

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

3rd Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
22 February 2023

PE1862: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities

Lodged on 24 March 2021

Petitioner Rona MacKay, Angus Campbell & Naomi Bremner on behalf of Uist
Economic Task Force

**Petition
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to
introduce community representation on boards of public organisations
delivering lifeline services to island communities, in keeping with the
Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1862>

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [9 November 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Transport.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new responses from the Minister for Transport, and Alasdair Allan MSP, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.

6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1862: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities

Petitioner

Rona MacKay, Angus Campbell & Naomi Bremner on behalf of Uist Economic Task Force

Date lodged

24 March 2021

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities, in keeping with the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

Previous action

Raised issue with the MSPs Beatrice Wishart, Liam McArthur and Alasdair Allan.

Background information

One of the strategic objectives of the National Islands Plan is designed to empower island communities and strong local partnerships.

We believe that public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities, such as the Highlands and Islands Airport Ltd (HIAL), should have representation from those communities on their boards. We also believe that this is in line with the National Islands Plan.

We believe this change will empower our communities based on a cohesive, place-based and holistic approach to policy. It will build

economic, social and environmental considerations in an integrated approach to strategy for the infrastructure and services that support our lifeline services. We believe that local knowledge should be viewed as an essential skill for the Boards of organisations accountable to the Scottish Government. Such knowledge would bring an appreciation and understanding of local community needs relevant to the service which is being delivered. In particular, we believe that local knowledge will bring insight to boards into economic and infrastructure development, local investment and planning, employment, housing, education and health and social care and how these relate to the service the public organisation provides.

This petition comes in the spirit of delivering active change as the communities have overseen community ownership transfers such that much of our land ownership and decision-making is now made in the islands and Caithness by communities themselves. We make this petition in the same belief that our communities should have ownership, through our place on boards, appointed on merit, over assets which are there to serve us. We want to create more local resilience in our communities through the decentralisation of strategic planning and decision-making.

HIAL is one example where this change could be applied. Its board meets regularly to provide strategic direction for the Company and is responsible for the determination of the company's strategic plan and direction. In particular, the board reviews safety, security, risk management, corporate governance, operational matters, financial management, business and commercial strategy, route development, pay, pensions and human resources.

It is the role of the HIAL board to challenge the senior management team on its strategy for the business and to provide guidance and support on aviation and non-aviation issues. The board is entrusted to provide leadership, direction, support and guidance to ensure that HIAL delivers and is committed to delivering its functions effectively and efficiently and in accordance with the aims, policies and priorities of the Scottish Ministers. The board is also responsible for appointing, with the approval of the Scottish Ministers, the Managing Director.

Major policy decisions are made at board level, drawing on information provided by the management team, the Scottish Government and other appropriate sources. There is, however, currently no specific requirement to draw on information from the Councils or communities that the decisions potentially affect.

Using HIAL as an example, we have set out how our petition aims could be achieved to increase community participation—

1. Reserving a place on the selection panel for the Chair of HIAL, for either the chair (or substitute) of the HITRANS or ZetTrans boards, and include island local authorities in the selection process;
2. Assigning three of the seats on the HIAL board to people who live in the communities served by the HIAL airports (we suggest a preference for island residents, on the grounds of air services being lifeline to islands, but commercially desirable for mainland areas);
3. One of these seats should be retained for a co-opted member from the HITRANS/ZetTrans Board. It is noted that this member while sitting on the HIAL Board would act only in the best interests of the HIAL ‘company’; and/or
4. At least one Council allocated a place on the board, from either Western Isles Council, Orkney Islands Council or Shetlands Islands Council. Local authorities should not, however, be excluded from other appointments or limited to involvement just with these appointments, and again while sitting on the HIAL Board the member would act only in the best interests of HIAL, as is the case with members of NHS Boards drawn from local authorities.

We believe that this approach is in keeping with the principles of public appointments, namely appointed on merit, and committed to diversity and equality, with a board that is representative of the community that the organisation seeks to provide services for.

We believe that by having community and island representation on this, and other, boards will increase accountability and participation. This is consistent with principles of accountability, inclusion and community

empowerment, and a more human rights-based approach. This would create ownership, monitoring and accountability, a fair and inclusive approach which is consistent with the Scottish Government's Purpose and National Outcomes.

Annexe B

Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1862 on 9 November 2022

The Convener: PE1862 is on introducing community representation on boards of public organisations that deliver lifeline services to island communities. I am almost surprised to say that we do not have Rhoda Grant with us this morning as we consider the petition. If you are watching, Rhoda, I say good morning to you.

The petition was lodged by Rona MacKay, Angus Campbell and Naomi Bremner on behalf of Uist economic task force. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities, in keeping with the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

We considered the petition very recently, at our meeting on 26 October, when we took evidence from the Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, and Fran Pacitti, who is director of aviation, maritime, freight and canals at Transport Scotland. During the evidence session, the minister and director shared information on the progress that is being made to encourage islander representation on boards, such as being more proactive in how the roles are advertised and making it an essential criterion that applicants for the position of non-executive director have a good understanding and knowledge of the issues affecting island communities.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for actions?

Alexander Stewart: I am delighted that we have had such a robust outcome so far, but it is important that we now seek further information. We should write to the Minister for Transport to find out about the process for appointments to the board of David MacBrayne Group and what work is being done to encourage candidates from communities. We can also ask for an update on the communities' communication with ministers and with Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd with regard to the proposals that the petition sets out.

The Convener: Thank you, Mr Stewart. Are colleagues content with those actions?

Members indicated agreement.

Annexe C

Minister for Transport submission of 6 December 2022

PE1862/D: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities

Thank you for your letter of 11 November 2022 seeking further information on the process for appointments to the board of David MacBrayne Limited (DML), and the work being done to encourage applications from island community representatives. You have also asked for an update on what communication I have had with Highlands and Islands Airports Limited (HIAL) in relation to the proposals set out within this petition.

Firstly, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee on 26 October 2022 to discuss this important issue.

I can confirm that the advert seeking two non-executive directors for the Board of DML was published on Tuesday 8 November 2022, with a closing date set for Monday 5 December 2022. An understanding of island life is a key criterion for both roles, and this will be fully explored and assessed throughout the entire recruitment process.

To support the advertising campaign we have highlighted in all of the recruitment paperwork, including the advert itself, our encouragement for island residents to apply. We make clear our recognition that the required knowledge and skills, set out in the application pack, can be achieved in a variety of ways.

We have advertised these positions widely. A letter from the Director of Aviation, Maritime, Freight & Canals at Transport Scotland was sent to a wide range of organisations across Scotland and the UK. In particular, it was sent to the Chief Executives of Shetland Islands Council; Orkney Islands Council; Comhairle nan Eilean Siar; the Highland Council; North Ayrshire Council; Argyll and Bute Council; the Ferries Community Board; the Scottish Islands Federation; Highlands and Islands Enterprise; Scottish Crofters Federation; Community Inshore Fisheries Association; SCVO and to the Community Development Trusts Association, asking

them to share with relevant interest groups on the CHFS route. In the letter to the six island local authorities, there was a specific request that they share details of the appointments with local planning boards and other relevant community groups.

A copy of the advert was published in www.ampaipear.com. The advert also appeared in English and Gaelic on www.appointed-for-scotland.org website. Details of the appointments were also shared on social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn for DML, Transport Scotland and Scottish Government public appointments. Members of the DML Board were also asked to circulate the advert to their contacts. The adverts have been placed on the CalMac vessels travelling to and from our island communities. We have been keen to do all that we can to promote the opportunities available to island communities to contribute to the work of the Board.

In relation to HIAL, it is important to note that the role of the Chair and Non-Executive Directors on the HIAL Board is to represent Ministers' interests and ensure that the company is being run in line with Ministerial expectations. While my officials have discussed the terms of this petition with HIAL, making appointments to the HIAL Board is a matter for Scottish Ministers. An understanding of the communities in which HIAL's airports are located is an essential requirement of all HIAL Board members. They are required to demonstrate "an ability to understand Highlands and Islands issues, including the economic development and social inclusion of the regions' communities and stakeholders". In addition, all Board members must also show "an understanding of the role of transport, including aviation, in maintaining the economic and social integrity of the Highlands and Islands." The Board Skills Matrix is reviewed at each appointment round to ensure that the Board collectively has the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively carry out its functions. Ahead of the next appointment round, we will further explore how we can ensure that the Board has a thorough understanding of Islanders' lived experience in relation to their use of HIAL's airports.

I have noted above the methods used to advertise DML Board vacancies and similar methods have been used for HIAL. The methods used to advertise vacancies are reviewed at each appointment round in

order to ensure as wide a candidate pool as possible can be attracted. For your information, HIAL has recently recruited a new Finance Director, Mr Jamie Manson, who I have also appointed to the HIAL Board. Mr Manson is a resident of Shetland and, in line with HIAL's policy of encouraging the recruitment of Head Office posts across their estate; he will be based at Sumburgh Airport in Shetland.

I would also like to take this opportunity to highlight the good engagement the HIAL Board and Executive Team already have with island representatives. HIAL dedicates significant resource to understanding the issues that affect the communities served by its 11 airports. The HIAL Chair and Managing Director host a four weekly call that is open to all local authority leaders, CEOs and Heads of Transport. The aim of this call is to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas, to raise particular matters of concern and to keep colleagues updated on a range of matters, including infrastructure projects such as the ongoing Barra terminal building enhancement work. Business development opportunities can also be discussed such as the Sustainable Aviation Test Environment (SATE) based at Kirkwall Airport. This is in addition to one to one meetings that HIAL undertakes with local authorities as well as local MSPs and MPs.

HIAL Board meetings are undertaken across the HIAL estate in order to provide an opportunity for the Board to engage face-to-face with stakeholders. The most recent HIAL Board meeting took place in Islay in October. The Board met with local stakeholders including elected representatives, local business operators and representatives of community groups. This enabled the Board to hear first-hand the issues that are impacting the local community and to explore how HIAL can contribute to addressing these issues. The Board also met with staff at Islay Airport to hear directly from them about their experiences of delivering front line services. HIAL is continually looking at further ways that they can engage with local communities in order to ensure that the services they are providing meet those communities' needs.

I hope my reply is helpful.

Alasdair Allan MSP submission of 25 January 2023

PE1862/E: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities

I write to express my support for petition PE1862: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities.

Unfortunately, I am not able to be at the upcoming Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee evidence session on this petition as I am a member of another committee which meets at the same time. I am, however, very grateful for the Committee's attention to the issue.

As the Committee will be aware from my previous contributions, this is an important and much-discussed topic in my constituency. Island communities are utterly reliant on organisations such as HIAL, David MacBrayne and CMAL. My constituents have the most to gain from seeing them governed as effectively as possible. Yet – paradoxically – people resident in islands are very rarely featured on the boards of these organisations.

I strongly believe that the governance of these organisations would be improved by having people who personally relied on their services represented on their boards. Accountability is also greatly improved when board members have the experience of meeting people in their local shop who are affected by their board's decisions.

I note the view that organisations like HIAL already have “good engagement” with island communities. However, a distinction needs to be made between consultation with communities and community voices being embedded in the decision-making process. Having at least some island-based board members would also make for a better flow of ideas from communities at an early stage, rather than consultation taking place after decisions have, essentially, already been made. Organisations would also have a better understanding early on of things that may be completely unpalatable to island communities and be much better equipped to nip any unworkable ideas in the bud.

There has been some progress since my member's debate on this issue in September 2021. While this was principally about ferry services, the same arguments can be made for HIAL or even organisations like NHS Western Isles. I welcome the focus on advertising board vacancies as widely as possible in island areas. A Lewis resident was appointed to the board of CMAL last year and a Shetland resident has recently been appointed to the board of HIAL.

While this is welcome progress, individual appointments do not necessarily mean that the issue is "solved." There needs to be an adequate response to the structural reasons that have hitherto prevented appointment recommendations for island-based individuals from appearing on Ministers' desks. In my view, this means ensuring that the job specifications of board members value lived experience of island life, as well as skills that abound in island communities (for example experience of working at sea and knowledge of the maritime world).