

New vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides

Written submission, by email from James Ferguson, 4 November 2022

I have just become aware that you held a hearing today relating to the awarding of the contract by the Scottish Government to build vessels 801 & 802 at Ferguson Marine. Incidentally, despite my surname, neither I nor my family have any connection to Ferguson Marine and no one I know has ever worked at the shipyard. Similarly, I have no interests in CMAL, Calmac, connections to Mr McColl, Ms Sturgeon or any political party allegiances.

I have some information on the above matter, which I feel is relevant to disclose.

I regularly attended the New Start Scotland exhibition at the SEC for entrepreneurs and start up companies and one year Jim McColl was the keynote speaker. I cannot recall the exact year that Mr McColl attended, but I think it was either in November 2014 or 2015; the organisers of the event should be able to confirm this to you if of relevance.

There is one issue that I clearly recall Mr McColl talking about, which has not seemed to have been mentioned by any of the parties involved since problems emerged; Mr McColl said in his talk that the £97 million contract had not been agreed and the contract was still being negotiated, but Nicola Sturgeon announced to the press that the contract price was £97 million and Mr McColl said that he felt that he had to go along with this as it had been publicly announced. Mr McColl did not make any further comment and did not say, or indicate, that he had a grievance about the announcement. However, clearly, if Ferguson Marine did not agree to this price and it was still being negotiated, it is likely that Ferguson Marine had reservations as to whether the two ferries could be built to specification for that price and, if not, clearly specifications would have to be altered or reduced in order to meet the price announced. Obviously, if the date Ms Sturgeon announced the £97 million price was before the contract was signed, this would support Mr McColl's statement during his talk and Ms Sturgeon should not have publicly announced the price of the contract (or that it had been awarded to Ferguson Marine) before the contract was finalised and signed (particularly if other shipbuilders were still submitting bids). This small issue at the start may have led to cumulative issues further down the line, particularly if Ferguson Marine did not have adequate time to consider the contract put forward and were 'bounced' into agreeing it.

Sources on the internet state that CMAL awarded the contract in August 2015, which would suggest that Mr McColl attended the New Start Scotland event in November 2015 and mentioned the above then, but I cannot be sure of this as I know I attended New Start Scotland events from 2013-2015. Having said this, I do vaguely recall going to another entrepreneurial event in which Mr McColl spoke, but I cannot recall what event that was or when that was as I was attending a lot of entrepreneurial/start up events from 2013 onwards.

I hope that this information is useful and I assume that Mr McColl would confirm the above if you do feel it is relevant and are in direct contact with him.