

Mull & Iona Ferry Committee

Press Release

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Islanders demand action on Oban ferry before parliament adjourns

Outgoing MSP and SNP candidate support islanders calls for action on new vessel

An influential group of islanders on Mull and Iona have demanded that the Scottish Government resolves a dispute over the purchase of a catamaran for the Oban to Mull route before parliament rises for the election, after a report by Strathclyde University found that the boat – available for purchase today - would instantly become one of the safest and most efficient in CalMac’s ageing fleet.

The Mull and Iona Ferry Committee commissioned a detailed technical report from the university’s respected Department of Naval Architecture, funded by donations from locals and other supporters from around the world after the Scottish Government refused to support a similar study.

Strathclyde University’s report found that the catamaran – nearing completion in Indonesia – will exceed Maritime and Coastguard Agency safety requirements with minimal modifications. The committee also found that the vessel’s cost - £12 million compared to the estimated £100m for each of the incomplete boats on the Clyde – will be recouped in just seven years through greater fuel efficiency and lower operating costs.

Joe Reade, chair of the Mull and Iona Ferry Committee, said: “The people of Mull and Iona are being treated with arrogant disdain by CMAL, an organisation owned by the Scottish Government but which appears to be accountable to nobody. It is time now for Paul Wheelhouse, the Islands Minister, to step in before parliament rises this week and instruct CMAL to agree terms on this new vessel before somebody else snaps it up.

“CMAL has spent nearly £200m of taxpayers money on two ferries that are nowhere near ready and four years late, yet when the opportunity presents itself to acquire a ferry that is available right now, they dismiss it out of hand and create artificial ‘safety’ obstructions – making assertions that have now been comprehensively dismissed by the respected academics of Strathclyde University’s Department of Naval Architecture.”

The Scottish Government’s islands minister has previously asked CMAL to acquire new boats when appropriate ones come on to the market – in the knowledge that CalMac’s fleet is as old as it has ever been and increasingly unreliable.

Retiring Argyll and Bute MSP and Cabinet Secretary Michael Russell is firmly behind the catamaran. He said: “The Strathclyde Report, the commissioning of which I was glad to support, indicates absolutely clearly that the vessel would be a good purchase at a low price compared to recent costs of ferries commissioned by CMAL.

“It is also available now which is an essential consideration given the long delays to the CMAL commissioned vessels and the long lead time for a new Mull vessel which hasn’t even been commissioned yet. The Scottish Government has been looking for an additional vessel for some time

and this is a first-rate opportunity to secure one that could make a big difference to the island very quickly. That opportunity needs to be seized with both hands.”

Mr Russell’s remarks were echoed by Jenni Minto, the SNP candidate for Argyll and Bute in the forthcoming election and island resident herself. She said: “It is clear that the CalMac fleet needs more vessels, and this opportunity is one that shouldn’t be passed up. I know as an Islay resident that the shortage of vessels causes considerable difficulty for all island communities so I hope that the Minister will look very carefully at the positive report and try to move this ahead as quickly as possible”.

Mull and Iona Ferry Committee (MIFC) identified a catamaran ferry being built in Indonesia in the summer of 2020. The CalMac fleet is the oldest it has ever been, and the delays in delivering hulls 801 and 802 have compounded the problem. The Oban to Craignure route is the worst affected of all Hebridean services, with the most congestion and fast declining reliability. It is dependent on the small and ill-suited MV Coruisk in summer, which was controversially removed from Skye in 2016. What was meant as a stop-gap re-deployment now looks likely to continue for another ten years, unless this catamaran is acquired.

Other influential voices in the local community added to the pressure on Paul Wheelhouse and the Scottish Government. “If this opportunity is not taken, Mull and Iona are facing ten more years of a failing ferry service”, according to Moray Finch, general manager of Mull & Iona Community Trust. “The ferry replacement program is hopelessly behind schedule, and it will take around 10 years for CMAL to procure an alternative, not to mention the larger pier that their predilection for over-sized monohulls demands.” he said.

Shiona Ruhemann of Iona Community Council added: “The whole ethos and purpose of the Islands Ministry is to empower our communities, to put us at the centre of decisions that are all too often taken for us by off-island ‘experts’. This is a prime case in point – we have proven the case, now we just need the Islands Minister to support us.”

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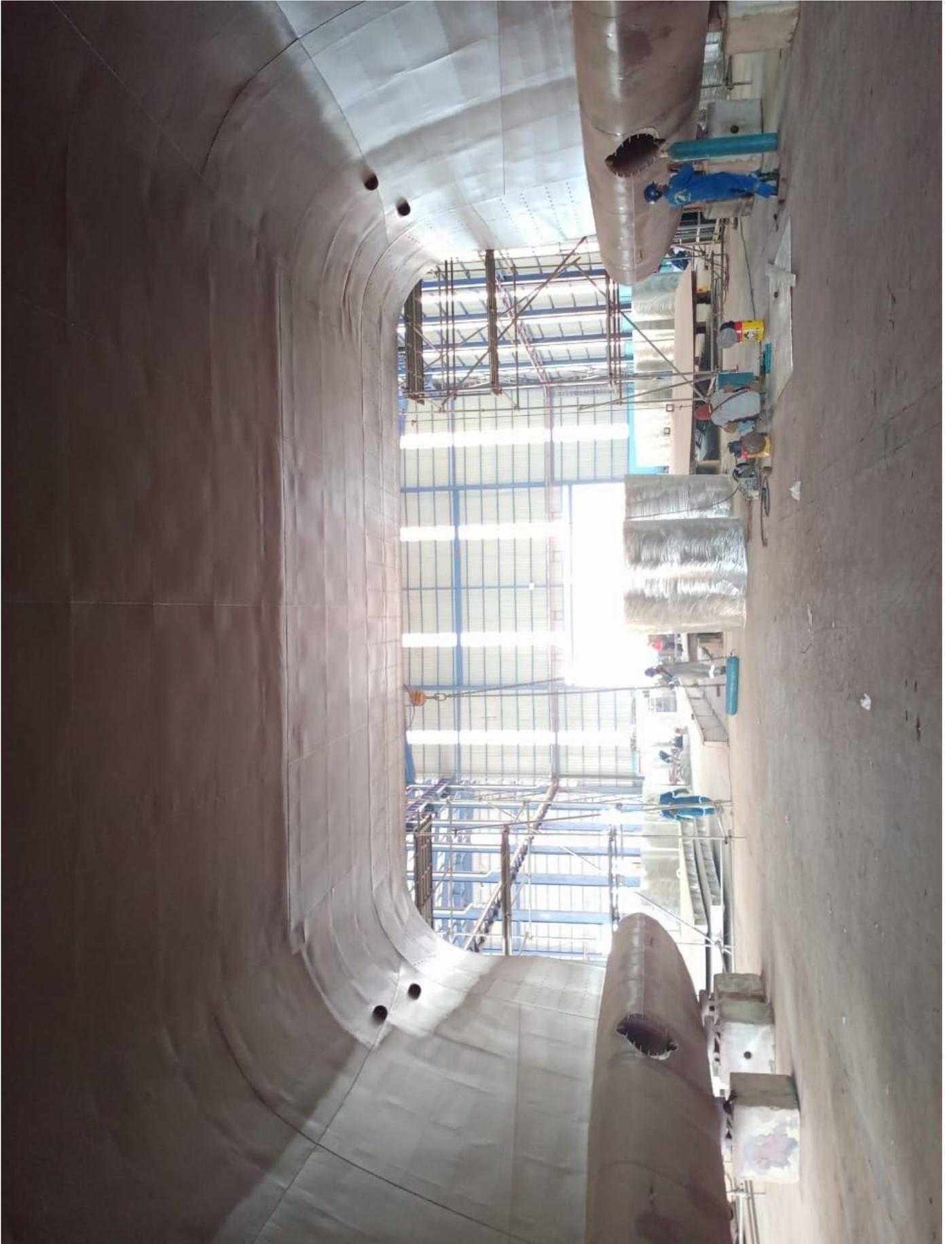
Further information available from: -

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Further background information: <https://mullandionaferrycommittee.org/future-ferries-for-mull/>



Stern of catamaran currently under construction. Image credit: Sea Transport Solutions, Australia.



Twin hulls of catamaran. Image credit: Sea Transport Solutions, Australia.



MV Alfred, a catamaran of similar design, operated by Pentland Ferries to Orkney. Image credit: Pentland Ferries.