

LICENSED BOAT OPERATORS JOIN THE MALTA CHAMBER OF SMES

A group of licensed boat operators that operate non-scheduled charters and pre-booked trips around Malta and Comino have joined the Malta Chamber of SMEs for formal representation in a bid to address recent serious events that are threatening their sector's livelihood. Transport Malta, the Minister for Transport and the Prime Minister have been informed accordingly.

As per a concession granted through the Comino Ferry Tender and later communicated via Port Notice 1/2020, Transport Malta planned to replace the service offered by numerous small operators that have been in this business for decades. The Malta Chamber of SMEs will be defending the right of these operators not to be sidelined by a single player and consequently keep their place in the market.

Being operators duly licensed by Transport Malta itself, it is highly unjust that the same authority did not involve the already existing and operating players with the drafting of its strategy and instead forged ahead with its drastic, potentially unconstitutional plans that have a direct and clear impact on their business operation. The way the tender was issued also raises serious doubts on its legality in terms of public procurement rules. The move is also deemed to pose a breach under competition law.

ABOUT MALTA CHAMBER OF SMES

Malta Chamber of SMEs (Formerly known as GRTU) is the largest social partner in Malta representing over 7,000 SMEs from over 90 different sectors. The SME Chamber has been established for over 70 years and its aim is of safeguarding the interest of businesses at large.

SPOKESPERSONS

Paul Abela | President
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HEAD OF COMMUNICATION

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The operators have sought redress in front of the Maltese Courts and the Public Contracts Review Board.

Meanwhile, implementation of Port Notice 1/2020 and the Comino Ferry Tender have been temporarily blocked from moving forward. This Port Notice unequivocally states that “In terms of the agreement, the Authority (Transport Malta) will be granting the Operator the exclusive right to provide scheduled passenger ferry services by sea on the route between the coastal area covering Cirkewwa South Quay to Marfa, Malta and the landing places found therein, and the berthing facilities and landing places in Blue Lagoon and Santa Marija Bay in Comino at all times. The Authority shall not authorise other passenger ferry operators to provide the same and/or similar services with the same rights on this route”

On meeting the Chamber of SMEs, the operators explained how they felt cheated that indications given by Government led them to believe that the request would be for a service that would complement theirs and not seek to push them out of the market. Most operators are family businesses that have been long operating and feel they are being pushed aside by an authority that has granted exclusive use of public land to accommodate one large player.

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As a Chamber of SMEs, we condemn such an approach from an authority that should use its powers to protect small operators and the best interest of Malta at large. As a Chamber we see no valid reason for the need for such a concession, giving the exclusive right of use being granted to the select company and only bidder through very poor procurement practices.

As a Chamber of SMEs, we have already repeatedly signaled the authorities about the numerous malpractices our members have been experiencing in public procurement. No stone will be left unturned and we will demand that the authorities and those responsible shoulder full responsibility for their actions.

A link to the port notice may be found [here](#).

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