2nd May 2018

Mr Edward Mountain MSP
Convener, The Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh

By Email

Dear Mr Mountain

Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

You will be aware that for more than two years the Sleat Transport Forum has campaigned for the return of a ‘robust and reliable’ CalMac ferry service on the Mallaig-Armadale route following the redeployment of the ‘MV Coruisk’ to Oban. You will also be aware of the significant disruption that occurred on this popular and economically important route in both 2016 and 2017 and described by Transport Scotland officials as ‘sub-optimal’. Regrettably this disruption has once again been repeated in 2018 across the CalMac network caused by vessel repairs, redeployments and a catastrophic winter refit programme by the Company. This situation has now extended to more than 15 routes across the CHFS network with widespread disruption across the west coast and islands, causing untold inconvenience and hardship to thousands of residents, visitors, businesses and organisations. The independent CalMac Communities Board has itself echoed the significant concerns for both the short and long-term future of these lifeline routes. Furthermore, the Sleat Transport Forum issued a Press Release1 on 11th April calling for a ‘root and branch review’ of CalMac Ferries Ltd.

The Forum is familiar with the appearance before the Committee on 25th January 2017 of Mr Martin Dorchester and Mr Robbie Drummond giving evidence on behalf of CalMac Ferries Ltd. You will be aware that Mr Dorchester left the Company on 16th March 2018 and has been succeeded by Mr Drummond as interim Managing Director.

We are also aware that Councillor Allan Henderson, Chair of HITRANS, has written to you calling for Mr Drummond to be recalled before the Committee on 16th May 2018. The Forum contends that this unprecedented disruption to ferry services needs a thorough and detailed hearing before the Committee as a matter of urgency.

Therefore, the Sleat Transport Forum respectfully requests that Mr Drummond is asked to return to the Committee at the earliest opportunity. The Forum contests that the Company has little or no contingency plans in place in the event of further major vessel failure this summer, with a potential

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devastating impact on communities and visitors across the network, as evidenced already by the extensive media and political coverage since 30th March.

Of equal major concern is the on-going delay to the introduction of the two new 100m vessels currently under construction in Glasgow, now running almost two years late, proving beyond doubt that the award of the contract to Ferguson Marine Engineering Ltd, in our opinion, was a flawed decision. It is also of national concern that FMEL is now more than 7 months overdue filing its Company Accounts \(^2\) for the year ended 31st December 2016 (due 30th September 2017), which potentially could result in the Company entering administration.

We further understand that the CalMac Communities Board has offered to work, as a matter of urgency, with CalMac, Transport Scotland and CMAL to seek long and short-term solutions.

We believe that it is the responsibility of Scottish Ministers, as sole shareholder of CalMac Ferries Ltd, to hold the Company to account to Parliament, and the recall to the Committee will allow Members as well as the public to hear what plans are in place to secure the return of stability to the economically vital CHFS ferry network.

We look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Rob Ware

Rob Ware
Secretary, Sleat Transport Forum

\(^2\) https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/SC48506