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Our Reference: 202100202751

Your Reference: FW: Urgent issue for incoming Islands Minister - Isle of Mull catamaran opportunity

8 July 2021

Dear Joe

ISLE OF MULL OPPORTUNITY TO PURCHASE A CATAMARAN –  
University of Strathclyde – Maritime Safety Innovations (MSI) Assessment

Thank you for your recent correspondence and meeting requests, concerning the proposed acquisition of the catamaran currently under construction. May I also apologise for the delay in confirming the position on this matter. I have been heavily engaged on wider ferry matters since taking up this post and have now had the opportunity to review this issue more fully.

The work that you and the MIFC have undertaken in getting things to this stage and commitment to finding the right vessel solution for Mull is sincerely appreciated.

We confirmed that we would review the report produced by MSI. The work was shared with CMAL and its consultants, Leadship, who had reviewed the original General Arrangement drawings. Leadship undertook a review of the MSI report to determine whether this changed the overall position or offered a strong case to pursue this vessel further. Whilst I realise this will be unwelcome news, the analysis has confirmed our original assessment of the position not to pursue this vessel.

The issue primarily remains a lack of engagement with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) by STS and that the significant concerns around the ability of the vessel to be made suitable for operations in UK waters– and around the impact of any required modifications on the capacity of the vessel if compliance and operational issues were able to be addressed. This continues to mean that we can have no confidence in the ability of this vessel to meet our requirements and therefore be a suitable prospect to pursue.

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Tha Ministearanna h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)



Unfortunately, the work undertaken by MSI does not move the position forward, nor offer the detail of any solutions – or the impacts of any required work on the vessel. I note the following key summary from the Leadship review of the MSI Report –

*The MSI Report simply points to many issues that we have highlighted and discussed with CMAL over many months. It is clearly the case that with significant design changes this could address some and potentially all of the issues raised. However, in doing so this would significantly change the vessel and it would have a reduced carrying capacity for passengers and cargo. The cargo diagrams which lead to the car capacity are theoretical and will be reduced in real life cargo operations.*

The report also highlights a number of areas of concern, unknowns and where additional information and consideration would be required and is clear these should be addressed before any commercial negotiations could be recommended. These have all been previously flagged to STS from the outset of discussions on this vessel and they have opted not to take this forward or to enter into discussions with the MCA.

On the basis of the above, despite the additional assessment of the vessel, Scottish Ministers continue to have insufficient and reasonable confidence that the vessel will achieve certification and are of the view that we will not pursue the purchase. I appreciate this decision will be very disappointing, but please allow me to reassure you that the option has not been dismissed lightly. All parties involved have carefully considered this and had it been felt there was a realistic prospect of this vessel being able to be made compliant and operationally suitable we would have pursued this further.

Allow me to reassure you that although this is not the news you wanted to hear, measures are being taken to address the challenges you have described in your correspondence. These have included working with CalMac Ferries Ltd. to assess the suitability of the MV Pentalina, to operate on the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Network. As you will be aware berthing trials involving the MV Pentalina were concluded and analysis of the results was being undertaken when unfortunately Pentland Ferries pulled out. This was disappointing as although berthing trials indicated limited opportunities for deployment, and some concerns around reliability in practice, the vessel should have added some temporary resilience pending the delivery of additional tonnage.

However, the Scottish Government continues to task CalMac Ferries Ltd and Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) with seeking potential additional tonnage to join the fleet. CMAL employ a number of shipbrokers in their continuing search for second hand tonnage and engage closely with CalMac Ferries Ltd.

CMAL, when considering a vessel, review a number of elements including vessel dimensions, speed and displacement, as well as the vehicle deck garage heights, loading system (ramps), shore side interfaces, compliance with the Maritime Coastguard Agency Regulations and the vessel's suitability for Scottish waters.

When a vessel is deemed suitable for inspection, technical specialists from CalMac accompany CMAL representatives to ensure that CalMac's operational requirements are fully considered. In 2020 CMAL reviewed 99 potential vessels, with 1 vessel almost reaching the inspection (Phase 4 of the process). However, due to that vessel failing the intact and damage stability assessment, it was decided that further interest in the vessel would not be pursued.

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Finally, as you are aware, the tripartite working group for the Mull vessel replacement work has held its first meetings and Transport Scotland Ferries Unit officials have already met with you to discuss the timescales involved with the project as we move to towards providing Mull and Iona with the services it needs.

I hope despite the disappointing news I have to convey at this time, the information I have shared with you above demonstrates that the Scottish Government takes its responsibility to provide the services our island communities need very seriously and when viable opportunities present themselves will pursue these.

Thank you again for your efforts and the wider work of the committee.

Yours sincerely



**GRAEME DEY**

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