TPT/S7/26/12/1

Transport Committee
Wednesday 18 November 2026
12th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Ports, harbour infrastructure, and ferries

Background

1. The Committee agreed to hold a series of standalone evidence sessions, focusing on different aspects of transport policy within its remit. These sessions will allow the Committee the opportunity to develop its understanding of its remit, discuss the issues currently being faced, and to inform future work programme discussions.

2. This session will focus on Scotland's port and harbour infrastructure. The Committee will examine whether ports and harbours are fit for purpose, whether they can accommodate existing and future ferry vessels, the investment required to upgrade infrastructure, and the respective responsibilities of organisations involved in planning, funding, and maintaining the network.

Evidence session

3. The Committee will hear evidence from over two panels. Firstly, from—

   - Richard Ballantyne, Chief Executive, British Ports Association & Secretary of the Scottish Ports Group
   - Kevin Hobbs, Chief Executive, Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL)
   - Calum Mackenzie, Chief Officer, Assets and Infrastructure, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (representing the Scottish Collaboration of Transport Specialists)
   - Duncan Mackison, Chief Executive, CalMac Ferries Ltd
   - Jacqueline McDonell, Chief Executive, Mallaig Harbour Authority

   And then from—

   - Stephen Flynn, Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport
   - Colin Cook, Director for Economic Development, Scottish Government
   - Alison Irvine, Chief Executive, Transport Scotland
   - Chris Wilcock, Director, Ferries, Transport Scotland

Written evidence

4. Written evidence was received from the CalMac Ferries Ltd, Mallaig Harbour Authority, SCOTS, Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd. These submissions are attached at the annexe.

Clerks to the Committee
November 2026

Annexe

Written submission from CalMac Ferries Ltd.

1. Introduction

CalMac Ferries Ltd (CalMac) welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Transport Committee's review of Scotland's ports and harbour infrastructure.

As the operator of the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services network, CalMac delivers lifeline ferry services to communities across Scotland's west coast. These services support economic activity, access to healthcare and education, freight movements, tourism, social connectivity, and community sustainability. CalMac operates a fleet of 35 vessels serving 55 ports and harbours that are owned by Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited (CMAL), local authorities and private organisations.

The Committee's inquiry raises important questions about the suitability and location of existing infrastructure, compatibility with future vessels, investment priorities and governance arrangements. From an operator's perspective, it is important to recognise that vessels, ports and ferry services function as a single integrated system that also includes passenger and freight facilities, road and rail networks, energy infrastructure and other timetabled services. A decision concerning one element will often have consequences elsewhere in the network.

Investment decisions should therefore not be taken solely on the basis of the requirements of an individual vessel, route or harbour. They should be assessed against their contribution to the reliability, resilience, accessibility, interoperability and long-term efficiency of the network as a whole

The ferry network should also be considered as part of Scotland's wider freight and logistics system. Planning should examine whether greater use could be made of dedicated freight services, particularly where this could reduce the movement of commercial vehicles over rural road networks. For example, a freight vessel could consolidate cargo from island locations and transport it directly to ports such as Ardrossan or Troon, with better access to the central Scotland motorway and distribution network. A dedicated freight service would also be more suitable for the carriage of dangerous goods.

CalMac's view is that Scotland's ferry network requires a long-term, coordinated approach to vessel and harbour development. This approach should treat the network as a single integrated system and prioritise reliability, resilience, accessibility, interoperability and effective connections with the wider transport network

2. Are Scotland's Ports and Harbours Fit for Purpose?

Many ports and harbours continue to support safe and effective operation of ferry services and enable communities to remain connected. However, some facilities were developed many decades ago and were designed around the operational requirements and vessels of their time and built to protect against prevailing weather

conditions. As demand has evolved, vessel requirements have changed, and weather patterns are changing; limitations have emerged in some parts of the network.

In our view, fitness for purpose should be assessed against several factors:

- Safe navigation of the current and future CalMac Fleet.
- Reliability of services.
- Ability to recover quickly from disruption.
- Accessibility for passengers.
- Support Suitable for freight and commercial traffic.
- Compatibility with future vessel requirements.
- Readiness for decarbonisation and climate adaptation.
- Suitability of port/harbour current location.
- Integration with Scotland’s wider road and rail network.

A port or marine facility may be capable of supporting its currently assigned vessel yet still constrain resilience because alternative vessels cannot readily operate there during periods of disruption.

Historically, vessels have been designed for specific routes, and ports were modified to accommodate those vessels. This approach can optimise performance for individual routes, but as a result, the network will have limited flexibility during the required vessel cascade in overhaul periods and in the event of disruptions. This means that vessel failures or overhaul overruns will have wider impacts across the network.

3. Accommodating Existing and Future Ferry Vessels

Vessel deployment requires compatibility across numerous operational factors, including:

- Protection of berth and approaches.
- Berth dimensions.
- Water depth.
- Linkspan and slipway arrangements.
- Tidal operating envelopes.
- Wind and weather limitations.
- Mooring arrangements including the use of automated mooring arrangements.
- Passenger access systems.
- Vehicle handling infrastructure.
- Shore power and future energy requirements.

Automated mooring systems secure a vessel at the berth using remotely controlled vacuum pads or other mechanical equipment, reducing reliance on conventional mooring lines. Where operationally and technically suitable, they can improve crew and quayside safety, shorten berthing and departure times, and help hold the vessel securely alongside in varying weather conditions

CalMac supports the principle set out within the fleet interoperability strategy that future vessel and infrastructure investment should progressively move towards greater standardisation and interoperability across the network. The strategy identifies three broad vessel categories:

- Small vessel class.
- Intermediate vessel class.
- Major vessel class.

The aim is to develop compatible classes of port infrastructure capable of accommodating all vessel classes, or where this is not practical, those vessels specific to that class of port. For example, ports capable of handling the Major Vessel fleet should also be capable of handling the intermediate vessel fleet. However, it is probably not practical to modify small vessel slips to be able to receive the major vessel fleet. This approach would significantly improve resilience by enabling vessels to be deployed more flexibly throughout the network.

Before significant investment is committed at any existing port or harbour, the first stage of planning should test whether the current location remains the most appropriate one for the service over the expected 40-to-60-year life of the infrastructure. This assessment should consider navigational safety, weather exposure, road and public transport connections, passenger and freight demand, accessibility, environmental constraints, energy availability, climate adaptation, harbour expansion potential and compatibility with future vessel classes.

There will always be exceptions. Currently, certain routes require bespoke solutions due to geography or harbour configuration, however, a bespoke vessel-and-port arrangement should be accepted only after the suitability of the current location and credible alternative locations have been objectively assessed.

CalMac believes the long-term objective should be a ferry network where disruption on one route does not automatically create disruption elsewhere because alternative vessels are able to operate from a wider range of ports and facilities.

4. Infrastructure Investment Requirements

Scotland's ferry infrastructure requires sustained long-term investment.

Many harbours have a design life measured in decades and are critical pieces of transport infrastructure. Investment decisions taken today will influence network performance for the next 40 to 60 years.

Future investment needs extend beyond maintaining existing assets and include:

- Replacement of life-expired infrastructure.
- Provision of infrastructure compatible with new vessels.
- Improvements to reliability and resilience.
- Accessibility enhancements.
- Shore power and decarbonisation infrastructure.
- Climate change adaptation measures.
- Improved passenger facilities.
- Integration with bus, rail, and active travel networks.

Future investment should not automatically reproduce existing infrastructure in its current location and to broadly the same design. Before committing to major refurbishment or replacement, there should be a strategic review of whether the location, harbour layout and vessel-port interface will meet the needs of the network over the next 40 to 60 years. Investment may involve substantial redesign, relocation, the development of a new facility, or changes to the way in which a route is served.

The objective should be to invest in the configuration that provides the best long-term outcome for communities and the wider ferry network, rather than defaulting to like-for-like replacement because an existing facility is approaching the end of its life.

An important point is that infrastructure projects should be assessed not just on the benefits delivered to a single port or route but on the wider benefits of resilience delivered across the overall ferry network.

Investment that enables multiple vessel types to use a harbour will generate significant operational benefits beyond that individual location, reducing network disruption and improving continuity of service for all communities.

5. Reliability and Resilience

Reliability and resilience are distinct but closely related concepts.

Reliability concerns the ability to deliver timetabled services consistently and minimise disruption arising from technical, operational, or environmental factors.

Resilience concerns the ability of the ferry system to recover quickly when disruption occurs. Examples include vessel failures, severe weather, infrastructure issues, or wider operational incidents.

The Islands Connectivity Plan identifies reliability and resilience as key priorities for Scotland's ferry network, and CalMac fully supports this objective. The approved interoperability strategy also places reliability and resilience at the centre of future fleet and infrastructure planning.

From an operator perspective, resilience can be improved through:

- Greater vessel interoperability.
- Standardised vessel-port interfaces.
- A fleet size that allows in-service maintenance of vessels, while delivering the service.
- Additional berthing flexibility including additional lay-by berths.
- Improved maintenance and asset management strategies.

The ability to move vessels between routes is one of the most effective ways to improve and maintain service and minimise disruption. To achieve this, infrastructure that is designed with network resilience and enhanced customer experience in mind is required.

6. Decarbonisation and Future Infrastructure Needs

The ferry network will play an important role in supporting Scotland's net-zero ambitions.

Future vessel programmes will incorporate increasing levels of electrification and low-carbon technologies. This requires corresponding investment in port infrastructure, including:

- Shore power provision.
- Grid network upgrades.
- Charging infrastructure.
- Facilities capable of supporting future alternative fuels.

The interoperability strategy identifies common shore electrical connections and future fuel compatibility as important elements of a modernised ferry network. Standardisation offers opportunities to reduce future complexity and cost while supporting the transition toward lower-emission operations.

Infrastructure planning must also account for climate adaptation. Rising sea levels, increasing storm severity, changes to prevailing wind direction and other climate-related challenges reinforce the need for long-term resilience to be embedded within future harbour developments.

7. Responsibilities for Planning, Funding and Maintenance

Clear responsibilities are essential for successful delivery of ferry services. Within the Clyde and Hebrides network, responsibilities are broadly shared as follows:

Transport Scotland

Transport Scotland establishes policy direction, determines service requirements on behalf of Scottish Ministers and provides funding for major vessel and harbour investment projects.

Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited (CMAL)

CMAL owns the majority of vessels and a significant proportion of ferry infrastructure within the network. CMAL is responsible for vessel procurement, harbour assets, long-term investment planning, and delivery of major infrastructure projects.

CalMac Ferries Ltd

CalMac operates ferry services, acts as the delegated statutory harbour authority in CMAL owned harbours, maintains vessels under contractual arrangements, provides operational expertise and works with CMAL and Transport Scotland to ensure that future infrastructure and vessel designs are effective and capable of delivering reliable services.

Other Harbour Authorities / Asset Owners

Other authorities are made up of Municipal, Trust or Private Ports. Local Authorities across the CalMac network manage the infrastructure within each of their areas and which ferry services and their users, such as education and health, rely upon. Local Authority owned ports and harbours including passenger and traffic access arrangements make up an important part of the integrated network of service providers. In addition, they manage the road networks that adjoin each of the ports and harbours across the ferry services network. All of these operate within their own governance and funding arrangements.

While responsibilities are not always clearly defined, success depends upon effective collaboration between all parties. Vessel planning, infrastructure planning, and operational planning must be developed together if the network is to achieve the reliability and resilience expected by communities and stakeholders.

It is the experience of CalMac that given the close working relationship with CMAL, that partnership is more efficient and effective in meeting our desired operational outcomes for port or marine facility upgrades in comparison with other Harbour Authorities / Asset Owners.

8. Conclusions

CalMac believes Scotland's ferry network should continue to evolve towards a more standardised, interoperable and resilient model.

The key issues facing the network are not just the condition of individual ports or individual vessels. Rather, they are concerned about how effectively vessels, infrastructure, and operations function together as a single integrated transport system.

In summary, CalMac believes:

- Scotland’s ferry services, vessels, ports, landside connections and supporting infrastructure should be planned as a single integrated transport system.
- Most ports continue to support safe operation, but infrastructure constraints limit flexibility and resilience in parts of the network.
- Before major renewal or replacement is approved, the suitability of the existing harbour location should be tested against credible long-term alternatives.
- Future investment should prioritise common vessel-port interfaces and greater interoperability between vessels and ports.
- Reliability and resilience should remain the primary objectives of long-term infrastructure planning.
- Harbour projects should be assessed based on their contribution to network-wide performance as well as local benefits.
- Planning should examine opportunities for a dedicated freight vessel where this could reduce pressure on rural roads.
- Decarbonisation, grid capacity and climate adaptation requirements must be incorporated into future infrastructure plans.
- Continued collaboration between Transport Scotland, CMAL, CalMac and other harbour authorities is essential to achieving long-term improvements.

Through coordinated investment and strategic planning, Scotland can develop a ferry network that is more reliable, more resilient, and better able to meet the future needs of island and coastal communities.

CalMac Ferries Ltd.
9 November 2026

Written submission from the Mallaig Harbour Authority

Summary

- Mallaig is the mainland gateway for Skye, South Uist, the Small Isles and the Knoydart Peninsula, and a hub for Scotland's aquaculture industry. It handles up to 25 ferry movements a day.

- Its ferry infrastructure is around 40 years old, relies on a single linkspan, and cannot fully accommodate the next generation of ferries without compromise.

- The long-term solution is understood. Transport Scotland officials and CMAL agree that a new breakwater is the best long-term outcome. The question is when and how it is delivered.

- At over £100m, the breakwater is far beyond the means of a trust port turning over around £2m a year. No single organisation can fund it alone.

- The timetables are out of step. The replacement Lord of the Isles is expected around 2030, but Mallaig's port works sit in Phase 3 (2031–36) of the draft Vessels and Ports Plan.

Our two asks of the Scottish Government

- **Support to fund a business case** for Mallaig, developed jointly by Mallaig Harbour Authority (MHA), Transport Scotland and CMAL, including a partnership plan for how the breakwater is funded and owned.

- **Move Mallaig's port works into Phase 2 of the Vessels and Ports Plan**, so the harbour and the new vessels are planned and delivered together.

About Mallaig Harbour



Mallaig Harbour, the mainland gateway to Skye, the Small Isles and the Outer Hebrides.

- Mallaig Harbour Authority is a statutory trust port, established in 1968. It has no shareholders, receives no routine public subsidy, and reinvests every penny of surplus in the harbour.

- The harbour supports four pillars of the West Highland economy: lifeline ferries, aquaculture, fishing, and marine tourism and has the communities it services at the heart of its decision making.

Measure	Figure
Economic value	£15.5m GVA and 249 FTE jobs supported (2024 Economic Impact Assessment)
MHA turnover	£2.04m (2025/26), up from £1.84m
Ferry movements	Up to 25 a day, through a single linkspan
Ferry traffic	7 ferry routes; 270k passengers and 67k vehicles
CalMac passengers	249,801 in 2025 – the network's 6th busiest port
Island freight	Up to 5 tonnes a day in loose freight to the Small Isles on 7 dedicated vehicles, and a further 5,790 tonnes of freight to Knoydart and Small Isles via a private operator.
Aquaculture	56k tonnes of feed handled; 61k tonnes of salmon harvested
Fishing	Over £5m of seafood landed
Marine tourism	50-berth marina at capacity; over 1,000 yachts a year
Community	Property leased to over 20 businesses and third-sector organisations

Ferry services through Mallaig

Route	Service
Armadale (Skye)	Regular summer sailings of 30–45 minutes, regularly at capacity; winter service by MV Lochnevis and MV Coruisk
Lochboisdale (South Uist)	Year-round service by MV Lord of the Isles, daily in summer
Small Isles (Eigg, Muck, Rum, Canna)	Year-round daily service by MV Lochnevis and carrying passengers, permitted vehicles and freight
Knoydart Peninsula	Private operator provides passenger and freight service to a community with no road or rail access

When all vessels are operational, four ferries berth overnight in Mallaig

1. Are Mallaig's facilities fit for purpose?

Not for the long term. The harbour is operating safely through careful management of ageing assets.

- **Ageing structure.** The ferry infrastructure was built around 40 years ago from circular cells filled with compacted material.
- **Single point of access.** All vehicle ferry traffic depends on one linkspan. It is due for replacement and is being managed until a decision is made on new infrastructure. There is no backup berth if it fails.
- **Fendering below modern standards.** The MV Lord of the Isles already has to approach at reduced speed to limit the force on the fenders.
- **Tidal restrictions.** Some vessels are designed for slipway use, which restricts timetabling at certain states of tide.
- **Terminal facilities.** Marshalling space is too small, the terminal building does not meet modern standards, and Small Isles freight facilities are not suited to current volumes.
- **Island supply line.** Everything from a pint of milk to a whole house kit for the Small Isles passes through Mallaig. The islands have growing populations and economies; the status quo would leave mainland infrastructure inhibiting that growth.

2. Can the harbour accommodate existing and future vessels?

Only with compromise, and the compromises grow with each new vessel.



Ferries at Mallaig. The harbour has one linkspan for all vehicle ferry traffic.

- **A non-standard vessel.** The replacement Lord of the Isles has been approved for tender and is expected in service in late 2029 or early 2030. Because of Mallaig's limited berth length and angle of approach, it cannot be a standard design.

- **Greater forces on old fenders.** The new vessel will have a bigger displacement, creating larger forces on the fenders, and will need to approach even more slowly to offset this.

- **Interim measures only.** MHA plans to install sensors on the fenders to set safe operating parameters for the new vessel while permanent infrastructure is developed. This manages risk; it does not remove it.

- **More vessels to come.** Discussions are beginning on replacements for the MV Lochnevis (Small Isles) and MV Coruisk (Skye). New infrastructure with both a linkspan and a slipway would give flexibility in vessel types and timetabling.

- **Electric ferries.** Future vessels for Mallaig–Armadale and the Small Isles are expected to move towards electric propulsion. A new berth could make Mallaig a charging hub for three routes.

3. What investment is required?

A consistent solution, tested over a decade

- MHA's Masterplan (2016/17), developed with stakeholders and the community, identified a New Breakwater Quay in the outer harbour as the preferred option.

- The STAG (Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance) published in 2020 identified three options, one very similar to the Masterplan option. Uncertainty about vessel deployment at the time has since been resolved, strengthening the case.



Mallaig Harbour Masterplan – preferred option, with the New Breakwater Quay in the outer harbour.

The ‘do minimum’ option costs a lot to stand still

- The ‘do minimum’ option examined in the vessel business case is costed at around £40m. It would strengthen the existing breakwater and modernise the fenders, requiring the linkspan to be realigned.

- It would effectively preserve the status quo: no improvement to the terminal, marshalling or freight facilities, and no backup berth.

- There is no alternative local provision to maintain ferry services at the same level while such works were carried out, so islanders and businesses would face significant disruption whilst the Harbour linkspan would be out of for the duration of the works.

The preferred solution: a New Breakwater Quay

- A ferry berth and linkspan for vessels up to 105m, plus a concrete slip for ramp vessels, providing resilience and a backup to the existing linkspan.

- We have worked closely with Transport Scotland, CMAL and CalMac on alternatives. Most of the cost of any new infrastructure lies in rock armour and infill, so savings are hard to find. The estimated cost is over £100m.

- A new breakwater would support strategic changes to the harbour, generating opportunities for other industries operating locally.

The return on investment

- The harbour is operating at capacity. Today it supports £15.5m of GVA and 249 FTE jobs; new capacity would allow aquaculture, fishing, cruise and marine tourism to grow.

- Mallaig is a primary base for Mowi, Scottish Sea Farms and Bakkafrost. Mowi has operated a harvest station in the harbour since 2004, with well boats discharging nightly for processing in Fort William.

- A new breakwater would free space for marina expansion, boatyard regeneration, secure freight storage and a potential maritime college with UHI, creating opportunities for young people locally.

The cost of disruption

- CalMac passenger numbers at Mallaig fell from 365,164 in 2019 to 249,801 in 2025, largely because vessels were redeployed to cover other routes. Despite this demand remains: sailings regularly operate at capacity.

- Disruption to ferries, along with recent cancellation of the Jacobite Train, has cost local hospitality businesses vital footfall, and islanders have faced long detours and delays to freight for their businesses and building projects.

4. Who is responsible for planning and funding?

A trust port cannot fund this alone

- MHA turns over around £2m a year. A project of over £100m is unaffordable for a trust port without significant Government investment.

- Trust ports cannot issue equity, so major works rely on borrowing or capital grants. To increase ferry dues by enough to service £100m of borrowing would create a substantial long-term liability for the public purse.

Partnership is already delivering



Construction of Mallaig's new overnight ferry berth, funded by Transport Scotland.

- Transport Scotland funded Mallaig's new £6.4m overnight ferry berth. It was designed to strengthen the existing linkspan breakwater, building resilience into any future development.

- CMAL have also been wholly supportive of the works done to date. We are grateful for the support from both organisations and want to build on it.

The ships and the harbour are planned on different timetables

Milestone	Timing
Replacement Lord of the Isles in service	Late 2029 / early 2030
Mallaig port works in draft Vessels and Ports Plan	Phase 3 (2031–36)
Lochnevis and Coruisk replacements	Discussions beginning
Harbour Revision Order and marine licence	Long lead-in; must start well before construction

Planning the vessels and the harbour separately risks costly piecemeal fixes, such as the £40m 'do minimum', and leaves the harbour as the bottleneck on the network.

Building a partnership plan together

- A project of this scale needs a shared plan for what each partner contributes, who owns what, and how cost is phased.

- The breakwater serves both lifeline ferry services and commercial users. The business case could test how costs are shared between public-service and revenue-earning elements, drawing on precedents elsewhere on the network.

- MHA is ready to work with the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, CMAL, Highland Council, HIE and other partners on that plan, starting with a jointly developed business case.

Recommendations

We respectfully ask the Committee to encourage the Scottish Government to:

- recognise a new breakwater as the right long-term solution for Mallaig;

- fund a business case for Mallaig, developed jointly by MHA, Transport Scotland and CMAL, including a partnership plan for funding and ownership; and

- move Mallaig's port works into Phase 2 of the Vessels and Ports Plan, aligning them with the arrival of the new vessel.

We would welcome the opportunity to host members at Mallaig to see the harbour and its challenges first-hand.

Jacqueline McDonell
Chief Executive, Mallaig Harbour Authority
9 November 2026

TPT/S7/26/12/1

Written submission from the Scottish Collaboration of Transportation Specialists (SCOTS)

1. About the Scottish Collaboration of Transportation Specialists (SCOTS)

The Scottish Collaboration of Transportation Specialists (SCOTS) is the professional body comprising transportation and roads authorities from all 32 Scottish local authorities. SCOTS works collaboratively to support the planning, management and delivery of transport infrastructure and services across Scotland. It provides technical advice to COSLA, SOLACE and other key partners on a wide range of transport matters, including roads, active travel, public transport, road safety, ferries, harbours and resilience.

Through its membership, SCOTS represents the collective operational experience of Scotland's local authorities, several of which are responsible for managing significant harbour estates and ferry infrastructure serving island and remote mainland communities.

2. The Local Authority Harbour Network in Scotland

Scotland's ports are generally classified as:

- Local authority ports and harbours;
- Trust ports; and
- Privately owned commercial ports. [transport.gov.scot], [transport.gov.scot]

Eight local authorities currently operate harbour estates:

Local Authority	Approximate Number of Harbours, Piers and Marine Facilities
Aberdeenshire Council Harbours	14
Argyll & Bute Council Harbours	40-45
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	Approximately 40
Dumfries & Galloway Council Harbours	3
Highland Harbours	Approximately 30
Moray Harbours	4
Orkney Islands Council	Approximately 29
Shetland Islands Council	Approximately 30

Collectively these authorities are responsible for approximately around 220 harbour, pier and marine facilities serving local communities, commercial fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, offshore energy activity and lifeline ferry services. [portsofscotland.co.uk].

3. Legal Framework Governing Local Authority Harbours

Local authority harbours operate within a complex statutory framework incorporating both general harbour legislation and local legislation.

The principal legislative instruments include:

- Harbours Act 1964;
- Ports Act 1991;
- Pilotage Act 1987;
- Merchant Shipping Acts;
- Marine (Scotland) Act 2010;
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974; and
- Port Marine Safety Code and associated guidance.

In addition, many harbour authorities operate under local harbour orders or harbour acts specific to individual ports. These local statutory provisions frequently define:

- Harbour authority powers;
- Limits of jurisdiction;
- Harbour dues and charging powers;
- Harbour master functions;
- Maintenance responsibilities; and
- Navigation and safety requirements.

Local authorities must also comply with environmental legislation including habitats, marine licensing and coastal protection requirements when upgrading harbour infrastructure.

4. Are Local Authority Harbours Fit for Purpose?

General Position

Most local authority harbours continue to provide a safe and effective service to their communities. However, many assets are ageing and were constructed to meet operational requirements that differ significantly from those faced today.

Across Scotland there are common challenges relating to:

- Ageing quay walls;
- Deteriorating breakwaters;
- Increased maintenance liabilities;

- Climate change impacts and coastal erosion;
- Rising construction costs;
- More demanding safety and security standards; and
- Changes in vessel size and design.

Particular pressure exists within island and remote mainland communities where harbours serve as critical economic and social infrastructure.

Key Concerns

Several local authority harbour estates contain infrastructure more than 50 years old, with some principal structures dating from the nineteenth century.

The principal risks include:

1. Structural deterioration leading to increased maintenance expenditure;
2. Reduced resilience to severe weather events;
3. Capacity constraints limiting future economic development;
4. Inability to accommodate future ferry replacement programmes; and
5. Reduced operational resilience during breakdowns or vessel substitutions.

In many locations, harbours remain operationally fit for current use but have limited resilience and spare capacity for future demands.

5. Harbours Supporting Ferry Services

The most strategically important local authority harbours are those supporting lifeline ferry links.

These include facilities operated by:

- Argyll & Bute Council Harbours
- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
- Highland Harbours
- Orkney Islands Council
- Shetland Islands Council

Can Existing Harbours Accommodate Current Vessels?

Generally, most ports continue to accommodate existing ferry fleets, although often with diminishing flexibility and major expenditure.

Common issues include:

- Restricted berth lengths;
- Weather related berthing;
- Limited draft;

- Insufficient marshalling areas;
- Passenger accessibility requirements;
- Ageing linkspans; and
- Electrical and utility infrastructure constraints.

Can Harbours Accommodate Future Ferry Vessels?

This represents perhaps the greatest strategic challenge facing the sector.

Future vessels are expected to feature:

- Larger dimensions;
- Increased vehicle capacity;
- Battery-electric propulsion systems;
- Shore power connections;
- Alternative fuel systems including hydrogen and methanol; and
- Enhanced accessibility standards.

Many local authority-owned ferry terminals will require significant infrastructure enhancement before they can fully support the next generation of vessels.

Without coordinated upgrades, there is a risk that vessel procurement programmes could progress more rapidly than associated harbour infrastructure investments.

6. Investment Required

While harbour-specific assessments are required, the scale of investment needed nationally is substantial.

Primary investment categories include:

Asset Renewal

- Quay wall reconstruction;
- Breakwater strengthening;
- Linkspan replacement; and
- Dredging programmes.

Climate Adaptation

- Wave overtopping mitigation;
- Sea-level resilience measures;
- Flood protection works; and
- Enhanced storm resilience.

Ferry Infrastructure

- New ferry berths;
- Shore power facilities;
- Grid reinforcement; and
- Passenger terminal improvements.

Digital and Operational Systems

- Vessel management systems;
- Remote monitoring;
- Security upgrades; and
- Communications infrastructure.

Based on recent harbour projects across Scotland, individual major harbour upgrades can range from £10 million to more than £100 million, depending on scale and complexity. Consequently, the cumulative investment requirement across local authority harbour estates is likely to extend into several hundreds of millions of pounds over the coming decades.

7. Responsibilities for Planning, Funding and Maintenance

Whilst the following sections detail individual responsibilities, island groups and communities can be reliant on a combination of public and privately owned facilities to maintain connectivity and resilience. This is where a regional, or place-based approach, is required to ensure that investment is strategically planned and delivered. Governance and collaboration are fundamental to the successful execution of strategic outcomes, which should be established on a national, regional and local basis, considering the integration of all transport modes and community needs.

Local Authorities

Local authorities are generally responsible for:

- Ownership and operation of harbour assets;
- Routine maintenance;
- Harbour management;
- Safety compliance;
- Local capital planning; and
- Harbour master functions.

Smaller Ports and Harbours

Alongside the ports supporting lifeline ferry services, Scotland has a dispersed network of smaller local authority harbours facing a different but increasingly

significant infrastructure challenge. Scotland has more than 200 ports and harbours, ranging from major commercial ports and ferry terminals to small fishing and leisure harbours. These assets operate under local authority, trust, private and other ownership arrangements and support national, regional and local economies.

Many smaller harbours were developed around an historic fishing industry which looked very different from the industry operating today. Changes in vessel design, technology and fishing patterns mean that modern vessels are frequently larger, deeper draughted and require more specialised landing, servicing and storage facilities. Activity has consequently tended to concentrate at ports capable of accommodating these requirements.

Smaller harbours can therefore lose much of the activity around which their original business model developed without losing the physical harbour or the responsibilities associated with it. The commercial purpose of the asset can change relatively quickly, but its walls, piers, breakwaters, quays and entrance channels remain.

This creates a fundamental financial challenge because the cost base of a harbour does not reduce in proportion to its commercial activity. Breakwaters, sea walls, harbour walls, piers, navigation infrastructure, dredged areas and slipways still require inspection, maintenance and eventual renewal, even where vessel numbers and fish landings have substantially declined.

Local authorities acting as statutory harbour authorities also retain responsibilities for the safe and efficient operation of their harbours. These include responsibilities relating to navigational safety, the safety of vessels and people within the harbour, management of marine operations and protection of the harbour environment. Those responsibilities remain even where the income generated by the harbour is modest.

Evidence from local authority harbour networks demonstrates that this can result in persistent operating deficits. Harbour dues, landing dues, berthing fees, rents and slipway charges may contribute towards operating costs, but they are often insufficient to meet the combined costs of staffing, inspections, routine maintenance, dredging and structural repairs. Major capital renewal is even less likely to be funded from operational income alone.

The decline in traditional fishing activity is evident at individual harbour level. Local authority studies have identified examples where the gross value of fish landed reduced by more than one third over a relatively short period and others where it fell by more than two thirds. These movements can be volatile from year to year, but they demonstrate the wider structural change affecting smaller fishing harbours.

Gross landing values should not, however, be confused with harbour income. A harbour authority generally receives only the relevant landing dues and other charges, representing a small proportion of the total value of the catch. A seemingly substantial gross value of fish landed can therefore produce relatively limited income for the harbour authority while still requiring the harbour to provide safe berthing, access and operational facilities.

Fishing nevertheless remains important to many smaller harbours. They can support inshore fishing, vessel repair, marine engineering, chandlery and other parts of the coastal supply chain. Some harbours may be able to develop specialist roles in fishing vessel servicing or other marine industries, particularly where they have appropriate depth, quay space, electrical capacity, lifting facilities and access to skilled local businesses.

For other harbours, leisure activity offers a possible alternative or complementary economic role. Permanent and visiting berths can generate direct income and contribute to wider expenditure on boat maintenance, chandlery, accommodation, food, tourism and local services. This wider economic benefit can be significant even where the income appearing in the harbour authority's own accounts remains comparatively modest.

A transition from fishing harbour to leisure marina is not, however, a universal solution. Many historic harbours are tidal, have restricted entrance depths or dry substantially at low water. Some are exposed to difficult sea conditions, have limited road access or lack sufficient space for pontoons, vehicle access, boat storage and shoreside development. These constraints can restrict both the size of vessels accommodated and the length of the operational season.

The leisure market also requires investment. Successful marina activity increasingly depends upon pontoons, electricity, fresh water, secure access, toilets, showers, laundry facilities, waste collection, dredging and attractive shoreside facilities. Increased charges may improve cost recovery, particularly where existing fees are below market rates, but customers will reasonably expect the standard of facilities to reflect the prices charged.

There is consequently a risk in assuming that every harbour can commercialise its way out of the problem. Some can become successful leisure destinations. Some can support vessel servicing, aquaculture, offshore renewables, tourism or other specialist marine activities. Others face geographic, tidal, access and market limitations which materially restrict these opportunities.

Even where new income can be secured, it may not be sufficient to fund major structural renewal. Improvements in berth occupancy, charging structures and visitor activity can help meet operational expenditure, but the cost of reconstructing a pier, stabilising a harbour wall or strengthening a breakwater can be several orders of magnitude greater than the annual income generated by a small harbour.

This creates an asset sustainability gap. The economic activity which originally justified and funded the harbour can diminish more quickly than the physical asset deteriorates. Maintenance can be deferred for a period, but defects in a marine environment can progress through scour, undermining, corrosion, joint deterioration and loss of structural material. Delayed intervention can therefore increase the eventual cost rather than remove it.

Climate change and more severe coastal conditions are likely to add to this pressure. Scotland's National Marine Plan recognises the need for port infrastructure and shipping services to adapt to the consequences of climate change. For historic

harbour structures, this raises issues including sea level change, overtopping, wave loading, scour and the resilience of assets constructed or substantially rebuilt many decades ago.

The current funding model presents a further challenge. The general policy position is that ports operate commercially and are expected to be self-funding, although grants may be available for qualifying projects. This approach is understandable for commercially successful ports, but it is more difficult to apply to a small historic harbour where commercial income is modest compared with the cost of major structural renewal.

Competitive funding programmes can support individual projects and should remain part of the solution. Marine funding has previously supported harbour improvements, safety measures, fishing businesses and processing infrastructure. However, competitive project funding is not the same as a long-term mechanism for inspecting, maintaining and renewing an ageing national stock of small harbour infrastructure.

The value of these harbours also extends beyond the harbour authority's accounts. They support tourism, recreation, fishing, local businesses and marine activity, but they are also central to the identity and development of many of Scotland's coastal settlements. In many communities, the harbour is the historic reason the settlement developed in its present form and remains a defining feature of its landscape and heritage.

SCOTS would therefore encourage the Committee to consider not only whether individual harbours can become financially self-sustaining, but whether Scotland has a sufficiently clear view of the strategic, economic, resilience, community and heritage value of the harbour network as a whole. Local authorities should continue to manage their assets efficiently, maximise appropriate income and pursue credible new uses. However, where a harbour has demonstrable public value beyond the income it can reasonably generate, there is a strong case for considering how national and local government should share responsibility for its long-term stewardship.

Summary

The commercial purpose of many small harbours has changed much faster than the physical asset or the harbour authority's responsibility for it. Fishing vessels may have become too large, or activity may have moved elsewhere, but the harbour wall, breakwater and pier remain, and they still have to be inspected, maintained and ultimately renewed.

Some harbours can reinvent themselves through leisure, tourism, vessel servicing or new marine industries. Others face physical and market constraints which make that much more difficult. That does not mean they have no value. The challenge is how Scotland recognises and funds the economic, community and heritage value which does not appear in a harbour authority's income account.

Transport Scotland

Transport Scotland is responsible for national ports and harbours policy on behalf of Scottish Ministers and administers relevant harbour legislation and harbour orders. [transport.gov.scot], [transport.gov.scot]

Transport Scotland also plays a key role in:

- Strategic transport planning;
- Ferry network development;
- Capital investment programmes; and
- Oversight of supported ferry services.

Scottish Government

The Scottish Government is responsible for:

- National transport policy;
- Capital funding settlements;
- Ferry replacement programmes;
- Climate adaptation policy; and
- Legislative reform.

UK Government

Responsibilities reserved to the UK Government include:

- Maritime regulation through the Maritime and Coastguard Agency;
- International maritime obligations; and
- Certain energy and grid investment matters relevant to future ferry decarbonisation.

8. Key Messages for the Committee

1. Scotland's local authority harbour network is extensive, comprising approximately 190-205 facilities operated by eight local authorities. [portsofscotland.co.uk], [transport.gov.scot]

2. These harbours are critical economic and social assets supporting fisheries, tourism, offshore energy and lifeline ferry connections.

3. Many assets remain operationally effective but were constructed for a different era and face growing challenges associated with age, climate impacts and changing vessel requirements.

4. Significant investment will be required to ensure ferry ports can accommodate future vessel designs, including electric and low-carbon ferries.

5. Greater alignment is required between vessel procurement programmes and harbour infrastructure investment.

6. A long-term national harbour investment strategy, supported by sustainable funding mechanisms and coordinated planning between local authorities, Transport Scotland, Scottish Government and private port operators, will be essential to maintaining resilient maritime connectivity for Scotland's communities.

9. Recommendations to the Committee

SCOTS welcomes the Committee's scrutiny of Scotland's local authority harbour network and recommends consideration of the following actions.

Recommendation 1: Develop a National Harbours Strategy

The Committee should recommend that the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland establish a dedicated National Harbours Strategy to sit alongside wider ferry and maritime policies. Such a strategy should consider cohesive regional and local approaches and identify:

- The strategic role of local authority harbours in national transport connectivity;
- Future ferry infrastructure requirements;
- Community Needs, including Health Services;
- Sustainable dependent transport links (road, rail, air)
- Investment priorities;
- Climate resilience requirements; and
- A long-term asset management framework and Place Based approach to investment. [transport.gov.scot], [transport.gov.scot]

The absence of a national framework can result in individual authorities addressing infrastructure challenges independently despite many facing common issues.

Recommendation 2: Establish a Multi-Year Harbour Investment Programme

The Committee should recommend the creation of a long-term capital programme for local authority harbours.

Many authorities are managing assets that are several decades old and face increasing maintenance liabilities. Investment cycles for major marine infrastructure typically extend over 10 to 20 years and cannot be effectively delivered through short-term funding settlements.

A dedicated programme should support:

- Quay wall renewal;
- Breakwater reconstruction;
- Linkspan replacement;
- Dredging;
- Climate adaptation works; and
- Ferry terminal upgrades.

Funding certainty would enable local authorities to plan and deliver projects more efficiently and reduce whole-life costs.

Recommendation 3: Align Ferry Procurement and Harbour Investment

The Committee should recommend closer integration between ferry replacement programmes and harbour infrastructure planning.

Future vessels are likely to be:

- Larger;
- Heavier;
- Electrified; and
- Dependent upon shore power and enhanced port infrastructure.

Without corresponding harbour investment there is a risk that new vessels could be delivered before port infrastructure is capable of accommodating them efficiently.

The Committee may wish to recommend joint infrastructure planning between Transport Scotland, ferry operators and local authority harbour authorities from the earliest stages of vessel specification and procurement. [transport.gov.scot], [transport.gov.scot]

Recommendation 4: Commission a National Condition Survey

A consistent picture of harbour condition across Scotland is currently lacking.

The Committee should recommend a Scotland-wide assessment of all local authority (may also include other public and private facilities) harbour infrastructure to establish:

- Asset condition;
- Remaining asset life;
- Climate vulnerability;
- Ferry readiness;
- Maintenance backlogs; and
- Future investment requirements.

This would provide an evidence base for future funding decisions and prioritisation.

Recommendation 5: Create a Dedicated Ferry Port Readiness Fund

Harbours supporting lifeline ferry routes require particular attention.

The Committee should recommend a targeted funding mechanism for ports supporting ferry services operated through public service contracts and island connections.

Priorities should include:

- Linkspan replacement;
- Shore power infrastructure;
- Accessibility improvements;
- Passenger facilities;
- Grid upgrades; and
- Landside marshalling capacity.

Such a fund would support both service reliability and ferry decarbonisation objectives.

Recommendation 6: Improve Climate and Resilience Planning

Climate change presents a growing challenge for harbour authorities.

The Committee should recommend that the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland develop guidance and funding streams specifically addressing:

- Sea level rise;
- Coastal erosion;
- Extreme weather resilience;
- Flood protection; and
- Emergency recovery capability. [transport.gov.scot], [transport.gov.scot]

Future harbour investment should be based upon adaptive design standards rather than replacement of infrastructure on a like-for-like basis.

Recommendation 7: Recognise Local Authority Harbours as Critical National Infrastructure

Many local authority-owned ports support:

- Lifeline ferry services;
- Fishing fleets;
- Aquaculture;
- Offshore energy developments;
- Emergency response operations; and

- Tourism activity.

The Committee should recommend that local authority harbours be explicitly recognised as strategic national infrastructure within future transport and economic development frameworks.

This recognition would help ensure appropriate consideration within national funding and resilience planning.

Recommendation 8: Strengthen Collaboration Across the Sector

The Committee should encourage greater collaboration between:

- Local authorities;
- Transport Scotland;
- Ferry operators;
- Trust ports;
- Bus/rail operators;
- The tourism sector;
- The offshore energy sector; and
- Regional economic partnerships. [transport.gov.scot], [transport.gov.scot]

Common standards, shared technical expertise and collaborative procurement could reduce costs and improve delivery.

SCOTS is well placed to assist in facilitating this collaboration through its existing network of transportation professionals.

Conclusion

Scotland's local authority harbour network, comprising approximately 190 to 205 harbour, pier and marine facilities operated by eight local authorities, represents a critical component of the nation's transport and economic infrastructure. [portsofscotland.co.uk], [transport.gov.scot]

Whilst most facilities continue to operate safely and effectively, many are facing increasing pressures associated with ageing assets, climate change, changing vessel requirements and constrained capital budgets.

The Committee therefore has an opportunity to support a long-term, nationally coordinated approach focused on:

1. Strategic planning;
2. Sustainable funding;
3. Ferry readiness;
4. Climate resilience;
5. Asset renewal; and
6. Stronger collaboration across government and harbour authorities.

SCOTS believes that early and sustained investment in harbour infrastructure will be essential to maintaining reliable ferry services, supporting coastal economies and ensuring resilient maritime connectivity for Scotland's island and remote communities over the coming decades.

The Scottish Collaboration of Transportation Specialists (SCOTS)
9 November 2026

TPT/S7/26/12/1

Written submission from Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL)

I would like to thank the Committee for inviting CMAL to give a written submission.

Introduction

As members may know, CMAL owns ports, harbours and ferries – we have 27 port facilities which is just over 50% of the lifeline ferry ports on the west coast of Scotland and its associated islands. We do not own any of the ports servicing the Northern Isles.

CMAL owns 37 ferries - of which 32 are chartered to CalMac Ferries and 5 to Serco Northlink Ferries and has a substantial renewal programme with 13 vessels at various stages of construction in Scotland, Turkiye, Poland and China.

Modern, accessible and fit for purpose ports are just as important as the ferries to maintain the lifeline services to the islands and remote communities.

Ports

Our programme of work for ports is a crucial factor in maintaining connectivity and network resilience. As an organisation we have embarked upon an ambitious programme of renewal and upgrades backed by Scottish Government – but there is still much to do. We have a legacy of ports that in some cases are reaching the end of their serviceable life and need significant improvement to accommodate the existing and future ferry fleet.

Of the 53 west coast ports, CMAL owns 27 and the other ports are owned by a combination of Councils (21), Trust Ports (4) and the National Trust for Scotland (1). It is our firm belief that if CMAL were to own a greater proportion of the ports, that progress of renewal and upgrades would accelerate.

Significant progress has been made, and we have a number of live projects that are currently in the construction phase – the most notable being:

Port Ellen

A three-year project to increase significantly the marshalling capacity, enable unaccompanied freight to be increased, improve the passenger facilities including accessibility.



Port Ellen redevelopment 6 months progress after closure

Ardrossan

The port at Ardrossan was purchased by CMAL in March 2026 from Ardrossan Harbour Company Ltd (part of the Peel Ports Group).

Since purchase we have carried out repair, maintenance and upgrade works across the port estate. This included replacing 11 fenders on the main Arran Berth and Winton Pier to improve resilience for CalMac over the winter period and repairs to the linkspan steelwork and machinery during a 5-week planned closure period. Additionally, we carried out repairs and upgrades to the terminal building including automatically opening main entrance doors and general site wide repairs to lighting, fencing, surfacing and white lining around the site. We will continue to manage the asset and carry out repairs and maintenance in line with our asset management policy.

At this early stage we have already appointed design consultants (Wallace Stone), cost consultants (Turner and Townsend) and architecture consultants (Graham and Sibbald), all of which are working closely with our team to advance the options under consideration for the long-term, major development of the asset.



Arran Berth Knuckle



Arran Berth Fender Replacement

Cumbrae Slipway

The Cumbrae slipway is being replaced with additional features that will enhance the operational capability and the customer experience. The introduction of a substantial marshalling area, a small passenger terminal with toilets (inc accessible), enhanced bus and car drop off zones and car parking.



Cumbrae Slipway Reconstruction and Marshalling area progress

Small Vessel Replacement Programme (Phase 1) Port enabling works

With the introduction of new, “all electric” ferries there are a number of CMAL slipways that are critical infrastructure for the small vessel routes that will need to be enhanced to accommodate the service. This includes the introduction of overnight berths with the appropriate power connections and cable handling devices.

CMAL does not own all of the ports that require improvement and a number of these are owned by local Councils. We will continue to work closely with the third-party ports in order to achieve the necessary improvements.

Ferries

MV Glen Rosa (MVGR)

The MVGR is in the final stages of completion and has a target delivery date of 26th February 2027. It is currently undergoing a series of “builder’s sea trials” which are required to test all systems and machinery.

MV Isle of Islay

The vessel was delivered in January 2026 and is currently servicing the Islay route from Kennacraig to Port Askaig (noting that Port Ellen is closed for redevelopment).



Finlaggan and Isle of Islay at the redeveloped Kennacraig Terminal

MV Loch Indaal

This vessel is due to be delivered imminently and is preparing for its repositioning voyage to Scotland from Yalova, Turkiye. This vessel is the 2nd vessel for the Islay route.



Loch Indaal moments after launch

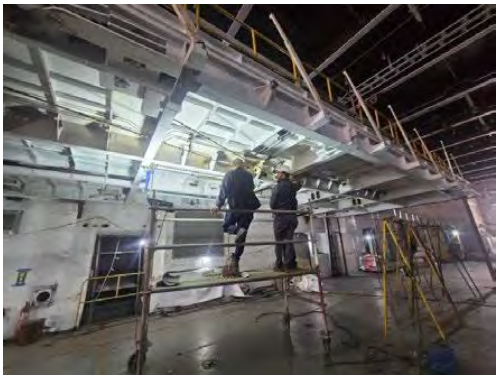


Passenger Lounge Completion

MV Lochmor and MV Claymore

The two vessels are afloat and work to complete construction continues at Cemre, Yalova, Turkiye. Both are in the latter stages of completion and there are target delivery dates at the end of Q1 and Q2 2027 respectively.

Both vessels are to be deployed on the Uig route to Tarbert (Harris) and Lochmaddy respectively.



Claymore Mezzanine Deck Inspection



Lochmor Battery Bank Installation

7 Small Vessels under construction at Remontowa, Gdansk, Poland

7 small ferries are contracted to be built at the Remontowa yard. The programme of work is currently on time and on budget.

5 vessels are in process at various stages of construction from steel cutting through to “ready to launch”. We anticipate the first 2 vessels to be launched during January 2027 with the next 5 to follow within 2027 and early 2028.

The first vessel is due for delivery in Q3 2027 and the final vessel within Q1 2029 – so all 7 vessels within a 21-month window.



Vessel 1 Initial Construction Phase



CGI Render of Completed Vessel

2 Freight Flex Vessels for the Northern Isles

A contract was signed in Q1 2026 for construction of 2 freight flex vessels which will replace the 2 existing unaccompanied freight vessels that service the Northern Isles Route. These vessels are designed to accommodate 40% more freight and increase the

number of passengers from 12 to 200 and will therefore be classified as passenger vessels. They will offer enhanced operating speeds, up from 14.5 knots with current vessels to 20 knots, which will ensure that southbound traffic can arrive to meet customer expectations.



CGI Render of the Freight Flex Ferry to be constructed at GSI

Future Vessel Programmes

We are anticipating a tender return by the end of November 2026 in relation to the vessel replacement for the Mallaig/Lochboisdale service.

We are close to a final decision regarding the Small Vessel Replacement Programme Phase 2 which is the replacement of vessels in the Outer Hebrides (Sound of Harris and Sound of Barra).

We have initiated a programme of work and have appointed concept design consultants for a series of vessels to replace those servicing Oban/Craignure, Wemyss Bay/Rothesay and Mallaig/Armadale.

Net Zero improvements (Ferries and Ports)

In line with the Scottish Government's emission and carbon reduction targets we are making all affordable and technically feasible efforts to reduce the environmental impact of our ferry and port infrastructure assets.

For major ports we have commenced the roll out of shore power connections for ferries to use when alongside, reducing emissions at port and elimination of noise pollution.

Several of our newer, major ferries are equipped with battery power which assists with energy consumption on approach and during berthing, where power consumption can be at its highest. We are also designing major vessels with the capability for a retrofit for use of alternative fuel solutions as and when these are technically feasible and fuel is sufficiently available.

Our Small Vessel Replacement Programme Phases 1 and Phase 2 are building fully electric vessels with a backup diesel generator to ensure that the services are resilient if there are any power outages within the electricity supply grid.

There are challenges in terms of timely grid connection which is well understood at national level, and we are working closely with SSEN as a primary provider to enable sufficient energy to be made available at our ports.



Final Installation of Cable Management System (CMS) at Port of Aberdeen

Advisory Services

We also act as advisors, not only to Scottish Government, but to other port owners and this is given on a pro bono basis especially regarding ports that have small management teams; examples being Corran Ferry, Mallaig, Tarbert Loch Fyne to name but a few. Additionally, over the past 20 years we have periodically managed renewal and upgrade works at several west coast ports for other port owners, who do not have the in-house expertise to manage such projects. Our ability to do this is very much driven by the capacity that CMAL has at any point in time and is therefore not guaranteed.

Looking Forward

Our primary desire is that there is a Cross-Party Agreement that lifeline ferries and associated ports have an agreed, long term, multi-year funding arrangement that delivers continuous improvement and renewal. The current, annual arrangement simply does not give certainty to the islands and remote communities that we serve and makes planning and delivery more complex than it should be.

The funding that has been afforded to CMAL for both replacement ferries and ports has been very welcome and has enabled substantial progress. However future funding is not guaranteed.

If we look at the current configuration of the ferry fleet there is an ongoing need to deliver 2 major vessels and 2 small/intermediate vessels every 3 years. Equally port infrastructure upgrades and renewal projects require continual investment to meet modern standards and to address climate change which is having significant impacts on ferry services (both ports and ferries).

Our concern as a business supporting the remote island communities on the west coast and the Northern Isles is that there is uncertainty as to future funding streams and that in turn could potentially impact the viability and economic prosperity of the communities that we serve. Funding of lifeline ferry services should not be politicised; it should be supported by all parties in the Scottish Government working collaboratively for the good and betterment of their communities.

Kind Regards,

Kevin Hobbs

Chief Executive
Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd
13 November 2026