Dear Alison

Consideration of Petition PE1394

Thank you for your letter of 16 November seeking a written response to the specific points raised in Petition PE1394 and the specific questions that the Committee has asked. Your letter was addressed to Carron Pollock, Transport Scotland but I am responding as the policy lead for ferries issues.

This petition by Huw Francis on behalf of Stòras Uibhist calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to reintroduce a direct ferry service between Lochboisdale and Mallaig.

Following my letter to you of 4 October, in which I addressed the specific points raised in Petition PE1394 and the specific questions that the Committee had asked, I now offer the following response to the issues raised in Stòras Uibhist’s letter to Chris Hynd dated 17 October, and during the Committee’s discussion on the petition.

In responding to the issues raised, I would emphasise that, as I indicated in my letter of 4 October, due consideration has indeed been given as part of the Ferries Review, to the introduction of Mallaig-Lochboisdale ferry service. The Draft Ferries Plan will set out Ministers’ proposals following full consideration of this and a number of other options for the delivery of ferry services in Scotland.

The conclusion of the Ferries Review will also inform the next Clyde & Hebrides Ferry Services (CHFS) tender. The contract is due for renewal in 2013 and the service levels across the country are likely to be different than they are now. I am aware that, following the introduction into service of MV Finlaggan, many stakeholders, including Stòras Uibhist, consider the MV Isle of Arran to be a “spare” vessel. However, bidders for the CHFS tender will be free to reconfigure the use of all vessels at their disposal to meet the needs of the communities. For this reason it is not possible to confidently predict, at this time, what role if any the MV Isle of Arran – or any other vessel – will play in the future provision of services.
In responding to Stòras Uibhist’s suggestion regarding the trialling of the MV Isle of Arran on a direct Mallaig – Lochboisdale ferry service, I would emphasise that a number of options for ferry service delivery are still being considered as part of the Scottish Ferries Review. It would therefore be premature to make any moves towards the establishment of any additional new service across the network before the conclusion of the Review.

For the reasons given above, we cannot consider implementing Stòras Uibhist’s suggestion of a trial service on the Mallaig-Lochboisdale route.

I trust this response is helpful.

Yours sincerely

GRAHAM M LAIDLAW

HEAD OF FERRIES UNIT