	704	Staff Helpfulness, Loading/Unloading
<i>** April 1, 2010 to November 24, 2010</i>		

## **BRITISH COLUMBIA FERRY SERVICE INC. (BCFS)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING COMPLAINTS PROCESS (CONT'D)**

#### **COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCESS**

##### *Step 1 – Entering Feedback into ResponseTek (Database)*

All incoming customer correspondence addressed to the Boards of BC Ferry Authority (BCFA) and BCFS, the President & CEO of BCFS, and the Executive of BCFS, or referred to BCFS from the office of the BC Ferry Commissioner, MLAs, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, or the office of the Premier that is received by Customer Relations is logged and tracked in the online correspondence database - ResponseTek. This database is used to track the status of each piece of correspondence. The response to each correspondent is also copied into this database.

All feedback received through ResponseTek, on the BCFS website, is automatically tabulated in a real-time reporting system to provide BCFS management with immediate access to customer satisfaction results and feedback. This system is also used to track and respond electronically to customer feedback. Feedback received in the form of phone calls, emails or letters is also entered into this online system.

##### *Step 2 – Review and Assign*

All comments entered into ResponseTek are reviewed throughout the day by the Customer Relations group who assign each comment to a staff member to respond. The response time assigned to each comment varies by priority:

- Urgent (1-2 days) - These customers require an immediate response. Compensation or corrective action to be taken; issues relate to safety and/or security (our number one priority). All efforts are made to contact these customers by phone.
- ASAP (3-5 days) - Customers assigned this priority usually have a complaint about a specific incident or interaction that occurred while travelling with BCFS. The customer will receive acknowledgement of their concern and be advised that an investigation into the incident will take place. Follow-up will occur after the investigation is complete.
- Scheduled (5-7 days) - These complaints are classified as general comments/questions related to policies, procedures, and requests for non-time sensitive information.
- Immediate Close - Comments received with no contact information provided, or may contain overly aggressive/negative feedback and/or threatening language.

The ResponseTek database tracks the progress of the Actions set within the system. Overdue Alerts are sent out if the comment is not resolved within the prescribed timelines. The Complaints Resolution Manager monitors the response times/delays and the file closure metrics.

##### *Step 3 – The Response*

The Customer Relations group acknowledges all incoming correspondence (with the exception of those containing overly aggressive or negative feedback and/or threatening language), through several channels. For instance, customers contacting BC Ferries through its online customer feedback website receive an automated response thanking them for their feedback. Customers who send in letters or comment forms receive a postcard or a phone call to acknowledge their comments. A more detailed response is provided to customers who require additional information or assistance. There are many customers who contact BC Ferries throughout the year who either do not provide any contact details to enable an acknowledgement to be sent, or request a response not be provided.

##### *Step 4 – Escalation Process*

A customer who is not satisfied with the response or resolution of the Customer Relations Group is escalated to the Director of Customer Care who will review their complaint. If the customer wants to escalate their complaint further, the President & CEO of BCFS will review their complaint and provide a final response on behalf of the Company.



## **BRITISH COLUMBIA FERRY SERVICE INC. (BCFS)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING COMPLAINTS PROCESS (CONT'D)**

#### **COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCESS (CONT'D)**

##### *Step 5 – Reporting and Continuous Improvement*

Approximately 100 Senior Managers within BCFS have access to ResponseTek. Dashboards provide each manager with a custom view of the customer feedback relevant to their specific area of the business.

Each manager receives a weekly email (on Sundays) generated from ResponseTek, containing a random sample of 10 compliments and 10 complaints received during that week.

Each Monday morning, the Operations Managers attend a conference call to review the health of the company assets, customer complaints, media, expected impacts for the week ahead, HR and IT issues. The Director of Customer Care reviews the top customer issues with the Operations team on the conference call.

Quarterly and annual customer feedback reports are produced and presented at the Operational Divisional meetings, attended by all senior operational staff.

Complaints and compliments are shared electronically with the manager(s) who has responsibility and accountability for the issue being raised. Options for corrective action are reviewed and implemented by the responsible manager, when necessary. Investigations are also undertaken by this manager and a report is provided to Customer Relations to follow up, respond and resolve the customer's complaint.

Repetitive complaints/issues related to customer service are reviewed by the Director of Customer Care. The Director works with the Director(s) of Standards and relative Vice Presidents to review opportunities for improvement. Based on customer feedback, improvements are being made to our onboard pet areas, bicycle racks have been installed onboard our major route vessels, a redesign of the Company's website was undertaken to improve usability and marketing opportunities, our overheight fare structure was reviewed and eliminated, and improvements to our online reservations booking system are being made.

#### **BOARD CORRESPONDENCE PROCEDURES**

Incoming correspondence addressed to the Chair or other members of the Board of B.C. Ferry Authority ("BCFA") and/or BCFS is received by the Corporate Secretary's Office. The Corporate Secretary reviews all such correspondence with the Chair and the President & CEO of BCFS, as well as other members of the Board, as appropriate.

The Corporate Secretary ensures that a response is drafted in a timely manner as there is a seven day turn-around *target* on all Board correspondence.

The Corporate Secretary reviews each draft response with the Chair of the Board, the President & CEO, as well as other members of the Board, as appropriate. The Corporate Secretary's Office arranges for signature of the final response, and keeps a copy of the incoming correspondence and the final response in its files. If the draft response has been prepared by Customer Relations, a copy of the final response will also be filed in the online correspondence database.

A copy of the final response, together with the incoming correspondence, is provided to other members of the Board by the Corporate Secretary, on the direction of the Board Chair.

Appendix A - **FEEDBACK CHANNELS**

Appendix B - **PROCESS MAP**

Appendix C - **DETAILED PROCESS DESCRIPTION**

## APPENDIX A: Feedback Channels

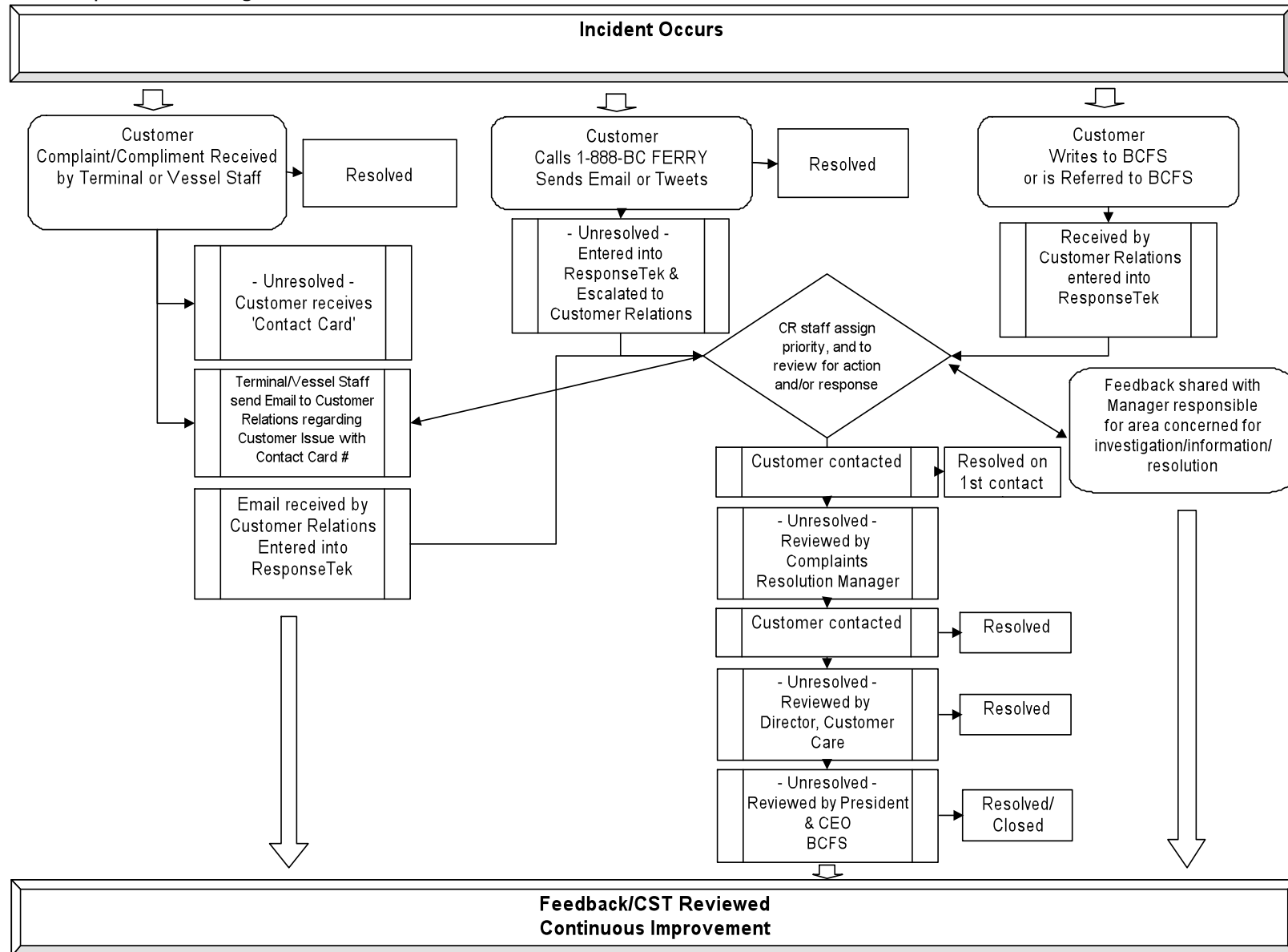
Customer feedback is received through various channels and entered into ResponseTek by Customer Relations:



**BRITISH COLUMBIA FERRY SERVICE INC. (BCFS)**  
**DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING COMPLAINTS PROCESS (CONT'D)**

**APPENDIX B: Process Map**

Customer Complaint Handling Process for BCFS:



**BRITISH COLUMBIA FERRY SERVICE INC. (BCFS)**  
**DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING COMPLAINTS PROCESS (CONT'D)**

**APPENDIX C: Detailed Process Description**

<b>CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS PROCESS</b>				
<b>DATA COLLECTED</b>	<b>PROCESS/HANDLING</b>	<b>PACKAGED</b>	<b>DESTINATION</b>	<b>USE</b>
Starting Point: Calls to Customer Service Centre (CSC) ↘ 540,500 per yr (5 yr average)	Via phone, email, Twitter	Counted in terms channel: phone, email, twitter, complaints  Also monitored through metrics: Call Handle time, Abandon Rate, Call Quality	Unresolved complaints are escalated to Customer Relations and entered into ResponseTek.  Feedback is shared with Management via email or phone calls and reports.	Reporting to Management team; process improvement; training opportunities, communication clarification; service plan review/changes, policy review/changes; staff commendations; disciplinary action; KPI reporting
Complaints/ Commendations  ↘ 7,600 per yr (3 yr average)  2010/11 YTD: ↘ 8,174  As of Nov 25/10	CSC enters escalated complaints into ResponseTek and Customer Relations (CR) staff assign priority, review for action/response.  CR enters feedback received via phone, email, escalations from terminal/vessel staff, letter, referrals from President & CEO, Executive, Boards of BCFS/BCFA, government, BC Ferry Commissioner.  Customers also enter feedback directly into ResponseTek via BC Ferries website.  All feedback is acknowledged either by auto-reply from ResponseTek, postcard, email sent by CR staff or by phone, with the exception of overly aggressive or negative feedback and threatening language or customers who don't provide contact details or request no contact. The target for acknowledgement is 7 days.	Individual complaints/commendations	Shared with responsible manager, and Vice President responsible (where appropriate)  Each manager responsible has access to ResponseTek to monitor feedback for their area.	Measure improvement quarterly  Ongoing Issue Tracking
		Weekly	Monday Operations Division Conference Call – top complaint areas reviewed/specific incidents  Report sent Sundays with sample of complaints/commendations for previous week	Review key concerns and share learnings with entire Operations group for ongoing improvement
		Monthly	Director, Customer Care reviews of top complaint areas and opportunities for improvement.	Working with vessel and terminal management teams to review/improve process.  Review challenges with Directors of Standards for opportunities for improvement
		Quarterly/ Annually	Review of Reports with Senior Management Team  Report to Commissioner	Review successes and opportunities for improvement in the following quarter.

**BRITISH COLUMBIA FERRY SERVICE INC. (BCFS)**  
**DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING COMPLAINTS PROCESS (CONT'D)**

DATA COLLECTED	PROCESS/HANDLING	PACKAGED	DESTINATION	USE
Complaints/ Commendations (cont'd)	Further action/ investigation may be required following the initial acknowledgement at which point the CR staff will work with internal managers and the customer to work towards a satisfactory resolution for the customer.			
Customer Satisfaction Tracking Survey (CST)  In 2009, a total of 12,700 screeners were completed and 5,076 questionnaires returned.	Surveys collected on BCFS behalf by the Mustel Group  The CST study is designed to monitor customer satisfaction with various aspects of service on BC Ferries in order to determine areas that passengers believe are performing well and areas that require improvement. This study is part of a regular program of ongoing research conducted each year by BC Ferries.  The following report provides annual customer satisfaction results for the following:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Overall ferry service</li> <li>➤ Service prior to arriving at the terminal</li> <li>➤ Service at the ferry terminal</li> <li>➤ Service onboard the ferry</li> <li>➤ Service pertaining to loading/unloading</li> <li>➤ Overall safety of operations, and</li> <li>➤ Value for money of fares paid</li> </ul> For each of the more than sixty attributes, the scores for the last four years are shown on the graphs, to allow for easy comparison.	Interviews are distributed across nine routes in total, both larger and smaller, during three different time periods: June, August and November.  The research involves a two- phased approach. First a random sample of passengers are intercepted onboard to collect key data including frequency of travel on BC Ferries, purpose of trip, area of residence, origin/ destination, and standard demographic questions. Immediately following this screener, passengers are given a longer follow-up survey to complete after they disembark and leave the terminal area.	Reporting to: Board of Directors  Management Teams  Customers  Media	Results of the survey are shared with the management team who review the results with their staff and look at areas that need to be addressed, area where slippage has occurred from the previous surveys, and areas that have seen improvement.  Used for Management KPIs