

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

4th Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday
22 September 2021

PE1872: Improve the reliability of island ferry
services

Note by the Clerk

Petitioner Liz Mcnicol

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

Full petition <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1872>

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that has been under consideration since 24 May 2021.
2. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures and comments on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 674 signatures have been received.
4. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. This response is included at **Annexe B** of this paper.

SPICe briefing

5. As detailed in the SPICe briefing, 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. This

produced a range of recommendations, which included calls for improvements in the strategy for the replacement of ageing vessels in the ferry fleet. The Committee heard further evidence on this issue from Paul Wheelhouse MSP (then Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands) at its meeting of 3 March 2021.

Scottish Government submission

6. In its written submission of 24 June 2021, the Scottish Government emphasises its on-going commitment to supporting vital lifeline services.
7. The petition highlights an example, from May, when the Uist ferry was redeployed to provide cover for other ferries.
8. In response, the Scottish Government explains that the MV Loch Seaforth resumed service on the Stornoway-Ullapool route on Monday 31 May 2021 having been out of service since 14 April 2021.
9. It further explains that all vessels displaced to alternative routes to provide cover during this period moved back to their normal scheduled services from 3 June 2021.
10. The submission stresses that CalMac—
 - worked throughout the recent disruption to find ways to continue the freight and passenger service to the Outer Hebrides;
 - strives to minimise the time that a vessel may be unavailable; and
 - seeks to make the best decisions to balance the needs of communities across the network, ensuring that island connectivity, including delivery of essential supplies, is maintained.
11. In its submission, the Scottish Government highlights action that it is taking in the short, and long, term to add resilience to the fleet.
12. In the short term, Transport Scotland is exploring opportunities for chartering additional tonnage including working with CalMac to consider the chartering of the MV Pentalina.
13. In the long-term, the Scottish Government assures that it is committed to securing replacement vessels that not only increase resilience and reliability of the fleet but will also improve and enhance services.
14. It highlights the development of its long-term programme of investment in vessels and ports which is being delivered with the support of £580 million over the next 5 years, as part of the Scottish Government’s wider Infrastructure Investment Plan announced on 4 February 2021. The submission also explains that it is

envisaged that further funds will be required and made available in future years to support investment throughout this decade.

15. This programme includes the delivery of two new major vessels, MV Glen Sannox and Hull 802, which the Scottish Government states it is working with Ferguson Marine Port Glasgow to do everything it can to ensure that the vessels are delivered according to the revised delivery schedules.
16. The Scottish Government states that, once in place, these vessels will contribute to the service and capacity improvements.
17. In its submission, the Scottish Government also highlights other projects, which are underway, including—
 - new Islay Vessel project which will deliver a new major vessel for this route, and provide additional capacity for the CalMac fleet;
 - Small Vessel Replacement Programme. Phase 1 will see up to 7 new vessels serving communities across the network; phase 2 will cover new vessels on both the Sound of Harris and Sound of Barra connections to the Uists;
 - a project to replace the vessel which serves the Mallaig-Lochboisdale year-round service and Mallaig-Armadale crossing in summer; and
 - vessel replacement projects for the Gourock-Dunoon/Kilcreggan and Craginure-Oban routes.

Action

18. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

PE1872: IMPROVE THE RELIABILITY OF ISLAND FERRY SERVICES

Petitioner

Liz Mcnicol

Date Lodged

21 June 2021

Petition summary

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

Previous action

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.

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-Cumbræ (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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Annexe B

Scottish Government submission of 24 June 2021

PE1872/A

Ministers fully understand customers' and residents' frustrations during periods of ferry disruption and want to emphasise the Scottish Government's on-going commitment to supporting vital lifeline services. The new Minister for Transport, Graeme Dey MSP, made this one of his first priorities, meeting with local constituency MSPs, including Alasdair Allan for Na h-Eileanan an Iar.

The MV Loch Seaforth resumed service on the Stornoway-Ullapool route on Monday 31 May 2021 having been out of service since 14 April 2021. All vessels displaced to alternative routes to provide cover during this period moved back to their normal scheduled services from 3 June 2021. CalMac Ferries Ltd is investigating the cause of the breakdown. CalMac worked throughout the recent disruption to find ways to continue the freight and passenger service to the Outer Hebrides. CalMac strives to minimise the time that a vessel may be unavailable and seeks to make the best decisions to balance the needs of communities across the network, ensuring that island connectivity, including delivery of essential supplies, is maintained.

To address critical resilience issues in the short-term, Transport Scotland is exploring opportunities for chartering additional tonnage including working with CalMac to consider the chartering of the MV Pentalina to add resilience to the fleet as a whole. Berthing trials have taken place at a number of ports and CalMac have been consulting with the Arran and Mull communities to discuss deployment options – though I should stress that the primary objective of the charter is to improve the resilience of the fleet as a whole and enable CalMac to better respond when breakdowns and other disruption occurs, wherever on the network that is.

Looking ahead, the Scottish Government is committed to securing replacement vessels that will improve and enhance services, and increase the level of resilience and reliability within the fleet. To demonstrate this commitment, a long-term programme of investment in vessels and ports has been developed and is being delivered with the support of £580 million over the next 5 years, as part of the Scottish Government's wider Infrastructure Investment Plan announced on 4

February 2021. It is envisaged that further funds will be required and made available in future years to support investment throughout this decade.

Transport Scotland, working with Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd and CalMac is making progress on the delivery of this investment programme. The Scottish Government is committed to delivering the new major vessels MV Glen Sannox and Hull 802. The Scottish Government continues to work with Ferguson Marine Port Glasgow to do everything it can to ensure that the vessels are delivered according to the revised delivery schedules, to contribute to the service and capacity improvements which our island communities depend on. This will include benefits to the Uists through capacity increases on the Uig-Tarbert/Lochmaddy services, supported by substantial Scottish Government investment at all three harbours.

The new Islay Vessel project will deliver a new major vessel for this busy route, providing additional capacity for the CalMac fleet. CMAL recently announced that this project is now moving into the procurement phase. Progress is also being made on other new vessel projects: phase 1 of the Small Vessel Replacement Programme will see up to 7 new vessels serving communities across the network; phase 2 will cover new vessels on both the Sound of Harris and Sound of Barra connections to the Uists.

Since the reinstatement of a Mallaig-Lochboisdale year round service in 2016, responding to community wishes in the Uists, this service has grown following some early reliability challenges. The vessel serving that route, as well as the Mallaig-Armadale crossing in summer, is approaching normal life expiry and a CMAL-led project to commission a replacement is underway; this is at an early stage and consultation with the Uists communities will be undertaken to inform the direction of the project. For completeness, a vessel replacement project for Gourock-Dunoon/Kilcreggan is well underway and one for Craignure-Oban is in its early stage.

The Transport Minister agrees that the important dialogue between MSPs, local authorities and other key stakeholders with himself and officials continues. As the Scottish Government addresses these key issues facing the ferries network.