



# Mull and Iona Ferry Committee

Representing the users of our lifeline ferry services

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## **Ferry Committee Meeting**

21<sup>st</sup> February 2024 | 19:00 **An Roth and Teams**

### **Members in attendance:**

Joe Reade (Chair)  
Claire Simonetta  
Moray Finch  
Colin Morrison  
Tim Dawson  
Andrew Knight  
Douglas Wilson  
Dave Currie  
Ben Wilson

Finlay MacDonald (Vice Chair)  
Billy McClymont  
Keith Robbie  
Stewart MacDougall  
Chris Roberts

### **Visitors**

Gordon Martin, RMT Organiser Scotland

### **1. Apologies**

- Chris James, John MacDonald

### **2. RMT**

- Gordon Martin joined the meeting to discuss the ferry situation. Finlay MacDonald and Gordon had a lengthy discussion prior to the meeting and agreed on most of the conversation, but especially the shared aims and aspirations of delivering a good ferry service for the people that need it.
- A significant number of the union members are islanders. The RMT have negotiated terms and conditions for them. They have a good job, good prospects, a reasonable wage and pension. Both RMT and MIFC want to see more roles, including apprenticeships, for residents, although it is recognised that there are resourcing issues so there may still be a requirement to get resource from elsewhere and then accommodation becomes an issue. Live aboard accommodation therefore has some advantages.
- The one area that the RMT and Mull and Iona Ferry Committee (MIFC) seem not to agree on is the identification of productivity and efficiency savings. Without efficiencies, the ferry service requires a larger subsidy to maintain it. MIFC can see this with the island connectivity plan and fares review. This is looking at raising fares and compromising RET as the subsidy is too high.
- The identification of efficiencies will help to reduce the overheads. This should not be seen as a challenge on the crew.
- The current ferry service is plagued with issues as it is being run by ferries that are old and not in a good mechanical state of repair. This has a large impact on the island when a ferry is removed from service for maintenance or repair.
- Additionally, the Isle of Mull, being a large ferry, gets called away to go to one of the outer isles if needed leaving Mull with a single small ferry that does not meet needs.

Mull does not necessarily need a ferry of this large size and wants ferries that will not be called away to go to other isles to cover breakdowns. This would improve the level of service for residents and visitors. For the first time, Transport Scotland have agreed with MIFC.

- The final area of consideration is the timetabling of reliable later ferries. The late ferry on a Friday is being under-utilised. The reason for this is that it is a very unreliable service that barely achieves 50% of its sailings. Therefore, residents do not use this ferry unless there is no other option. This means it has become under-utilised rather than the valuable ferry that students, weekend visitors or weekend travellers want to use. This needs to be addressed in the plans.
- What MIFC want is ferries running when required with a maximum frequency, capacity and length of operating day. This can be achieved by two or three vessels. Each of these vessels may require less crew but overall, the number of people may remain to be broadly the same. So MIFC are not challenging staff numbers, they are challenging the overall productivity associated with the current vessels and how to make the replacement vessels for the Isle of Mull and Loch Frisa more efficient.
- What became obvious during discussions is that the union have not played the part in the current design process that CalMac are saying. The design of the vessels is being completed by CMAL, CalMac and Transport Scotland without influence or input from either the RMT or MIFC. What they have not expected is that the RMT and MIFC will talk to each other. With the direct contract award to CalMac, the Government are saying that it will be different, but this is not being quantified.
- Going forwards, MIFC and RMT have agreed that it is important that they work together where they can, and discuss so that any differences can be openly discussed, and a way forward agreed for a joined up approach to a better ferry service for everyone.
- There is a meeting to be held next month which Mull and Iona Ferry Committee have been invited to join which will have all key players in one place – CalMac, CMAL and Transport Scotland. RMT would like to be invited to the meeting.

### **3. Reporting on Community Ferry Co Outcome / Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services (CHFS) Contract Award**

- A web post has been drafted for review to conclude the Community Ferry company discussions and the CHFS contract award.
- The post will clarify that the core of the feasibility study was to unbundle services as a means of improving ferry services for everyone. It was not about the Ferry Committee running a ferry service. This approach has not been accepted by Scottish Government and there are no avenues to pursue this further now.
- However, this will not be taken forward as the Scottish Government have now announced that their preference is to make a direct award to David MacBrayne Ltd, without competition. The full announcement from Fiona Hyslop will be shared on the Ferry Committee website.

### **4. Fair Fares and Islands Connectivity Plan**

- The islands connectivity plan is looking at several fare change options and how RET is calculated to address the current service revenue gaps. Much of the costs are baked in so cannot be adjusted with the current fleet and commitments, leaving the option to look at increasing revenues. Consideration is currently being given to:
  - Non island residents not receiving RET fares or receiving different levels of RET to island residents.
  - Flexible fares changing at certain times of day (e.g. peak travel times) / days of week (e.g. workdays versus weekends) like airlines and trainlines already use.

- Freight fares.
- Consideration for island residents and their essential travel requirements, including a review of the island priority pilot for essential travel at short notice.
- Consideration needs to be given to the impact when RET was brought in. Did the passenger numbers increase significantly across winter and summer? This will give an idea as to what could potentially happen if RET was removed/reduced and the corresponding impact to tourist businesses. Passenger information has been requested from CalMac to undertake a review of this position.
- The approach to freight needs to be considered. If freight prices were reduced, would that saving be passed on to the customers/residents?
- Consideration needs to be given to the impact of the fares review on de-population of the islands.
- It must be remembered that this is a network wide review and not a review of Mull services alone. However, all the islands are very different in terms of differing service requirements (e.g. Mull receives a lot of day trippers) and also different routes are used for very different things. Consideration needs to be given to how to apply fair fares across these.
- The Ferry Committee will produce a response to the consultation that tries to address all aspects of this.

## **5. Any Other Business**

- CMAL Meeting
  - The postponed CMAL meeting has been rescheduled to March 11<sup>th</sup>.
  - Within the contract, it clearly states that CMAL have to work with island communities.
  - With regards to ferry replacement, the ferry committee still need to state clearly that we want the process health checked and that the outcome of the review should be implemented. However, what the Ferry Committee want to achieve is the best, most productive, resilient and efficient service for Mull and Iona.
  - The other factor to be considered alongside the new ferry/ferries is the requirement for a new pier. If smaller ferries were put in place, there may not be a requirement for a new pier, therefore saving money. This should be taken into consideration in a full cost/benefit review.
  - The “not knowing” what is in the plans is unacceptable. For example, if the option is the Argyll and Bute ferry model, these are not big enough to do the job that Mull needs, so we would require a 3 vessel service.
  - The key point for this meeting is to reach an understanding on what the service is going to look like going forwards.