

FRESH LINK: RETURN OF THE STAR

Founding a new shipping company to save a vital link between the Faroe Islands and Scotland turned out to be a smart move—with hundreds of tonnes of fresh and frozen fish products exported every week, and imports growing.

IN THE SPRING of 2008, Faroese exporters of fresh fish products were in for a shocker as they learned that the shipping route they relied on for virtually all of their trade was to be permanently closed already by July. To avoid letting their clients in Scotland down, two major exporters, Rainbow Seafood and Valhalla, moved quickly to establish their own reefer shipping company, Fresh Link. Based at Toftir, the new shipping line managed to become operational just in time to ensure that no deliveries were disrupted.

Eighteen months on, there seems to be little doubt that setting up Fresh Link was the right decision for the seafood trade. The business already runs at a profit, serving its founders as well as several other exporters, including fish farmers who ship their salmon products across the Atlantic by air via Glasgow. At the same time, Faroese importers have smelled the coffee and are now re-

MARIA OLSEN



Managing director Ingun Olsen, right, with Kim Olsen, Sínfríð Jacobsen; reefer vessel Silver Fjord berthed at Toftir (bottom left); loading cargo (bottom center); pallets of fresh chilled fish ready for loading on board the Silver Fjord (bottom right).

ceiving an increasing amount of goods from the United Kingdom.

With only four employees, Fresh Link has, in a matter of less than two years, built a well-established service that could have a significant impact on the Faroese economy.

“We’re sending several hundred tonnes a week to Scotland,” said managing director Ingun Olsen. Trained as a professional logistics manager and with long experience in the business, Ms. Olsen runs a lean operation that is custom made to serve the needs of its main clients. Together with chairman Andreas F. Hansen, she’s been respon-

sible for getting Fresh Link up and running. Mr. Hansen is a former employee of Star Line, which was dissolved after its acquisition by Faroe Ship in the early 1990s. Ms. Olsen likewise worked for Star, albeit indirectly, as a trainee at a



stevedoring company in Denmark, one of whose clients was Star’s agent there.

“The two companies that founded Fresh Link are among the largest fish exporters in the Faroes and much of their sales goes to Scotland and England,” Mr. Hansen said. “Therefore the old transport route to Scotland was very important for these companies. It would have been a sad thing to end the business connections that have been built over the years.”

FRESH FRUITS AND VEGS: Chartering the 77.6 meter reefer vessel Silver Fjord from Norway, Fresh Link’s sailing

schedule is simple: Departing Toftir for Scrabster every Friday to arrive back on the following Sunday, then departing Toftir for Aberdeen Monday to return two days later. At speeds up to 13 to 14 knots, the former trip usually takes 18 hours each way, the latter 27 hours.

While imports may add to the usefulness of its service, Fresh Link’s focus is clearly on the export side—making sure fish products from its export clients in the Faroe Islands are shipped twice a week regularly to the north of Scotland.

“Three things are essential for Fresh Link’s success,” Ms. Olsen said. “One, our clients must be happy for the service; two, we can be trusted to be on time always; and three, we deliver all the way. Now all these parts are interdependent

which means it really boils down to the same thing—meeting our clients’ needs and requirements to their full satisfaction. It also implies that we’re committed to respond to a clearly defined demand, which is transportation of fresh fish to Scotland. So we know what we’re doing and why we’re doing it.”

With its service Fresh Link has proved that a freight connection to Scotland can indeed be economically viable—and may even come with a bonus to the extent that Faroese importers make use of the return route. Fresh fruits and vegetables, for example, are purchased

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Shipping, domestic and international transportation and logistics services. Temperature controlled cargo; air cargo; forwarding; stevedoring.

Operating the only liner service between the Faroe Islands and Scotland.

Weekly sailing schedule:

Toftir-Aberdeen (Monday)

Aberdeen-Toftir (Wednesday)

Toftir-Scrabster (Friday)

Scrabster-Toftir (Sunday)

at better price from the UK than from Denmark—which has otherwise traditionally been the main source country for Faroese imports—and the goods arrive fresher because of the shorter sailing distance.

“We’re seeing a growing amount of cargo on the return trips,” Ms. Olsen said. “It’s mostly fresh fruits and vegetables but even other goods, such as musical instruments and auto parts...”

Originally the Star Saga, built for Star Line in 1984 at the Skála shipyard, the Silver Fjord is fairly fast going, which is important for the transport of fresh goods. A sizable break-bulk vessel that can handle rough weather, she has sufficient cargo capacity without being too large to be operated economically.

