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Our Reference: 202200330028  
Your Reference: Ferry Crisis in Mull & Iona

13 December 2022

Dear Janna,

Thank you for your email regarding the ferry service to Mull.

CalMac Ferries Ltd (CFL) have confirmed that MV Loch Frisa operated as a single vessel service on the Oban – Craignure route between 2nd and 13th of November. The reason for this was because the MV Isle of Mull had to be redeployed to operate between Oban – Castlebay and Lochboisdale, as this was to provide lifeline services while MV Lord Of The Isles was out of service. During this time MV Loch Frisa, operating as a single vessel, provided more sailings than she normally would provide, to ensure capacity was available on the Oban – Craignure service. During that time, she operated 137 sailings of the scheduled 139 sailings from a two-vessel schedule (an average of 11 sailings a day) and carried 6,455 passengers. Her normal sailing schedule is for 6 sailings daily, except for Fridays when she provides 8 sailings.

I note your point about catering facilities on board the MV Loch Frisa. This is classed as a small vessel; the facilities do not include a restaurant/bar area and only allow a vending machine to provide refreshments to passengers.

I understand that the Port Managers work closely with local hauliers (including the Royal Mail, Co-op and other companies providing essential lifeline service to ensure that CFL can carry the required traffic when needed.

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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)



CalMac do endeavour to provide a timetable that matches the expected demands of local community needs. The current timetable was agreed with the Mull & Iona Ferry Committee as happens bi-annually for each seasonal timetable. I am advised that the Mull & Iona Ferry committee pushed for the early sailing at 0515.

Your comment about the MV Loch Frisa not being well received by the community surprises me. I met with the Mull & Iona Ferry Committee on 1 June to discuss the introduction of MV Loch Frisa into service and the feedback received at this meeting was resoundingly positive. I was informed that the vessel was being welcomed by the community. The Loch Frisa is proving itself to be a very resilient vessel and continued to operate during poor weather this year throughout periods that the Isle of Mull would not have been able to.

I include a recent quote from Mull & Iona Ferry Committee's Facebook page from 11 November 2022 during the period when a single vessel operated on the route:

*"Small and slow maybe ... but today the Loch Frisa proved she can cope with some pretty poor weather. Every other major ferry was tied up in port, but the Frisa kept on going. Arran, Lewis, Harris, North Uist, South Uist, Barra, Islay, Coll, Tiree, Arran and more all without service today, but our little ferry kept on going. Is this the benefit of a small boat with little windage, and highly-powered and manoeuvrable propulsion? Whatever the reason, thank you Loch Frisa Crew!*

*Were you on the Loch Frisa today? We'd love to hear what you thought of your journey. In particular ... did you try the Bovril from the vending machine? "*

Regarding the possible purchase of the catamaran that you allude to in your correspondence, in mid-2020, the Scottish Government considered a proposal from Stuart Ballantyne of Sea Transport Solutions (STS) who was looking to sell a partially built catamaran after the intended buyer withdrew. CMAL, engaged naval architects to undertake an independent assessment against the applicable UK regulations – ones which may well not apply in the Pacific islands where this vessel was being designed and built for.

The architects report highlighted, an extensive list of modifications that would require substantial redesign and rebuild; CMAL's professional advice was that it would not be practical, and may not be possible, to rebuild the vessel in order to make it compliant for operation in Scottish waters and therefore the purchase of this vessel was not pursued. The price quoted did appear to be very competitive, however, this did not take account of the extensive alterations required to meet UK regulations. If the vessel had been unable to comply with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's requirements, we would have been in possession of a vessel which was unsuitable to be used in our waters and with a very limited market in which to sell it.

Since 2007, this Government has invested over £2bn in ferry services and ferry infrastructure. We recognise these are lifeline services and we are determined to support, protect and enhance these for residents, communities and industries that rely on them. I have publicly acknowledged the need to address delays in delivering new and improved ferry infrastructure, which is why the Scottish Government has committed to investing a further £580m in our Infrastructure Investment Plan.

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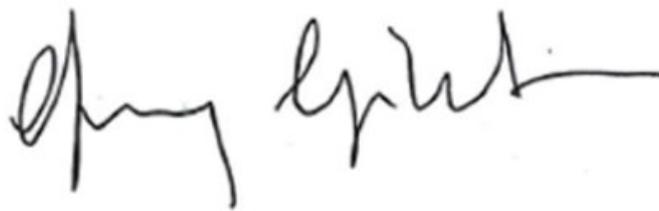
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I sailed on the Loch Frisa in August this year and met with the Mull and Iona Ferry Committee in person. We discussed a range of different matters and I believe it is essential that Ministers engage directly with island communities. That is why since my appointment in January I have spent a considerable amount of time meeting with and listening to islanders. It is also why I have asked Angus Campbell to lead on the community consultation required on the back of Project Neptune, which you may recall published earlier this year. That report makes a number of recommendations which now require community feedback – I very much hope that you and your readers will be able to respond to that consultation because I am clear of the need for reform of the delivery of ferry services on the Clyde and Hebrides network.

Finally, it is important to say that the Government is working hard to introduce more capacity and greater resilience on the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service Network. We have made significant progress in the construction of vessels MV Glen Sannox and Hull 802. We have commissioned two new vessels for Islay, progressed investment in essential harbour infrastructure, and now we are delivering a further two new vessels. At the same time, we are continuing to work on pursuing all reasonable and appropriate opportunities to enhance capacity and resilience in the short term through second hand vessels.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely,



JENNY GILRUTH

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