

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vessels being used on the Clyde and Hebrides routes have recently experienced technical problems, requiring them to be withdrawn for repairs.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

SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe),
an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The
Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP