

PRESS RELEASE MULL AND IONA FERRY COMMITTEE

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Island Community calls for new catamaran ferry for Mull

Community groups, businesses and islanders have today called on the Scottish Government and CMAL (the quango responsible for the CalMac ferry fleet) to stop dithering and acquire an environmentally-friendly catamaran similar to the vessel owned by Pentland Ferries operating to and from Orkney.

The call from the communities of Mull and Iona – in a letter to islands minister Paul Wheelhouse - follows the December publication of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee’s enquiry into the CalMac ferry fiasco that has left two boats incomplete and put further pressure to an already ageing, limited and in some cases unreliable fleet of boats serving the Clyde and Hebridean islands.

Joe Reade, chair of the Mull & Iona Ferry Committee, said “CMAL has an excellent and immediate opportunity right now to bring a much needed new vessel – which is already built - into the fleet, and satisfy the task they were given by the Scottish Government to buy from the used market as soon as they can.

“Progress has been torturously slow and for some reason they seem unwilling to take this opportunity that could have such a positive impact for our ferry operator and for our islands.”

“This ferry can fit our piers, it can cope with our seas, it can carry all the cars and people necessary – in short, it can do exactly what CalMac and the islands need of it. Despite it being an excellent option, CMAL is in danger of letting the islands down by not acting quickly enough and there is a real risk now that this boat will be sold elsewhere as CMAL dithers and delays.”

CalMac’s ferry fleet is stretched to breaking point, with more breakdowns and congestion every passing year. The dire situation has been accelerated by the fiasco at Ferguson’s and the five-year delay on hulls 801 and 802.

A key conclusion of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee’s report was that “***...the Committee calls on the Scottish Government to provide an urgent update on measures being taken to address capacity constraints on the routes affected and more widely across the network ... until vessels 801 and 802 enter into service.***” The Craignure to Oban ferry route that serves Mull and Iona is the most congested service in the entire CalMac network. The Mull group believes that the catamaran they have found will address congestion on their route, as well as bring a host of other benefits.

The catamaran is available for a fraction of the price of any ferry recently bought by CMAL. It is on the market for around 10% of the £110 million being paid for each of the partially completed dual-fuel ferries being built in Port Glasgow. The delay with the two ferries is being felt across the entire Hebrides, but no more so than on Mull.

Sandy Brunton, convenor of the Mull and Iona Community Trust added that this was a clear test of whether the needs and views of island communities are being listened to or not. “The RECC inquiry heard evidence from many islands that all too often, the ferries we are given are not suited to the communities they are supposed to serve. The RECC has asked Government to produce tangible evidence that island communities are being listened to. Here is the first test of that. Mull and Iona

Images below of MV Alfred, the second catamaran ferry bought by Pentland Ferries, and delivered in 2019. Image credit: Pentland Ferries.

