

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee 12th Meeting, 2021 (session 6), Tuesday, 30 November 2021

Petition for consideration - PE1872: Improve the reliability of island ferry services

Note by the Clerk

1. This paper invites the Committee to consider petition PE1872: Improve the reliability of island ferry services.
 - Purpose: Calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to urgently ensure that all Islanders have access to reliable ferry services.
 - Petitioner: Liz Mcnicol
 - Date published: 24 May 2021
 - Webpage: [The full petition PE1872 can be viewed here](#) and is also available in Annexe A.

Prior Consideration of the petition

2. On 22 September 2021, the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions committee agreed to refer the petition under Rule 15.6.2 of Standing Orders to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.
3. A paper by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) was published on 31 August 2021 ahead of the consideration by the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee. It is available in Annexe B.

Issues raised in the petition: impact on island communities

4. The petitioner highlights how the unreliability of ferries has resulted in losses to island economies relying on tourism and travel restrictions for island resident's dependent on regular ferries.
5. The petitioner gives the example of the island they live on, Uist. The island relies on visits by holidaymakers for employment and income and received no revenue from tourism for 18 months during the pandemic. The petitioner says that this year islanders are still being impacted by regular cancellation of ferry bookings by Calmac, putting tourists off planning visits to the island and preventing residents from travelling to the mainland.
6. There is mention of the importance of ferries to island communities in the [National Islands Plan](#), and the [subsequent National Islands Plan survey](#). During

the consultation on the draft National Islands Plan in 2019, Scottish Government officials visited 40 islands, held 61 events and met with almost 1,000 people. The most common issues people raised related to transport. In October 2020, 20,000 surveys were posted to adult residents of 76 permanently inhabited islands. A total of 4,347 people responded to the survey from 59 islands, giving a response rate of 22%.

7. The subsequent survey found that ferries to and from the mainland are one of the most frequently used forms of transport for islanders. It also found that two thirds of island residents agree that the mainland ferry service runs when they need it, 58% that it is reliable and 64% that there is usually space when they need it.
8. During an [evidence session in October 2021](#), the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee heard from the Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community's Jenny Milne:

“Ferries underpin the lives of those who reside on and travel to and from the islands... The fleets are old, there are capacity issues and, at the moment, it is costing the Government more money to maintain them than it would be to look at a longer-term plan.”

9. During the same session, Douglas Cowan, Highlands and Islands Enterprise's Director of Communities and Place, told the Committee:

“On priorities for the [islands] connectivity plan, I agree with Jenny Milne that ferries are the big issue. We hear about it all the time. Reliability and resilience issues are impacting our communities across the islands at a time when there are enough other problems to be getting on with.”

Scotland's ferry fleet

10. The SPICe paper at Annexe B provides some background information on Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament action in relation to Scotland's ferry fleet and services during the last session and into the early months of this session.
11. As the paper notes, the then Rural Economy and Connectivity (REC) Committee reported to the Parliament on the construction and procurement of ferry vessels in Scotland. It concluded that there had been “a catastrophic failure” in the management of the procurement of two recent vessels, leading the Committee to conclude that “processes and structures are no longer fit for purpose.” The report added that the Scottish Government should commission an independent external review of the processes for public procurement of ferries to ensure appropriate

lessons are learned for the future and to keep the Committee updated of its progress and conclusions.¹

12. The Scottish Government has commissioned consultants to investigate possible future institutional arrangements for the management and delivery of Clyde and Hebrides ferry services, with a report expected in late 2021. No further information on the date of publication is available at this stage.
13. The Islands Connectivity Plan will replace the current Ferries Plan at the end of 2022 and is due to be published sometime in 2022. No further information on the date of publication is available at this stage.
14. [Audit Scotland's report on the constructions of vessels 801 and 802 is available here](#). Audit Scotland have indicated that [another report will be published in March 2022](#). The report will include a review of the initial arrangements, consider the learning that has been applied and make recommendations to improve the management of similar projects.
15. As the successor Committee to the REC Committee on transport issues, the NZET Committee receives periodic updates from the Scottish Government and from Fergusons Marine Ltd on issues related to ferry procurement and ferry services generally. Here is a link to the [correspondence on the update on Hulls 801 and 802](#) and the [most recent Ministerial update on 21 October 2021](#).

Decision on the petition

16. Under Standing Orders, the Committee may take such action as it considers appropriate in relation to any petition. This may include—
 - (a) referring the petition to the Scottish Ministers, any other committee of the Parliament or any other person or body for them to take such action as they consider appropriate;
 - (b) reporting to the Parliamentary Bureau or to the Parliament;
 - (c) taking any other action which the Committee considers appropriate; or
 - (d) closing the petition. If a petition is closed, the petitioner must be notified of the reasons for this. It is good practice for the Committee to agree in its public discussion of any petition it intends to close, the reason(s) why it is being closed.
17. The Committee is invited to consider its approach to the petition, bearing in mind the options available to it, as set out in paragraph 16 above.

¹ Pages 1 and 2 of report

ANNEXE A

PE1872: Improve the reliability of island ferry services

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to urgently ensure that all Islanders have access to reliable ferry services.

Previous action taken

I have contacted Alasdair Allan MSP.

Background information

Unreliable ferry services are causing huge losses to island economies. After a very difficult 18 months with no tourists, holidaymakers who had booked for this year are now cancelling as Calmac regularly cancel their ferry bookings.

In Uist, we are suffering tremendously and constantly refunding people's bookings. As a very small island we do not have a choice of employment and we need the tourists back.

Islanders have been told by Calmac that they will not be allowed on ferries to the mainland until 8th June. The Uist ferry, Lord of the Isles, is consistently deployed to cover other ferries which have broken down, leaving us without a reliable service. Many islanders cannot afford to fly.

People want to come here on holiday, but this situation is putting them off. We stuck rigidly to the covid rules and thought there would be light at the end of the tunnel, but the current situation is disastrous.

Created by

Liz Mcnicol

Considered from

21 June 2021

674 signatures

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: PE1872

Main Petitioner: Liz Mcnicol

Subject: Improve the reliability of island ferry services

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to urgently ensure that all Islanders have access to reliable ferry services.

Background

Clyde and Hebrides ferry services are specified, funded and operated by three organisations under the control of Scottish Ministers. These are:

1. **Transport Scotland:** An agency of the Scottish Government which is responsible for Scottish ferries policy and the letting, management and funding of the Clyde and Hebrides ferry service contract.
2. **CalMac Ferries Ltd:** A company wholly owned by Scottish Ministers which provides ferry services to 22 islands and four peninsulas on Scotland's west coast. CalMac Ferries operate Clyde and Hebrides ferry services under contract to Scottish Ministers. The current contract runs between October 2016 and October 2024.
3. **Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL):** A company wholly owned by Scottish Ministers which owns 36 ferries, 31 of which are leased to CalMac Ferries and five to SERCO Northlink. It is also leading on the procurement of new vessels for these services. It also owns 16 Clyde and Hebrides harbours and owns or leases properties and port infrastructure at 10 other Clyde and Hebrides locations.

The Scottish Government has commissioned consultants to investigate possible future institutional arrangements for the management and delivery of Clyde and Hebrides ferry services, with a report expected in late 2021.

Several vessels being used on the Clyde and Hebrides routes have recently experienced technical problems, requiring them to be withdrawn for repairs. This has resulted in cancelled sailings and reduced capacity on key routes, including Brodick-Ardrossan and Ullapool-Stornoway. Media reports have highlighted that this is having knock-on impacts on affected island communities and businesses.

Scottish Government Action

The Scottish Government published its [Ferries Plan](#) in December 2012, which makes recommendations on:

- where investment should be focussed to improve connections for island and remote rural communities
- improving reliability and journey times
- seeking to maximise the opportunities for employment, business, leisure and tourism
- promoting social inclusion.

The Ferries Plan is due to be replaced by a new Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) from the end of 2022. The ICP will consider island connectivity in the round, covering ferries, fixed links (bridges or tunnels) and aviation.

CMAL announced on 23 February 2021 that it was launching phase 1 of a [Small Vessel Replacement Programme](#), with the aim of replacing the following vessels over a ten-year period:

Vessel	Year built	Current route
MV Loch Striven	1986	Oban-Lismore
MV Loch Riddon	1986	Largs-Cumbrae (second vessel, summer only)
MV Loch Ranza	1986	Tayinloan-Gigha
MV Loch Dunvegan	1991	Colintraive-Rhubodach

MV Loch Fyne	1991	Mallaig-Armadale (summer only)
MV Loch Tarbert	1992	Tobermory-Kilchoan
MV Loch Linnhe	1986	relief vessel

Phase 2 of the programme will involve replacement of vessels serving the Sound of Barra, Sound of Harris and Sound of Iona.

Two dual-fuel ferries are currently under construction at the Ferguson Marine shipyard in Port Glasgow. The first vessel, MV Glen Sannox, is now due for delivery between July and September 2022 and the second vessel, known only as Hull 802, is due between April and July 2023. These vessels are slated to operate on the Ardrossan-Brodick route and the Uig triangle (Uig-Tarbert-Lochmaddy).

Scottish Parliament Action

The Scottish Parliament's Rural Economy and Connectivity undertook an inquiry into the [construction and procurement of ferry vessels in Scotland](#), the report of which was published on 9 December 2020. The Committee heard further evidence on this issue from Paul Wheelhouse MSP (then Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands) at its [meeting of 31 March 2021](#). Scottish Ministers have recently been asked oral parliamentary questions about their response to Clyde and Hebrides ferry service disruption, including on [26 May 2021](#) and [9 June 2021](#).

Key Organisations and relevant links

- **Transport Scotland:** Sets national ferries policy and lets, manages and funds the Clyde and Hebrides ferry service on behalf of Scottish Ministers.
- **CalMac Ferries:** Operates Clyde and Hebrides ferry services, ultimately owned by Scottish Ministers.
- **Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL):** Owns the vessels used by CalMac Ferries to provide Clyde and Hebrides services, ultimately owned by Scottish Ministers.

Alan Rehfisch
Senior Researcher
 July 2021

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