

By email
23/02/22

For the attention of both Jenny Gilruth, Minister for Transport, and Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Islands

Dear Minister and Cabinet Secretary

In the last few days I have copied both of you into emails to Robbie Drummond (Managing Director, CalMac Ferries Ltd) and Chris Wilcock (Head of Ferries Unit, Transport Scotland) regarding CalMac's booking system.

The major ferry routes have always operated a 'first-come-first-served' ticket sales system, and until recent years that has operated relatively effectively. However, increasing traffic generated by RET has stretched the capacity of the fleet to its maximum (and beyond). None more so than on the main service to Mull from Oban. During the summer months, deck space is a scarce resource, and the crude 'first come first served' system results in those who can plan their journeys far ahead of time being prioritised. So in effect, holiday makers and occasional visitors are allocated that scarce deck space ahead of island residents, for whom it is impossible to plan every journey weeks in advance. Shopping trips, family visits, hospital visits, livestock movements, funerals – in short, some of the most important reasons to travel – are effectively given a lower priority.

The under-supply of ferry capacity in conjunction with first-come-first-served ticket sales has resulted in a ferry service that is increasingly inaccessible to the communities for whom it acts as a lifeline.

The Islands Act is a powerful tool for the protection and empowerment of island communities, if it is respected by the agencies that should be observing it. We feel that the inequitable access to the ferry system that we are suffering from is precisely the sort of circumstance that the Islands Act should prevent.

First come first served is a **policy** prescribed to CalMac by Transport Scotland. CalMac are currently planning to roll out a new IT and ticketing **service** that embeds that policy. Under the terms of the Islands Act, both the **policy** and the **service** should be subject to an Islands Community Impact Assessment. As you can see from the emails I have copied you in to, an ICIA does not appear to have been considered in relation to either.

We are sure this is an oversight on the part of CalMac Ferries Ltd and Transport Scotland, but we are writing to you both so that you can ensure that the Islands Act is respected, and to ensure that full and meaningful ICIA's are carried out in respect of the ticketing policy and the ticketing service.

With best regards

Joe Reade



Mull & Iona Ferry Committee

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Joe Reade, Chair.

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