



**PUBLIC PETITION NO.**

**PE01394**

### Name of petitioner

Huw Francis on behalf of Stòras Uibhist

### Petition title

Reintroduce Lochboisdale to Mallaig ferry service

### Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to reintroduce a direct ferry service between Lochboisdale and Mallaig.

### Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

Stòras Uibhist Ltd has had protracted correspondence between Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar (local council), local councillors, MPs and the Scottish Government in an attempt to improve the poor ferry service to the port of Lochboisdale.

In 2008 the Minister for Transport (Stewart Stevenson) invited Stòras Uibhist to submit a proposal for the introduction of the Lochboisdale-Mallaig ferry service and indicated that there would be up to £1m available to support this service. Stòras Uibhist submitted a proposal that was rejected by the Scottish Government primarily on the grounds that the proposed vessel was not suitable for the route, in a letter from Brian Wither dated December 5th 2008. In a further letter dated October 29 2009 from Colin Grieve the Minister stated that the matter would be considered as part of the Ferry review in early 2010.

However, the ferries review has been ongoing for a long time and has been delayed many times. It does not seem to be any closer to being published and even further from being acted upon. Meanwhile, the residents of South Uist, who have been consulted many times previous to, and since, the ferries review about the ferry service they want are left with an inadequate ferry service that can take 7.5 hours to reach the mainland. It is six years since the STAG Appraisal identified a need for the Lochboisdale-Mallaig ferry service and the people of these islands are still waiting for the Scottish Government to deliver on the recommendations of that report.

There is also the matter of the spare vessel in the CalMac fleet with the arrival of the MV Finlggan for the Islay service. When there is an identified need for a ferry service between Lochboisdale and Mallaig, that many surveys have demonstrated will greatly benefit the island community, that is in the sole power of Scottish Ministers to implement, it would be remiss of Scottish Government to delay making a decision while they await the results of another open-ended review process.

Failure to make a decision on the use of this spare vessel will result in a valuable Scottish Government asset being wasted, when it could be used to reduce regional inequality, boost the tourism sector and local economy and provide social benefits through reduced travel time for the residents of the islands of Eriskay, Benbecula and

## South Uist.

The ferry operator, wholly-owned by Scottish Government, delivers a service under contract from Scottish Government and cannot vary that service without direction from Scottish Government, which is why it is not a matter for the publicly owned operator, CalMac to decide.

The Outer Hebrides are an important component of the Scottish economy in the tourism, aquaculture, fishing and Defence sectors. Improving the transport links to these islands will boost both the local economy and contribute to overall Scottish GDP growth.

### **Petition background information**

A reintroduced Lochboisdale to Mallaig service would fit the growing pattern of shorter ferry routes for the benefit of the Southern Isles and for Mallaig and their surrounding area, making it a natural option to boost tourism and the local economy for both communities. But for many reasons, including a refusal by the previous Scottish Executive, as outlined above, this has not been established.

The re-introduction of this service has been supported by MSP Alasdair Allan, MP Angus Brendan MacNeil, community councils, and local councillors, together with local businesses on both the mainland and the islands. In addition, consultations carried out by both independent consultants and the Comhairle have indicated overwhelming support for the re-introduction of this service.

Currently the vehicular ferry route entails a staggering seven hour journey to Oban, regularly via the Isle of Barra. Stòras Uibhist and the community have long campaigned to change to a more suitable and economical route to the mainland. The re-introduction of this service has been supported by MSP Alasdair Allan and MP Angus Brendan MacNeil and consultations done with the people indicate the large amount of support for this service. Community councils and councillors as well as local businesses on both the mainland and the islands have given their full support to this service.

The huge benefit of a three hour journey to Mallaig instead of five to seven hours to Oban speaks for itself.

The STAG appraisal completed on the introduction of this route clearly demonstrated the benefits it would bring. The inclusion of the route in the CHFS tender documents demonstrated that the Scottish Government had approved its introduction. Only the failure of CMAL and CalMac to secure a vessel to serve this route prevented its introduction.

Recently a ship has become available within the CMAL/CalMac fleet that could be used on the proposed reintroduced route. The benefits to Lochboisdale and the wider community would be hugely advantageous through increased tourism and businesses activity on both sides of the water.

The people of South Uist have been fighting for a re-introduction of this ferry since 1992. The lack of a proper service to the Southern Isles is curtailing the economic and social growth of our region. The current route is out dated and definitely not meeting the needs of the people. Local people are missing out on the opportunity for an improved transport system and a boost to the economy.

Repeated consultations have demonstrated strong local support for the introduction of the service, including the latest series of consultation events in 2011.

### **Unique web address**

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01394>

**Related information for petition**

**Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?**

NO

**How many signatures have you collected so far?**

757

**Closing date for collecting signatures online**

N/A

**Comments to stimulate online discussion**