

PE2029/M: Nationalise Clydeport to bring the ports and harbours on the river Clyde into public ownership

CalMac Ferries Ltd. written submission, 9 April 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above petition regarding the operation of ports and harbours on the river Clyde.

There is a wide variety of ownership of ports and harbours up and down the west of Scotland, which CalMac must contend with when operating the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services contract. While this results in added complexity across the network, CalMac does not hold a view on ownership patterns of ports and harbours. Our overriding priority is that the onshore infrastructure is kept in a fully working and operational state and that these assets are properly maintained to ensure that poor infrastructure is not responsible for reducing services for our customers, negatively impacting on the economies of west coast communities.

The facilities at Ardrossan have not been maintained to an acceptable standard. There has been a continuing deterioration in the condition of both berths (Arran and Irish berths) over many years, brought about by a lack of investment in the maintenance of this piece of critical infrastructure.

The berths at Ardrossan have had numerous issues over recent years, ranging from a fendering system that is very susceptible to damage, defects with the fendering system that have not been rectified in a timely manner, numerous failures of the linkspan and now the complete closure of the Irish berth. This is a result of a lack of investment from Peel Ports, with the general condition of the whole port being sub-standard. Not only does this create greater levels of risk for the safe operation of the service, but it also gives a very poor image to customers from around the world who are visiting Arran.

The service operates at Ardrossan to the Arran berth, but also includes use of the Irish berth, which provides resilience on the route when short term impacts hit one of the berths, but it also provides CalMac with the flexibility to operate in differing wind conditions. In addition, when we have to provide short-term cover to the Arran route using vessels from elsewhere on the network, having two berths allows us a choice of a wider variety of vessels as some of them can only berth at one or other of the berths.

A current example of the impact caused by the closure of the Irish berth is that MV Alfred, which could only operate to the Irish berth, has been unable to operate additional sailings to/from Arran. Instead, it now has to operate from Troon to Brodick, which due to the longer passage time results in a reduction in the number of return sailings per day. It also means Ardrossan isn't available to CalMac in certain wind conditions, as the vessels cannot berth safely in the Arran berth when the wind is from the East and anything above moderate in strength.

The state of the Arran berth, and in particular the fenders, mean that Masters have concerns about berthing their vessel alongside in weather conditions from the West

and Southwest because of fears that exposed bolts will damage the side of the vessel.

The state of the fenders also impacts on our ability to berth overnight on the Arran berth, owing to the risk of vessel damage, meaning the first sailing from the mainland is cancelled. This is a key sailing for the island, with deliveries, mail, workers in health and social care and tradesmen, all using this service to get to the island.

The condition of Ardrossan Harbour is all the more unacceptable as over the last 10 years, CalMac have paid Ardrossan Harbour company (Peel Ports) a total of £15,480,000 in fees for the use of the berths at Ardrossan. This is split into two fee categories, £3,265,000 in berthing dues (fee for loading and unloading at the port) and £12,215,000 in traffic dues (fee based on the total number of passengers and vehicles).

If the current situation at Ardrossan is not resolved there is a risk that CalMac will have to operate the Arran service from Troon to ensure we can provide a reliable timetabled service for the residents of Arran and the many visitors who wish to travel there. However, operating to Troon will result in a reduced frequency of service when compared with the service that should be operating from Ardrossan.

Whatever ownership arrangement is in place for harbours and ports on the Clyde and across the entire Clyde and Hebrides network, CalMac requests that the owners are required to maintain these vital pieces of infrastructure to a high standard and fit for purpose.

Kind Regards

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Interim Chief Executive