

*Going Forward  
Together*



## **STÒRAS UIBHIST LTD.**

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### **FERRIES REVIEW SUBMISSION**

Dear Sir/Madam,

Stòras Uibhist is the largest community landowner in Scotland, managing the 93,000 acre estate covering the islands of South Uist, Eriskay and Benbecula (part) in the Outer Hebrides. The estate has a resident population of 3,000 people and the land buyout took place in December 2006 for a purchase price of £4.5M. The company operates as a membership organisation with 850 members who elect a board of directors who oversee the work of the 18 full time equivalent employees.

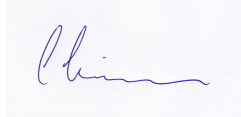
We note below the main points which we would like to make in relation to the Ferries Review, and we will, of course, be happy to provide any further information and explanations you may require.

- A direct ferry service between Lochboisdale and Mallaig should be provided to improve transportation links to South Uist, and to reduce journey times. This new ferry service should be provided as soon as possible, and be incorporated in the next tender for the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services contract.
- A link with Oban should be retained by means of a direct ferry service from Castlebay to Oban, which residents of Uist can link to via the Sound of Barra ferry service, with a through ticketing system and suitable ferry provision across the Sound of Barra to link in with the Oban-Castlebay schedule.
- The annual revenue subsidy for the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service is estimated to be less than £60M per annum. In comparative terms this is 2.4% of the Scottish Governments' entire Transport Department budget and is not a significant investment in relation to the considerable public benefit received in return. Ferry services provide an essential transport link for many remote and fragile island communities, as do roads in mainland Scotland, and are essential to the economic sustainability of these communities.

- We reject the principle that investment in ferry services should be cut. Ferry services provide an excellent return on investment to the public purse, and, indeed, we would advocate greater levels of investment to produce better outcomes for communities and the nation as a whole.
- We challenge the principle that underlines the government's economic strategy which results in those areas which can contribute most to gross value added (GVA) being prioritised for investment. Ferries are a lifeline service to island communities and it is essential that fragile and peripheral communities are not disadvantaged when investment decisions are made.
- Ferries are vital to the sustainability of island economies, and ferry subsidies are a significant tool to be used by government in supporting economic development and strengthening island communities.
- The ferry services provide good employment opportunities to island communities. Recruitment fairs should be held on a regular basis in all islands schools to encourage youngsters to consider a career at sea.
- Vessels are ageing and require replacement. The government requires to accelerate plans to replace the fleet, as mechanical breakdowns and the resultant decrease in the quality of service will become common place.
- Leasing of vessels should be explored as an option for fleet replacement.
- We do not agree with the proposal that ports and harbours should be self-funding. Ports and harbours in many fragile island communities will be unable to provide sufficient revenue for re-investment without significant public investment intervention.
- Fares policy should reflect the key issues of community sustainability and supporting economic development.
- We would not support longer journey times as part of a CO2 emissions reduction programme.
- The Clyde & Hebrides routes should be re-tendered as one bundle.
- The RET scheme currently operating in the Western Isles, Coll & Tiree, should be continued on a long term basis to benefit the travelling public, and to allow business people to make long term investment decisions. At present, the uncertainties surrounding the pilot project do not give confidence to island based business people to make anything other than short term investment decisions.
- Ferry fares should differentiate between island residents and other travellers. Ferry operators should be allowed to vary fares in a similar way to that which is prevalent in air travel. This should be in addition to RET.

- A mechanism should be put in place for offshore windfarms to provide additional revenue through ‘community benefit’ schemes for investment in ferries and ferry services.
- The Scottish Government should have overall responsibility for overseeing the management of ferry services.

Yours faithfully



Angus MacMillan  
Chairman