

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

10th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
14 June 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 [22 February 2023](#). 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 the Petitioners, 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](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 960 signatures have been received on this petition.

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 22 February 2023

The Deputy Convener: We will now consider PE1862, lodged by Rona MacKay, Angus Campbell and Naomi Bremner on behalf of the Uist economic task force, which 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.

At our previous consideration of the petition on 9 November 2022, we agreed to write to the Minister for Transport to seek information on the process for appointments to the board of David MacBrayne Ltd, and to seek an update on communication between the minister and Highland and Islands Airports Ltd—HIAL—about the proposal in the petition.

I am pleased to say that we have now received a response from the minister that sets out details of the advertising campaign to recruit two non-executive directors to the board of David MacBrayne Ltd. The minister highlights that an understanding of island life is a key criterion for those roles and that that will be fully explored and assessed throughout the recruitment process.

On HIAL, the minister notes that an understanding of the communities in which HIAL airports are located is an essential requirement for all board members. It also noted that HIAL has recently recruited a new finance director, who has also been appointed to its board. That person is an island resident.

The committee has also received a submission from our colleague Alasdair Allan MSP. He has reiterated his support for the petition and notes that, although progress is being made, individual appointments to the boards of HIAL and Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd do not necessarily mean the issues have been resolved.

Do members have any comments or suggestions?

Carol Mochan: I have been approached by people who, although they acknowledge that there has been some movement, consider that there is no great urgency to see the issue as a key priority. I have been asked to raise with the committee that having an islander on HIAL's board should be a priority. Beatrice Wishart from Shetland has spoken to me about how the community there feels that it is imperative that that happens. I want to share that with the committee.

Alexander Stewart: Progress is being made, but we require more information. I suggest that we write to the Minister for Transport encouraging the Scottish Government to continue to make progress on the issue, which has already been

raised by other MSPs and not just by those on this committee. We should also recommend that it explores all available options to formalise the role of community representation on boards of public organisations providing a lifeline service to island communities. We have discussed some of those organisations in the past, when we have talked about the representation on HIAL, David MacBrayne Ltd or CMAL. It is those types of organisations that we would be requesting the minister to give us more information about. With that information, we can then assess what progress is really being made.

Fergus Ewing: I support the recommendation that Alexander Stewart has just made. I would add that specific reference in the letter to the minister could be made to, and perhaps a copy appended of, Alasdair Allan's submission, because he makes several very good points about the value of having island residents on boards relating to ferries, transportation and health.

Alasdair Allan goes into a couple of reasons for that, which I will briefly set out. First, he says that organisations are improved by having people who rely on the services rather than outsiders who do not use the services. That is a commonsense point and seems to be a practical example of the benefits of having local residents on the boards rather than—without being pejorative—outsiders.

Secondly, he says:

“Having ... 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.”

That, too, is a very good point, convener, and one that perhaps we could ask that the minister bear in mind with further future appointments to public bodies.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you for that. Do we all agree on those recommendations?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C

Minister for Transport submission of 6 April 2023

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

Thank you for your letter of 22 March 2023, addressed to Ms Gilruth. I am replying in my new role as Transport Minister. You have asked us to explore all available options to formalise the role of community representation on the boards of public organisations providing lifeline services to island communities.

As agreed previously, hearing from, and including the views and experiences of people, businesses and communities on our islands is key, not just for our islands but also for the more rural and remote communities that are connected to our islands.

I whole-heartedly agree that we need more islanders to be involved in decision making on lifeline services. I am pleased that we have already made progress on this, improving the way we advertise and promote Board opportunities. This has involved taking some pro-active and direct actions to ensure vacancies are visible to as wide a range of potentially interested candidates as possible.

In relation to CMAL and DML we have made clear in all of our recent recruitment paperwork that applications from island representatives are welcomed. We have advertised our vacancies on CalMac vessels, travelling to and from our island communities. We have written to key organisational and local island contacts asking them to encourage applicants from within their communities and made clear that an understanding of island life is considered to be a key criterion. A good knowledge of island life is fully explored and assessed throughout the entire recruitment process.

Details of the opportunities have been shared on social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Members of each Board have also been asked to circulate the advert to their own contacts.

You are aware that these recent steps have already led to some success, with the most recent CMAL recruitment exercise leading to the appointment of an island representative. You will also be aware that the same, or a similar approach, was taken in the most recent recruitment exercise for DML.

Turning to HIAL, it should be noted that the HIAL Director of Finance, Jamie Manson, is a member of the HIAL Board and is a resident of Shetland. In addition to his expertise in finance and the other skills he brings to the Board, Jamie is able to reflect his lived experience as an island resident on decisions made by the Board. HIAL have a location neutral policy for Head Office posts enabling staff undertaking Head Office functions to be based at any of HIAL's sites. This increases the employment opportunities for residents of our remote and island communities.

When recruiting for the Chair and Non-Executive Director roles at HIAL we will continue to actively encourage applications from island residents through pro-active advertising of the vacancies. This includes not only online and newsprint media but also through bodies such as the Scottish Islands Federation.

All three (DML, CMAL and HIAL) are regulated public bodies, and I can confirm that each recruitment process is independently regulated by the Ethical Standards Commissioner and overseen by the Scottish Government's Public Appointments Team.

I want to make clear my commitment moving forward is that islanders' voices will be better heard and represented across our Boards. Scottish Ministers are committed to ensuring that we attract diverse and well-functioning Boards. I am keen to continue to do everything that we can to encourage applications from our island-based residents who have a desire and the necessary knowledge and skills to become a member of our boards.

We will continue to review and consider any further steps necessary to promote available Board opportunities when preparing for future individual recruitment campaigns and will introducing further change, if required.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

KEVIN STEWART

Petitioners submission of 7 June 2023

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

The evidenced based case for having Islander knowledge on public boards has only increased since we first put forward our petition.

The example of decisions being taken around ferry services is a prime example of unintended consequences and lack of understanding of how dependant Islanders are on lifeline services. We fully understand that boards do not and should not take day to day operational decisions, but they should set the policy, define the way of working and set the culture of the organisation. In addition, it is their duty to hold management to account against the outcomes set by the board.

Our petition is based around bringing the necessary skills to these boards to enable the best informed and mutually beneficial decision making and governance to take place.

Organisations such as DML and HIAL who take misinformed decisions are damaging all the island communities. Even when these decisions are reversed at a later date the damage is already done.

Our petition also seeks to bring better outcomes across many areas of public policy. The initiatives to reverse depopulation, have equality of access and deal with wellbeing are only three such examples and we would encourage that wider benefit to be factored in.

We really feel it would be helpful to be able to give evidence in person to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee and respectfully ask you to allow that at your next consideration of our petition.