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Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

A Modern and Sustainable Ferry Service for Scotland



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Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition, with the exception of matters relating to just transition; on matters relating to land reform, natural resources and peatland, Scottish Land Commission; Crown Estate Scotland, and Royal Botanic Garden within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands; and on matters relating to energy within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy.



netzero.committee@parliament.scot

Committee Membership



Convener
Edward Mountain
Scottish Conservative
and Unionist Party



Jackie Dunbar
Scottish National Party



Liam Kerr
Scottish Conservative
and Unionist Party



Monica Lennon
Scottish Labour



Ash Regan
Scottish National Party



Mark Ruskell
Scottish Green Party

Executive Summary

Leadership in the form of long-term strategic thinking and investment is required to bring all Scotland's ferry services to an acceptable standard. Service users have told the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee that ferry services are not good enough and need to change. We call on the Scottish Government to—

- Set out its comprehensive vision for a high quality service for all ferry-dependent communities in the Islands Connectivity Plan;
- Establish the governance and delivery structures capable of delivering this vision; and
- Provide sufficient resources and the systems required to make the vision a reality.

Improvements must be delivered in collaboration with ferry-dependent communities, inspiring much needed confidence in ferry services.

The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's inquiry into a Modern and Sustainable Ferry Service for Scotland sought to identify the current and evolving needs of ferry users and to consider how services could be better designed to meet those needs. The report begins by discussing the urgency of the need for change. We provide an overview of how ferry services are currently delivered, as well as recent scrutiny of this in Parliament and Scottish Government strategies and reviews.

The forthcoming Islands Connectivity Plan represents the chance for a genuinely fresh start. The Scottish Government must seize this chance to create a vision for island connectivity starting again from first principles. It is an opportunity for the Scottish Government to prove it is listening to ferry-dependent communities and committed to delivering a service that meets their needs. To that end, it must be comprehensive, cohesive and collaborative.

Our understanding of the extent of service disruption, and its impact on ferry users, was hampered by a lack of truly meaningful presentation of statistical information by operators. This does not appear to tell the whole story and we urgently need better performance metrics to drive improvement and create more trust in the service. The root causes of the current problems include an ageing fleet, lack of resilience, increased usage and a pass-the-parcel of responsibility culture in governance structures. A lack of political leadership on these matters and the level of churn in the role of Transport Minister, as initially identified by island communities, is unhelpful. Ferry-dependent communities need a champion in the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government must create the governance and delivery structures best able to realise an ambitious vision. The current system has been a recipe for confusion and buck-passing that cannot be allowed to continue. Stronger regulation of Scotland's ferry services is required. We call for an accountable and transparent governance and delivery structure which achieves value for the taxpayer, meets the requirements of communities and supports progress towards emission reduction targets. This should include prominent space for formal and informal engagement with service users. The Scottish Government must pay careful attention to community responses to its review of current structures, Project Neptune, before it decides on the best course of action. The Committee is disappointed the Scottish Government has not progressed its work on this review at pace. We believe the Scottish Government should consider assuming the functions of

Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) within the Transport Scotland ferries team. However it is also disappointing that there is not yet clear advice in the public sphere on which options for re-organising structures are legally permitted. This has hindered the Committee in our scrutiny role.

The next contract for delivery of services on the Clyde and Hebrides routes presents an opportunity to deliver change. Closer working between the operator and local authorities and communities, simplified contract variation processes, collection of more data on which to assess value for money and key performance indicators are all additions to the contract the Committee would welcome. We understand it is likely to be offered as a single bundle on this occasion. To ensure continuity of service and to avoid disruption given the proximity to the end of the current contract, the Committee would, on this one occasion, support a direct award of the CHFS3 contract. This is provided this arrangement is acceptable to communities and there are no legal barriers. If the contract is to be tendered, we believe those managing this process must learn the lessons from the process for tendering CHFS2 as identified by Audit Scotland. We are concerned the mechanism for the delivery of Clyde and Hebrides services remains unclear just 16 months before the end of the current contract and may already be behind schedule. The length of the contract should be extended to 10 years.

We are aware the culmination of our recommendations in this area could result in a 10-year direct award to CalMac Ferries Ltd. A direct award is a privilege and with it must come great responsibility for competent stewardship of Clyde and Hebridean ferry services during this period. Our recommendations on the next CHFS contract are therefore caveated on the Scottish Government, as the owners of CalMac, ensuring that it delivers real improvements for communities. Evidence suggests the current tripartite arrangement is not working and must be reviewed.

Scotland needs modern, economical and sustainable ferries. The Scottish Government should set out how it will deliver on its commitment to reduce the average age of vessels to 15 years by 2030. The Islands Connectivity Plan must go further than these projects and establish a commitment and long-term, rolling programme of investment in new vessels and associated harbour developments. The design of new ferries and ports and harbours should be standardised, and the Scottish Government should consider where routes currently served, or due to be served, by large vessels could be better provided by a higher number of smaller vessels. The requirements of communities served by vessels must be taken into account in future ferry procurement and lessons must be learned from procurement exercises of the past. The need to achieve net zero emissions should drive decisions on specification and vessels must be designed with zero-emission retrofit in mind. We are concerned at the lack of prominence given to low carbon concerns in the approach to consultation on the Islands Connectivity Plan. We call for support for local authorities in procuring low or zero-carbon vessels.

Scottish ferry services must be reliable. The Scottish Government must chart a course which facilitates the efficient transportation of freight on our ferries to allow businesses on islands to flourish and ensures vital provisions are delivered with ease. Integrated transport is essential and we include the availability of electric vehicles for use on islands in this. It is unacceptable some of Scotland's ferries are not equally accessible to everyone and an audit of vessel accessibility should be carried out to identify priorities for investment. While recognising the benefits of the Road Equivalent Tariff, we think this should be evaluated as part of the Islands Connectivity Plan consultation work on fares. Any proposal to extend or amend this policy must carefully consider unintended consequences. We call on the Scottish Government to consider how it can make ferry

services more affordable to young people through a concessionary scheme.

Local authorities also deliver lifeline ferry services and the Scottish Government must collaborate effectively with councils to ensure those communities can rely on those services. This should include discussion of fixed links and we recommend the Scottish Government comprehensively assess the value for money presented by tunnels and bridges as opposed to ferries across Scotland. The Scottish Government must leave open the option of responsibility for local authority-run ferry services being transferred to Transport Scotland, as established in the Ferries Plan.

Ferry services must be shaped by the communities reliant on them. In this regard, we call on the Scottish Government to consider how their voices can be championed through formal and informal roles in decision making.

We are grateful for those who took the time to share their views and appreciate that in many cases these opinions will have been formed by suffering the disruptive effects of unreliable services. The Scottish Government must improve communication by all those in receipt of public funding to run ferry services with communities. Many communities feel fatigued by consultation without feeling it has led to real improvement. In that context we are especially indebted to those who hosted visits and participated in our online engagement events. These contributions have been invaluable to our work. We wish also to acknowledge the efforts of hard-working ferry staff providing lifeline services.

Ferry services have occupied the work programmes of several Scottish Parliament committees in the last few years. A series of recommendations have resulted but we are not convinced the Scottish Government has paid sufficient attention. We want this to be a positive report that helps achieve tangible change for islands and other ferry-dependent communities. However, things will not improve without an honest and unflinching look back at past errors, so that we may learn from them.

Recommendations

Scottish Government Plans and Project Neptune

1. **An Islands Connectivity Plan is an opportunity for fresh thinking about how ferries are run in Scotland and how the transport needs of islands and other ferry-dependent communities are met. It is also an opportunity to reset the damaged relationship between island communities and all those responsible for delivering public ferry services. If the Plan is to be successful—**
 - **It must be a truly comprehensive plan, covering all modes, or potential modes, of maritime transport that are an alternative to ferries, including air, bridges, causeways and tunnels, and connecting and onward travel;**
 - **It must also take account of the position and future needs of *all* ferry-dependent communities, including those currently served by council-run ferries;**
 - **It should be integrated with other key Scottish Government policies, for instance the Climate Change Plan and the National Islands Plan;**
 - **It must cohere. While we understand the pragmatic reasons for consulting on separate "pieces" of the Plan, the final document must be a single integrated piece of work. To ensure this, there must be an opportunity for key stakeholders to comment on and propose changes to a final draft before publication;**
 - **Plan preparation needs to move at pace. It is important that island communities and other key stakeholders see that change is coming; to address the sense of drift and abandonment felt in some communities and to enable positive choices to be made about the future. Signs of delay in the consultation process for the Plan are concerning and the Committee asks for an update on timetabling from the Scottish Government;**
 - **It must, at the same time, be based on consultation with representatives of ferry-dependent communities, with their needs put at its core. They must have ample opportunity to express their views at every major stage of the Plan's development. We ask the Scottish Government to provide more information on its engagement strategy for islands and other ferry-using communities;**
 - **It should include specific and timetabled targets (for instance on fleet replacement) and outline a plan for achieving each major target; and**
 - **It should set out a system for its own monitoring and evaluation, including annual reports.**

Understanding and measuring the problem - recording reliability

2. Solving problems with our ferry services requires first being able to accurately measure them. Rebuilding public confidence in ferry services also starts with measuring performance in a clear way that inspires trust, even if the message the figures convey may at times make for uncomfortable reading. The Committee believes that current methods of gathering statistics on Scottish Government-funded services do not do either of these points fully and satisfactorily. CalMac's criteria for measuring reliability are opaque, poorly understood and apparently not widely trusted within ferry-using communities. NorthLink's publicly available figures on cancellations contain even less detail.
3. The Committee calls on the Scottish Government to undertake a comprehensive review of how data on the performance of CalMac and NorthLink services is gathered. This should take into account service users' own view of what issues should be recorded. Statistics must accurately reflect the actual experience of travellers. At the very least, the "actual performance" figure for cancellation or significant delay of services should be published alongside the "contractual reliability" figures cancellations in order to better reflect the customer experience.
4. Going further, statistics should ideally provide sufficient detail to allow government and service providers to assess the root causes of poor service provision, route-by-route, so that they are in a better position to fix them, as well as to get the more strategic "big picture" decisions right when these are called for. Statistics on cancellation or delay caused by cascading services (i.e. moving a vessel to cover a vessel loss elsewhere) should also be recorded on a route-by-route basis.
5. Whilst respecting the autonomy of local authorities, the Committee recommends the principles of data gathering are applied to all publicly-funded ferry services.

Understanding and measuring the problem - customer satisfaction

6. The Committee welcomes undertakings from CalMac and Transport Scotland to, respectively, outsource customer satisfaction data-collection and develop new performance indicators. We call on the Scottish Government to ensure that new approaches are tested on user groups that include representatives of ferry-dependent communities and other regular ferry users.

What are the root causes of problems with the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services?

7. Far too many ferry services in Scotland are unacceptably unreliable. This is causing real damage to communities, particularly those dependent on Clyde and Hebridean ferry services. For more fragile island communities, consistently unreliable services risk becoming a literal existential threat.
8. There is not one single root cause for unreliable ferry services but rather an

interplay of factors. These include—

- **An ageing ferry fleet and a ferry replacement programme that, over several years, has been slow and plagued with delivery problems. This points to issues with funding, procurement, design and specification, to be explored further in the rest of this report. Efforts by CMAL to purchase or lease existing vessels abroad are not working and should not be relied upon;**
- **A fleet operating practically at full capacity, meaning that where a vessel is out of action, problems cascade through the service;**
- **An increase in usage without increased capacity;**
- **An administrative set-up - the tripartite arrangement - that is unresponsive and not transparent, and which does not sufficiently incentivise optimal decision-taking or secure value for money. The tripartite arrangement is widely perceived as enabling a "pass the parcel" culture in which no one takes ultimate responsibility for the effective delivery of taxpayer-funded ferry services.**

9. The Committee is clear that this responsibility rests with the Scottish Government. It is our view that another factor contributing to underperforming ferry services has been a lack of continuity in political leadership, with most recent transport ministers lasting no more than 18 months in the role. Ferry-dependent communities in Scotland need continuity and confidence at Ministerial level: they need a champion in Government with the knowledge, experience and staying power to push through the reforms and improvements the sector now urgently needs. This requires an end to churn in the Transport Minister role.

10. We have already expressed disappointment at the lack of sufficiently robust statistics data on ferry performance and asked for the Scottish Government to address this. More data and analysis are required on—

- **Weather: we need to understand better the impact of weather; for instance, whether there has been an objectively measurable increase in extreme weather, which has directly caused increased disruption, or whether other factors (for instance, ageing vessels) are leading to a more precautionary approach in response to bad weather. There is an important role for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in this work and we recommend that the Scottish Government seek to work with them on this; and**
- **Maintenance, servicing and repairs, for instance whether it is costing more or taking longer than previously, or whether there are differences in the way operators service and repair vessels that appear to lead to measurably different results. The overall aim should be to benchmark ferry maintenance standards and ensure best practice is being followed on all taxpayer-funded vessels on taxpayer-supported routes.**

How should taxpayer supported ferry services be run?

- 11. There is widespread agreement that the current tripartite arrangement for managing Scottish Government-funded ferries is not working effectively for the Clyde and Hebrides and is not adequately serving ferry-dependent communities. Change is needed. No clear consensus has emerged from this inquiry as to what form it should take. Preparation of the Islands Connectivity Plan enables a continuation of the conversation, and the Scottish Government must ensure all ferry users - and especially ferry-dependent communities - have the opportunity to participate in it.**
- 12. However, it is important to build and maintain momentum for change, in order to create confidence that we will soon have more reliable ferry services. The Scottish Government must set out a clear backstop for taking a decision on future arrangements. The Committee considers the following principles are foundational for any modern administrative structure delivering ferries and ferry services for Scotland: it must—**
 - Be truly accountable to ferry-dependent communities , to Government and Parliament;**
 - Be transparent;**
 - Be competent. It follows from this that where decisions taken reflect a lack of competence there should be consequences;**
 - Seek and achieve value for money in all major decisions, especially on ferry procurement. Again, for there to be public confidence in the system, there should be consequences for failures to do so;**
 - Be responsive to need, including local need. In practice, this should include having mechanisms to enable a degree of localised management;**
 - Support the delivery of net zero.**
- 13. The Committee believes Ministers and Transport Scotland must be guided by the best advice and expertise. In many circumstances this will come from CMAL and CalMac. However, where it requires an objective assessment of their performance and advice, other voices have a role to play.**
- 14. The Committee supports a formal structure for Transport Scotland to hear from impartial experts and recommends the Scottish Government provide a progress update on work towards convening an international expert group. This should include the remit of the group and the status of the advice it provides.**
- 15. Whilst Project Neptune recommended consideration of a CalMac-CMAL merger, there was a mixed response to this proposal during the inquiry and the Committee remains to be persuaded this outcome would be optimal. On**

its own, this change does not clearly deliver on the principles we have outlined. The Committee also observes that merging the vessel owner and ferry operator into a single organisation appears to cement CalMac Ferries' position as the provider of Clyde and Hebridean ferry services into the foreseeable future.

16. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should give consideration to a CMAL-Transport Scotland merger, to create a "Ferries Scotland" as an arm of Transport Scotland. This could streamline decision-taking, improve understanding of ferry services, and the importance of ferry services, within Transport Scotland, and at least partly address concerns the current tripartite structure enables a blame-shifting culture. The Committee considers the obstacles to merger that Project Neptune identified - such as issues over transfer of pensions - can, with sufficient political will, be addressed. However, other changes would still be required - as discussed later in this report - to ensure that ferry users have a service that better embodies the principles outlined above.
17. Finally, it is regrettable that discussion on future ferry services has, for the entire length of this inquiry, been hindered by uncertainty as to whether the tripartite arrangement is, in some form or another, still required for legal reasons. It is unclear to the Committee why the Scottish Government does not yet have this clarity. It is also regrettable this situation has continued while community consultation on the proposals of Project Neptune has been carried out. The Scottish Government must make it clear in its response to this report whether it considers it would be lawful to merge CMAL and CalMac or to bring the functions and expertise of CMAL within the purview of Transport Scotland.

The next contract for Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services

18. The Committee accepts that the Scottish Government is likely to offer the next contract for Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services as a single bundle. We acknowledge there are benefits to a single bundle. These include greater service resilience, economies of scale, the ability to maintain relief vessels and to redeploy staff and vessels to deal with periods of disruption. However it does not believe these are being delivered on the CHFS network by the parties to the tripartite arrangement and this needs to change. The Committee is content with the award as a single bundle on this occasion.
19. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should use the opportunity of the next CHFS contract to include specific requirements for the operator to work with local authorities and communities on service delivery and decision making.
20. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should consider how to facilitate easy use by private companies of Scotland's public ports and harbour network to allow for demand-led additional services to be provided with ease, for example for freight, provided this does not threaten lifeline services.

21. **The Committee understands the Scottish Government's preference is to make a direct award for Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services and recognises the benefits of doing so. However, the Committee does not believe the position on whether this is possible is clear. The Committee asks the Scottish Government to clarify—**
 - **The outcome of consultation by the Chair of the Ferries Community Board, and whether it indicates that communities served by the CHFS network would prefer a direct award;**
 - **Whether it considers it would be lawful to make a direct award and, if so, whether it will do so;**
 - **How it will ensure a direct award will deliver value, taking into account the savings in not running a tender exercise compared with the resource required to ensure an award is compliant, and how Transport Scotland will ensure a direct award will deliver value as recommended by Audit Scotland.**
22. **The Committee believes that, if island communities appear to support making a direct award, and there is no legal barrier to it, then this should go ahead for the CHFS3 contract only. This would provide continuity of service and avoid disruption for communities in relation to a new contract that is now little over a year from starting. This does not mean "business as usual" for CalMac and should not set a precedent for future CHFS awards.**
23. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government publish the outcome of the consultation of the Chair of the Ferries Community Board.**
24. **If it is to be tendered, the Committee recommends the Scottish Government provide details of how the process for tendering for the third Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services contract (CHFS3) contract will learn the lessons outlined by Audit Scotland.**
25. **The Committee believes the Scottish Government must begin to collect and analyse meaningful data to ensure true value for money is being achieved from spend on ferry services (particularly around vessel specification and fixed link proposals). This includes the socio-economic factors highlighted by Audit Scotland and the Ferries Community Board in their reports, such as depopulation.**
26. **The Committee recommends Key Performance Indicators for the CHFS contract must include community and customer satisfaction rates and the gathering of this data must be done in a way which does not place additional burdens on communities.**
27. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government design within the next CHFS contract a formal mechanism whereby communities could propose contract variation or service changes to either Transport Scotland and/or the operator.**

28. **At six and eight years, contracts for operating the Clyde and Hebrides and Northern Isles contracts seem short by international standards and less likely to reward investment and decision-taking oriented towards the long-term. The Committee therefore agrees with Project Neptune that there would appear to be advantages in setting a longer contract, although this also depends on improved governance structures being put in place for their design, tendering and management. The Committee agrees the length of the contract should be longer and we propose 10 years.**
29. **We understand that these recommendations, if agreed to by the Scottish Government, carry a likely outcome of a 10-year direct award to CalMac. A direct award is a privilege and with it must come great responsibility for competent stewardship of Clyde and Hebridean ferry services during this period. Our recommendations on the next CHFS contract are therefore caveated on the Scottish Government, as the owners of CalMac, ensuring that it delivers real improvements for communities reliant on these services of the Clyde and Hebrides. This relies on the recommendations we make later on this report on improved services, and on responding to community need, to be accepted and delivered in the new contract.**

Modern, economical and sustainable ferries - Investment in ferries and infrastructure

30. **The Committee strongly welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment, in early consultation on the Islands Connectivity Plan, to reduce the average age of the fleet to 15 years. However, previous commitments on fleet renewal have not been met. We call on the Scottish Government to set out what concrete steps (including financial commitments) it will be taking, within this period of under seven years, to deliver the commitment.**
31. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government provide a detailed breakdown of the projects within its Infrastructure Investment Plan and those outstanding from the Scottish Ferries Plan, and the anticipated budget required for these.**
32. **The Committee recommends the Islands Connectivity Plan contain long-term investment plans for a rolling programme of vessel renewal.**

Modern, economical and sustainable ferries - procurement and design of vessels

33. **The Committee is not qualified to suggest one design of ship over another. However, it takes seriously the suggestions from experts their views have been overlooked. We highlight this as a further example of where decision making within the tripartite arrangement has not been transparent.**
34. **While the Committee supports the Scottish Government's efforts to secure additional capacity at speed through leasing vessels, it recognises this is not a long-term solution. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government use the current opportunity of running a catamaran on some appropriate west coast routes to evaluate performance and establish whether this type of vessel, is suitable for general use on Scottish ferry**

routes.

35. The Committee has recommended the Scottish Government should establish a long-term approach to vessel replacement on a rolling basis to inspire confidence in ferry users. The Committee recommends standardisation of design will be essential to this in order to achieve best value and efficiency, both in the construction and resulting operation of the vessels. The Committee recommends the drive for standardisation must also include the fittings, fixtures and parts to achieve easy replacement as required.
36. The Committee recognises the role of small vessels, not least in their role to play in achieving net zero emissions targets give the technology for smaller vessels is more advanced. The work CMAL is doing on the [Small Vessels Replacement Programme](#) (SVRP) is a welcome step towards delivering a new generation of low emission small vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides fleet.
37. The Committee believes consideration should be given to whether routes currently served, or due to be served, by existing major vessels could be better provided by a higher number of smaller vessels.
38. The Committee has heard varying evidence on the specification of vessels in different circumstances, which emphasises the need for meaningful engagement with communities on their requirements. They are best placed to outline their needs. We include staff and crew in this.
39. The Committee has recommended the Scottish Government should consider the future of CMAL, both within the context of the Project Neptune proposal for merger with CalMac and on giving further consideration to assimilation within Transport Scotland. The status quo is unacceptable. In this context, an evaluation of the improvements made to procurement processes for vessels by CMAL should take place.
40. The Committee requests quarterly updates from the Scottish Government on progress towards the completion of the vessels being built by Cemre Marin Endustri A.S in Turkey.

Modern, economical and sustainable ferries - sustainable ferries

41. The Committee recommends that the next Climate Change Plan and the Islands Connectivity Plan should mirror the commitment in the Clean Maritime Plan that by 2025 "All new vessels being ordered for use in UK waters are being designed with zero emission propulsion capability."¹
42. The Scottish Government plan to develop the Islands Connectivity Plan in sections and the Low Carbon Plan will be the final aspect of the draft Islands Connectivity Plan to be considered. The Committee asks the Scottish Government to respond to its concerns that reduced carbon emissions risk being treated as an add-on rather than an integrated element of all aspects of the Plan, starting with the limited consultation process

currently underway on ports and harbours.

Modern, economical and sustainable ferries - sustainable ferries - fuel source

43. **The Committee calls for a Scottish Government update on its efforts to "actively pursue opportunities to source liquefied natural gas (LNG) fuel supplies at locations within Scotland". ²**
44. **The Committee calls on the Scottish Government to provide details of the supply chain of liquefied natural gas (LNG) proposed for use once Hulls 801 and 802 are delivered, including work to source this locally. If it is not possible to source this locally, the Scottish Government should provide an assessment of the carbon savings achieved by transporting LNG on long over-land distances as compared to using diesel on the intended routes.**

Modern, economical and sustainable ferries - sustainable ferries - investment and incentives for innovation

45. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should consider how local authorities can be supported with sufficient resource and to develop skills in procurement of low and zero carbon vessels.**
46. **The Committee looks forward to the recommendations of the Net Zero Investor Panel and recommends the Scottish Government consider where and how these recommendations can be best applied to support the decarbonisation of ferries.**

Modern, economical and sustainable ferries - ports and harbours

47. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should through the Islands Connectivity Plan establish a plan to continue to identify ways in which it can support development and standardisation of ports and harbours. The public sector needs to work strategically in partnership with private and council-owned harbours to replicate the success of joined up installation of weather monitoring equipment for other aspects of harbour infrastructure, especially those supporting decarbonisation of vessels.**
48. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should consider how it can influence ease of access to ports and harbours to support potential additional operators who may wish to provide services on top of the bundle.**

Ferry services fit for the future

49. **The Committee has concerns about the impact a substandard ferry service has on the economic success of island and coastal communities, and has heard concerns about the jeopardy the ferry service creates for exploitation of the industries of the future in island and remote communities. ³ The Committee considers the issue of fares for commercial and freight vehicles, as well as RET, is part of a larger conversation on support needed to facilitate successful businesses working on and delivering to island**

communities. This includes inspiring confidence by anticipating success and delivering a service with the capacity to accommodate economic growth. There are questions about the role of the Scottish Government and the point at which businesses making a profit should no longer be reliant on public subsidy. These issues must be considered in a joined up way through the National Islands Plan and the Islands Connectivity Plan.

50. The Committee recommends questions on freight, fares and economic growth in island communities should be considered comprehensively through the Islands Connectivity Plan to ensure strategic and coherent policies are developed.

Ferry services fit for the future - integrated transport

51. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government provide details of the proposed review of transport integration at ferry terminals, including—
- Remit and scope of the review;
 - Public engagement;
 - How modes of transport as set out in the Sustainable Transport Hierarchy will be prioritised in the review; and
 - Anticipated timescales for completion.
52. The Committee is of the view the ICP should set out proposals for end-to-end journey opportunities for freight. End-to-end journey opportunities for passengers should include the use and promotion of electric vehicle hire which could be used by tourists, businesses and the health service for example.

Ferry services fit for the future - Equally accessible to everyone

53. While welcoming the availability of funding for improvements to accessibility of Scotland's ferry fleet, the Committee recommends an audit of accessibility to identify priority areas for upgrade or systems of provision of further support, including priority boarding and disembarking, for disabled passengers.
54. The Committee seeks an update from the Scottish Government on engagement with disabled passengers in the design of new vessels, including in the Small Vessel Replacement Programme.

Ferry services fit for the future - Reasonable fares - Road equivalent tariff

55. The Islands Connectivity Plan is a chance to reconsider, in a comprehensive manner, fare policies including the Road Equivalent Tariff. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government evaluate the Road Equivalent Tariff as part of its consultation and work on fares in the Islands Connectivity Plan, before taking any decision to reform or extend RET. To avoid unintended consequences, this evaluation should include modelling

for the increased traffic this may produce, associated costs of demand on island infrastructure and the vessels/services required to mitigate potential capacity issues this could cause to existing services.

Ferry services fit for the future - Reasonable fares - young people

56. The Committee is of the view that young people in ferry-dependent communities should have concessionary fares for ferries and recommends that the Scottish Government, as part of its Fair Fares Review, explore this option.

A service shaped by ferry communities

57. Throughout our inquiry we have identified areas where further oversight and expert consideration of issues is required, as well as adjudication of competing needs and interests and, where necessary, the protection of the passenger interest. Increased regulation of ferry services in Scotland is required and the Committee believes the Scottish Government should demonstrate in its response to this report and in the Islands Connectivity Plan how increased regulation and oversight will be achieved. The Committee is of the view there should be stronger regulatory function for ferry services and this could take a number of forms. This could include an independent ferry regulator, which Project Neptune considered, and we seek the views of the Scottish Government on this.
58. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government provide an update on the status of the revised communications and stakeholder strategy highlighted in its response to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, including a copy of this and information on how it is implemented and how its performance is being measured, including feedback from communities.
59. The Committee recognises board membership is a powerful and meaningful form of participation but believes it is not the only route to representation in decision making. In conjunction with our previous recommendation that the next CHFS contract must include specific requirements for the operator to work with local authorities and communities on service delivery and decision making, the Committee recommends the Scottish Government give consideration to how board membership of publicly owned ferry delivery organisations could include meaningful representations of the island communities they serve.
60. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government set out the skills it believes are currently missing from public ferry delivery organisation board applications from island community members and consider how it achieve the "upskilling" it considers necessary and within its responsibility.
61. The Committee recommends trade union representation on the boards of public ferry delivery should be explored further, akin to the model adopted for ScotRail in 2022.

62. The Committee seeks clarification on who would take the decision on the constitution of boards of publicly owned companies and requests an update on Scottish Government discussions with CalMac and CMAL about adding a trade union representative to their boards, including—
- Considerations on union representatives on the Board;
 - The action to be taken were union representatives to be appointed to the board; and
 - The timescales for such action.
63. The Committee recognises the merits presented to us of locating management positions for public ferry delivery organisations within the communities they serve and recommends the Scottish Government reflect on the evidence presented to us on this.
64. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government consider how it could use the forthcoming new iteration of the CHFS contract to mandate regular meetings with stakeholders by senior management, as well as local operational officials, of public ferry delivery organisations.
65. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should consider what further Scottish Government support can be provided to the Ferries Community Board and in particular to facilitate structured and regular access to organisations such as Transport Scotland, CalMac and CMAL.
66. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government review the patchwork approach of organisations representing community interests in ferry services and ensure there is a consistency of representation and access to decision makers to all communities in formally established groups.
67. The Scottish Government should clarify the status of the Islands Transport Forum and whether this has met yet.

Council-run ferry services

68. The Committee supports the principle of local management of lifeline ferry services and therefore supports the principle of council-run ferries. However, the Committee believes they should be supported to provide lifeline services where required. The Scottish Government must collaborate effectively in joint ventures with local authorities on reasonable needs and achieve long-term clarity on ongoing support (capital and revenue) to ensure communities have a reliable local ferry service now and in the future.
69. For vessel procurement a number of options need to be looked at, including local authority and Scottish Government joint ventures.
70. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government undertake a

comparative review of the status of services currently delivered by local authorities in Scotland with a view to establishing a minimum standard for consistent delivery across the country. A local authority working group should be established to consider how to implement this.

- 71. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should include Transfer of Responsibility as an option for councils to apply for in the next Islands Connectivity Plan. The Scottish Government should reconsider whether the criteria for this are still appropriate and will ultimately lead to value for money and quality services.**
- 72. The situation with the Corran Ferry is deeply regrettable having been predicted by Highland Council when they gave evidence earlier this year.**

Fixed links

- 73. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government commission a comprehensive study into the viability, cost and potential savings of fixed links in appropriate locations across Scotland. It should work with local authorities to build on the experience they have developed in initial scoping exercises to identify sites. The review must consider an assessment of increased costs of transfer of traffic to roads where available were ferry or fixed link ruled out. Auditing the environmental and carbon emission benefits and disbenefits must be a key element of any such studies.**
- 74. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government provide an update to the Committee on the timescales for its investigation of fixed links in the Sounds of Barra and Harris and between Mull and the mainland. This should include an update on community engagement.**

Membership changes

75. During this inquiry there have been membership changes on the Committee—
- Edward Mountain replaced Dean Lockhart as Convener.
 - Ash Regan replaced Natalie Don as a Committee Member.
 - Fiona Hyslop resigned as a Committee Member on 14 June 2023.
76. The Committee thanks all former Members for their contribution to the inquiry.

Introduction

77. At our meeting on 15 March 2022, the Committee agreed to undertake an inquiry into ferry services.⁴ The Committee had been referred [Petition 1872: Improve the reliability of island ferry services](#) which said the unreliability of ferries has resulted in losses to island economies relying on tourism and in travel restrictions for island residents, who need reliable and regular services.
78. The Committee agreed the petition was important but noted there were concerns with island connections beyond those covered by the petition. We also noted the ten-year Scottish Ferries Plan (discussed below) was coming to an end, and this provided an opportunity to take a fresh look at the issue and to make recommendations. We agreed to take a comprehensive look at ferry services and to launch an inquiry into current and future ferry provision in Scotland.
79. After an evidence session where we heard from representatives of community groups, and shared a draft remit with them, we agreed a final remit for our inquiry.⁵ This was drawn deliberately widely, to enable us to look at the whole issue of services for ferry-dependent communities in the round, with nothing off the table and with a focus on the future and on sustainability: both sustainable communities and sustainable transport.

Remit - Inquiry into a Modern and Sustainable Ferry Service for Scotland

The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee are holding a major inquiry into current and future ferry provision in Scotland, which will ask—

1. What do island residents, businesses, and other ferry users need in the short, medium and long-term from Scottish Government-supported ferry services?

Meeting the needs and sustainability of island and remote rural communities and businesses, including secure jobs providing ferry services.

- Meeting the needs of mainland communities and businesses, including visitors.
- Service needs at different times of the year.
- Which needs are better met by other modes, e.g. air travel where available?
- How should the Scottish Government support council-run ferry services?
- How can ferry users and island communities be involved in decision making at strategic and operational level?

2. What institutional and funding arrangements would most likely deliver service patterns, vessels, and crewing arrangements that meet the needs of current and potential future ferry users?

- Can the current tri-partite arrangement (Transport Scotland, Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL), Ferry Operator) for managing most ferry service provision be

improved?

- Can current tendering arrangements be improved, e.g. through service unbundling?
- Can Scottish Government subsidies be better deployed to meet the needs of current and future ferry users?
- Are current services providing best value for the taxpayer?

3. What vessel size, type, deployment and crewing arrangements would best satisfy the needs you have identified?

- Vessel size and type
- Sustainable propulsion systems (including energy-use and moves to low carbon systems)
- Compatibility with harbour facilities
- Onboard crew accommodation
- Current procurement criteria and processes: what are their strengths and weaknesses? Are they “future proofed” to accommodate new technologies and the need for sustainable low-carbon travel?

During the inquiry, the Committee will also pursue the following objectives:

- To engage with communities impacted by problems with ferry services and understand better the impact these have, particularly on island life (in particular, the effects of weather on services, sustainability of population and attracting inhabitants, access to key services and businesses)
- To understand what a modern ferry service should look like from different perspectives, from island and mainland residents, individuals and businesses,
- To consider and draw attention to best practice in ferry provision and service including considering examples from private enterprise or internationally;
- To hold the Scottish Government, operators and asset holders to account and scrutinise carefully whether their decisions and strategies are in the best interests of service users and the taxpayer;
- To help inform Scottish Government’s policies and strategies on ferries and island connectivity as well as the procurement process for future vessels.
- To identify the needs and views of different groups in particular young people and disabled people;
- To adapt scrutiny to the different needs, experiences and solutions of different islands and communities;
- Recognise the importance of island impact assessments carried out by relevant

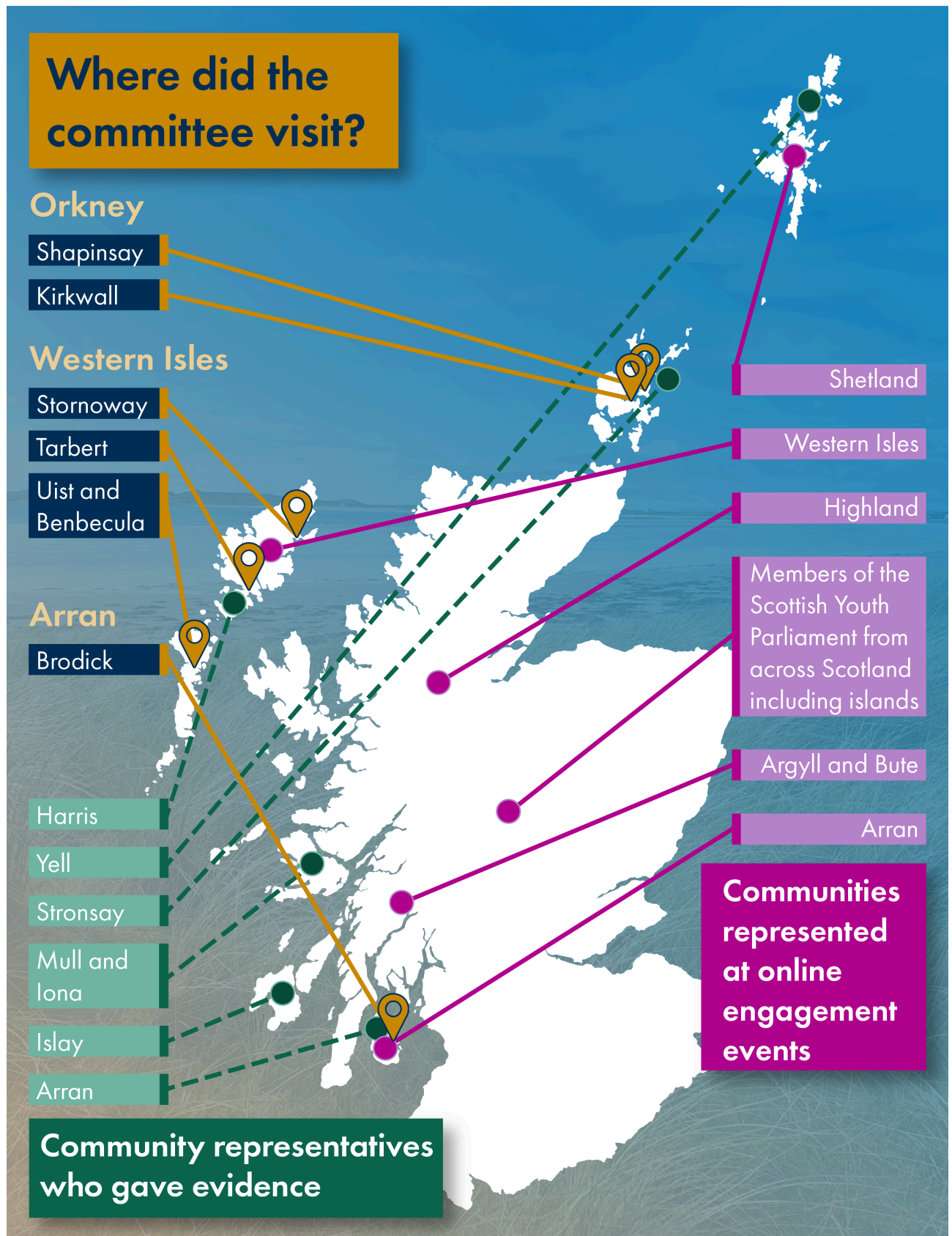
authorities; and

- To incorporate the contribution of transport to net zero goals into scrutiny throughout the inquiry.

Conclusions and recommendations will be set out in a report to the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland, setting out the Committee's views on how best to secure a state-funded ferry service that is future-proofed, compatible with Scotland's net zero goals and will meet the needs of all service users, having regard in particular to the long-term sustainability of island communities.

Evidence, visits and engagement

80. A call for views took place over the summer of 2022, with just under 400 responses. People and groups have continued to provide the Committee with information and views throughout the inquiry.
81. Over 12 oral evidence sessions, we heard from private operators, business representatives, trade unions, ferry experts and academics, local authorities, ferry operators, including private operators, Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited (CMAL), and the Scottish Government. A full list of the evidence sessions is available at Annexe A.
82. We also made visits to Arran and the Western Isles to experience ferry services and hear people's views. In June 2022, some Committee Members visited Orkney. This was in relation to other business but the delegation took the time to discuss the state of local ferry services with the Council while there. This was instrumental in helping the Committee determine that Council-run ferry services should be within the inquiry remit. The Convener then made a follow-up visit to Orkney during the inquiry.
83. We also held online engagement events with—
 - Members of the [Scottish Youth Parliament](#), including the Transport, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee; and
 - Residents of island communities around Scotland.
84. Summaries of the themes discussed at these events are available in Annexe C and D.



85. We wanted this to be an inquiry with community need at its heart. We are therefore grateful to have received so many submissions from people and groups who use ferry services, alongside a wide variety of other stakeholders. We are also grateful for the hospitality and assistance received during visits to island communities and to those who gave up their time to share their lived experiences with us in our engagement events. These added depth and important context to the evidence received in written format and in Parliament. We are especially grateful for

engagement of this level in the context of the "consultation fatigue" reported by many ferry-dependent communities.

The key message

86. The key message of this inquiry from service users is that ferry services are not good enough and need to change.⁶ This message is not just about "delivery", in the sense of reliable services, standards of service, customer relations, ticketing and so on, vitally important though these are. It is also about truly prioritising the needs of ferry-dependent communities, listening to them, restoring trust between users and providers, and putting all this at the heart of our ferry services.⁷ Any new vision for ferries and island connectivity must be based on meaningful engagement with communities by the Scottish Government.
87. The then Minister for Transport acknowledged "we now have to reform how ferry services are delivered in Scotland, but with the guiding principle that our island communities have to be part of what comes next."⁸
88. Overall, dissatisfaction is high, particularly in relation to services along the western seaboard. In some communities, people have spoken of a feeling of being abandoned. Many council-run services are also viewed as being close to breaking point.⁹ An overview of how lives and communities have been affected by the current standard of service would include—
- Education and young people;
 - Missed school hours;¹⁰
 - Lack of access to extra-curricular activities;¹¹
 - Health, families and caring;
 - Disrupted attendance at medical appointments on the mainland or another island;¹²
 - Lack of reliability causing anxiety and mental health issues;¹³
 - Inability to reliably care for relatives and friends, disrupted end of life care; having to miss funerals;¹⁴
 - Business and work¹⁵
 - Impact on tourism: the cost of cancelled holidays and the chilling effect that unreliable services have on future bookings;¹⁶
 - Transport requirements of the whisky industry and the impact on its growing needs;¹⁷
 - Agriculture, fishing and seafood, for instance missing the crucial window to

get livestock or perishable foods to market;¹⁸

- Renewable energy industry requirements;¹⁹

- Depopulation;²⁰

- Inability to recruit people to live and work on islands²¹, including on ferries;²² and

- Commuting becomes impossible leaving people no choice but to move.²³

89. Above all, people living on islands or other ferry-dependent communities have emphasised that ferry services are *existential*: they are literally lifeline services, necessary for the community's survival. We heard warnings of a tipping point or spiral effect when consistently poor or unreliable transport connections can risk leaving previously flourishing and robust communities fragile and potentially unviable.²⁴

90. There is some good practice to build on. Some services are broadly reliable and largely retain the trust of the communities they serve. Islanders also recognise that ferry staff - many of them islanders themselves - are trying to do their best under difficult conditions. Ferry-dependent communities are not looking to return to any perceived 'golden age' and recognise change is needed. They have spoken to the Committee with authority and insight derived from everyday lived experience about what reshaped ferry services could look like. They have also shared their ideas about more radical solutions such as fixed links and about reducing the environmental impact of maritime travel. Engaging with service users on their positive proposals for change was the most rewarding part of the inquiry. Taking our cue from them, we want this to be a forward-looking report.

91. As discussed later in the report, some progress has been made since 2021 with an acceleration of investment, new vessels with more being currently procured and built, and infrastructure upgrades all welcome developments in the last few years.

92. Service users' needs are straightforward although, starting from where we are right now, this does not necessarily mean that they will all be easily deliverable. They want services that—

- Are reliable;
- Are resilient and flexible;
- Provide sufficient passenger and vehicle capacity;
- Charge reasonable fares;
- Are environmentally sustainable and future proofed, in terms of new technology and climate change;
- Are easy to use;
- Are accessible to the whole island community, including children and young

people, older people, or people with disabilities; and

- Are "listening services", with usable, trusted channels for dialogue between users and providers, with capacity to respond to reasonable requests. Many service users also wanted partially devolved decision-making to be a feature of future service provision.

93. We have kept these needs in mind throughout the inquiry and they have helped determine the content of this report.

94. The report is in three parts—

- A brief factual overview of Scotland's ferries, recent relevant scrutiny by Scottish Parliament committees, and Scottish Government ferry plans.
- The next section seeks to understand and measure what has gone wrong, focusing particularly on the current main reason for public concern about ferries: unreliable services, unavailable boats and cancellations.
- The final section discusses vessel requirements; and how services could be better configured in future, asking what needs to change and in what way. It is the most important and therefore longest part of the report.

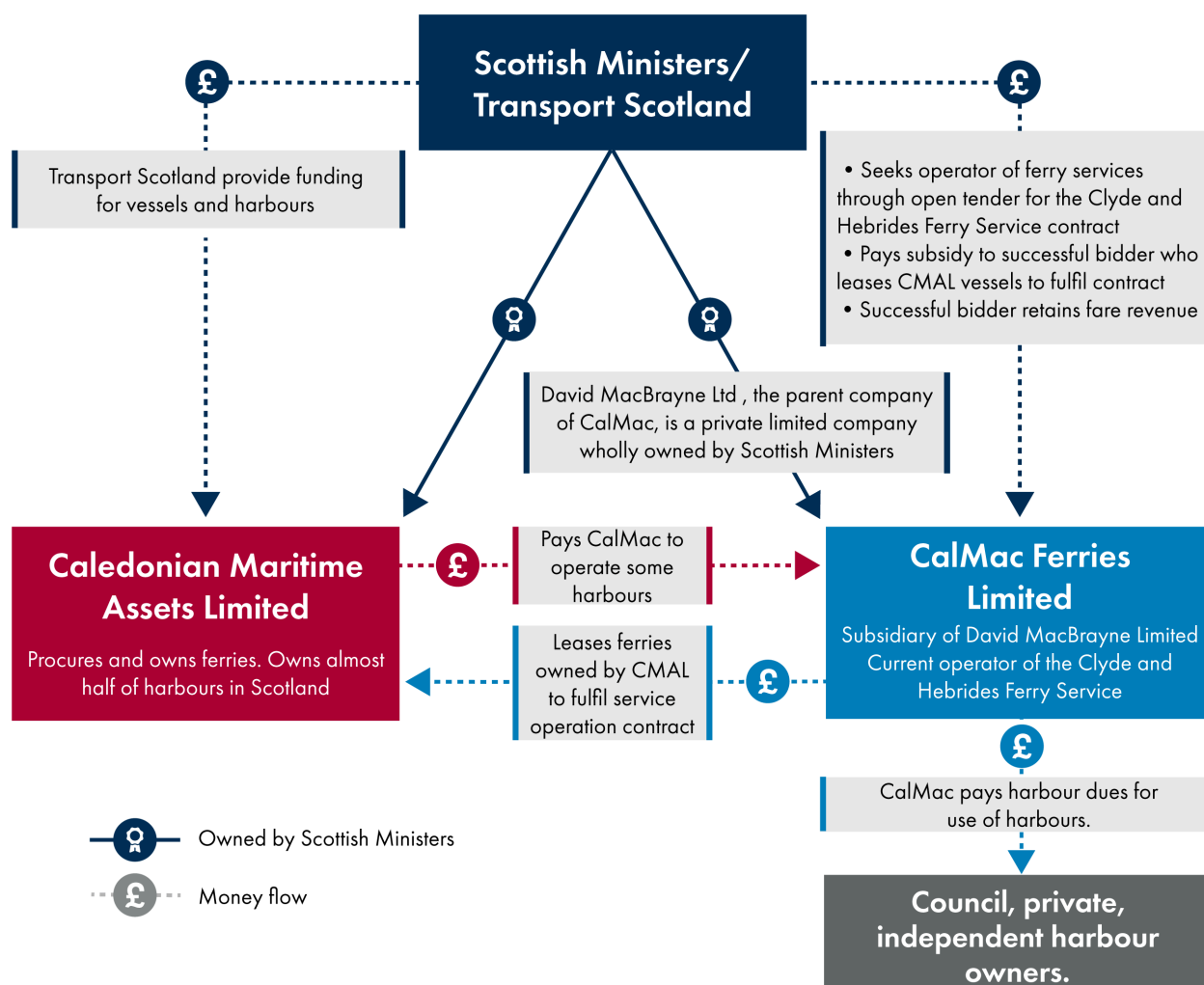
An overview of Scotland's ferry services

95. Ferry services in Scotland are delivered by a variety of bodies. The majority of these are publicly run services delivered by the Scottish Government and local authorities. Private operators and community groups also run several ferry services.
96. The Scottish Government currently supports ferry services in the Clyde and Hebrides and to the Northern Isles.

Scottish Government-supported services

97. Most Clyde and Hebrides ferry services, and most services linking the Scottish mainland and Northern Isles are specified, let, and funded by Transport Scotland. Multi-year contracts for the provision of these services are awarded following competitive tendering exercises. The current operators are—
 - [CalMac Ferries Ltd](#) (CalMac): A subsidiary of David MacBrayne Ltd, a company wholly owned by the Scottish Ministers, which provides ferry services to the 22 islands and four peninsulas on the Clyde and Hebrides. The current contract runs between October 2016 and October 2024.
 - [SERCO NorthLink](#): A subsidiary of Serco PLC which operates ferries between the Scottish mainland and the Northern Isles. The current contract runs between June 2020 and June 2028.
98. CalMac is part of what is known as the tripartite arrangement, a term used to describe current organisational structure for CHFS delivery. The three points of the triangle are the Scottish Government itself in the form of Transport Scotland (who report directly to the Scottish Government), CMAL, a company wholly owned by Scottish Ministers and CalMac.

The Tripartite Arrangement



99. Ferries for both the Clyde and Hebrides and Northern Isles services are owned not by the operators but by **CMAL**. CMAL also leads on the procurement of new vessels. It owns 37 ferries, 32 leased to CalMac and five to Serco NorthLink. CMAL also owns 16 Clyde and Hebrides harbours and owns or leases properties and port infrastructure at 10 other Clyde and Hebrides locations.
100. The current Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service (CHFS) contract requires the operator to provide the specified services using vessels leased from CMAL. This requirement extends to using specified new vessels procured by CMAL, as and when they become available for use. This can be contrasted with the Northern Isles Ferry Service (NIFS) contract and rail service contracts where more flexibility over the stock used is available provided specified outcomes are delivered.

Other ferry services

101. Inter-island services within Orkney and Shetland are also public services, provided by the two island councils, rather than under the tripartite arrangement. (This is further discussed in the **Council-run ferry services** section of this report). Argyll and Bute and Highland Councils also operate some ferry services. This includes the Corran ferry service on Loch Linnhe (run by Highland Council) which has run into

crisis during the lifetime of this inquiry. There are a number of private sector operators, of which two - Western Ferries (Gourock-Dunoon) and Pentland Ferries (St. Margaret's Hope to Gills Bay) - run vehicle ferries.

102. All ferry services in Scotland are within the ambit of this inquiry, with a particular focus on those providing lifeline services to communities. The remit allowed us to reflect on whether private ferry companies, as well as overseas services, potentially offer any useful lessons for public sector ferry provision.

Prior Parliamentary scrutiny

103. The Scottish Parliament's session 5 (2016-2021) Rural Economy and Connectivity (REC) Committee concluded an inquiry into Construction and Procurement of Ferry Vessels in Scotland in December 2020.²⁵ Its report made a series of recommendations to the Scottish Government on previous construction and procurement processes, with its main focus on the process around new Hulls 801 and 802, then under construction by Ferguson Marine. It made strident criticisms of many aspects of that process. More generally, it criticised—

”a cluttered decision-making landscape that lacks transparency and where there have been varying degrees of failure by all of those with decision-making responsibilities, including the Scottish Government.”²⁶

104. The report further called for a "root and branch overhaul of current decision-making structures" in order to—

”...consider the relative roles and responsibilities of all bodies involved in decision-making around the procurement of new vessels and should also include an appraisal of whether each of these bodies should continue to exist or whether there is scope to streamline and simplify decision-making structures by merging or abolishing certain of them.”²⁷

105. Hulls 801 and 802 remain uncompleted. In this session, the Public Audit Committee has recently held an [inquiry into an Audit Scotland report on the delivery of Hulls 801 and 802](#). The impact of these two vessels being absent from service has understandably been raised in evidence to this inquiry. Other than that, we have sought to avoid replicating detailed scrutiny of this issue, except in the context of learning lessons for future procurement.

Scottish Government Plans and Project Neptune

106. In December 2012, the Scottish Government published its Ferries Plan 2013-2022, which it described as the "first ever comprehensive review of ferry services in Scotland."²⁸ In 2018, this was complemented by a Vessel Replacement and Deployment Plan.²⁹ Some of the goals set out in the two Plans have been met. For example, there have been port and harbour upgrades, increased sailings to some islands, additional services added and some services were brought within the CHFS network.³⁰ Since 2013, the Scottish Government has delivered three new

small hybrid vesselsⁱ as well as the MV Loch Seaforth in 2014 and corresponding upgrades to the harbours.³¹ Contracts have been awarded to Cemre Marin Endustri A.S in Turkey to build four ferries to include services to Islay, Jura and the Little Minch. These have been scheduled for delivery in October 2024 and February, June and October 2025.³²

107. It has not achieved—

- Replacements for the MV Hebridean Isles, MV Isle of Arran and MV Isle of Mull; and
- Replacement of small vessels (MV Isle of Cumbrae, MV Loch Linnhe or MV Loch Riddon).ⁱⁱ

108. It was a broadly shared view in evidence to this inquiry that delivery of some aspects of the Ferries Plan in isolation, without the required levels of fleet modernisation, was a cause of current difficulties. An example of this is the introduction of the Road Equivalent Tariff (RET), a scheme designed to achieve parity of fares based on distance that has tended to make fares less expensive. Without the level of fleet renewal anticipated in the Plan, this has placed additional pressure on the network. It is estimated that by 2018, RET has increased network-wide passenger numbers by 11.6% and cars carried by 20.6%.³³ Statistics produced by Transport Scotland have shown passenger, commercial vehicles and buses, and car traffic on subsidised ferry services have risen each year since 2015 (not including reductions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021).³⁴

109. An Audit Scotland report on Transport Scotland's ferry services was published in 2017 and noted the lack of "Scotland-wide, long-term strategy" for ferry services and ports and harbours. It called for this to be created, including provisions for measurement and review, how it would contribute to National outcomes, assessment of long-term affordability and details of how spending will be prioritised across the whole ferry network.³⁵

110. The Ferries Plan will be replaced by an Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP). The change of name indicates a change of emphasis away from ferries alone to considering island transport in the round including, for instance, the possibility of bridges or tunnels, as well as onwards and connecting travel.³⁶ It was not possible to consider these issues in depth during this inquiry, but they are important and there are short discussions of the main points raised on fixed links and integrated travel later in the report.

111. The draft of the first part of the plan published for consultation makes clear it refers only to CHFS and NIFS.³⁷ We heard views from local authority representatives that, at this early stage in the Plan's development, there had been little engagement with council services.³⁸ Instead, it appeared that the Plan's focus would be on CalMac routes. They told us that it would be "disappointing" for communities served

i ie a vessel capable of running on more than one fuel source.

ii A list of all the vessels within the CHFS and NIFS network, and their ages, can be found at Annexe F.

by council ferries if the Plan took this "narrow" approach.³⁹

112. The Scottish Government had previously indicated that the ICP would be in place by the end of the 2022.⁴⁰ This has now been delayed and a revised completion date has not been announced.⁴¹ The delay is regrettable given the clear need for change, but it has enabled more time for this inquiry, as it has been our working assumption that the right place to implement our report recommendations would be in the Plan.
113. The plan is being developed in stages. (See Annexe E for a timeline, as currently understood by the Committee.) The first consultation is on the Long-Term Plan for Vessels and Ports on the Clyde & Hebrides and Northern Isles networks (2023 – 2045).⁴² This was prioritised "to give confidence that investments are being planned and actions are being taken".⁴³ There appear to have been further delays, with the consultation not yet fully public, despite an announcement from the Scottish Government that a full draft would be made publicly available in "early 2023". (In February, the then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, told us consultation would start in April.)⁴⁴ The draft was instead shared with selected stakeholders for early comment.
114. While everyone agrees that a new Plan, and a fresh start, is needed, we note views from the Chair of the Ferries Community Board, Angus Campbell, that "there is space for more community voices in the shaping of it" and he committed to feeding back any views heard on the ICP during his consultation work on Project Neptune.⁴⁵
115. Project Neptune is a Scottish Government-commissioned review of the institutional arrangements for management and delivery of the CHFS. The report was delivered to the Scottish Government in February 2022 and published in September. It is in two parts—
- Part One - Governance, Internal Controls and Value for Money;⁴⁶ and
 - Part Two - Strategic Framework of Options for the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service Network.⁴⁷
116. On most of the key issues discussed later in this report, the Project Neptune review seeks more to clarify available options, and their potential benefits and disbenefits rather than making express recommendations. It says it is for Transport Scotland and its stakeholders to further evaluate these options, in consultation with ferry-using communities.⁴⁸ Options were assessed for their ability to provide best value.⁴⁹

117. **An Islands Connectivity Plan is an opportunity for fresh thinking about how ferries are run in Scotland and how the transport needs of islands and other ferry-dependent communities are met. It is also an opportunity to reset the damaged relationship between island communities and all those responsible for delivering public ferry services. If the Plan is to be successful—**

- It must be a truly comprehensive plan, covering all modes, or potential modes, of maritime transport that are an alternative to ferries, including air, bridges, causeways and tunnels, and connecting and onward travel;
- It must also take account of the position and future needs of *all* ferry-dependent communities, including those currently served by council-run ferries;
- It should be integrated with other key Scottish Government policies, for instance the Climate Change Plan and the National Islands Plan;
- It must cohere. While we understand the pragmatic reasons for consulting on separate "pieces" of the Plan, the final document must be a single integrated piece of work. To ensure this, there must be an opportunity for key stakeholders to comment on and propose changes to a final draft before publication;
- Plan preparation needs to move at pace. It is important that island communities and other key stakeholders see that change is coming; to address the sense of drift and abandonment felt in some communities and to enable positive choices to be made about the future. Signs of delay in the consultation process for the Plan are concerning and the Committee asks for an update on timetabling from the Scottish Government;
- It must, at the same time, be based on consultation with representatives of ferry-dependent communities, with their needs put at its core. They must have ample opportunity to express their views at every major stage of the Plan's development. We ask the Scottish Government to provide more information on its engagement strategy for islands and other ferry-using communities;
- It should include specific and timetabled targets (for instance on fleet replacement) and outline a plan for achieving each major target; and
- It should set out a system for its own monitoring and evaluation, including annual reports.

Understanding and measuring the problem

118. Some issues with ferry provision are historic, going back some years. However, there is a growing sense of a worsening problem with ferries in Scotland, particularly on routes along the western seaboard, that many communities have even called a crisis. A mass of evidence from individuals, businesses and community groups gave examples of services gone wrong, alongside suggestions of various possible root causes. These included age or design of vessels or lack of maintenance, more extreme weather, staffing issues, or a more precautionary approach to piloting. More fundamental issues such as a lack of strategic leadership, lack of investment, lack of accountability or lack of incentives or self-correcting mechanisms within the current tripartite system were also cited.
119. None of these appear to the Committee to be mutually exclusive: they might be mutually reinforcing. For instance, it has been suggested anecdotally that some cancellations formally attributed to "weather" might be a result of greater risk aversion, itself a possible product of ageing vessels.⁵⁰

Recording reliability

120. Recognising that disentangling all these factors to better understand the root causes would not be easy, the Committee nonetheless asked for, and sought to interrogate further, the official data on reliability provided by the two main operators.
121. CalMac's figures showed "contractual reliability" for 2021-22 of 98.76%. For scheduled sailings delivered (described as "actual reliability"), the figure was 93.11%.⁵¹ NorthLink reported 2880 operated sailings in 2021-22 and 97 cancelled sailings, resulting in a reliability figure of 96.6%.⁵²

CalMac reliability statistics

Year	Scheduled Sailings	Cancelled Sailings	Additional Sailings	Operated Sailings	Cancelled Due to Weather
2020	119,988	7434	4908	117,462	6107
2021	155,198	9351	5661	151,508	4506
2022	171,402	11301	5553	165,654	5679
Overall Total	446,588	28,086	16,122	434,624	16,292

NorthLink reliability statistics

Year	Operated Sailings (includes additional sailings)	Cancelled Sailings	Cancellation figure "after relief event" ⁱⁱⁱ
July 2020 - June 2021	2832	107	39
July 2021 - June 2022	2880	97	0

122. CalMac's figures include reasons for cancellation, as discussed below. NorthLink did not provide information broken down by reason for cancellation.⁵³
123. Particularly in the case of CalMac, the relatively high reliability figures recorded in operators' own data does not match the experiences communities were reporting to the Committee. In particular, it was suggested official reliability figures were not characteristic of travel on "major vessel(s)".⁵⁴ Communities told us that official figures did not reflect their experiences and some are collecting their own figures.⁵⁵
124. We heard that weather-related cancellations have become more common and sought to explore this further.⁵⁶ CalMac provided information showing that weather-related cancellations⁵⁷ accounted for 50% of cancelled sailings in 2022, and in some areas over 90%. For example, on the Ullapool to Stornoway route 6% (146) of scheduled sailings were cancelled, but 91% (133) of these were due to the weather.^{iv}
125. Cancellations due to weather are not included in contractual reliability statistics to avoid commercial pressures to sail.⁵⁸ Robbie Drummond of CalMac suggested this explained the difference between the official statistics and what service users were telling the Committee.⁵⁹ Despite describing the "actual performance" figures as "the real one that our islanders and communities understand", Mr Drummond said contractual reliability statistics were the "important" ones.⁶⁰
126. In 2021/22, cancelled sailings on the CHFS network were 10,825, up from 8347 the year before. These included sailings caused by the following which CalMac considered to be within their control—
 - "Force Majeure" events which in 2021/22 accounted for 2053 cancelled sailings
 - Mechanical problems with ships which in 2021/22 cancelled 1678 (up from 1064 in 2019/20).
127. A category CalMac did not consider within their control were "Scottish Government Approved" cancellations, which rose from 120 in 2019/20 to 1551 in 2021/22.
128. In combination, these three categories of cancellation just outnumber the cancellations caused by weather (5282 against 5113 cancellations).
129. When CalMac gave oral evidence, we asked them to define "Force Majeure" and "Scottish Government Approved" cancellations. They could not do so at the meeting but undertook to follow up in writing.⁶¹ It transpired that "Force Majeure" refers to "... provision within the contract where sailings can be cancelled for unexpected, substantial events."⁶² CalMac said all cancellations under this heading related to the COVID-19 pandemic—

iv A table containing the weather related cancellations by route is available at Annexe J.

- ” "These cancellations were due to either planned cancellations to service to minimise travel to the island communities in compliance with Scottish Government covid guidance around essential travel, or due to lack of crew/staff due to covid outbreaks." ⁶³
130. This does not explain figures provided under that heading pre-March 2020. CalMac's letter also states "Exceptions are measured against the timetable published and agreed with Transport Scotland. During peak covid we were running essential only timetables and the lower number of sailings would not appear as force majeure." ⁶⁴
131. In relation to "Scottish Government Approved" cancellations, Chris Wilcock of Transport Scotland said—
- ” "My understanding of CalMac's categorisation is that that is when we give it relief for known events, such as closures at Uig or other places, or when there is an outage of a vessel and CalMac cascades other vessels to provide relief. There are arrangements and agreements in the contract that allow certain changes.....It is about my team asking whether there are legitimate elements whereby on a contractual basis those would not count in those statistics."
132. CalMac's letter told us that Scottish Government Approved figures refer to "...sailings which were cancelled to allow a vessel to be cascaded to another route to maintain lifeline connectivity." ⁶⁵ Noting a lack of relief vessels, CalMac said cascading was the only option to ensure a lifeline service across the network. ⁶⁶
133. CalMac said cascading did not appear in reliability statistics.^{v 67} During visits and engagement events, people in some areas reported a feeling that cascading was a process that always favoured some routes over others. Collecting statistics on cascading would help evaluate that claim.

134. **Solving problems with our ferry services requires first being able to accurately measure them. Rebuilding public confidence in ferry services also starts with measuring performance in a clear way that inspires trust, even if the message the figures convey may at times make for uncomfortable reading. The Committee believes that current methods of gathering statistics on Scottish Government-funded services do not do either of these points fully and satisfactorily. CalMac's criteria for measuring reliability are opaque, poorly understood and apparently not widely trusted within ferry-using communities. NorthLink's publicly available figures on cancellations contain even less detail.**
135. **The Committee calls on the Scottish Government to undertake a comprehensive review of how data on the performance of CalMac and NorthLink services is gathered. This should take into account service**

^v The letter to the Committee said "The contract also goes further to exempt against reasons which enhance the provision of lifeline services such as, medical emergencies, bereavement issues, emergency situations and **cascading vessels to support elsewhere within the network** ."

users' own view of what issues should be recorded. Statistics must accurately reflect the actual experience of travellers. At the very least, the "actual performance" figure for cancellation or significant delay of services should be published alongside the "contractual reliability" figures cancellations in order to better reflect the customer experience.

136. **Going further, statistics should ideally provide sufficient detail to allow government and service providers to assess the root causes of poor service provision, route-by-route, so that they are in a better position to fix them, as well as to get the more strategic "big picture" decisions right when these are called for. Statistics on cancellation or delay caused by cascading services (i.e. moving a vessel to cover a vessel loss elsewhere) should also be recorded on a route-by-route basis.**
137. **Whilst respecting the autonomy of local authorities, the Committee recommends the principles of data gathering are applied to all publicly-funded ferry services.**

Customer satisfaction

138. A subset of ferry-related data are statistics on customer satisfaction.

NorthLink Customer Satisfaction 2022

Positive feedback	103	50.5%
Neutral/observations	96	47.05%
Negative feedback	5	2.45%
Total positive/ neutral feedback	199	97.5%

139. Passengers appear to be broadly satisfied with the service operated by NorthLink. ⁶⁸ Shetland's constituency MSP said it provided the "best service it can within the confines of the contract and current infrastructure". ⁶⁹ (The maritime trade union, Nautilus International, suggested that - compared to CalMac - NorthLink benefited from slightly more modern vessels and timetables that afforded more time for maintenance time. ⁷⁰)
140. CalMac reported meeting their target of 85% customer satisfaction. ⁷¹ Some doubts were expressed about this by island communities ⁷² and the Committee notes that the level of satisfaction among island dwellers was consistently below this. ⁷³
141. CalMac told us it will be outsourcing collection of customer satisfaction information ⁷⁴ and Transport Scotland said it is "developing performance indicators that will be distinct from contractual targets, to better reflect the real experience of passengers." ⁷⁵

142. **The Committee welcomes undertakings from CalMac and Transport Scotland to, respectively, outsource customer satisfaction data-collection**

and develop new performance indicators. We call on the Scottish Government to ensure that new approaches are tested on user groups that include representatives of ferry-dependent communities and other regular ferry users.

What are the root causes of problems with the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services?

143. Absent more reliable data, ascertaining the root causes of the decline in ferry services is harder than it should be. However, the wealth of evidence and other information presented to the Committee during the inquiry was useful in clarifying many key issues.

Fleet age, maintenance and capacity

144. In its 2020 report, the then REC Committee commented on "a failure by successive administrations in Scotland to develop and implement an effective strategy for renewing the fleet".⁷⁶ During this inquiry, we heard that the Scottish Government and its agencies must speed up vessel replacement.⁷⁷ The Scottish Government's failure to meet its own targets in its 2013-2022 Plan were outlined earlier. It is also not clear to the Committee why it took CMAL until 2021 to produce its Small Vessel Replacement Programme⁷⁸, intended to implement commitments set out in a ten-year plan by then reaching its final year.⁷⁹
145. The average age of the 37 vessels leased to CalMac and NorthLink is currently 24.5 years.⁸⁰ A benchmarking exercise carried out under Project Neptune, comparing the CHFS fleet to those of four other countries or territories, indicates that this does not make Scotland an outlier, as fleets in those territories were around the same average age or older.^{vi} However, the Scottish fleet has certainly been ageing contributing to increased unreliability, with more mechanical breakdowns and vessels spending more time out of service being fixed.⁸¹
146. CalMac's statistics showed that mechanical breakdown is one of the main reasons for cancellations on its routes.⁸² In 2021-22, the Wemyss Bay to Rothesay route experienced the most mechanical problems. (One of the two vessels on this route, the [MV Argyle](#), is one of three CalMac vessels not leased from CMAL.)
147. Older vessels are also more costly to maintain⁸³ and money spent in this way is money not available for more strategic long-term purposes. We heard views that it is taking longer and costing more to find replacement parts, especially specialist parts for uniquely designed vessels.⁸⁴ CMAL told us that responsibility for

^{vi} The Committee notes that Project Neptune's data on the age of Norwegian ferries does not appear consistent with evidence from a Norwegian expert [Dag Hole] which indicated that the Norwegian fleet is much younger than the Scottish fleet.

maintenance and repair lies with the ferry operator.⁸⁵ Evidence from the private company Pentland Ferries highlighted the importance of inbuilt redundancy within their vessels, e.g. in the form of additional engines.⁸⁶ CMAL confirmed to us that such redundancy would be designed into new vessels.⁸⁷

148. In its first stage of consultation on a new ICP: the "Islands Connectivity Plan Long-Term Plan for Vessels and Ports on the Clyde & Hebrides and Northern Isles networks (2023 – 2045) – the Scottish Government sets out a commitment to reduce the average age of the fleet to 15 years by the end of the decade.
149. Fleet capacity (i.e. number of vessels in service) is, on paper, a distinct issue. However, it became clear in evidence that capacity is a key element in the overall "health" of any fleet, as the lack of it risks boats being overworked. A lack of slack within the fleet also increases the general risk of cancellations, delays and unpredictable service.⁸⁸ It is clear that there is no excess capacity within CalMac operated services, and some Council-run services were also felt to be seriously overstretched. We heard views that this leads to the regular dry dock maintenance being missed.⁸⁹ We also heard that, as vessel maintenance programmes often take place in winter, this can leave vessels less capable in the seasonal conditions to operate the service, leading to more breakdowns or disruptions.⁹⁰
150. The Committee heard of the urgent need for investment in the ferry service⁹¹ and of failure over a prolonged period to dedicate adequate funding required to maintain Scotland's ferry fleet to an acceptable standard.⁹² We were also told where funding had been made available, it was badly managed and failed to secure maximum benefit for passengers.⁹³
151. We heard views that operators should be looking to buy or lease existing vessels as a short-cut to increasing capacity.⁹⁴ CMAL and the Scottish Government both told us this was an option they had explored but that it was not easy to buy or lease the right type of vessel in a competitive market.⁹⁵ Kevin Hobbs of CMAL said the organisation had looked at 650 ships over a 5-year period in a quest to secure additional second hand tonnage.⁹⁶ The Scottish Government has since leased the MV Alfred from Pentland Ferries, although its transfer and entry into service was delayed.⁹⁷ Even more recently, the removal of the Alfred from the Pentland Firth route has had regrettable knock-on consequences for that service, underlining that (even if the cost implications, which may be considerable, are left aside) buying or leasing suitable vessels within Scotland may not be a simple short-cut.⁹⁸
152. While there was consensus that new boats were needed, and that this was a matter of relative urgency, community representatives stressed the importance of listening to ferry users about their needs before making major commitments⁹⁹ and this was something CalMac agreed with.¹⁰⁰ As discussed further below, there are a number of different views on which principles should guide decision-making on fleet replacement and on how these should be weighted.

Weather and climate

153. With bad weather one of the main cause of cancellations ¹⁰¹, we sought to interrogate whether there has been a trend towards more extreme weather and if so whether this appears to be one of the root causes of a decline in services. (In the context of ferry sailings "extreme weather" mainly means high winds, although other factors such as visibility are of course important.) A Met Office report "about whether the climate of Scotland has been getting stormier with impacts on the ferry services to Scottish island communities" ¹⁰² showed—
- ”
- "Climatologically the period 1981-2010 saw predominantly higher occurrence of specific weather patterns associated with stormy conditions than the period 1951-1980.
 - The period 2011-2020 saw 10% more occurrence of these patterns than the 1981-2010 climatology.
 - Currently it is not possible to ascertain if this is either a) natural variability or b) a climate signal. It is entirely feasible it could be some combination of both. However, given we know that the natural variability can be quite large, identifying a climate signal as a trend is very difficult to do." ¹⁰³
154. It added "Based on this analysis, a perception that it has become stormier in recent years (2011-2020) is a valid belief, and the period 1981-2020 is stormier than the mid-20th century." ¹⁰⁴
155. It is clear that this is a potentially complex issue as it may be the interaction of weather conditions with other factors, rather than weather alone, that causes disruption. We heard—
- Vessel ¹⁰⁵ and port design were important features and some are insufficiently resilient to bad weather. CalMac noted the impact of weather was often on whether a vessel could berth, rather than sail at all. ¹⁰⁶ CMAL said predicted sea level rises were being incorporated into designs of port works; ¹⁰⁷
 - Safety must be the primary concern for Masters, with whom the ultimate decision and liability for sailing lies. ¹⁰⁸ Unions highlighted the expertise they demonstrated in taking a variety of factors into account in any decision on sailing. ¹⁰⁹ CalMac said Masters were anecdotally reporting "increased depth of weather patterns and worse sea states that take longer to recover". ¹¹⁰ We heard the frustrations of communities when they were not provided with adequate vessels or port side infrastructure to allow sailings. ¹¹¹ On visits, we were told local masters were more confident making crossings in all weathers because of their knowledge of the area;
 - Changes in the law meant the acceptability of certain practices has changed; ¹¹² and
 - CMAL, NorthLink and CalMac highlighted increasing sophistication of weather monitoring tools. ¹¹³

156. Where possible, CalMac said it would "seek weather windows to run additional sailings" ¹¹⁴ and Robbie Drummond suggested sailings were cancelled as a last resort as it is—

” "...far more challenging for us to cancel a sailing than to operate it. We keep making that point to communities. We do not cancel a sailing lightly. That is absolutely the last resort because, when we cancel a sailing, we have disruptive passengers to deal with, communications to issue, and a vessel out of synch." ¹¹⁵

157. On whether average sailing conditions are, objectively, worsening in a way that impacts sailings no clear view emerged. The then Minister for Transport said "weather is impacting on sailings in a way that it has never done in previous years". ¹¹⁶ NorthLink noted no specific trends. ¹¹⁷ CalMac and others suggested that increased weather disruption was anecdotal and called for more research into the impacts of climate change on weather and ferry services to inform future strategy. ¹¹⁸ A submission from a community group shared data indicating no clear long-term trend towards more extreme weather in their area but an apparently increasing tendency to cancel sailings in high winds. ¹¹⁹

Staffing

158. During the inquiry, the Committee heard warm praise for staff across all aspects of ferry services, from booking offices to onboard crew. This report is a good opportunity to acknowledge the huge effort and the personal sacrifice of staff and crew during the COVID19 pandemic to support essential travel. ¹²⁰ It also provides an opportunity to make clear that the threatening behaviour of a small number of passengers towards ferry staff is completely unacceptable. ¹²¹ CalMac and NorthLink described processes to protect staff, including a zero-tolerance policy for violent and aggressive behaviour. ¹²²

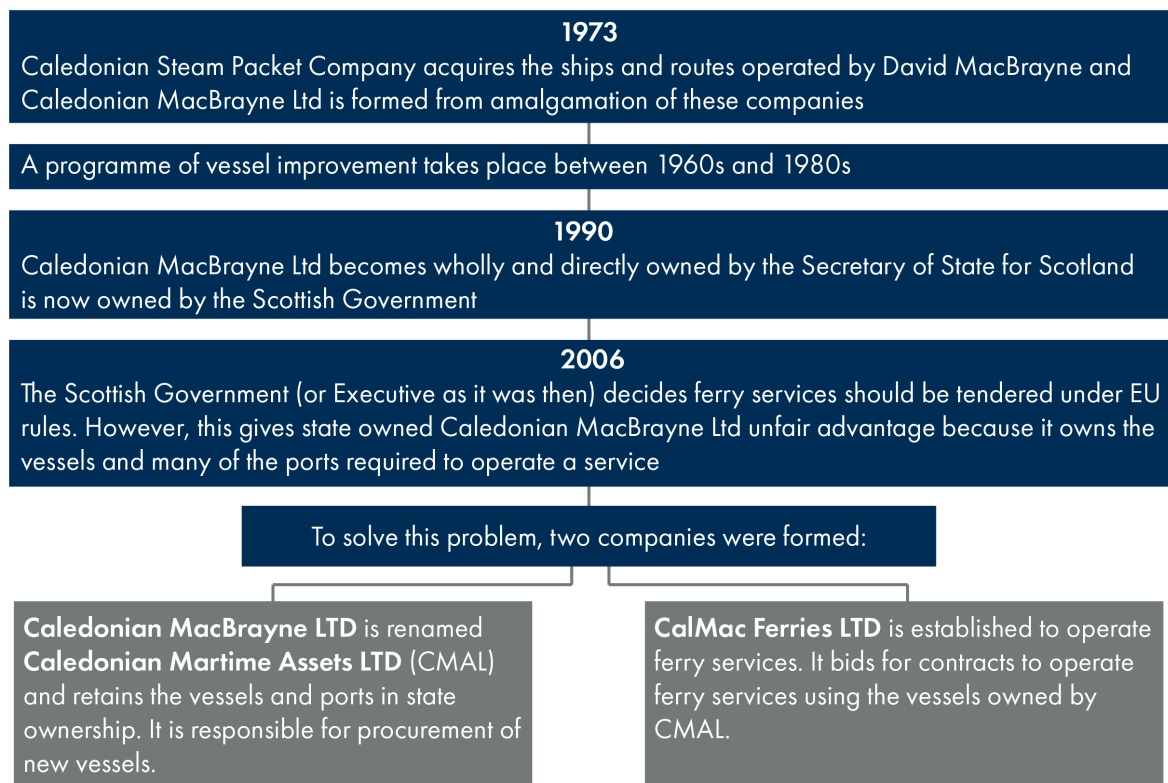
159. Staffing issues have sometimes caused delay or cancellation, but were not raised during the inquiry as a major cause of unreliable ferry services, particularly in a post-pandemic context. ^{vii} ¹²³ The need for investment to train and retain staff, partly with competitive and attractive remuneration packages, was highlighted to the Committee. ¹²⁴ This included developing skills in propulsion systems of the future.

The tripartite arrangement

160. Referring mainly to the tripartite arrangement between the Scottish Government, CMAL and the two operators, the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee's 2020 report described it as "a cluttered decision-making landscape that lacks transparency". ¹²⁵ Government support for ferry services in Scotland has been

^{vii} Where COVID or other illnesses rendered a sailing impossible due to lack of staff, it was suggested contingency staffing arrangements should have been made to facilitate the service.

provided since the 1960s. The following graphic is timeline of how this system has developed.



161. There is a list of private, independent harbour owners in Annexe K.
162. The intention behind the 2006 decision to split Caledonian MacBrayne Limited was to avoid a breach of European state aid rules. At the time the Scottish Government said—

” The European Commission has a duty under Article 88(1) of the Treaty to keep under review aids existing in Member States and to propose to the Member States appropriate measures required by the progressive development, or the functioning, of the Common Market. Following the introduction of Community guidelines on State aids to maritime transport, the Commission wrote to Ministers seeking information about the compatibility with Community law of our current arrangements whereby CalMac receives public subsidy to provide Western Isles and Clyde ferry services."
163. The tripartite arrangement is clearly not popular with stakeholders. It was not always wholly clear from evidence whether dissatisfaction is with the arrangement itself or with the perceived failings of any of the parties to it, for instance in relation to how they communicate or decisions they have taken. For many people, the two issues may understandably be merged. However, we heard views that the CMAL/ CalMac split was "artificial" ¹²⁶ or was a "clumsy solution" to the legal problem. ¹²⁷ We also heard views that the arrangement was a consequence of Scotland (unlike most comparable countries) retaining a state-owned company rather than private operators for so many of its routes. ¹²⁸
164. Further specific criticism of the tripartite arrangement was that—

- It is not transparent;¹²⁹
- It does not provide clarity on responsibility and accountability.^{viii 130} (In this connection, we note two instances during the inquiry itself of Transport Scotland correcting evidence of CMAL and CalMac on their role and responsibilities¹³¹);
- It does not incentivise value for money;¹³² and
- It does not seem to incentivise quality outcomes or effective decision-making.¹³³

165. Joe Reade of the Mull and Iona Ferry Committee said—

”when a vessel is being replaced, as is happening in Islay now, the decisions that go into the vessel design and bake in the operating costs....all those decisions about the operating costs of the vessel—are being taken by CMAL, whose success or otherwise is completely unrelated to the financial success of CalMac. If CMAL specifies a high-cost vessel, it makes no difference to its business or personal outcomes. In addition, CalMac can specify a vessel, but there is no opportunity for a competitor to offer a different vessel, because CalMac knows that the vessel that it specifies now is the same vessel that any competitor will be obliged to use, so it has no incentive in that regard.”¹³⁴

166. On their roles and responsibilities, the Scottish Government acknowledged there is a perception of "a lack of accountability among the parties".¹³⁵ CMAL CEO Kevin Hobbs conceded in their working relationship, the parties "might not be as joined up as we ought to be".¹³⁶ It was suggested the role of the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland should be focused on the tendering for contracts and the provision of capital funding for ferry procurement.¹³⁷

Political leadership

167. Throughout this inquiry, there has been frequent reference to the importance of having visible leadership and strategic long-term thinking and planning on ferry services.¹³⁸ Regardless of current complex arrangements, widely perceived as a barrier to accountability, ultimate responsibility for Scotland's ferry services rests with the Scottish Government, through the Minister for Transport, reporting to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition

168. Jenny Gilruth MSP was the Minister for Transport for most of this inquiry and was appointed to that role in January 2022. She was promoted to Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills in March. Between April 2023 and June 2023, the role was held by Kevin Stewart MSP. In June 2023, Fiona Hyslop MSP was appointed

^{viii} One example raised with the Committee was the closure of the mezzanine deck on the MV Hebrides during COVID and the subsequent decision to keep it closed. CalMac suggested in [correspondence](#) this was due to staffing and authorised by Transport Scotland.

Transport Minister. The new Minister for Transport is the eighth person in this role since the launch of the Scottish Ferries Plan in December 2012 and the Cabinet Secretary she will report to is the fifth Cabinet Secretary with responsibility for transport during this time.^{ix}

169. The Committee understands that ministerial change is a fact of political life but this level of churn is unhelpful as we heard from island communities on our visits.

What are the root causes - conclusions

170. Far too many ferry services in Scotland are unacceptably unreliable. This is causing real damage to communities, particularly those dependent on Clyde and Hebridean ferry services. For more fragile island communities, consistently unreliable services risk becoming a literal existential threat.
171. There is not one single root cause for unreliable ferry services but rather an interplay of factors. These include—
- An ageing ferry fleet and a ferry replacement programme that, over several years, has been slow and plagued with delivery problems. This points to issues with funding, procurement, design and specification, to be explored further in the rest of this report. Efforts by CMAL to purchase or lease existing vessels abroad are not working and should not be relied upon;
 - A fleet operating practically at full capacity, meaning that where a vessel is out of action, problems cascade through the service;
 - An increase in usage without increased capacity;
 - An administrative set-up - the tripartite arrangement - that is unresponsive and not transparent, and which does not sufficiently incentivise optimal decision-taking or secure value for money. The tripartite arrangement is widely perceived as enabling a "pass the parcel" culture in which no one takes ultimate responsibility for the effective delivery of taxpayer-funded ferry services.

^{ix} **Cabinet Secretaries with responsibility for Transport** - Nicola Sturgeon MSP (Infrastructure, Capital Investment and Cities - 2012 - 2014), Keith Brown MSP (Infrastructure, Investment and Cities - 2014 - 2016), Fergus Ewing MSP (Rural Economy and Connectivity - 2016-2018), Michael Matheson MSP (Transport Infrastructure and Connectivity - 2018- 2021, and Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport - 2021 - April 2023), Mairi MacAllan MSP (Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and a Just Transition April 2023-June 2023 and Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition June - June 2023 - Present); **Transport Ministers** - Keith Brown MSP (Transport and Veterans - 2012-2014), Derek Mackay (Transport and Islands - 2014-2016), Humza Yousaf MSP (Transport and the Islands - 2016 - 2018), Paul Wheelhouse (Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity - 2018-2021), Graeme Dey MSP (Transport 2021 - 2022), Jenny Gilruth MSP (2022-April 2023), Kevin Stewart MSP (April 2023 - June 2023) and Fiona Hyslop MSP (June 2023 - Present)

172. **The Committee is clear that this responsibility rests with the Scottish Government. It is our view that another factor contributing to underperforming ferry services has been a lack of continuity in political leadership, with most recent transport ministers lasting no more than 18 months in the role. Ferry-dependent communities in Scotland need continuity and confidence at Ministerial level: they need a champion in Government with the knowledge, experience and staying power to push through the reforms and improvements the sector now urgently needs. This requires an end to churn in the Transport Minister role.**
173. **We have already expressed disappointment at the lack of sufficiently robust statistics data on ferry performance and asked for the Scottish Government to address this. More data and analysis are required on—**
- **Weather: we need to understand better the impact of weather; for instance, whether there has been an objectively measurable increase in extreme weather, which has directly caused increased disruption, or whether other factors (for instance, ageing vessels) are leading to a more precautionary approach in response to bad weather. There is an important role for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in this work and we recommend that the Scottish Government seek to work with them on this; and**
 - **Maintenance, servicing and repairs, for instance whether it is costing more or taking longer than previously, or whether there are differences in the way operators service and repair vessels that appear to lead to measurably different results. The overall aim should be to benchmark ferry maintenance standards and ensure best practice is being followed on all taxpayer-funded vessels on taxpayer-supported routes.**

The future of Scotland's ferry services

174. The Committee has been clear our inquiry has been about the future of Scotland's ferry services and the steps required to progress from the current situation to one which meets the self-identified needs of communities. We will discuss—

- The organisational structure for delivery of public ferry services;
- The next CHFS contract;
- Vessel and service requirements and how to meet them;
- Community voices in shaping ferry services;
- Council run ferries; and
- Fixed links.

How should taxpayer-supported ferry services be run?

175. The then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, told us that the common theme arising from reports on ferry services was governance and that she did not yet believe the right structures were in place. She acknowledged Project Neptune's view the tripartite arrangement was often detached from Government Ministers, and agreed this was problematic. She highlighted the Ferry Communities Board, a now independent group of representatives of island communities, as having an important role in helping develop future structures. ¹³⁹

176. Ms Gilruth believed a restructuring of responsibility within Scottish Government was helping to strengthen the working relationship. ¹⁴⁰ She said collaboration had improved during her tenure as Minister but more needed to be done. However, she also suggested, for the sake of ferry communities, the priority right now should be to focus on addressing unreliability rather than governance issues. ¹⁴¹

177. In this section of the report we have considered evidence presented to us on—

- Project Neptune recommendations on a potential merger of CMAL and CalMac;
- The role of Transport Scotland including how it utilises expert advice and whether the functions and expertise of CMAL should be assumed within Transport Scotland; and
- The legal parameters of the Scottish Government's ability to restructure ferry delivery services.

A merger of CMAL and CalMac

178. Project Neptune considered the benefits and disbenefits of the tripartite arrangement and possible alternatives. Its recommended option was to establish a

business case to consider the amalgamation of CMAL and CalMac. It said that this "has the potential to contribute towards the achievement of Best Value."

179. This proposal attracted widespread but not unanimous support. Professor Neil Kay described CMAL as "an extra party" in the ferries system that "could well be a redundant factor".¹⁴² We heard a merger could improve collaboration and achieve efficiency savings. Unions backed a CalMac/CMAL merger.¹⁴³
180. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar was among those expressing doubts about a merger, on the ground that CMAL had shown a greater openness to dialogue and engagement than CalMac.¹⁴⁴ They said this would make CMAL's merger into CalMac a "retrograde step". Instead, they suggested merging CMAL with Transport Scotland to create a "Ferries Scotland", provided this went together with a more devolved model of decision-taking.

Transport Scotland

181. Transport Scotland is an executive agency of the Scottish Government, accountable to the Transport Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition. We heard views in evidence, as well as during engagement and on visits, that it does not seem to truly understand the needs of ferry-dependent communities or the detail of maritime transport policy.¹⁴⁵ Transport Scotland's lack of due diligence in relation to Hulls 801 and 802 has also been the subject of criticism by Parliamentary committees.¹⁴⁶
182. Transport Scotland told the Committee—
- ” "...we are generalist civil servants....we rely very much on the expertise in the other parts of the tripartite arrangement.....We do not purport to be the overall experts with all the answers; our role is very much to support ministers in their engagement around contract specifications and other elements. As with other large Government contracts, we also rely on the advice of industry experts and consultants, as people would expect us to do as part of such work." ¹⁴⁷
183. The Scottish Government previously convened a Ferry Expert Group. According to November 2018 minutes of the group's meeting at which its purpose was discussed—
- ” “The collective view was that the group was here to help advise Transport Scotland and that they would then come to the group with a specific issue or questions and the group would in turn advise Transport Scotland on options for moving forward.” ¹⁴⁸
184. However this was disbanded as, according to the Scottish Government it had "evolved into something away from its original aim".¹⁴⁹ Group members and others¹⁵⁰ have suggested it was disbanded because their views were not fully incorporated into decisions.¹⁵¹ Alf Baird said—

” "My experience in the EFG was that the tripartite members ignored most of the advice and recommendations made by the three independent members as to how to improve ferry service delivery, different vessels etc., and they simply continued to make costly mistakes on procurement, 'strategy' etc. The EFG was ended by officials when the very serious problems arose with vessels 801/02, and I expect the tripartite could no longer face independent members without some considerable embarrassment on their part; they had ignored our advice on alternative options and their 'strategy' had been found wanting." ¹⁵²

185. Professor Neil Kay said he left due to the lack of transparency of issues under consideration. ¹⁵³ It is also not clear why this group was disbanded. It was convened to provide advice where required and appears to have done that. Advice of some members appears not to have been taken. The then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, announced in September 2022 she had asked Transport Scotland to advise on establishing a round-table of experts at international level. ¹⁵⁴ The Committee also notes Transport Scotland has appointed consultancy firms to provide advice and expertise on the preparation of the next CHFS contract. ¹⁵⁵

A merger of CMAL and Transport Scotland

186. A further option considered by Project Neptune is a CMAL - Transport Scotland merger. ¹⁵⁶ It would involve Transport Scotland taking on the direct role of asset owner with responsibility for procurement and fleet renewal. The report described this as "similar to the Scottish roads network, whereby major trunk roads are owned by the SG and maintenance is procured via four separate contracts". ¹⁵⁷ The report notes—

- This option has potentially negative and positive implications for expertise, noting if assimilated there is a danger key staff may leave, but further expertise could be sought using contractors or recruitment; and
- It could help streamline the tripartite system and support accessibility to communities.

187. The report also noted some potential disadvantages: perceived complexities to do with the transfer of staff, pensions and chargeable assets.

188. Because of this, Project Neptune concluded, of the options available, a CMAL-Transport Scotland merger was not optimal. ¹⁵⁸

Legal parameters for change

189. Given the origins of the tripartite arrangement (discussed in [The tripartite arrangement section](#) of this report), we sought to explore whether exit from the EU, and from being directly subject to EU competition law, meant the Scottish Government now had more freedom to reconfigure the arrangement. Ms Gilruth told us that UK legislation - the Subsidy Control Act 2022 - has much the same effect as previous EU competition law. She said

” "...despite the fact that we have left the EU, a lot of the legislation that was previously in place is now covered by the Subsidy Control Act 2022. It is not clear to me from the advice that I have had from officials whether we have the freedom to do things markedly differently from what was previously envisaged." 159

190. She said legal advice would be sought on whether it would be possible to reconfigure relationships and to do things "radically differently". ¹⁶⁰ Follow-up correspondence from her ministerial successor confirmed this was still the position that they are seeking legal advice. ¹⁶¹ We note the reported services of the consultancy firm hired to provide expertise on the preparation of the next CHFS contract includes legal advisers who provided support to the Scottish Government on "CHFS1 procurement and the associated restructuring of Caledonian MacBrayne in 2006". ¹⁶²
191. CalMac declined to offer views on a preferred model but said that any chosen structure should deliver clarity and accountability. ¹⁶³ CMAL said the important goal was a structure which delivered good results. ¹⁶⁴ The CEO Kevin Hobbs said CMAL's lack of involvement in operations meant they did not have a role in crisis management and could thus "concentrate 100 per cent on strategy, the asset base and such like". ¹⁶⁵ He told us that his preference was for CMAL to continue. ¹⁶⁶
192. The then Transport Minister, Jenny Gilruth MSP, told us she was not "wedded to any one concept" except that "something will have to change pretty radically". ¹⁶⁷ She said merging CalMac and CMAL would raise questions about the Northern Isles ferry contract. ¹⁶⁸

Conclusions

193. **There is widespread agreement that the current tripartite arrangement for managing Scottish Government-funded ferries is not working effectively for the Clyde and Hebrides and is not adequately serving ferry-dependent communities. Change is needed. No clear consensus has emerged from this inquiry as to what form it should take. Preparation of the Islands Connectivity Plan enables a continuation of the conversation, and the Scottish Government must ensure all ferry users - and especially ferry-dependent communities - have the opportunity to participate in it.**
194. **However, it is important to build and maintain momentum for change, in order to create confidence that we will soon have more reliable ferry services. The Scottish Government must set out a clear backstop for taking a decision on future arrangements. The Committee considers the following principles are foundational for any modern administrative structure delivering ferries and ferry services for Scotland: it must—**
 - **Be truly accountable to ferry-dependent communities , to Government**

and Parliament;

- Be transparent;
 - Be competent. It follows from this that where decisions taken reflect a lack of competence there should be consequences;
 - Seek and achieve value for money in all major decisions, especially on ferry procurement. Again, for there to be public confidence in the system, there should be consequences for failures to do so;
 - Be responsive to need, including local need. In practice, this should include having mechanisms to enable a degree of localised management;
 - Support the delivery of net zero (as discussed in the [Sustainable ferries](#) section of this report).
195. The Committee believes Ministers and Transport Scotland must be guided by the best advice and expertise. In many circumstances this will come from CMAL and CalMac. However, where it requires an objective assessment of their performance and advice, other voices have a role to play.
196. The Committee supports a formal structure for Transport Scotland to hear from impartial experts and recommends the Scottish Government provide a progress update on work towards convening an international expert group. This should include the remit of the group and the status of the advice it provides.
197. Whilst Project Neptune recommended consideration of a CalMac- CMAL merger, there was a mixed response to this proposal during the inquiry and the Committee remains to be persuaded this outcome would be optimal. On its own, this change does not clearly deliver on the principles we have outlined. The Committee also observes that merging the vessel owner and ferry operator into a single organisation appears to cement CalMac Ferries' position as the provider of Clyde and Hebridean ferry services into the foreseeable future.
198. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should give consideration to a CMAL-Transport Scotland merger, to create a "Ferries Scotland" as an arm of Transport Scotland. This could streamline decision-taking, improve understanding of ferry services, and the importance of ferry services, within Transport Scotland, and at least partly address concerns the current tripartite structure enables a blame-shifting culture. The Committee considers the obstacles to merger that Project Neptune identified - such as issues over transfer of pensions - can, with sufficient political will, be addressed. However, other changes would still be required - as discussed later in this report - to ensure that ferry users have a service that better embodies the principles outlined above.

199. **Finally, it is regrettable that discussion on future ferry services has, for the entire length of this inquiry, been hindered by uncertainty as to whether the tripartite arrangement is, in some form or another, still required for legal reasons. It is unclear to the Committee why the Scottish Government does not yet have this clarity. It is also regrettable this situation has continued while community consultation on the proposals of Project Neptune has been carried out. The Scottish Government must make it clear in its response to this report whether it considers it would be lawful to merge CMAL and CalMac or to bring the functions and expertise of CMAL within the purview of Transport Scotland.**

The next contract for Clyde and Hebrides services

200. The current contract to provide the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service is due to end in 2024. The then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, said that CHFS3 contract was an opportunity to do things differently and learn lessons.¹⁶⁹ The Project Neptune report had provided the Scottish Government with a suite of options to consider for the CHFS network in this regard. Due to the proximity of the next iteration, we have considered the future of the Clyde and Hebrides Service in depth, although some of these considerations and recommendations will also be relevant to future procurement processes for the NIFS. The Committee has focused on —
- Whether the contract should be "unbundled", i.e. divided into a set of smaller contracts based around geographical clusters or potentially in some cases single services;
 - Whether the contract should be open to tender or be awarded directly;
 - The duration of any contract or contracts; and
 - What additional conditions, if any, should be written into future contractual arrangements.

Unbundling

201. The way in which the CHFS contract is currently packaged for tendering and delivery as a single "bundle" of routes was discussed evidence sessions. This means where bidders seek to deliver the services, they must bid to deliver all of them. The Committee explored whether this is the optimal way to deliver those ferry services or whether "unbundling" the package would achieve better results.
202. However, an issue faced by the Committee throughout this discussion was a lack of clear definition of the extent of the unbundling being referred to. It could encompass various scenarios. It could mean separation of all routes into separate tender packages attractive to the private sector, or it could mean a division of the current bundle delivered by CalMac into different geographical areas. Professor Neil Kay of Strathclyde University told us joint ventures were common elsewhere and the

public-private dichotomy was misleading, proffering the view CalMac could successfully bid for smaller bundles potentially with delivery partners. He said were unbundling to be considered, a decision would have to be taken on the extent of this but he suggested it did not have to be either route-by-route or whole bundle distinction.¹⁷⁰ Services could be broken down into a few smaller bundles for example.¹⁷¹

203. The Project Neptune report described several options on decentralisation¹⁷² —
- Decentralisation of power to procure and manage ferry services using centrally owned vessels;
 - Decentralisation of power to procure and manage ferry services and vessels (also involving passing ownership of ports and harbours to local authorities where applicable); and
 - A hybrid model where Transport Scotland operate major routes and local authorities assume responsibility for smaller ones (as happens in Norway).
204. Norway was alone in the international examples considered by the Project Neptune report in decentralised delivery, however the Committee heard this was a common response to competition law requirements across Europe.¹⁷³ Countries such as Greece and Denmark operate systems tendering for smaller contracts or packages of routes.¹⁷⁴
205. The Scottish Government had previously ruled unbundling out as an option for consideration in 2014.¹⁷⁵ In a statement to Parliament, the then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, said the then First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon MSP,—
- ” “...has been absolutely clear that we will not consider unbundling or privatisation, and the report sets out in further detail some reasons why that will not be pursued.”¹⁷⁶
206. The then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, said if she felt unbundling would be a “silver bullet, it would be on the table”. She said she did not believe unbundling would work given the “variety of routes and vessels that we have in CalMac”. She continued that her focus was on improving reliability and resilience, and confirmed her belief the way to deliver this was through extra tonnage.¹⁷⁷
207. The Committee heard support for unbundling, predominantly due to allowing for more competition in the sector.¹⁷⁸ Stakeholders told the Committee that private sector operators would be able to deliver value for money¹⁷⁹, efficiency¹⁸⁰ and flexibility¹⁸¹ and would inject a service-improving level of competition currently not incentivised in the tripartite model of delivery.¹⁸² This was partly to do with the ownership of the vessels resting with private operators, as happens in Norway.¹⁸³ Arguments in favour included—
- It could facilitate faster, simpler tendering processes and more agile contracts;
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- Tendering for smaller bundles could allow for a system akin to the Norwegian model to develop.¹⁸⁵ Project Neptune was described as "disappointing and expensive" as the system employed by the international comparator most akin to Scotland, Norway¹⁸⁶, had already been ruled out.;¹⁸⁷
- Roy Pedersen, an author and consultant, told the Committee small bundles with maximum community contribution was "the answer".¹⁸⁸ It could bring decision making, potentially through operation and ownership of ferry services¹⁸⁹, closer to communities.¹⁹⁰ Conversely, the need for community ownership was seen as a failing of publicly delivered services¹⁹¹ and the complexities of doing so were noted;¹⁹²
- It could achieve better value for money;¹⁹³ and
- It could offer commercial opportunities leading to new operators providing services desired by communities. Services offered by private sector operators in Scotland were much praised.¹⁹⁴ We heard the model implemented by Western and Pentland ferries should be replicated by public services to deliver value for money. This included their levels of onshore and onboard service, their approach to vessel procurement and the crewing and operation of vessels. Both organisations suggested there were other routes on which commercial services could be successful.¹⁹⁵ Recognising this has been ruled out however, the possibility of additional privately operated services on top of the core bundle was raised, with particular reference to freight.¹⁹⁶

208. However, the Committee also heard arguments for most ferry services to remain publicly delivered and run.¹⁹⁷ Concerns regarding unbundling¹⁹⁸ included—

- It could add to existing problems with recruiting staff;¹⁹⁹
- It could lead to worse services in some areas while other, more profitable routes, enjoyed a better service;²⁰⁰
- More resilience and a better service were offered through public delivery;²⁰¹ Robbie Drummond of CalMac said that operating a large network allowed for contingency planning and unbundling could lead to duplication of effort, such as the need for individual operators to invest in additional relief vessels. He said this would not offer value to the taxpayer;²⁰² and
- Trade unions believed it could lead to private operators "cherry picking" the routes they wished to operate, resulting in the loss of a universal standard of service.²⁰³

209. Others agreed there were ways to utilise the expertise and benefits of both public and private sector organisations.²⁰⁴ For example, it was suggested freight only or overnight freight vessels may be a way to resolve this tension on some routes. The Committee explored whether this could be achieved in addition to current services provided through the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service contract.

210. This issue was exemplified in evidence by the needs of the whisky industry in Islay and considerations given there to chartering additional services.²⁰⁵ CalMac said it did not gather data on "quantity or type of goods transported in commercial vehicles" but that it was concerned about its ability to "manage the growing demands of the whisky industry" in advance of delivery the new ferries for the route²⁰⁶. Gordon Ross of Western Ferries proposed an additional service to support the growing needs of the whisky industry on Islay but said the procurement of new vessels for the route had overtaken this.²⁰⁷
211. Difficulties in accessing ports and harbours run by CalMac on behalf of CMAL, further deterred investment in establishing private, demand led services on routes in addition to the CHFS contract.²⁰⁸

Direct award

212. Project Neptune explored the prospect of a direct award of the CHFS contract. The decision as to whether a direct award is appropriate is integrated with other decisions on governance structures and long-term ambitions for the ferry sector, as highlighted by the Project Neptune report. The ability to do this depends on whether the Teckal Exemption could apply to the legal requirement to tender for CHFS contracts.
213. The Teckal exemption stems from a 1999 European Court of Justice ruling²⁰⁹ (further detail is available at Annexe L) and "allows for public contracts to be awarded to in-house companies under strict conditions relating to the parent authority's control and the functions performed."²¹⁰ The conditions of this are—
- ” • "the public body fully controls that company in a similar way to its own departments
 - the publicly owned company carries out at least 80 per cent of its activities with the public body."²¹¹
214. In 2016, the European Commission told the Scottish Government "the Teckal exemption should be capable of being applied to the maritime cabotage regulation, under strict conditions".²¹²
215. In May 2018, the then Minister for Transport and the Islands, Humza Yousaf MSP, acknowledged the European Commission thought it would be "challenging" for the Scottish Government to meet the criteria. However he stated "I remain fully committed to building a case for a direct award to an in-house operator that would satisfy the state-aid rules before the existing Clyde and Hebrides ferry services contract ends in October 2024".²¹³
216. Project Neptune also highlights the need for a direct award to meet procurement and UK Subsidy Control conditions.²¹⁴
217. The benefits of making a direct award would be to avoid the need for a competitive tendering exercise, saving public resource of Transport Scotland and CalMac.

However, the Project Neptune assessment of this was "due to the stringent requirements of making a Direct Award TS may have to invest a similar level of resource in proving that these requirements are satisfied." The report also noted it removed the competitive element which can drive quality and value.

218. In the previous tender exercise for CHFS2, the only other bidder, SERCO, submitted a non-compliant bid. It did not wish to accept the risk for the vessels due to its perceptions of insufficient information on their current state. This left CalMac as the only bidder. Transport Scotland did not consider the 350 commitments in the CalMac bid, making it hard to demonstrate the value it expects the contract to provide.²¹⁵
219. In evidence to us, the RMT called for CalMac to get the next CHFS contract by direct award.²¹⁶ The then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, had previously told Parliament this would only happen if communities were content with that option and mentioned the consultation work undertaken by Angus Campbell.²¹⁷
220. In March 2023, the then Minister for Transport, Kevin Stewart MSP, told us that legal advice is expected later in the year on the Scottish Government's abilities to redesign ferry services within the new UK Subsidy Control regime.²¹⁸ The Committee notes correspondence from the then Minister for Transport outlining the role of legal consultants with regard to preparation of the next contract. This includes "reviewing and advising on options and assisting in implementing the chosen strategy".²¹⁹

Contract length

221. The current CHFS and NIFS contracts are for six and eight years respectively. The Project Neptune report observed that this makes them shorter than benchmarked international examples as well as other Transport Scotland contracts such as those for rail. The Committee heard that Norwegian ferry contracts are for 8-10 years.²²⁰ Pentland Ferries said their rebuild schedule for vessels was roughly every 10 years²²¹ and Western Ferries suggested the length of the current tender was short in terms of allowing an operator to recoup investment in a vessel to operate the route.²²²
222. The Project Neptune report said the benefits of extending the contract length were--
- It could better support capital investment by an operator;
 - It could encourage long term decision making; and
 - It would allow an operator to align with Transport Scotland and CMAL's "asset renewal strategy" which in term could lead to reduction of the age of the fleet.
223. The then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, confirmed the length of the contract was being considered.²²³

Contract conditions

224. The Committee received views on what the next iteration of the contract should contain, including on—
- Contract variation;
 - Timetables;
 - The specification of use of CMAL vessels;
 - Length and complexity of the contracts for operators; and
 - Value for money and Key Performance Indicators.
225. CalMac can make changes to its contract by making a request to Transport Scotland to "improve the economy efficiency and effectiveness" of a service.²²⁴ It can make "operational variations" by notifying Transport Scotland.²²⁵
226. CalMac noted its ability to run additional sailings within the contract.²²⁶ More generally, it reviews timetables biannually as set out in the contract based on customer feedback. These are assessed for viability before presentation to Transport Scotland for approval.²²⁷ It was also made clear the decision was for Transport Scotland.²²⁸
227. However, it was suggested communities would wish for this to be more flexible rather than requiring application to Transport Scotland or Scottish Ministers.²²⁹
228. The Chair of the Ferries Community Board said—
- ” “One thing that we have to break from is having an operator being told to just do a timetable. That results in no recognition of need or of what the service should be. It stops flexibility...”²³⁰
229. On visits we heard contract changes required huge bureaucratic processes. Transport Scotland said there were reasons for this, noting the unintended consequences of contract changes posed challenges²³¹ and decisions were made on the basis of crewing hours, impacts on other communities and a principle that changes should be cost neutral.²³²
230. In evidence the contracts were described as unattractive and overly prescriptive.²³³ Professor Alf Baird, Western Ferries and Pentland Ferries described the challenges of the model for other operators, including the mandate to use CMAL vessels.²³⁴ The Committee heard in evidence the contracts are overly complex and inefficient in comparison to Norwegian counterparts.²³⁵
231. In terms of efficiency and value for money, the Committee was told—
- CalMac relies heavily on subsidy rather than achieving a profit;
 - Crewing levels on ferries exceeded what appeared to be required; and

- Procurement of "more efficient ships" could lead to "double the ships". ²³⁶

232. An Audit Scotland report ²³⁷ on Transport Scotland's ferry services was published in 2017 and found the amount of subsidies paid in the decade before on the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry network has risen by 185% due to "increase in services, new vessels and the introduction of the Road Equivalent Tariff". Orkney Island Council suggested the efficiencies achieved on the NIFS network could be replicated in CHFS. ²³⁸

233. The Audit Scotland report further noted—

” "Transport Scotland does not routinely measure the contribution that ferry services make to social and economic outcomes at a network level, which makes it difficult to determine whether its spending is value for money. Better information would allow Transport Scotland to demonstrate the impact of its decisions and the contribution that ferries make to the Scottish Government's National Outcomes."

234. The Committee heard the absence of information on the cost of delivering publicly funded ferry services, including on a route-by-route basis made it hard to assess value. ²³⁹ Other information such as social and economic factors, the impact on mental health of constantly feeling trapped, missing life events and depopulation meant true value for money was not being taken into account in decisions on ferry services and fixed links. ²⁴⁰ The Chair of the Ferries Community Board highlighted the socio-economic impact report ²⁴¹ carried out by the group and said, along with others, that such factors had to be considered. ²⁴² The draft Islands Connectivity Plan for Vessels and Harbours notes the challenges in quantifying information. ²⁴³

235. It said new Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for ferry services would be developed and these will be—

- Network reliability;
- Service and/or vessel/port outages – frequency and duration;
- Age of the oldest vessel in the fleet and/or age of vessels at replacement;
- Rolling average number of vessels replaced; and
- Capacity available and utilisation (passengers and vehicles).

236. These do not include community satisfaction rates. ²⁴⁴

Countdown to the next contract

237. In October 2017, Audit Scotland published a report on tendering for the current Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service Contract. ²⁴⁵ Among its key observations and recommendations were Transport Scotland must—

” Improve its approach to procuring ferry services. This should include—

- ensuring that procurement teams include staff with procurement qualifications and experience of the ferry sector
- applying lessons from previous procurement exercises
- building in sufficient time to prepare important project documentation, such as business cases
- ensuring that contract specifications are accurate, up to date and clear to potential bidders
- providing bidders with clear, good-quality and timely data to allow them to make informed bids" ²⁴⁶

and

"Strengthen its contract management arrangements by—

- ensuring there is a sufficient number of people, with the right expertise, to effectively manage ferry contracts
- involving the contract management team in ferry procurement exercises to inform its understanding of contract requirements." ²⁴⁷

238. On timescales, Project Neptune suggested the tender process could last at least 18 months and the contract's key commercial principles should be agreed by summer 2022. ²⁴⁸ It also said Transport Scotland should identify and incorporate long-term strategic objectives into the tender to ensure any structural changes complements the contract. The then Minister for Transport and Transport Scotland confirmed to the Committee these had not yet been agreed as the community consultation work undertaken on Project Neptune involved asking people what they would like to see from the next CHFS contract. ²⁴⁹

239. The Project Neptune Report was delivered to the Scottish Government in February 2022 but not published until the September of that year despite calls to do so. ²⁵⁰ Angus Campbell and the Ferry Community Board were asked to carry out consultation work which he said was due to conclude in March 2023. ²⁵¹

240. The tender exercise for CHFS2 was delivered on time but criticised by Audit Scotland for "delays and weaknesses in how Transport Scotland managed the procurement project". ²⁵²

241. The Committee accepts that the Scottish Government is likely to offer the next contract for Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services as a single bundle. We acknowledge there are benefits to a single bundle. These include greater service resilience, economies of scale, the ability to maintain relief vessels and to redeploy staff and vessels to deal with periods of disruption. However it does not believe these are being delivered on the CHFS network

by the parties to the tripartite arrangement and this needs to change. The Committee is content with the award as a single bundle on this occasion.

242. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should use the opportunity of the next CHFS contract to include specific requirements for the operator to work with local authorities and communities on service delivery and decision making.
243. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should consider how to facilitate easy use by private companies of Scotland's public ports and harbour network to allow for demand-led additional services to be provided with ease, for example for freight, provided this does not threaten lifeline services.
244. The Committee understands the Scottish Government's preference is to make a direct award for Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services and recognises the benefits of doing so. However, the Committee does not believe the position on whether this is possible is clear. The Committee asks the Scottish Government to clarify—
 - The outcome of consultation by the Chair of the Ferries Community Board, and whether it indicates that communities served by the CHFS network would prefer a direct award;
 - Whether it considers it would be lawful to make a direct award and, if so, whether it will do so;
 - How it will ensure a direct award will deliver value, taking into account the savings in not running a tender exercise compared with the resource required to ensure an award is compliant, and how Transport Scotland will ensure a direct award will deliver value as recommended by Audit Scotland.
245. The Committee believes that, if island communities appear to support making a direct award, and there is no legal barrier to it, then this should go ahead for the CHFS3 contract only. This would provide continuity of service and avoid disruption for communities in relation to a new contract that is now little over a year from starting. This does not mean "business as usual" for CalMac and should not set a precedent for future CHFS awards.
246. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government publish the outcome of the consultation of the Chair of the Ferries Community Board.
247. If it is to be tendered, the Committee recommends the Scottish Government provide details of how the process for tendering for the third Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services contract (CHFS3) contract will learn the lessons outlined by Audit Scotland.
248. The Committee believes the Scottish Government must begin to collect and analyse meaningful data to ensure true value for money is being achieved from spend on ferry services (particularly around vessel specification and fixed link proposals). This includes the socio-economic factors highlighted

by Audit Scotland and the Ferries Community Board in their reports, such as depopulation.

249. The Committee recommends Key Performance Indicators for the CHFS contract must include community and customer satisfaction rates and the gathering of this data must be done in a way which does not place additional burdens on communities.
250. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government design within the next CHFS contract a formal mechanism whereby communities could propose contract variation or service changes to either Transport Scotland and/or the operator.
251. At six and eight years, contracts for operating the Clyde and Hebrides and Northern Isles contracts seem short by international standards and less likely to reward investment and decision-taking oriented towards the long-term. The Committee therefore agrees with Project Neptune that there would appear to be advantages in setting a longer contract, although this also depends on improved governance structures being put in place for their design, tendering and management. The Committee agrees the length of the contract should be longer and we propose 10 years.
252. We understand that these recommendations, if agreed to by the Scottish Government, carry a likely outcome of a 10-year direct award to CalMac. A direct award is a privilege and with it must come great responsibility for competent stewardship of Clyde and Hebridean ferry services during this period. Our recommendations on the next CHFS contract are therefore caveated on the Scottish Government, as the owners of CalMac, ensuring that it delivers real improvements for communities reliant on these services of the Clyde and Hebrides. This relies on the recommendations we make later on this report on improved services, and on responding to community need, to be accepted and delivered in the new contract.

Modern, economical and sustainable ferries

253. Having highlighted the need for fleet replacement as one of the root causes of problems, the Committee considered evidence on the vessels required, including—
 - The investment needed to ensure vessels can be procured;
 - The process by which these should be specified and procured;
 - Future proofing and decarbonisation of Scotland's ferries; and
 - The port and harbour infrastructure to support these ambitions.

Investment in ferries and infrastructure

254. The Scottish Government has committed to reducing the average age of the

publicly owned ferry fleet to 15 years. CMAL was confident this could be achieved, but noted it depended on funding.²⁵³ Transport Scotland said there was “real momentum behind that in terms of the investment that is going in now”.²⁵⁴ The then Minister for Transport agreed that “accelerating investment” would bring down the average age of the fleet and achieve greater resilience.²⁵⁵ She highlighted recent funding decisions but said the investment needed would be “financially challenging”.

255. There were calls for the Islands Connectivity Plan to include—

- a review of the ship maintenance arrangements, with published deadlines around overcoming problems of vessel reliability, and for additional funding for the increased costs of maintenance”;²⁵⁶
- A transparent maintenance schedule;²⁵⁷ and
- An increase in preventative maintenance spend.²⁵⁸

256. In 2020, the Scottish Government published the Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP), a five year plan^x for delivering and investing in infrastructure projects. It pledged £580m of investment and an additional £115m for the two additional Islay class vessels.²⁵⁹ CMAL and CalMac both told us they were confident sufficient funding is now available for vessel replacement and harbour upgrades.²⁶⁰ However, they also said that higher inflation meant they could not buy as much as they previously anticipated.²⁶¹ CMAL told us both that “I do not think that we need anything more” and “we cannot buy as much as we thought we were going to buy”.²⁶²

257. CMAL told the Committee its [Small Vessel Replacement Programme \(SVRP\)](#) would see designs for 10 new 100% battery operated ferries completed in the first quarter of 2023, with the tendering process taking place in the last quarter.²⁶³

258. Contingency plans were another feature of calls for increased resilience.²⁶⁴ CMAL and CalMac indicated at least in the short term, relief vessels would greatly increase resilience.²⁶⁵ CMAL noted this would have cost implications.²⁶⁶

259. The Committee strongly welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment, in early consultation on the Islands Connectivity Plan, to reduce the average age of the fleet to 15 years. However, previous commitments on fleet renewal have not been met. We call on the Scottish Government to set out what concrete steps (including financial commitments) it will be taking, within this period of under seven years, to deliver the commitment.

260. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government provide a detailed breakdown of the projects within its Infrastructure Investment Plan and those outstanding from the Scottish Ferries Plan, and the anticipated

^x The Scottish Government's [Medium Term Financial Strategy](#) published in May 2023 noted an intention to extend this by 1 year to 2026-27.

budget required for these.

261. **The Committee recommends the Islands Connectivity Plan contain long-term investment plans for a rolling programme of vessel renewal.**

Procurement and design of vessels

262. In our consideration of procurement in this inquiry, we have sought to be forward-looking, whilst also learning lessons that will help faster and most-effective delivery of the lifeline services people rightly expect. The Public Audit Committee has led on scrutinising procurement concerns around Hulls 801 and 802.
263. Evidence the NZET Committee received related to—
- Whether CMAL have made the improvements recommended by the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee; and
 - Decision making on specification and design of vessels.
264. Both this Committee and the Public Audit Committee have received details from CMAL on the changes it has introduced to procurement exercises to build vessels.

Vessel specification

265. A major area where communities sought input was in vessel specification. The Committee heard communities should be involved from the outset of this process, when the desired outcomes and characteristics of the vessel are specified, rather than detailed technical specification – which are largely matters for naval architects, engineering experts and operators. Stakeholders acknowledged there should be a wider net cast in seeking views on vessel design. The then Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands committed to—
- ” ”improve transparency on how community views are taken into account in decision making, including providing a clearer explanation of why specific design decisions have been reached, and why on some occasions community or individual preferences have not been reflected in a bespoke design... We have already begun the process of developing a revised communications and stakeholder strategy.” ²⁶⁷
266. On community involvement in decisions on vessel specification, the Committee was concerned at CMAL's dismissive view of this. ²⁶⁸
267. Trade unions and others ²⁶⁹ told the Committee crew, staff and unions should be involved in vessel specification and design from conception stage. ²⁷⁰ Examples of where unions felt they could have been involved earlier included—
- If there is insufficient crew accommodation, this results in additional hotel costs;
 - On 801 and 802, they suggested they could have advised on earlier staff

training to use the dual fuel systems; and

- The crew accommodation is also at the rear of the ship where the most vibrations will be felt during docking, resulting in poor sleep for crew.

268. CMAL told the Committee of their working groups looking at new vessels, which now included “specialists who operate the ships”. The Committee welcomes CMAL’s involvement of masters, crew, and engineers in vessel specification, as it repeatedly heard there is little confidence in the expertise and qualification of those making decisions on ferry services.²⁷¹

269. The Norwegian model was heralded as “the operator of the vessel is also the owner of the vessel and people compete for the right to Government subsidy to operate a service on the basis of their efficiency and productivity. Therefore, their decisions are linked to their financial and business performance.”²⁷² As noted above, it was argued that the lack of commercial incentive by the operator in the Scottish system led to poor decisions on vessel specification.²⁷³

270. The role of the operator in vessel specification in Scotland was highlighted as important but the process for their involvement was not clear.²⁷⁴ The Mull and Iona Ferry Committee and the Arran Ferry Action Group were agreed Government should set strategic direction and operators should respond to that with plans fully cognisant of community need.²⁷⁵ CMAL²⁷⁶ and NorthLink²⁷⁷ highlighted the close collaboration between the operators and CMAL on vessel design. CMAL suggested operators were mainly responsible for vessel specification²⁷⁸, but also suggested it laid out pre-determined criteria (for example the length of a ship).²⁷⁹ CalMac said it was “agnostic on vessel design”.²⁸⁰ Stuart Garrett said it was the role of the operator to design ferries²⁸¹ while Robbie Drummond said “..we have to use whatever is provided to us and we will do that to the absolute best of our ability”.²⁸²

271. We have received a wealth of evidence on the merits of catamarans over monohulls.²⁸³ These included—

- Cheaper to purchase allowing for more boats for the same money and thus increased frequency of services;²⁸⁴
- Quicker to build;²⁸⁵
- More efficient to run and “half the powers requirement of a monohull, to they have half the emissions”;²⁸⁶ and
- They are lighter²⁸⁷ and more stable in the water.²⁸⁸

272. CMAL suggested it was not against catamarans. The reasons provided by NorthLink and CMAL for not opting for catamaran designs were confusing. For example, they said a catamaran could not be used in the Pentland Firth²⁸⁹, yet this is what Pentland Ferries does. The Scottish Government has since announced the chartering of the MV Alfred (although the transfer of this to CalMac was delayed

290).

273. Former members of the Ferry Expert Group reported they felt ignored on vessel design when proposing catamarans.²⁹¹ A further example was suggestions during the development of Hulls 801 and 802 where two smaller vessels were suggested for each route, but a larger individual vessel was purchased.²⁹²

Standardisation of design

274. The interoperability of the fleet and infrastructure is essential to securing the flexibility stakeholders told us they wanted.²⁹³ The Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee also called for "standardisation and simplification" of vessels and ports.²⁹⁴
275. Stakeholders called for—
- Vessels to be compatible with existing berthing facilities at many harbours²⁹⁵, citing frustration at the incompatibility of available vessels with various ports.²⁹⁶ We heard private operators have done this in recent vessel procurement exercises.²⁹⁷
 - Standardisation of harbour and port berthing facilities and use of technological advances like the automated systems used in some Norwegian Ports;²⁹⁸ and
 - New and renovated harbours should be future proofed for different types of vessels.²⁹⁹
276. Standardisation of harbours would also allow for the standardisation of vessels themselves to achieve economy of scale in procurement and building.³⁰⁰ CMAL noted the extent to which this was already happening, and said had the budget been available, further vessels could have been incorporated into the contract to build vessels at Cemre.³⁰¹ The Committee was pleased to hear the vessels coming on stream through the small vessel replacement programme are designed with a degree of uniformity.³⁰² CMAL told us this extended not only to the aesthetics of the boat, but also the machinery and navigational equipment.³⁰³

Smaller vessels

277. Several island communities expressed a preference for having a ferry fleet with fewer large vessels but more vessels overall.³⁰⁴ They felt this model would better suit the specific needs of their community. Suggested benefits included—
- Ability to increase the frequency of services;³⁰⁵
 - Inherent flexibility in the system, including more resilience and capacity
 - if there's an issue with one boat;³⁰⁶
 - Depending on the time of year as we heard extensive evidence on the

changing needs of business, community and visitors depending on the season;³⁰⁷

- Increase the number of scheduled sailings;³⁰⁸
- Able to dock in more (but not all) harbours without the need for work on the ports;³⁰⁹ and
- Cheaper to procure and run.

278. We heard views that a mixture of small and large vessels would be optimal, to derive the benefits inherent in both, along with the need for a whole system view on the types of vessels required.³¹⁰ It was also argued that increasing the number of vessels would increase the maintenance costs and potentially the crewing costs³¹¹, but there was also suggestion the increased frequency would also boost patronage and fare revenue, helping to offset increased costs.³¹²

Onboard crew accommodation

279. Mixed views were presented on whether onboard crew accommodation is always required on ferries serving short routes.³¹³ The need for such accommodation is dependent on several factors, including minimum crew complements, the length of the sailing day, the size of vessel, certification and the route it served.³¹⁴

280. Those in favour of onboard crew accommodation argued this allowed them to—

- Provide more sailings as part of the crew could rest during crossings (however, it was suggested CalMac operating hours do not require this);³¹⁵
- Made cascading vessels to service routes suffering a breakdown much easier if the crew was on board;³¹⁶
- Respond to emergency situations;³¹⁷
- Implement different shift patterns. For example two crews could run the vessel for longer operating hours each day;³¹⁸
- It had been beneficial during the pandemic to allow service to continue.³¹⁹

281. However, it was also suggested crewing levels could be examined.³²⁰ Those proposing vessels should not include accommodation for crew onboard said—

- It increased vessel weight and height, increasing fuel consumption and susceptibility to the wind;³²¹
- CalMac vessels were over staffed,³²² especially when compared with international counterparts (CalMac explained more crew was required here for the same vessels due to Maritime and Coastguard Agency requirements);³²³

- Some of the crew were providing unnecessary services (such as catering);³²⁴
 - Onshore accommodation should be provided (the cost of this was highlighted to us but it was also proposed it could have additional revenue raising functions for tourists or stranded passengers);³²⁵ and
 - Crews should be recruited from local communities to assist with population issues (although challenges with recruiting sufficient staff locally were also noted).³²⁶
282. In response to perceived inefficient crewing, it was suggested different vessel designs could reduce the personnel requirements.³²⁷
283. It was also proposed that where accommodation and crew facilities on board were necessary, the size of this could be examined.³²⁸ The importance of consultation with unions on the requirements of onboard crew were also emphasised.³²⁹ RMT told us there was often insufficient crew accommodation in response to questions on their involvement in vessel specification.³³⁰

Role of CMAL

284. Whilst the Committee has left it others to look in depth at the circumstances surrounding Hulls 801 and 802, an important aspect of considering future strategy is to learn lessons of the past.
285. Kevin Hobbs, CEO of CMAL, told the Committee he agreed with the recommendations and principles of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee report which said a “root and branch overhaul of current decision-making structures is urgently needed”.³³¹ Yet, he also said three years on from that recommendation “massive change has not happened, but project Neptune might look at that.”³³²
286. Contracts have been awarded to Cemre Marin Endustri A.S in Turkey to build ferries to serve Islay and routes between Uig, Lochmaddy, and Tarbert (Harris).³³³ Morag McNeill, Chair of the Board of CMAL, offered reassurance the procurement exercise for these vessels demonstrated the progress that had been made. She said “I do not think that you could challenge the manner in which the four large vessels have been procured”.³³⁴
287. CMAL wrote to the us on the improvements they have made in the process of procuring these ferries and provided similar evidence to the Public Audit Committee.³³⁵ These were—
- "Use of specialist third parties to assist with financial and technical evaluation;
 - Use of an independent shipping brokerage to provide market intelligence;
 - Regular financial health checks of the shipyard are being carried out throughout the term of the contract;

- More robust procedures regarding the refund guarantee – with only 100% refund guarantees against each milestone payment accepted;
- Legal advice concerning the procurement routes and also legal oversight at each step of the process leading to award;
- Once the preferred bidder was identified the fine detail of the contract was the primary responsibility of CMAL but there was oversight given both legally and utilising shipbroking services"; ³³⁶
- Milestone events no longer trigger payments as these have to obtain Class approval ensuring third party oversight of the work;
- Technical and Professional ability of yards was assessed but it is not clear if this includes an assessment of project management abilities as recommended by the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee. ³³⁷

288. We were pleased to hear from CMAL on the levels of satisfaction resulting from engagement and consultation undertaken ³³⁸ and that CMAL are confident sufficient improvements have been made in this procurement process. Unfortunately, this confidence was not universally shared.

289. We heard—

- The process has been restrictive in terms of the vessel specification "and perhaps geared towards selecting an operator."; ³³⁹
- The bid chosen was not the lowest cost or fastest delivery time; ³⁴⁰
- CMAL is unaware of its capacity to specify supplier involvement (CMAL told us it was within its gift to specify whether Scottish or UK suppliers were used ³⁴¹ , whereas the Scottish Government confirmed it could not ³⁴²); and
- Prices paid for ferries were "inflated prices". ³⁴³

290. The then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, said in Parliament "The bid that was received from the yard represented best value for money in quality and price." ³⁴⁴ She also said they were—

” "progressing well and remain on time and within budget. CMAL's recent confirmation of signing the contract for the additional two vessels, at the same design specification and with the same yard, follows the recent procurement exercise to which the member has alluded—but that also includes a full builder's refund guarantee." ³⁴⁵

291. **The Committee is not qualified to suggest one design of ship over another. However, it takes seriously the suggestions from experts their views have been overlooked. We highlight this as a further example of where decision making within the tripartite arrangement has not been transparent.**

292. While the Committee supports the Scottish Government's efforts to secure additional capacity at speed through leasing vessels, it recognises this is not a long-term solution. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government use the current opportunity of running a catamaran on some appropriate west coast routes to evaluate performance and establish whether this type of vessel, is suitable for general use on Scottish ferry routes.
293. The Committee has recommended the Scottish Government should establish a long-term approach to vessel replacement on a rolling basis to inspire confidence in ferry users. The Committee recommends standardisation of design will be essential to this in order to achieve best value and efficiency, both in the construction and resulting operation of the vessels. The Committee recommends the drive for standardisation must also include the fittings, fixtures and parts to achieve easy replacement as required.
294. The Committee recognises the role of small vessels, not least in their role to play in achieving net zero emissions targets give the technology for smaller vessels is more advanced. The work CMAL is doing on the [Small Vessels Replacement Programme](#) (SVRP) is a welcome step towards delivering a new generation of low emission small vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides fleet.
295. The Committee believes consideration should be given to whether routes currently served, or due to be served, by existing major vessels could be better provided by a higher number of smaller vessels.
296. The Committee has heard varying evidence on the specification of vessels in different circumstances, which emphasises the need for meaningful engagement with communities on their requirements. They are best placed to outline their needs. We include staff and crew in this.
297. The Committee has recommended the Scottish Government should consider the future of CMAL, both within the context of the Project Neptune proposal for merger with CalMac and on giving further consideration to assimilation within Transport Scotland. The status quo is unacceptable. In this context, an evaluation of the improvements made to procurement processes for vessels by CMAL should take place.
298. The Committee requests quarterly updates from the Scottish Government on progress towards the completion of the vessels being built by Cemre Marin Endustri A.S in Turkey.

Sustainable ferries

299. Transport is the biggest contributor to Scottish carbon emissions, accounting for 29.2% of emissions.³⁴⁶ Domestic ferries (including council and private operators)

represents 1.7%³⁴⁷ of Scottish transport emissions and just under 1% of all emissions.

300. A number of ferry users said reliability was paramount and wanted lifeline services to be fuelled by proven technology.³⁴⁸ Others believed the environment and drive to net zero to be a key factor in future ferry design.³⁴⁹ Organisations involved in ferry service delivery spoke of their commitment to a net zero future.³⁵⁰
301. In this part of the report, the Committee considers the decarbonisation of vessels. In the following discussion of ports and harbours, there is discussion of how technology used at them could be decarbonised. Alternative forms of transport, including fixed links, and their potential role in emissions reduction are discussed in a later section of the report.

Decarbonising vessels

302. Research³⁵¹ commissioned by the UK Government to inform its Clean Maritime Plan suggests "the vast majority of emissions reductions...for UK domestic maritime vessels will be achieved by a switch to low or zero emission fuels".³⁵² The Clean Maritime Plan expects by 2025 "All new vessels being ordered for use in UK waters are being designed with zero emission propulsion capability."³⁵³ A new plan was consulted on last year and is anticipated in 2023.³⁵⁴ The consultation sought views on how the UK Government can incentivise and support the 2025 goal.
303. The Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan update published in 2020 commits to "30% of Scottish Government owned ferries will be low emission by 2032" and states it will "Continue to examine the scope for utilising hybrid and low carbon energy sources in the public sector marine fleet as part of our vessel replacement programme."³⁵⁵ This was considered to be on track in the 2022 Climate Change Plan monitoring report.³⁵⁶

Expected share of vessels in Scottish Government fleet that are low/zero emission: 2018 – 2032

2019 - 2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031 - 2032
8%	10%	13%	15%	18%	21%	23%	26%	28%	31%	33%

304. The journey to 30% is dependent on the successful delivery of the Small Vessel Replacement Programme³⁵⁷. Currently, 3 small CMAL owned vessels are diesel-electric hybrid and the remainder run on marine fuel oil. The figures do not account for the number of ferries run by councils and private operators. In replacing the ferry fleet, vessels must be future proofed, both excluding further emissions now and being capable of adapting to technologies of the future.³⁵⁸
305. There are opportunities and associated benefits of decarbonising vessels, including additional employment opportunities. The challenges associated with skills to operate new fuel systems were noted and there were calls for investment in skills of those to operate the ferries of the future and for these roles to be based in islands to mitigate depopulation.³⁵⁹
306. The Scottish Government's alignment of the Islands Connectivity Plan with a "legal

obligation to achieve net zero climate emissions" ³⁶⁰ is a welcome but ambitious goal. However, CMAL told us it will not achieve the 2030 targets ³⁶¹, (although it is confident solutions will be available by 2045) and its current work represents "small stepping stones to the future". ³⁶² This is at odds with Scottish Government's statement "We need to keep pace with technology". ³⁶³ CMAL have suggested they have to act now to replace ships, rather than wait for the optimal technology to be available at a suitable cost. ³⁶⁴ Nautilus International suggested it would be more cost effective and involve less work to vessels to get a firm strategy "locked down" and progress with cleaner technologies in the first instance rather than retrofit. ³⁶⁵

307. The importance of the Islands Connectivity Plan in setting out a pathway in the form of a comprehensive, system wide strategy for vessels and ports, as well as surrounding transport and energy infrastructure, was highlighted. ³⁶⁶ The Committee believes the plans for vessel replacement and port upgrades must be ambitious, represent value for money in their longevity and be future proofed. It logically follows, these should seek low or zero-emission vessels for all ferry services in Scotland. Norway has demonstrated this can be achieved where the "political will" is there. ³⁶⁷

308. **The Committee recommends that the next Climate Change Plan and the Islands Connectivity Plan should mirror the commitment in the Clean Maritime Plan that by 2025 "All new vessels being ordered for use in UK waters are being designed with zero emission propulsion capability."** ³⁶⁸

309. **The Scottish Government plan to develop the Islands Connectivity Plan in sections and the Low Carbon Plan will be the final aspect of the draft Islands Connectivity Plan to be considered. The Committee asks the Scottish Government to respond to its concerns that reduced carbon emissions risk being treated as an add-on rather than an integrated element of all aspects of the Plan, starting with the limited consultation process currently underway on ports and harbours.**

Fuel source

310. It was suggested the shipping industry is on the cusp of identifying proven, long-term solutions to decarbonise travel. ³⁶⁹ However, there are still many variables which make it hard for those seeking to invest in ferries to identify a long-term path in terms of fuel source. ³⁷⁰

311. Options discussed in evidence to us included—

- **Hydrogen.** ³⁷¹ Of renewable sources, it has been described as most likely to be scalable at the pace required. ³⁷² Contractually green and locally sourced ³⁷³ hydrogen is already being used to power ferries in Norway ^{374 xi}, cited enthusiastically by stakeholders ³⁷⁵ in evidence on potential in Scotland. ³⁷⁶ CMAL ³⁷⁷ and Orkney Ferries Ltd ³⁷⁸ described their work in developing hydrogen technologies. Concerns were raised about infrastructure and long-

term potential.³⁷⁹ It was noted the regulatory framework for its use, as well as other suggested fuels such as methanol and ammonia were not yet in place either.³⁸⁰ The draft ICP notes the Scottish Government support for the [HySeasIII project](#) but says "further advancement of the technology is required until the fuel can be economically viable for use on the networks".³⁸¹ CMAL suggested Scotland was not "lagging behind".³⁸² Scottish Government commitment to the potential of hydrogen to Scotland's economy is demonstrated in the Hydrogen Strategy and Action plan.³⁸³ Several of the proposed hydrogen hubs are located in island or coastal communities. However, the action plan does not mention ferries, either as a crucial transport link for developing industry or as a potential use of hydrogen produced.

- **Electric and battery powered.**³⁸⁴ The draft ICP suggests this is being explored for smaller vessels, while "other options will need to be explored" for larger vessels.³⁸⁵ We were told operating³⁸⁶ and maintenance costs are less³⁸⁷ (which the ICP acknowledges)³⁸⁸ and electric ferries have more power so "can take the weather better than a diesel ferry".³⁸⁹ CMAL said its [Small Vessel Replacement Programme \(SVRP\)](#) would see designs for 10 new 100% battery operated ferries completed in the first quarter of 2023, with the competition of tendering to build them taking place in the final quarter of the year.³⁹⁰ These will be charged on shore via the grid.³⁹¹
- **Continued use of diesel engines³⁹² and diesel-electric hybrid models.**³⁹³ Even using diesel, it was suggested modern ferry designs or catamarans³⁹⁴ would reduce emissions from current levels³⁹⁵ as they needed half the fuel of a "equivalent-capacity monohull".³⁹⁶ The new vessels being built at CEMRE are diesel-electric hybrid, with the ability to retrofit to fuel cells built into the design³⁹⁷ which the then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, said would lead to a reduction in emissions.³⁹⁸ Transport Scotland confirmed this was due to the hull design, not the fuel.³⁹⁹ CMAL cited their experience of innovating and delivering low emission ferries.⁴⁰⁰ However, the Committee heard these may not provide an optimal solution. Electric vessels are cheaper to run⁴⁰¹, the weight of the batteries in hybrid vessels requires higher fuel use when not running on electric power⁴⁰² and it was suggested the distances involved rendered hybrid engines redundant as the time spent running on marine oil and getting up to speed covered much of the journey.
- **Liquefied natural gas (LNG),** a fuel used to power Norwegian ferries a decade ago⁴⁰³ and which CMAL described LNG as a "transition fuel".⁴⁰⁴ Hulls 801 and 802 will partially use LNG but will use diesel to enter and leave harbours. They " ...will reduce the carbon footprint of our ferry fleet by 25 per cent overall and almost eliminate emissions such as NOx, SOx and particulates." ⁴⁰⁵ Many questioned the carbon savings given the transportation

xi Norwegian ferry company Norled launched the world's first hydrogen ferry, the [MF Hydra](#), in March 2023

requirements of the LNG fuel by road from southern England and, on visits and in written evidence, it was suggested LNG is hard to store.⁴⁰⁶ It was asserted fuel sources and their emissions should be comprehensively assessed, including the transportation of those sources to point of use.⁴⁰⁷ The Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee recommended the Scottish Government should "actively pursue opportunities to source LNG fuel supplies at locations within Scotland".⁴⁰⁸

312. The Committee noted that vessels currently being designed and commissioned by CMAL consider the option of mid-life re-fit to accommodate future technological development⁴⁰⁹ and operators were confident solutions would be available within the next decade.⁴¹⁰ Stuart Garrett of NorthLink said that ferries used on the Northern Isles routes had a "good 10 years' worth of operating life left in them" and that NorthLink would not look to retrofit these.⁴¹¹
313. Design based upon the availability of fuel source was also highlighted. CMAL said it was possible more ships running on LNG would be commissioned but highlighted it is not suitable for every vessel due to the weight of the onboard infrastructure required. It was for this reason it was not sought for the four new ferries.⁴¹²

314. **The Committee calls for a Scottish Government update on its efforts to "actively pursue opportunities to source liquefied natural gas (LNG) fuel supplies at locations within Scotland".⁴¹³**
315. **The Committee calls on the Scottish Government to provide details of the supply chain of liquefied natural gas (LNG) proposed for use once Hulls 801 and 802 are delivered, including work to source this locally. If it is not possible to source this locally, the Scottish Government should provide an assessment of the carbon savings achieved by transporting LNG on long over-land distances as compared to using diesel on the intended routes.**

Investment and incentives for innovation

316. The Norwegian Government's National Transport Plan 2022–2033⁴¹⁴ and Action Plan for Greener Shipping⁴¹⁵ commit to using public procurement as a tool to accelerate innovation. In Norway, we were told, decarbonisation is incentivised—
- Through grants for local authorities to upskill on green procurement⁴¹⁶ and sufficient funding to reflect initial outlays for low emission vessels;
 - By using competitive tendering to insist on operators' use of low and zero-emission ferries;⁴¹⁷ and
 - Offering funding for bidders to "enable them to be creative and we use the best ideas that come out of the process"⁴¹⁸. The "first mover in technology"⁴¹⁹ is subsidised to achieve this.

317. Dag Hole of the Norwegian Public Roads Administration also suggested a contractual requirement ⁴²⁰ to use modern low emission vessels meant the average age of the fleet was around 10 years. ⁴²¹ The experience of other countries, more advanced in the journey to vessel decarbonisation, could provide a roadmap for swift action. On the Norwegian model of procurement, incentivising innovation and carbon friendly thinking, CMAL said Scotland is not “particularly far away from it, to be honest”. ⁴²² A previous lack of investment was cited as the issue but this has been “addressed with the infrastructure investment plan” ⁴²³. Funding provided by the Scottish Government for vessel replacement was described by the Chair of CMAL as “significant” and instilled confidence “we can achieve net zero”. ⁴²⁴ The Scottish Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan for Scotland 2021-22 to 2025-26^{xii} ⁴²⁵ was published in February 2021 and is centred around three key priorities, the first of which is “Enabling the Transition to Net Zero Emissions and Environmental Sustainability”. Unfortunately, ferry services are not mentioned in the chapter of the plan on this theme.
318. The Infrastructure Investment Plan also only applies to CMAL vessels and the Committee also heard of lack of funding for vessel replacement at a local authority level. The Norwegian approach includes training for local authority staff in green vessel procurement, an expertise Orkney Ferries Ltd said it would like to develop ⁴²⁶. We also heard of local authority hope for innovative funding streams or grants to become available to them for vessel replacement. ⁴²⁷
319. The Committee notes the then First Minister established a Net Zero Investor Panel ⁴²⁸ to examine “how Scotland can attract global capital investment and the infrastructure required to transition to net zero”. This will provide recommendations to the Scottish Government in summer 2023 and the terms of reference include looking at procurement, as well as the “effectiveness of the existing landscape supporting infrastructure investment and innovation”. ⁴²⁹ A key area of potential being considered by the panel is green hydrogen. CMAL emphasised the collaborative nature of the HySeas project and work on reducing maritime emissions more generally including with universities.
320. The Committee suggests the sufficiency of funding could be used to inspire innovation and ease fears of operators. Stuart Garrett of NorthLink said “You do not necessarily want to be the builder of a first-in-class vessel; you want someone else to iron out the issues before you get there.” ⁴³⁰
321. The ICP draft for consultation says “Modernisation of the fleet will ultimately lead to lower total emissions by adopting, and encouraging, the use of modern technologies and efficient design to make the strongest possible contribution to the climate change targets set out in NTS” ⁴³¹.

322. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should consider

xii The Scottish Government's [Medium Term Financial Strategy](#) published in May 2023 noted an intention to extend this by 1 year to 2026-27.

how local authorities can be supported with sufficient resource and to develop skills in procurement of low and zero carbon vessels.

323. **The Committee looks forward to the recommendations of the Net Zero Investor Panel and recommends the Scottish Government consider where and how these recommendations can be best applied to support the decarbonisation of ferries.**

Ports and harbours

324. Ports and harbours around Scotland are owned by a variety of different organisations which adds another dimension to complexities of ferry service delivery.⁴³² We heard varying evidence on how this should be approached in the future.
325. CMAL suggested ownership of all the ports by a single body would make matters such as vessel standardisation and operation easier.⁴³³ However Professor Neil Kay argued that ports and harbours should not be owned or managed by a single body, such as CMAL, as management is already too distant from the ports and harbours it owns and that a locally based management body, such as a council, would provide greater in depth knowledge of local need.⁴³⁴
326. The Committee explored ways in which the benefits of unitary ownership could be achieved under the current patchwork system of ownership. For example CMAL was tasked with delivering weather monitoring equipment at all ports, not just the ones it owned, for the benefit of the whole ferry service.⁴³⁵ While there was a suggestion this equipment was not always used⁴³⁶, it demonstrates the potential for standardisation in a complex ownership landscape. CMAL also highlighted attempts to future proof ports and harbours, both from predicted weather and sea level rises, but also by enlarging the ports themselves to accommodate more types of vessels.⁴³⁷
327. CalMac and NorthLink suggested standardisation of ports and harbours by way of a common interface and approach to investment would help.⁴³⁸ Robbie Drummond used the example of standardisation in the Norwegian system as a way to derive flexibility over vessel deployment.⁴³⁹ Port and harbour interfaces in Norway also supported automatic berthing, increasing efficiency and value for money as fewer crew were required to dock.⁴⁴⁰
328. Professor Neil Kay proposed fresh ideas and strategic thinking was required and suggested long-term leasing opportunities for ports and harbours could encourage commercial operators.⁴⁴¹ He said there was a need for a comprehensive review of the ownership and management of the ports and harbours used by Scotland's ferry operators, and this should take place separately from any consideration of service provision.⁴⁴²
329. Investment in port infrastructure will assist in delivering standardisation and

interoperability of new and existing vessels, increasing network resilience. This investment would also contribute to reducing emissions across the ferry network and support Scotland's net zero carbon emission targets. The Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) recommends an investment programme in ferry port infrastructure, including shore power supplies to ferry vessels, to support ferry vessel renewal and replacement and progressive decarbonisation. The Scottish Government as noted in the draft ICP section on vessels and ports includes proposals for major port renovations, although suggests this is not comprehensive and more work will be done through engagement with port owners to complete this work for the final plan.⁴⁴³

330. The Committee also notes that the Scottish Ferry Plan commits to upgrades at Lochboisdale and Armadale Piers.⁴⁴⁴ The IIP dedicates £306m over the five years to "project such as Ardrossan, Skye Triangle and Gourock Harbour, proposed projects at Lochboisdale, Armadale and Kennacraig, and an Oban Masterplan". Concern was also raised about pace of progress of the IIP commitments⁴⁴⁵ leading the Committee to question the breakdown of this allocation.

Decarbonising port and harbour infrastructure

331. The Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan update published in 2020 commits to "By 2032 low emissions solutions will be widely adopted at Scottish ports"⁴⁴⁶. It states—

”We will achieve this with our new policy to work with individual ports and the British Ports Association to consider a process for encouraging shared best practice initiatives for reducing emissions across the sector. Additionally, we will work with the ports sector and with its statutory consultees through the Harbour Order process to ensure future port developments are environmentally underpinned.”⁴⁴⁷

332. STPR2 recommends upgrades to the roads leading to Stranraer and the ports at Cairnryan, as well as "Investment in port infrastructure to support vessel renewal and replacement, and progressive decarbonisation". This suggests "This investment would also contribute to reducing emissions across the ferry network and support Scotland's net zero carbon emission targets".⁴⁴⁸

333. Examples of CMAL action on ports and harbours included—

- Biomass boiler and solar panels at Brodick Ferry Terminal, Arran;
- Reed beds at Portavadie provide a low-cost, zero energy wastewater treatment system; and
- Air source heating system at Tarbert Ferry Terminal.

334. CMAL said several of their own and third party ports had been fitted with shore side power to charge hybrid and electric vessels over night, which would support the Small Vessel Replacement Programme⁴⁴⁹. They also highlighted the development of electrical hook-ups for large vessels, although not for propulsion but to provide electrical power while the vessel is berthed, removing the need to keep onboard diesel powered engines or generators running. Work to take energy efficiency

measures and retrofit buildings with insulation and low carbon electricity and heating were also described.

335. CMAL "continually investigate improved solutions for implementation across our network" and "endeavour" to include energy saving measures in new buildings ⁴⁵⁰. Investigating and endeavouring do not equate to action and does not suggest the bold ambition demonstrated in evidence on action taken on ports and harbours in Norway.
336. Stuart Garrett described the progress made with the Northern Isles vessels in adaptation to battery power ⁴⁵¹ for electricity requirements on board the ship. Robbie Drummond of CalMac called for investment in ports to allow for vessels to be plugged in when berthed overnight. ⁴⁵² Transport Scotland said they "will look to roll that out more widely". ⁴⁵³

337. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should through the Islands Connectivity Plan establish a plan to continue to identify ways in which it can support development and standardisation of ports and harbours. The public sector needs to work strategically in partnership with private and council-owned harbours to replicate the success of joined up installation of weather monitoring equipment for other aspects of harbour infrastructure, especially those supporting decarbonisation of vessels.**
338. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should consider how it can influence ease of access to ports and harbours to support potential additional operators who may wish to provide services on top of the bundle.**

Ferry services fit for the future

339. During the inquiry we also sought views on improving public-funded ferry services (whoever delivers them), with a focus on the passenger experience and on the needs of ferry-dependent communities in the 21st century. We considered—
- The process for booking a ticket;
 - Transportation of freight;
 - Integration with other forms of transport;
 - Equality of access;
 - Support in the event of cancellation;
 - Affordability; and
 - Adequately staffed.

Booking and ticketing

340. The Committee heard people want it to be easier to book a space on a ferry. Proposals were put to the Committee for a ticketing system which—
- Was integrated with other modes of transport; ⁴⁵⁴
 - Allowed for concessionary tickets to be booked with ease; ⁴⁵⁵
 - Allowed for trips to be booked door-to-door using a single online portal; ⁴⁵⁶
 - Incentivised desired travel patterns, such as use of off-peak sailings or travel by active and sustainable modes, including zero emission vehicles; ⁴⁵⁷ and
 - Facilitated sufficient capacity for passengers and vehicles.
341. Gordon Ross of Western Ferries also highlighted the company's contrasting approach with CalMac as it allowed tickets to cover any vehicle and issued them without expiry dates. ⁴⁵⁸ Rob Dickson of VisitScotland foresaw ticketing becoming more sophisticated and factoring in issues like the fuel type of the vehicle, the capacity of the vehicle and the length of a stay. ⁴⁵⁹
342. The importance of "High-quality journey planning information" is highlighted in the Second National Transport Strategy ⁴⁶⁰ and the Committee heard of examples of apps which would assist with integrated travel planning. ⁴⁶¹
343. The National Islands Plan includes a goal to "develop and introduce a new booking, reservation and ticketing system, with Smart Ticketing capability, to replace the existing system" for the CHFS network. CalMac told us of their work to develop the new system, which was due to be introduced in April 2023, but has been delayed. ⁴⁶²
344. While technology was seen as important, people also highlighted the role of booking offices. Anecdotally, the Committee heard that ferries appearing fully booked online would have capacity if you asked at the ticket office ⁴⁶³. Local expertise and assistance was widely praised in the Committee's visits and online engagement events. It was suggested local booking offices provided wider services such as tourist information. There were calls for longer opening hours. ⁴⁶⁴
345. The issue of commercial bookings was raised with the Committee. The block booking system provided by CalMac allows businesses to indicate the lane space they will require on a yearly basis, despite the notion of 'first come, first serve' applying to other forms of tickets. Communities require the certainty that lorries bringing provisions will make it to islands. However, where commercial bookings were not cancelled, and space became available but unused, this contributed to frustration. It was suggested there should be financial penalties for no-shows. ⁴⁶⁵
346. People called for sufficient vehicle and passenger capacity to be available on vessels. ⁴⁶⁶ This included for residents of island communities and visitors. Residents did not want to be stuck on islands during busy holiday periods.

Consistent ability to travel throughout the year was requested.⁴⁶⁷

347. Proposals to address this included—

- Ferries for resident only use and specific ferries to transport visitors;
- Dedicated spaces on ferries for island residents;⁴⁶⁸
- More expensive tickets for tourists and visitors.⁴⁶⁹ Helen Inkster of Pentland Ferries suggested rising fuel costs would mean fare increases were inevitable and suggested discounted travel for island residents should be examined;⁴⁷⁰
- Priority booking for island residents which CalMac suggested would be possible but complicated;⁴⁷¹ and
- Reasons for travel should be taken into account and prioritisation given to certain categories.⁴⁷²

348. NorthLink and CalMac both said they were contractually required to treat customers on a 'first come first served basis' (although a notable exception to this is block booking for commercial vehicles).⁴⁷³ Neither currently requests information on reason for travel.⁴⁷⁴ Views on this varied and stakeholder engagement would be key to delivering a workable solution.⁴⁷⁵ The Committee heard of informal attempts by operators to support travel for emergency medical need.⁴⁷⁶ CalMac has a protocol to accommodate spontaneous travel for particular reasons, for example medical appointments.⁴⁷⁷ CalMac also described a new Advanced Standby process which allowed for prioritisation of certain passengers in the event of a cancellation and efforts to calculate abandoned booking attempts. Transport Scotland told the Committee of pilot work taking place on Coll and Mull and Iona on release of a certain amount of deck space for those seeking essential travel, rather than booking ahead.⁴⁷⁸

349. Capacity on NorthLink routes in particular were highlighted as an issue.⁴⁷⁹ This was partly to do with alterations to the policy on booking cabins post-pandemic.⁴⁸⁰ The reasons for this were questioned as shared occupancy was allowed, just not facilitated by NorthLink.⁴⁸¹ The impact of this on concessionary allowances was also highlighted as well as calls to re-instate the previous ability to book a single berth within a shared cabin.⁴⁸² It was proposed the Scottish Government should consult on this change if it was to be permanent.⁴⁸³

350. A further challenge for the northern isles was the transportation of freight and additional capacity to support industry and local economies, such as agriculture and fishing, was called for.⁴⁸⁴ It was put to the Committee an additional crew and a daytime service might provide additional sailing capacity.⁴⁸⁵ NorthLink described complications with this such as onward travel being unavailable and proposed the solution lay in "additional tonnage"⁴⁸⁶, a view shared by stakeholders.⁴⁸⁷ CMAL described to the Committee attempts to purchase second hand vehicles for the route.⁴⁸⁸ There was also call for additional frequency.⁴⁸⁹

Freight and commercial vehicle fares

351. Businesses reported issues with transportation of goods and services—

- The importance of reliability for time sensitive produce such as fish and shellfish; ⁴⁹⁰
- Businesses and those relying on them wanted a reliable service all year round, recognising there were peaks for some industries throughout the year which also had to be accommodated; ⁴⁹¹
- The carriage of certain goods, such as timber, is also restricted in some conditions; ⁴⁹²
- The future needs of the renewable energy industry;
- On visits we heard of the impact of disrupted sailings on the transportation of livestock. CalMac suggested compensation for livestock caused by delays or cancellations would be a policy matter for Transport Scotland; ⁴⁹³ and
- The largely single-track road network was unhelpful for Clyde and Hebrides routes and it was suggested additional charters could relieve the pressure on the roads in some areas. ⁴⁹⁴

352. There are competing interests inherent in the use of publicly funded ferries for business purposes. Residents rely on the ferries for their own transport and described frustrations at space taken up by freight and commercial vehicles. Conversely, they also rely on those shipments for essential goods and services on islands.

353. NorthLink operates separate freight vessels and there were calls to increase this capacity. ⁴⁹⁵ Tensions between the movement of freight to Orkney and Shetland, and the prioritisation of each area were highlighted. ⁴⁹⁶

354. We heard about discussions to establish separate freight services in some areas on the CHFS network (discussed in detail in the [Unbundling](#) section of this report). Submissions to us called for individual freight services in other locations too. ⁴⁹⁷

355. The Committee was interested in how a circular economy approach might prevent the need to transport industrial goods to and from the island and discussed this with the Scotch Whisky Association on the local re-use of draff. ⁴⁹⁸ Highlands and Islands Enterprise said businesses were moving towards circular principles but "by their nature, islands will have an irreducible point where goods must come and go by ferry." ⁴⁹⁹

356. The Scottish Ferries Plan included a commitment to review freight fares on ferry services. ⁵⁰⁰ A working group was established and research was undertaken into various options. The research report published in 2015 stated—

” "There was a general consensus amongst stakeholders that the lane metre or lane metre equivalent should be used as the basis of the charge for all freight carried; and fares should bear at least some relationship to distance, with a view that the £/mile fare should decline with distance travelled." ⁵⁰¹

357. It presented three options for consideration—

- ” • "Option 3: Fixed Charge (assumed at £50) plus rate per lane metre per mile based on distance threshold
- Option 5: Constant rate per lane metre per mile within distance band
- Option 7: Flat Fare per lane metre within distance band". ⁵⁰²

358. Minutes of the Working Group from November 2016 suggest the first of these (option 3) was the preferred model. ⁵⁰³ HITRANS called for the work of the review to be concluded and for Transport Scotland to "implement a fairer fares solution that reduces the cost of moving freight to and from islands". ⁵⁰⁴ Highlands and Islands Enterprise said there was an important discussion to be had with commercial stakeholders on fares. ⁵⁰⁵

359. The National Islands Plan states the Scottish Government will—

- "Develop a new Ferries Plan that will meaningfully contribute to delivering the outcomes of wider Scottish Government strategies as set out in the National Transport Strategy and this National Islands Plan.
- As part of the next Ferries Plan, review the impacts of Road Equivalent Tariff and consider future ferry fares policy options that will meet the needs of islanders and support island economies.....
- Subject to requirements as set out in the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service and the Northern Isles Ferry Service contracts, we will always strive to improve, where necessary and possible, issues relating to freight and will engage proactively with operators, communities and stakeholders as appropriate." ⁵⁰⁶

360. **The Committee has concerns about the impact a substandard ferry service has on the economic success of island and coastal communities, and has heard concerns about the jeopardy the ferry service creates for exploitation of the industries of the future in island and remote communities. ⁵⁰⁷ The Committee considers the issue of fares for commercial and freight vehicles, as well as RET, is part of a larger conversation on support needed to facilitate successful businesses working on and delivering to island communities. This includes inspiring confidence by anticipating success and delivering a service with the capacity to accommodate economic growth. There are questions about the role of the Scottish Government and the point at which businesses making a profit should no longer be reliant on public subsidy. These issues must be considered in a joined up way through the National Islands Plan and the Islands Connectivity Plan.**

361. **The Committee recommends questions on freight, fares and economic growth in island communities should be considered comprehensively through the Islands Connectivity Plan to ensure strategic and coherent policies are developed.**

Integrated transport

362. Better integration of ferry ticketing and timetabling with bus and rail services, and improved cycling infrastructure ⁵⁰⁸, was seen as vital to reducing non-essential car use, reducing carbon emissions, and maximising vehicle space on vessels for essential business and personal travel. The Committee was told of public transport connecting with ferry travel in Norway ⁵⁰⁹. The Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) has recommended a review of integration and accessibility at ferry terminals. ⁵¹⁰
363. In Scotland, it was said that the single track road networks on smaller islands often cannot cope with amount of traffic disembarking from larger vessels. ⁵¹¹ Smaller, more frequent, efficient ferry services were a potential solution to this although it was noted these did not always work with public transport. ⁵¹²
364. New or improved connecting bus and rail services were also called for. ⁵¹³ The challenge in delivery was recognised by witnesses who suggested it would take a collaborative effort to achieve better co-ordination. The unreliability of the ferry element of a journey was highlighted as a barrier.
365. CalMac suggested they were constrained by the differing regulatory systems that apply to each mode of transport, the limitations of current infrastructure and the number of hours in the working day, but said in situations of disruption, they worked with bus companies in particular to arrange alternative travel. ⁵¹⁴ NorthLink said they also worked to provide an "alternative relief service" where required. ⁵¹⁵ Where attempts to align bus transport with ferry arrivals had been made, it was noted these services were "undermined" by the unreliability of the ferry.
366. The then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, indicated this will be a key part of the Islands Connectivity Plan ⁵¹⁶. She recognised the need for this to be done in a climate friendly way and mentioned shared transport hubs. One approach to relieving traffic pressures on island or small communities suggested to the Committee was the provision of shared electric vehicles for use on islands. This would reduce the requirement for many travellers to take their cars on the ferry, and facilitate sustainable travel on the islands. Considerations such as the need for better public transport on islands and the volume of traffic were also highlighted. ⁵¹⁷
367. The Committee received several pieces of evidence on how ferries contributed to wider efforts to reduce emissions ⁵¹⁸ and strategy on integrated transport must include wider consideration of transport emissions overall.

368. We were told any travel by road produced fewer emissions than ferry travel ⁵¹⁹. Written evidence suggested more fixed links were the solution. ⁵²⁰ It was also proposed shorter ferry journeys supplemented by longer road journeys would produce fewer emissions. ⁵²¹
369. Harald Høyem of Norwegian planning and engineering consultancy Asplan Viak, told the Committee some buses had priority boarding on ferries in Norway and described how fast passenger-only vessels were aligned with scheduled bus services in some areas, encouraging use of public transport. ⁵²²

370. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government provide details of the proposed review of transport integration at ferry terminals, including—**
- **Remit and scope of the review;**
 - **Public engagement;**
 - **How modes of transport as set out in the Sustainable Transport Hierarchy will be prioritised in the review; and**
 - **Anticipated timescales for completion.**
371. **The Committee is of the view the ICP should set out proposals for end-to-end journey opportunities for freight. End to end journey opportunities for passengers should include the use and promotion of electric vehicle hire which could be used by tourists, businesses and the health service for example.**

Equally accessible to everyone

372. The importance of equality of access to ferry travel was emphasised to the Committee. ⁵²³ One of the issues with an ageing fleet is accessibility and we were told in Norway ageing vessels would be discounted for use on grounds of accessibility. ⁵²⁴
373. The Committee heard of situations ranging from people experiencing undignified ways to board the ship to an incident where someone was placed in danger attempting to travel. ⁵²⁵ Once on board, facilities for disabled travellers were not of the same standard of those for other travellers. ⁵²⁶
374. In particular, problems were presented to the Committee on inter island ferries in the Northern Isles ⁵²⁷ and Members saw for themselves the challenging conditions in which disabled travellers are placed in order to use the ferry.
375. The Scottish Government offers a [Ferries Accessibility Fund](#) which can be accessed by "Any ferry or harbour operator providing an internal ferry service". In 2023, the fund opened to applications in May and £71,143 is "available for bids from the public or private sector" ⁵²⁸. The Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland

outlined their engagement in the development and of the Islands Connectivity Plan and proposed all "crew should be trained in how to assist disabled travellers". ⁵²⁹

- 376. **While welcoming the availability of funding for improvements to accessibility of Scotland's ferry fleet, the Committee recommends an audit of accessibility to identify priority areas for upgrade or systems of provision of further support, including priority boarding and disembarking, for disabled passengers.**
- 377. **The Committee seeks an update from the Scottish Government on engagement with disabled passengers in the design of new vessels, including in the Small Vessel Replacement Programme.**

Support in the event of cancellations

- 378. Where services were cancelled, the Committee heard calls for further support with both communication and alternative transport or accommodation.

Communication on cancellations

- 379. The importance of timely communication about disruption caused by weather is recognised in the National Transport Strategy ⁵³⁰ and we heard on visits that cancellations, particularly for weather, were often at the last minute which causes issues for travellers.
- 380. There was concern that the focus was predominantly on online communication, whereas customers did not always have access to the internet. We heard of cancellation communications directing people to call centres which were not open. CalMac ⁵³¹ and NorthLink ⁵³² both advise customers through a variety of media and state they will confirm service disruption no later than 30 minutes after an advertised departure time.

Support for stranded passengers

- 381. The Committee has also heard of a lack of support for passengers where sailings are cancelled. We were concerned by the safety implications of some of the situations described, particularly where vulnerable people or lone travellers were effectively abandoned, with no support in arranging alternative travel or accommodation.
- 382. CalMac highlighted ⁵³³ the work it is doing locally with communities and Local and Regional Resilience Partnerships to support stranded passengers, as well as its [Passenger Rights Scheme](#). NorthLink similarly pointed to their [Passenger Welfare Guide](#). Neither include reimbursement or accommodation support where sailings are cancelled due to the weather (although NorthLink suggested they will accommodate passengers on board the vessel where possible).

383. The list of things that cannot be claimed for in the CalMac scheme includes unused accommodation, services and car hire.⁵³⁴ CalMac describes these expenses as "consequential".⁵³⁵ Business owners spoke of the challenges involved in cancelled sailings and the potential loss of revenue.

Reasonable fares

384. The Chair of the Ferries Community Board, Angus Campbell, said islanders were as deserving as all other taxpayers to receive support with transport costs and that subsidies had a role in achieving parity.⁵³⁶
385. People wanted reasonable fares with a need for affordable travel to and from islands for residents helping to prevent depopulation.⁵³⁷ However, it was also suggested cost was not as important as factors such as reliability and resilience.⁵³⁸ Fares are set by Transport Scotland.⁵³⁹ The cost of ferry travel was highlighted to the Committee in several themes—
- Road Equivalent Tariff;
 - Different costs for business and freight transport; and
 - Concessionary travel for young people.⁵⁴⁰

Road Equivalent Tariff

386. The [Road Equivalent Tariff \(RET\)](#) was introduced in stages and was fully implemented on the Clyde and Hebrides Routes in 2015 following a series of pilots. It is—
- ” "a distance based fares structure, which underpins the Scottish Government's commitment to providing one single overarching fares policy across Scotland's entire ferry network." ⁵⁴¹
387. An assessment of the implementation of the scheme for the final areas of introduction published in March 2020 suggests it has "largely delivered" the original policy intentions.⁵⁴² The then Minister for Transport said the scheme has saved passengers £25 million per year.⁵⁴³
388. While the report notes the general consensus that RET had a positive impact, this was not a universal opinion. Several issues have arisen as a result of RET including capacity on ferries, strain on island infrastructure and an extension to the period for advance bookings from a few days to several weeks.⁵⁴⁴ The report says—
- ” "As well as putting cost and resilience pressure on the assets, it is leading to network-wide demands for investment in additional services, tonnage and infrastructure."
389. It is apparent that although there have been significant benefits to RET, there have also been unintended consequences putting pressure on the ferry system with increased usage and additional cost. The evaluation concludes—

” “Unless there is a policy decision to reverse at least some of the fares reductions introduced since 2008, there is a strategic choice between ‘predict and provide’ - which would be contrary to the draft National Transport Strategy and present substantial capital and ongoing operating costs - or implementing a more balanced approach of additional capacity and demand management measures (of which fares could be a part), which would represent a departure from the current RET policy. In order to aid transparency and understanding, the objectives of any fares review should reflect the findings of this, and previous RET evaluations, which could be captured in revised / new Transport Planning Objectives, reflecting the greater understanding of the scope and scale of impacts of the current fares policy.” ⁵⁴⁵

390. In evidence to us, the intention of this scheme was lauded but it was criticised for failing to consider the wider impacts of a sudden growth in traffic on already constrained ferry capacity. ⁵⁴⁶ It has resulted in an 11% increase in passenger numbers ⁵⁴⁷ and 20% increase in car traffic on CHFS. ⁵⁴⁸ It was noted RET did not apply to hauliers as originally intended and only applied to certain routes. ⁵⁴⁹ The Committee heard in evidence and on visits that the scheme had increased the number of cars being brought to islands. ⁵⁵⁰ It was also noted that the introduction of RET was not matched by increased vessel capacity and that further investment was needed in this regard too. ⁵⁵¹ We heard that a policy like RET required additional funding, rather than maintenance of existing budgets. ⁵⁵² It was thought to be symptomatic of a system pieced together rather than being part of a wider, holistic strategy. ⁵⁵³

391. Roy Pedersen who developed the RET concept said it was a "blunt instrument" and did not support its use on Clyde and Hebrides routes. ⁵⁵⁴ He called for a "market-orientated charging system". ⁵⁵⁵ Several options for reform were proposed to the Committee—

- A separate, higher tourists and campervan tariff; ⁵⁵⁶
- A system akin to the Air Discount Scheme; ⁵⁵⁷
- Demand responsive pricing ⁵⁵⁸, whereby price is used to incentivise travel on less busy services. CalMac said this was being explored with Transport Scotland to alleviate capacity constraints caused by RET. ⁵⁵⁹ It was suggested this demonstrated the failure to prepare for RET. ⁵⁶⁰ The then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, said this would be consulted on as part of the work on the Islands Connectivity Plan ⁵⁶¹, which acknowledges "significant unused capacity exists year-round for passengers and, outside peak season, for vehicles too." ⁵⁶²

392. Transport Scotland said the approach it was taking to the ICP would allow for more regular review of policy areas, including fares. ⁵⁶³ RET fares are currently reviewed annually. ⁵⁶⁴ In the National Islands Plan, the Scottish Government has said it will extend RET to the Northern Isles "when we are able" and it will review the impacts

of RET as part of the ICP.⁵⁶⁵

393. **The Islands Connectivity Plan is a chance to reconsider, in a comprehensive manner, fare policies including the Road Equivalent Tariff. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government evaluate the Road Equivalent Tariff as part of its consultation and work on fares in the Islands Connectivity Plan, before taking any decision to reform or extend RET. To avoid unintended consequences, this evaluation should include modelling for the increased traffic this may produce, associated costs of demand on island infrastructure and the vessels/services required to mitigate potential capacity issues this could cause to existing services.**

Young people

394. The need to both retain and attract young people to island living was highlighted as an issue in discussions on the impact of ferry services on depopulation.
395. There were calls for concessionary travel for under 22s to extend to ferry services.⁵⁶⁶ The Committee heard representations from young people on the inequity of receiving concessionary travel for buses when limited services exist in their island communities, while not receiving a discount on ferry services.⁵⁶⁷ Inter-island ferries in particular were described to the Committee as akin to bus services and young people were of the view they should have parity with young people on the mainland.
396. Young people aged 16-19 and resident in the Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland, plus islands in North Ayrshire, Argyll and Bute and Highland Council are entitled to 4 ferry journeys to/from the mainland for free (effectively two return trips) each year. This is administered through the Young Scot scheme.⁵⁶⁸ This is age limited so those who were 16-19 during the pandemic had limited opportunity to use it. Free travel for under 22s exists on inter-island ferries in Orkney and it was suggested a wider application should be considered.⁵⁶⁹ On visits, we heard directly from young people and their teachers, who suggested ways in which schools could support the administration of this.

397. **The Committee is of the view that young people in ferry-dependent communities should have concessionary fares for ferries and recommends that the Scottish Government, as part of its Fair Fares Review, explore this option.**

A service shaped by ferry communities

398. The first recommendation of the Project Neptune report was on the need to engage local communities before decisions were taken on any of the options presented. Upon publication, the then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, pledged to reform delivery of ferry services guided by a central principle of the need to involve

communities⁵⁷⁰ and the report suggested no decisions should be taken without further consultation⁵⁷¹. It was announced that the Ferries Community Board would carry out a public consultation exercise on the recommendations of the report⁵⁷². There was agreement on the importance of community involvement⁵⁷³ and accountability to passengers.⁵⁷⁴

399. The Committee and the Scottish Government⁵⁷⁵ are aware of the consultation fatigue that exists. The Scottish Government said it is essential "sufficient evidence is collected to ensure the right investment decisions are made to support our island and rural communities."⁵⁷⁶
400. The Scottish Government previously committed to a revised communications and stakeholder strategy.⁵⁷⁷
401. Evidence presented to us suggested formal involvement for community voices in service design and delivery through—
 - Community and union places on the Boards of delivery and decision making organisations;⁵⁷⁸
 - Locating management positions within these organisations in the communities they serve; and
 - Other formal and informal structures for the involvement of communities in decisions on services.
402. CalMac expressed support for islander experience on the board.⁵⁷⁹ The CMAL Board now includes an island-based non-executive director.⁵⁸⁰ The then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, told us she agreed that it was important for islanders to be represented on the boards, but said this should not be in place of other engagement.⁵⁸¹ Transport Scotland said boards required the right mix of skills and expertise.⁵⁸² Stakeholders argued their lived experience of the service was ample qualification.⁵⁸³
403. Transport Scotland said they were "looking at whether there is something else we could be doing"⁵⁸⁴ in relation to supporting people to gain the skills and experience necessary to join the Board, which the then Minister for Transport identified as "upskilling".⁵⁸⁵ They said "...there was a requirement for those who came forward to demonstrate that they fully understood and were familiar with the issues".⁵⁸⁶
404. The Committee was also interested in exploring whether people working on and around ferries formed part of the ferry-dependent communities and the potential trade union representation on boards, replicating the model used by Scottish Rail Holdings Ltd.⁵⁸⁷ Robbie Drummond said a place on the board for union representatives was a matter for the board.⁵⁸⁸ The then Minister undertook to speak to CalMac and CMAL about this.⁵⁸⁹ The Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA) also proposed a formal route to engagement with trade unions through a consultative council approach.⁵⁹⁰ Several written submissions were

critical of the influence already exerted by trade unions.⁵⁹¹

405. The Committee also heard calls that management positions of delivery organisations should be based in the communities they served. This stemmed from suggestions those taking decisions were too remote from the impacts of those decisions. There were examples of people taking up positions within organisations delivering ferry services and failing to engage with or visit the communities they were employed to serve.⁵⁹² The benefits of regular meetings between operators and stakeholders such as local authorities were highlighted, including examples from Norway.⁵⁹³
406. Gordon Ross of Western Ferries provided anecdotal evidence of his accessibility as a ferry operator within his local community.⁵⁹⁴ Councillor Uisdean Robertson extolled the benefits of having the CalMac Head of Operations based in the Western Isles.⁵⁹⁵
407. It was also proposed operations could be based in ferry-dependent communities and suggestions included locating the Transport Scotland ferries division within an island community.⁵⁹⁶ Such actions were also thought to be a potential solution for depopulation issues.⁵⁹⁷
408. As well as formal board and management positions, the Committee is aware of other groups, including volunteers, working to improve their local ferry services. The Committee has engaged with local ferry groups and communities, and places its thanks on record to all those who generously gave up their time. These groups are voluntary and the expertise developed by those participating in them is much appreciated. The Committee heard these groups were helpful⁵⁹⁸ but also views there were too many small groups and a pooled effort may have more impact.⁵⁹⁹
409. The then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, praised their efforts and acknowledged—
- ” “the Government—and the organisations that run ferry services on our behalf—need to do better at engaging with, listening to and acting on island communities’ needs.”⁶⁰⁰
410. One way in which efforts of these groups may be pooled is the Ferries Community Board, from whom the Committee took evidence. Initially set up by CalMac as part of the CHFS contract⁶⁰¹, the Chair of the Board said it has evolved into an independent group due to its engagement with organisations beyond the operator.⁶⁰² He noted that since then support has been lacking.⁶⁰³ The independent nature of the group was cited as important by stakeholders.⁶⁰⁴
411. The Chair added it had taken a while for the board to find its purpose due to being initially constituted in a top-down fashion.⁶⁰⁵ He believed it now understood community need and had achieved influence. He indicated the Board had been engaged on the Islands Connectivity Plan and the Chair is running a consultation exercise on Project Neptune. However, challenges were identified as ferry delivery structures were not well set up for consultation⁶⁰⁶ and “it is quite difficult to always

talk to individual parts" ⁶⁰⁷ of the Tripartite arrangement. Members of the Board said its existence suggested there were problems with service delivery ⁶⁰⁸ and formal engagement structures with island communities should improve. ⁶⁰⁹

412. Scottish Government convenes an [Islands Strategic Group](#) and a [National Islands Plan Delivery Group](#). The Chair of the Ferries Community Board sits on the latter.
413. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and HITRANS called for the Islands Transport Forum to be reconvened. ⁶¹⁰ There was formerly a NIFS User Group which met 2-3 times a year and Orkney Island Council called for this to be re-established. ⁶¹¹ The then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, announced in September 2022 she would re-establish and refresh the Islands Transport Forum. ⁶¹² It is not clear if this group has met or what its renewed role or remit may be.
414. Communities and stakeholders may benefit from coherent and independent oversight of how advocacy informs decision making. Although we have received minimal evidence as part of our inquiry ⁶¹³, the Project Neptune report ⁶¹⁴ has suggested one way to achieve this would be a commissioner or regulator model. This option scored highly in terms of deliverability, accountability and transparency and value for money, although it requires further research on supporting the passenger experience. The report describes the advantages as—
 - Would be an easily identifiable body with oversight of the whole system of ferry delivery in Scotland;
 - It could drive improved performance depending on role (although caveat of comparisons with energy was applied);
 - Could adopt some of the responsibilities of Transport Scotland (which the Committee considers could be an opportunity to enhance expertise in decision making);
 - Could provide independent perspective and increase accountability and transparency;
 - If required to consider spending on new vessels, it could increase chances of vessels being "fit for purpose";
 - Could achieve efficiencies; and
 - Is a system replicated in other public transport delivery such as rail.
415. It adds however that—
 - A full economic assessment would be required to establish how savings could be achieved as compared to the potential cost of a new body. The report notes however "an effective commissioner should be capable of driving efficiencies in the sector that are greater than its operating costs. If this is achieved, then the net impact should be positive.";
 - Another body could increase confusion as to responsibility;
 - The initial Project Neptune evaluation "has not found justification for the more

expansive regulation that would be present under a Regulated Asset Base, particularly if the desired outcomes can be achieved with more limited regulation".

416. It was suggested that some of the perceived benefits of unbundling could be improved with more flexibility within the current contract structure, localised decision making⁶¹⁵ and community involvement.⁶¹⁶

417. Throughout our inquiry we have identified areas where further oversight and expert consideration of issues is required, as well as adjudication of competing needs and interests and, where necessary, the protection of the passenger interest. Increased regulation of ferry services in Scotland is required and the Committee believes the Scottish Government should demonstrate in its response to this report and in the Islands Connectivity Plan how increased regulation and oversight will be achieved. The Committee is of the view there should be stronger regulatory function for ferry services and this could take a number of forms. This could include an independent ferry regulator, which Project Neptune considered, and we seek the views of the Scottish Government on this.
418. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government provide an update on the status of the revised communications and stakeholder strategy highlighted in its response to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, including a copy of this and information on how it is implemented and how its performance is being measured, including feedback from communities.
419. The Committee recognises board membership is a powerful and meaningful form of participation but believes it is not the only route to representation in decision making. In conjunction with our previous recommendation that the next CHFS contract must include specific requirements for the operator to work with local authorities and communities on service delivery and decision making, the Committee recommends the Scottish Government give consideration to how board membership of publicly owned ferry delivery organisations could include meaningful representations of the island communities they serve.
420. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government set out the skills it believes are currently missing from public ferry delivery organisation board applications from island community members and consider how it achieve the "upskilling" it considers necessary and within its responsibility.
421. The Committee recommends trade union representation on the boards of public ferry delivery should be explored further, akin to the model adopted for ScotRail in 2022.
422. The Committee seeks clarification on who would take the decision on the constitution of boards of publicly owned companies and requests an update on Scottish Government discussions with CalMac and CMAL about adding a trade union representative to their boards, including—

- **Considerations on union representatives on the Board;**
- **The action to be taken were union representatives to be appointed to the board; and**
- **The timescales for such action.**

423. **The Committee recognises the merits presented to us of locating management positions for public ferry delivery organisations within the communities they serve and recommends the Scottish Government reflect on the evidence presented to us on this.**
424. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government consider how it could use the forthcoming new iteration of the CHFS contract to mandate regular meetings with stakeholders by senior management, as well as local operational officials, of public ferry delivery organisations.**
425. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should consider what further Scottish Government support can be provided to the Ferries Community Board and in particular to facilitate structured and regular access to organisations such as Transport Scotland, CalMac and CMAL.**
426. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government review the patchwork approach of organisations representing community interests in ferry services and ensure there is a consistency of representation and access to decision makers to all communities in formally established groups.**
427. **The Scottish Government should clarify the status of the Islands Transport Forum and whether this has met yet.**

Council-run ferry services

428. The Committee experienced first hand the importance of the council-run ferry services during its visits to Orkney. People described the inter-island ferry services as akin to roads⁶¹⁷ or a bus service and said they expected the same level of service as residents of Edinburgh, for example, might expect from Lothian Buses.⁶¹⁸ There was praise for the services operated by councils and local authorities felt they were positioned to engage with and respond well to community need.⁶¹⁹ They deliver some of the busiest ferry services in Scotland.
429. Inter-island ferry services across the Orkney archipelago are provided by Orkney Ferries Ltd. 100% of the shares of Orkney Ferries Ltd, a private limited company, are owned by Orkney Islands Council and all five seats on the company Board are occupied by Elected Members.
430. Orkney Ferries Ltd can trace its history back to the Orkney Steam Navigation

Company Ltd (OSNCo), a private company established in 1867 to provide services between Kirkwall and the North Isles of Orkney. During the early to mid 20th Century OSNCo services received considerable taxpayer support and new vessels were Government funded. In the 1950s concerns were raised about the level of service provided and a consultant report concluded the company could not raise the capital to replace the ships.⁶²⁰

431. OSNCo was wound up in 1962 and a new company, the Orkney Islands Shipping Company Ltd – a Government supported non-departmental public body, was formed with local and Government-appointed directors. Levels of taxpayer support for the continued operation of services and the purchase of new vessels was set out in an “undertaking” between the Secretary of State for Scotland and the company.
432. Orkney Islands Council assumed ownership of the Orkney Islands Shipping Company on 1 April 1987, acquiring the share capital of the company and its vessels. Again, levels of UK Government support for continued service provision were set out in an understanding between the Council and Secretary of State for Scotland. The company changed its name to Orkney Ferries Ltd in 1995.
433. The historical position of ferries in Shetland has been harder for the Committee to track, but it is clear that council-run ferry services on the islands date back many decades.
434. Several challenges for council-run services were presented to the Committee—
- Councils experience the same challenges as government run routes with regard to the age and accessibility of their fleets, and linked to this was the levels of revenue funding provided to local authorities to run services and capital funding to replace vessels;⁶²¹
 - The disparity between treatment of routes falling within the CHFS and NIFS networks and council-run services in terms of Scottish Government support;⁶²² and
 - Lack of clarity over the ability to transfer council-run ferry services to the Scottish Government.
435. Solutions presented included—
- Provide levels of capital funding sufficient to support robust vessel replacement plans.⁶²³ The descriptions of vessels being used does not suggest operators have confidence in their boats and for some replacement is an urgent need⁶²⁴ ;
 - Continue to commit to provision of full revenue funding.⁶²⁵ The Committee heard concerns about rising costs of operating services⁶²⁶ and some ferries are not operating to optimum levels of service suggested by the Route and Services Methodology;⁶²⁷
 - Shetland Islands Council reiterated their position that, in the longer term, ferries were not their preferred option for the long-term on shorter routes, arguing that fixed links would ultimately provide both better connectivity and lower whole-life

costs (see the [FIXED LINKS](#) section of this report for further details); ⁶²⁸

- Funding allocations should be confirmed for several years in advance to allow for planning; ⁶²⁹
- Scottish Government should develop a minimum service standard and provide funding to allow councils to deliver service to at least that level; ⁶³⁰ and
- Collaboration through a working group on all revenue funded lifeline services in Scotland to ensure consistency of service. ⁶³¹

436. Funding for local authorities is derived for the most part through the block grant provided by the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government also—

” "...set the allocation and distribution of Specific Grants in connection with specific policy initiatives and expectations. The grants can only be used for specific services, so are known as ring-fenced funding." ⁶³²

437. Support for operation of inter-island ferry services falls within this specific revenue funding. HITRANS highlighted positive engagement from the Scottish Government in providing revenue funding support for local authority services. However, it notes funding provided in 2018/19 and said—

” "In each subsequent year the settlement has increased with allocations for each local authority varying each year depending on information supplied in support of their request for funding support, and the outcome of negotiations between the councils and officials in Transport Scotland. For the 2022/23 budget the Scottish Government has agreed to provide the four local authorities with a specific ring-fenced revenue grant funding support for ferry funding of £32.095m. This sum is less than each council's full ask submitted to Transport Scotland for ferry funding support, including allowance for fares at Road Equivalent Tariff rates where relevant, but still represents a significant increase from 2018-19 levels when all support was through the Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE) mechanism." ⁶³³

438. Others, such as Argyll and Bute Council, also noted the Scottish Government had not offered what councils had requested to cover the cost of ferry services. ⁶³⁴

439. In the Stage 3 debate on the Budget Bill in February 2023, the then Deputy First Minister, confirmed the Scottish Government would provide full revenue funding for inter-island ferry services and would work with local authorities on establishing the levels of funding required. ⁶³⁵ The Scottish Government has also established Task Forces with the Northern Isles councils on long-term plans for replacement of their ferry fleets.

440. In emergencies, the Scottish Government has had to step in to support councils, as shown with the recent ⁶³⁶ collapse of Highland Council's Corran Ferry Service ⁶³⁷ . The Council told us the service was "hanging by a thread" on 7 February and both vessels used to operate the service were broken down from 15 April until 1 June, when the secondary vessel, the Maid of Glencoul, resumed service. ⁶³⁸ Highland

Council sought support from the UK Ministry of Defence and the Scottish Government.⁶³⁹

441. The previous Ferries Plan (2013-2022)⁶⁴⁰ included provision to transfer responsibility for ferry services from local government to the Scottish Government. This was subject to various criteria including the service being considered 'lifeline' and agreement on transfer of ownership of surrounding infrastructure and revenue. Highland Council told the Committee it had applied to transfer responsibility for the Corran Ferry but was thwarted by lack of capital funding to replace vessels.⁶⁴¹ Having received assistance for this through the SVRP, it sought assurance the option of transfer would remain open in the Islands Connectivity Plan.⁶⁴² However, the £62m required to replace the vessels is not yet in place. Shetland Islands Council suggested it was no longer keen on transfer of responsibility due to a perceived lack of proactivity from Transport Scotland.⁶⁴³ Orkney Islands Council thought ownership and vessel responsibility could be transferred while local authorities retained operational control.⁶⁴⁴ It said discussions were ongoing.⁶⁴⁵ For Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council, a hybrid option involving outsourcing operational services for council owned vessels was preferable.⁶⁴⁶
442. The ability of local authorities to provide a service in a cost effective and efficient manner was highlighted.⁶⁴⁷ Because island councils are seen as more accessible and responsive than distant national bodies such as CMAL, their role in running ferries has been welcomed by some as a good model. There have been calls for *more* council involvement in ferry services and harbour ownership.⁶⁴⁸

443. **The Committee supports the principle of local management of lifeline ferry services and therefore supports the principle of council-run ferries. However, the Committee believes they should be supported to provide lifeline services where required. The Scottish Government must collaborate effectively in joint ventures with local authorities on reasonable needs and achieve long-term clarity on ongoing support (capital and revenue) to ensure communities have a reliable local ferry service now and in the future.**
444. **For vessel procurement a number of options need to be looked at, including local authority and Scottish Government joint ventures.**
445. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government undertake a comparative review of the status of services currently delivered by local authorities in Scotland with a view to establishing a minimum standard for consistent delivery across the country. A local authority working group should be established to consider how to implement this.**
446. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should include Transfer of Responsibility as an option for councils to apply for in the next Islands Connectivity Plan. The Scottish Government should reconsider whether the criteria for this are still appropriate and will ultimately lead to value for money and quality services.**

447. **The situation with the Corran Ferry is deeply regrettable having been predicted by Highland Council when they gave evidence earlier this year.**

Fixed links

448. In some cases it was suggested tunnels and bridges should be constructed as opposed to committing to new vessels on some short routes.⁶⁴⁹ These were seen as convenient and reliable. It was also suggested fixed links would attract people to island life and help address depopulation⁶⁵⁰.
449. Stakeholders reported that engaging with Transport Scotland on the issue of fixed links and funding had been difficult.⁶⁵¹ Some suggested the Scottish Government should give consideration to these as part of the Islands Connectivity Plan.⁶⁵² The STPR2 contains a recommendation to explore the potential of fixed links in the Sounds of Harris and Barra and between Mull and the Scottish mainland.⁶⁵³
450. Other options and possible locations for fixed links are ruled out with scope of the STPR2. The STPR2 Island Community Impact Assessment suggests other islands will benefit from fixed links being built, allowing the reconfiguration of the existing ferry routes to create land bridges⁶⁵⁴. Inter-island fixed links in the Northern Isles were considered out with the scope of STPR2 "as it would not reduce the operating costs of the CHFS or NIFS network"⁶⁵⁵ and "they are local services in the same way as other transport provision is in other local authorities".⁶⁵⁶
451. Several written submissions highlighted the success of development of a network of tunnels in the Faroe Islands as an example to be replicated. A network of tunnels to connect as many as possible of the archipelago's 18 inhabited islands was started in the 1960s. The most recent to be completed is the 6.6 mile Eysturoyartunnlin network which connects the islands of Streymoy and Eysturoy⁶⁵⁷. Estunlar, the company which built the tunnels, noted it reduced the travel time from the capital Tórshavn to Runavík/Strendur from 64 minutes to 16.⁶⁵⁸ A second tunnel is due to be completed in late 2023.⁶⁵⁹
452. Some Members of the Committee met with delegates from the Faroe Islands at the Arctic Circle Assembly last year and discussed the role of fixed links. We heard of the transformative effect tunnels had on previously isolated and declining communities, contributing to more economic activity, better access to public services, and better life quality all round. There are tolls although the long-term aim is to make the tunnels free to use. Tunnels are funded through public-private partnership. Loans are taken out and underwritten by the government, with ultimate backing from the Danish Government.
453. We heard that councils and community councils are conducting or have conducted individual assessments of viability of fixed link options in their areas.⁶⁶⁰ Advocates suggested these demonstrated the value for money provided by fixed links as

opposed to replacement ferry services in the longer term.⁶⁶¹ But unless capital is forthcoming from the Scottish Government, few if any such projects are likely to progress.

454. Of those potential links being explored, the then Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport, Michael Matheson MSP, said local community engagement in this investigation would be important.⁶⁶² He said the review would consider the costs of fixed links compared with replacement ferries⁶⁶³ and indicated timescales for this work would be confirmed in "coming months".⁶⁶⁴ Again this comparison of the cost benefits of fixed links as opposed to ferry services could deliver more were it done on a comprehensive basis.
455. Stakeholders on Shetland advocated fixed links to replace several inter-island ferry services.⁶⁶⁵ Shetland Islands Council suggested funding allocated to a report considering tunnels as part of wider connectivity by the local authority demonstrated the importance of these to local communities.⁶⁶⁶
456. Highland Council suggested a bridge was a long-term ambition but in the meantime the Corran Ferry needed to be replaced.⁶⁶⁷ This proposal was not put forward for recommendation in the Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) on the grounds improved connections to the Ardnamurchan peninsula would better address the issue.⁶⁶⁸
457. There were also questions about whether the plan would encompass all forms of transport to islands⁶⁶⁹, such as air links. For some areas, a flight is not available and ferries are the only option. However, where air transport is available, people had various comments, including—
- Good for moving people⁶⁷⁰ but the air discount scheme should apply to businesses;⁶⁷¹
 - Air travel was expensive⁶⁷², even with the air discount scheme;⁶⁷³
 - You could not take vehicles or freight;⁶⁷⁴ and
 - The climate change implications of promoting air travel should be accounted for and it should be for emergency use only.⁶⁷⁵

458. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government commission a comprehensive study into the viability, cost and potential savings of fixed links in appropriate locations across Scotland. It should work with local authorities to build on the experience they have developed in initial scoping exercises to identify sites. The review must consider an assessment of increased costs of transfer of traffic to roads where available were ferry or fixed link ruled out. Auditing the environmental and carbon emission benefits and disbenefits must be a key element of any such studies.**
459. **The Committee recommends the Scottish Government provide an update to the Committee on the timescales for its investigation of fixed links in the**

Sounds of Barra and Harris and between Mull and the mainland. This should include an update on community engagement.

Annexe A - Oral evidence

You can read Minutes of the Committee's meetings at the Scottish Parliament website: [Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee - Meetings](#)

Meetings at which evidence was taken

- [28 June 2022](#) - Islands community representatives
- [1 November 2022](#) - Independent ferry service operators
- [8 November 2022](#) - Business, trade and tourism representatives
- [15 November 2022](#) - Trade union representatives
- [31 January 2023](#) - Independent experts, followed by members of the Ferries Community Board
- [7 February 2023](#) - Local authorities involved with operating Council-run services or affected by the delivery of ferry services
- [21 February 2023](#) - Experts on Norwegian ferry services, followed by CalMac Ferries and NorthLink Ferries
- [28 February 2023](#) - Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL), followed by the Scottish Government.

Annexe B - Written evidence

The Committee ran a **call for views** which closed on 26 August 2022. You can read 388 published responses at the Scottish Parliament website: [A modern and sustainable ferry service for Scotland - Published responses](#)

All **correspondence** received as part of the inquiry is published and available to read at the inquiry homepage: [A modern and sustainable ferry service for Scotland - Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee \(Scottish Parliament\)](#)

Annexe C - Themes discussed at engagement events

Scottish Youth Parliament – Online Engagement Event – Themes – 17 January 2023

Cost

- Ferries were described as equivalent to bus services for young islanders
- Where overnight stays are required due to timetables not aligning with activities, the cost can be prohibitive to participation
- Taking a car is expensive
- Cannot visit friends who live on islands due to costs

Access to goods and services

- Sometimes deliveries of goods cannot be made to island communities
- Extra-curricular activities - competitions take place on the mainland so travel is required
- Access to health care

Reliability

- Age of vessels and unreliability caused by breakdown or maintenance
- Cancellations due to weather

Safety

- Whether young people, particularly young women, feel safe on public transport
- Increased lighting at transport connections

Ferry travel passes

- There were calls for free ferry travel for under 22s as with buses
- It was noted the benefit of free bus travel did not extend to islanders in the same way as other parts of the country because of a lack of bus service
- There were calls for the extension of the existing scheme of offering 2 free returns to young islanders and linking a discount on all journeys to Young Scot cards.

Priority travel for local communities

- Reserve a number of places for island residents to travel on and off islands
- Discounted or free travel for island and peninsula residents, potentially funded by a surcharge for tourists

Alignment of public transport

- Bus timetables and ferry timetables should align
- Integrated ticketing was proposed (and thought to encourage increased use of public transport in general)

Technology

- Wi-Fi on ferries
- Create an app for ferry travel to provide updates on where the boat is and whether it is delayed

Sustainability and fuel sources

- Currently used LPG but it is shipped

Island Communities – Online Engagement Event – Themes – 17 January 2023

Reliability

- Ferry services are unreliable
- Ferries should connect with other modes of travel easily
- The issue of weather-related cancellations was raised, including whether the type of vessel had an impact and whether catamarans were more reliable
- Where sailings are cancelled, people called for more support. This included in situations relating to medical appointments
- Delays to medical treatment because of ferry service cancellations was also raised
- Need bespoke contingency plans depending on the service
- Want a year-round service
- People are incurring additional costs when travelling because they are going a day or two early to ensure they are able to travel

Resilience and flexibility

- Want more smaller vessels with flexible timetables
- More frequent sailings were called for
- A resilient crew base is required to prevent cancellations and delay for crew related reasons
- Want sailings which run earlier in the morning and later at night, and longer stopovers would facilitate day return trips
- People in some areas felt others were prioritised in terms of contingency plans
- Vessels could carry people during the day and freight at night

Fares

- Discounts and vouchers for concessionary travel should be maintained
- Ferry travel should be free for under 22s
- Strategic thinking about fares should be implemented (example of introduction of the Road Equivalent Tariff)
- Examples were provided on where even with concessions, fares were still unaffordable
- Increases in freight costs were linked to increased costs for local businesses

Capacity

- It is hard to book a cabin on NorthLink ferries
- Hard to travel with a car
- Allow for short notice travel, which can be hard at the moment
- This is especially true during peak tourist season
- Makes it hard to attend medical appointments
- Business or service requirements
- Lack of capacity can inhibit travel for education, work and extra curricular activities. Such restrictions can have a negative impact on mental health
- There should be freight-only services to free up space on passenger ferries
- Tourists to be welcomed and valued, but has to be balanced against local need to travel on lifeline services
- Operators should understand the purpose of travel of people and goods
- Priority should be given to people depending on resident status or reason for travel
- Penalties should be applied for business no-shows
- Lack of capacity for disabled travellers, which was linked to poor accessibility in general

Sustainability

- There was support for sustainable and fuel efficient systems, providing this was not at the expense of better services
- In the long-term, ferries with sustainable propulsion systems were sought including electric and hydrogen
- Supporting infrastructure should also be sustainable (loading vehicles were example provided)

- Should be able to lease electric vehicles to travel on an island to reduce need to bring own vehicles and to promote sustainable travel
- The carbon considerations of ferries need to take into account the distances travelled to use particular routes or land based alternatives where available

Communication and engagement with island communities

- Calls for local understanding of the short, medium and long-term plans for ferry services
- Local communities should benefit from employment opportunities presented by the ferries
- Decision making bodies should include local representation, including business interests
- Communities should be at the heart of decision making and involved in every step of process
- Management should be based in the communities they serve

Ferry replacements

- Support for announcements of new ferries
- Concern at the timescales for procurement
- Should consider the available harbour infrastructure during procurement process
- Concerns raised at the expertise of those making decisions on ferry procurement
- Master mariners and local crew with knowledge of sea conditions should be involved
- Local communities should be involved and development trusts were cited as a good source of expertise
- Communities were grateful for the new ferries coming into service but were concerned at the timescales and questioned what was to happen in the meantime
- Calls for more second-hand vessels
- Innovative thinking about vessel use, such as on a loan or leased basis, is needed
- Vessels should be capable of transporting the type of vehicle that wish to travel to a certain area without loss of capacity or service levels (examples given were hauliers, camper vans and ability to accommodate growing private vehicles)
- Concerns raised about funding to replace council ferries

Crew

- Accommodation should be provided onshore

Tripartite structure

- Should be revised
- Lack of accountability and no incentive to provide an excellent service

Council services

- Concerns were raised over funding for council run ferry services
- Was noted councils often had lived experience among decision makers but it did not always feed into service

Private ferry services

- Lessons should be learned from private operators' service models

Fixed links

- Ongoing costs of ferry services are not sustainable so must look at alternatives

Onward Travel

- Ferries should be link up with onward travel and it was emphasised the ferry is part of the journey

Annexe D - Themes discussed on visits

Cultural

Once lost, confidence in travel to islands takes a long while to return.

The cost of the lost confidence to local business is not quantified.

Consultation fatigue is an issue-

- People are really knowledgeable about the ferry services because they have to be;
- Meeting multiple transport ministers;
- Lack of access to decision makers.

Communities felt services, vessels and terminal building designs have been imposed on them and wanted different options and co-design. Communities did not feel they were listened to or that their representations had made a difference.

People in island communities called for equality of treatment, and said they were not prioritised, either in comparison to people living on the mainland or people living on larger/ more populated islands.

Communities do not necessarily care about the process, they just want things done. Current system was not innovative in finding solutions and had a “no can do” attitude.

There should be community representation on boards of lifeline services.

Depopulation

People are leaving islands and directly citing ferry services.

It is expensive to live on an island and the further you go from the centres of population, the worse this becomes. Roles on the mainland are paying more than equivalents on the islands, including for some publicly funded services.

Young people are choosing to leave resulting in demographic issues.

Planning to travel

Booking travel on a ferry

This is essential, especially if you want to take a vehicle.

Reasons for travel are not given consideration for example emotional, health, bereavement etc. The need to attend medical appointments at short notice is not given any weighting in booking currently.

Islanders who need to book travel at short notice should have a mechanism to do this.

There's no additional capacity added for things like special long weekends, school holidays or other predictable points when demand may be higher for ferry services.

Local relationships were important in accessing ferry travel at short notice.

People said where ferry offices were staffed, staff were helpful.

Situations where people are unsuccessful in making a booking, and their reasons for travel, are not recorded. This would show when and why additional sailings are needed.

Assistance requirements

It was suggested those with disabilities, access issues (such as prams) or mobility issues should receive priority boarding onto ferries.

People reported finding it difficult to get out of their car because of the proximity to other vehicles once parked on the ferry.

Disabled travellers can often be last off the ferry which means potential delays and being last in a queue of traffic once on the island/road on the mainland.

Prioritisation of island communities

Island residents should have priority when booking onto the ferries.

Should be focus on and special assistance for business customers

Capacity on boats

During the pandemic the mezzanine level on the MV Hebrides was closed. The information provided on why and the decision making process were questioned.

Road Equivalent Tariff

Means people will bring multiple cars and load up with goods they are then not buying on the island.

Transport on islands

Bus services are not reliable or sufficiently connected in some areas. It was felt there is a lack of incentive for a commercial organisation to take on an island bus service.

Young people noted their counterparts on the mainland or in places with reliable bus services were offered free travel on that mode of transport, but they did not receive an equivalent for the ferry and there were no buses for them to take. This meant they were not deriving the same benefits as young people elsewhere despite the fact inter-island ferries are the equivalent of bus travel for young islanders in some places.

Changes to flight routes put additional pressure on the ferry services. It was suggested transport should be looked at as a whole system on islands, from travelling from the mainland to how people moved around once there. Suggestions included improved electric private vehicle and public transport infrastructure, and timetables that complemented one another. The Committee heard examples such as coach services on the mainland not waiting for delayed ferries and the train into a port town arriving five minutes before a ferry leaves.

Innovative thinking around fixed links was called for, including utilising these for renewable energy generation too.

Cancellations

Notice given – time

Where ferries are cancelled, communities reported this being at relatively short notice either in comparison to the next alternative or to the time of the cancelled crossing.

Notice given – means of communication

Not everyone is connected to the internet, or has a smart phone. It was suggested this was not an issue with connectivity, but with accessibility or ability to use digital tools.

Island communities are relying on each other to stay informed.

The Committee was told of services where a text message is sent to inform people of cancellations and asks them to phone a call centre, but the call centre is often not open.

Reasons for cancellations

Services are being cancelled on the basis of weather more frequently than in the past.

Factors included in this decision may be—

- Conditions at sea and in open water; and
- Conditions at the harbour and whether the vessels can easily and safely dock in certain weather conditions and wind speeds. It was suggested local skippers/masters were more confident making crossings in all weathers because of their knowledge of the area.

Where vessels required refits, residents were frustrated where alternative vessels were not sourced.

Support provided on cancellations

Communities reported a lack of support when services are cancelled often leaving people in vulnerable situations. It was suggested the contract for ferry services should include a requirement to provide compensation and support in the event of cancellations. Currently compensation arrangements do not include the accommodation, transport or activities passengers did not manage to reach. This can impact on tourism businesses on islands and the Committee heard anecdotes of full bus groups being unable to travel to their accommodation on islands and there being no support for the cancellation of those bookings.

Contingency

Lack of contingency vessels or options where services are cancelled.

Services on islands

Construction

Hard to persuade contractors to work in island communities or for this to be affordable.

Cannot transport timber or livestock in some conditions The Committee was told some

quotes included days of extra work for a single day job because contractors had to factor in potential delays in getting on or off an island.

Domestic renewable energy sources

Either hard to find someone to install these or prohibitively expensive.

Access to goods on islands

Cancellations sometimes mean delivery drivers do not have enough time to distribute goods and leave the island. This can result in them not coming which leads to shortages of goods like food and car/domestic heating fuel.

Where hauliers rely on a particular service and that is routinely cancelled, this has an impact on the stock available in shops on the islands.

Can often be nothing on shelves and people on low incomes cannot afford to stockpile.

If there is a run on goods in shops, automated ordering system will automatically request the same thing for the next week which can lead to food waste.

Once deliveries are made, those who can go straight to the shop have choice whereas those working all day cannot get there until later and can find there is nothing left or no choice.

Can be especially hard to get specialist things such as gluten free options.

There was a preference for local haulier firms to provide services due to their knowledge of the islands and the people.

Healthcare

Use of helicopters to move people to mainland for treatment becoming more common because ferries cannot be relied on.

It is hard to recruit healthcare professionals to work on islands because they either have to commit to living there or risk not being able to travel to the island. Where staff do not live on an island, ferry disruption is resulting in missed appointments for services like home care.

The unreliability of the ferry service is detrimental to people's mental health.

Ferry services do not join up with clinics or mass services on the mainland. This can mean travelling several days in advance to guarantee your attendance and limited expenses are available.

Education

Hard to recruit teachers

Sports and recreation

Hard to compete in sports or other competitions (choirs etc) because you cannot travel to mainland or encourage other competitors to the islands.

Also hard to find accommodation on mainland/island for teams or groups of competitors, and cannot rely on same day ferry services.

No discount for buses of young people.

The cost of travel to attend sporting lessons was described as prohibitive if this involved travel by ferry and potential overnight stays.

Tourism

The needs of tourists and those of island residents can conflict. Communities told the Committee of the need for balance between their needs.

Communities reported wanting to be tourists in other parts of the country or world, but being unable to get off the island during peak seasons.

Agriculture

Livestock can be lost on route due to delays caused by ferry cancellations. Specialised livestock ferry services for all islands was proposed.

Suggested service improvements

Strategy and planning of ferry service delivery

Tenders for improvements to harbours required to accommodate new vessels was not taking place to simultaneously deliver harbours and vessels, and did not always align.

Tendering for new vessels not taking place sufficiently early and leaving a lack of capacity in the system.

Planning of services should involve ferry users and—

- This should involve representation of island residents on the boards of ferry operators;
- Meaningful consultation and a demonstrable result of how this contributed to change;

Freight only services

- It was suggested these could take place through the night
- Subsidies should not benefit those making a profit from ferry services and the cost of travel should be means tested.

Re-open the mezzanine deck on the MV Hebrides Subsidies should be for supporting locals to travel on and off islands.

Participants in Orkney called renewal of aging council fleets and harbour infrastructure, including to improve accessibility. It was also proposed the renewed vessels should be more environmentally friendly and suggested Scotland should be looking at what Norway are doing around low emissions ferries as a marker to aimed for. Hydrogen also thought to be a key part of the future of inter-island ferry services.

Tripartite system of management and delivery

Should be streamlined.

Lack of confidence in the leadership, management, skills and results of the current system.

Too cumbersome to deliver change at the pace needed. The speed of movement within the system was slower than in private sector and it was proposed this was due to the lack of requirement to make a profit.

CMAL own some piers and harbours and it was suggested the Scottish Government should own piers to allow for different services to access them. Changes to the contract, even minor service changes like a 15 minute time difference, require a contract variation. People felt they should have more say in contract variation.

Impact of the UK leaving the European Union on the tri-partite structure

All boats and ports should be compatible.

It was suggested a proportion of the members of the board of CalMac should be required to live in island communities. People commented on the ability to work remotely now and how this strengthened the argument ferry related roles should be based in the communities they serve.

Vessels

In certain areas, preferences were expressed for more smaller vessels rather than one large. Communities were well aware of their requirements and demonstrated expertise in types of vessels. The suggested benefits of this were—

- Increase the number of scheduled sailings;
- More resilience and capacity if there's an issue with one boat;
- Able to dock in more harbours;
- It was suggested there should be sufficient capacity in the system to allow boats to take a day in dry dock for maintenance.

Need to build vessels which are future proofed. For example, new ferries are still going to have diesel engines or run on LNG which is hard to store.

Vessels should be powered using renewable sources and the people required to run and maintain this should live on islands to mitigate depopulation.

Tendering

Adapting and renovating a vessel to re-purpose it can cost almost the same as buying a new vessel.

Crewing arrangements

On some vessels, staff live on board.

Some passenger facilities have been removed to make way for facilities for staff who live on board.

Working on ferries

Concerns were expressed about recruitment exercises for new boats not happening quickly enough to ensure adequate staff when they are ready.

Shore based accommodation could be built and cost of this could be compared to cost of building a bigger boat.

Annexe E - Timeline for consultation process on Islands Connectivity Plan

460.

Anticipated sections of the Islands Connectivity Plan and timescales for consultation and finalisation
Letter from the Minister for Transport to the Committee providing further information following the evidence session - 31 March 2023

Section of the Islands Connectivity Plan	Timescales for consultation and finalisation
ICP document	A draft for formal consultation will be published "later in the year"
Long -term plan for vessels and ports	A final version will be published by the end of the year and it will take account of the outcomes of the community needs assessments
Community Needs Assessments and Market Assessments	These will be commissioned "during 2023"
Fares Policy	This "will be explored as other parts of the ICP continue to be developed". The Minister notes the Fair Fares Review "continues"
Connecting and onward travel	A scoping document will be developed in the "first half of 2023" and engagement will take place over the summer
Low carbon plan	A draft plan will be completed by summer 2023 to fit the timetable of development of the next climate change plan.

Annexe F - Age of vessels used to deliver CHFS and NIFS

Vessel	Built	Age
MV Isle of Cumbrae	1976	47
MV Isle of Arran	1984	39
MV Hebridean Isles	1985	38
MV Loch Linnhe	1986	37
MV Loch Riddon	1986	37
MV Loch Striven	1986	37
MV Loch Ranza	1987	36
MV Isle of Mull	1988	35
MV Lord of the Isles	1989	34
MV Loch Dunvegan	1991	32
MV Loch Fyne	1991	32
MV Loch Buie	1992	31
MV Loch Tarbert	1992	31
MV Caledonian Isles	1993	30
MV Isle of Lewis	1995	28
MV Loch Bhrosda	1996	27
MV Loch Alainn	1997	26
MV HELLIAR	1997	26
MV Clansman	1998	25
MV HILDASAY	1999	24
MV Ali Cat*	2000	23
MV Hebrides	2000	23
MV Lochnevis	2000	23
MV Argyll Flyer*	2001	22
MV HJALTLAND	2002	21
MV HROSSEY	2002	21
MV HAMNAVOE	2002	21
MV Coruisk	2003	20
MV Loch Portain	2003	20
MV Bute	2005	18
MV Argyle	2007	16
MV Loch Shira	2007	16
MC Chieftan*	2007	16
MV Finlaggan	2011	12
MV Hallaig	2012	11
MV Lochinvar	2013	10
MV Loch Seaforth	2014	9
MV Catriona	2015	8
MV Loch Frisa (She was previously named MV Utne and operated by Norled from 2015 to 2021)	2015	8
MV Carvoria	2017	6

There are currently 40 vessels deployed on the CHFS and NIFS services: 35 on CHFS and 5 on NIFS; these are all owned by Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) except for

3 passenger vessels(*) serving Dunoon and Kilcreggan (the Gourock-Dunoon vessels are owned by CalMac's parent company, David MacBrayne Ltd, and the Gourock-Kilcreggan vessel is owned by the previous route operator, Clyde Marine).

HITRANS provided median ages of ferries in Scotland by operator/owner

- Argyll and Bute Council - 33 years
- CalMac Ferries Limited - 24 years
- Highland Council - 33 years
- Orkney Islands Council - 31 years
- NorthLink Ferries - 22 years
- Shetland Islands Council - 30 years

Annexe G - Passenger Traffic on Subsidised Ferry Services, thousands

Route	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020 [note30]	2021 [note30]
Total Clyde	2,847.5	2,737.3	2,727.8	2,740.6	2,728.4	2,940.4	2,984.6	3,016.9	3,044.2	1,389.8	2,149.1
Total West Coast	2,136.9	2,114.8	2,165.9	2,222.5	2,200.0	2,418.7	2,554.3	2,524.2	2,641.8	980.6	1,800.5
Total North	303.7	298.0	282.9	288.6	297.6	301.5	307.5	322.5	347.6	121.8	229.5
Total	5,288.1	5,150.0	5,176.6	5,251.7	5,226.0	5,660.6	5,846.4	5,863.6	6,033.7	2,492.2	4,179.1

Source - Transport Scotland - [Scottish Transport Statistics 2022](#)

Annexe H - Car traffic on subsidised ferry services, thousands

Route	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020 [note30]	2021 [note30]
Total Clyde	557.9	520.7	520.0	532.3	597.9	684.1	709.0	708.0	731.9	429.3	635.2
Total West Coast	530.0	524.8	544.3	562.6	570.0	672.5	719.0	722.0	762.0	374.3	624.3
Total North	62.6	61.2	55.6	55.3	58.5	62.8	67.0	71.5	76.6	34.6	63.0
Total	1,150.5	1,106.7	1,119.9	1,150.2	1,226.4	1,419.4	1,495.0	1,501.5	1,570.5	838.2	1,322.5

Source - Transport Scotland - [Scottish Transport Statistics 2022](#)

Annexe I - Commercial vehicles and buses on subsidised ferry services, thousands

Route	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020 [note30]	2021 [note30]
Total Clyde	48.5	47.1	46.3	45.6	40.5	34.1	33.3	33.2	32.5	25.6	30.8
Total West Coast	64.2	63.4	57.6	56.8	56.8	55.4	57.0	57.7	58.8	44.4	53.9
Total North	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.45	0.43	0.43	0.56	0.51	0.53	0.016	0.031
Total	112.8	110.5	104.3	102.9	97.7	89.9	90.9	91.4	91.8	70.0	84.7

Source - Transport Scotland - [Scottish Transport Statistics 2022](#)

Annexe J - CalMac sailings cancellations by route in 21/22

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

A Modern and Sustainable Ferry Service for Scotland, 11th Report, 2023 (Session 6)

Route	Scheduled Sailings	Cancelled Sailings	Additional Sailings	Operated Sailings	Cancelled Due to Weather	Percentage of sailings cancelled due to weather	Percentage of cancelled sailings due to weather
Ardmhor (Barra) - Eriskay	3,447	357	40	3,130	234	6.79	65.55
Ardrossan - Brodick	4,794	617	80	4,257	348	7.26	56.40
Ardrossan - Campbeltown	154	19	0	135	6	3.90	31.58
Bemeray - Leverburgh	2,298	188	2	2,112	92	4.00	48.94
Claonaig - Lochranza	3,936	165	183	3,954	129	3.28	78.18
Colintraive - Rhubodach	22,581	551	36	22,066	291	1.29	52.81
Fionnphort - Iona	8,470	443	167	8,194	407	4.81	91.87
Fishnish - Lochaline	8,572	43	125	8,654	23	0.27	53.49
Gallanach - Kerrera	9,972	273	4,124	13,823	210	2.11	76.92
Gourock - Dunoon	18,396	2,752	10	15,654	1,155	6.28	41.97
Gourock - Kilcreggan	7,983	684	0	7,299	403	5.05	58.92
Kennacraig - Islay	2,795	150	31	2,676	49	1.75	32.67
Kennacraig - Islay/C'say/Oban	429	46	6	389	19	4.43	41.30
Largs - Cumbrae Slip	22,398	793	223	21,828	310	1.38	39.09
Mallaig - Ardnadale	4,554	913	43	3,684	220	4.83	24.10
Mallaig - Eigg, Muck, Rum/Canna	1720	213	264	1771	180	10.47	84.51
Mallaig to Lochbisdale	674	195	6	485	34	5.04	17.44
Oban - Castlebay/Lochboisdale	791	137	16	670	67	8.47	48.91
Oban - Coll/Tiree	1156	153	24	1027	121	10.47	79.08
Oban - Coll/Tiree/Castlebay	168	10	0	158	3	1.79	30.00
Oban - Colonsay	424	41	3	386	15	3.54	36.59
Oban - Craignure	5867	260	48	5,655	83	1.41	31.92
Oban - Lismore	2,634	95	0	2,539	59	2.24	62.11
Sconser - Raasay	6,058	173	32	5,917	146	2.41	84.39
Tarbert LF - Portavadie	6,698	437	0	6,261	182	2.72	41.65

Tayinloan - Gigha	6,643	365	22	6,300	327	4.92	89.59
Tobermory - Kilchoan	3,726	196	4	3,534	74	1.99	37.76
Uig - Tarbert/ Lochmaddy	2,158	192	56	2,022	71	3.29	36.98
Ullapool - Stornoway	2,062	146	8	1,924	133	6.45	91.10
Wemyss Bay - Rothesay	9,844	694	0	9,150	288	2.93	41.50
Totals	171402	11301	5553		5679	3.31	50.25

Annexe K - Ports and Harbours used on the CHFS and NIFS networks

Clyde & Hebrides: List of CHFS ports and owners

Port	Location	Owner
Ardmhor	Barra	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Ardrossan	North Ayrshire	Peel Ports
Armadaile	Sleat, Skye	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Berneray	Berneray	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Brodick	Arran	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Bull Hole	Mull	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Campbeltown	Kintyre	Argyll and Bute Council
Canna	Canna	National Trust for Scotland
Castlebay	Barra	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Claonaig	Kintyre	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Colintraive	Cowal	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Coll	Coll	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Colonsay	Colonsay	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Craignure	Mull	Argyll and Bute Council
Cumbræe	Cumbræe	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Dunoon	Cowal	Argyll and Bute Council
Eigg	Eigg	The Highland Council
Eriskay	Eriskay	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Fionnphort	Mull	Argyll and Bute Council
Fishnish	Mull	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Gallanach	Near Oban	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Gigha	Gigha	Argyll and Bute Council
Gigha berth	Gigha	Argyll and Bute Council
Gourock	Inverclyde	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Iona	Iona	Argyll and Bute Council
Kennacraig	Kintyre	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Kerrera	Kerrera	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Kilchoan	Ardnamurchan	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Kilcreggan	Rosneath	Argyll and Bute Council
Largs	North Ayrshire	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Leverburgh	Harris	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Lismore	Lismore	Argyll and Bute Council
Lochaline	Morven	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Lochboisdale	South Uist	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Lochmaddy	North Uist	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Lochranza	Arran	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Mallaig	Mallaig	Mallaig Harbour Authority
Muck	Muck	The Highland Council
Oban	Oban	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Otternish	Berneray	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Port Askaig	Islay	Argyll and Bute Council
Port Ellen	Islay	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Portavadie	Cowal	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Raasay	Raasay	The Highland Council
Rhubodach	Bute	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Rothesay	Bute	Argyll and Bute Council
Rum	Rum	The Highland Council
Sconser	Skye	The Highland Council

Port	Location	Owner
Stornoway	Lewis	Stornoway Port Authority
Tarbert, Harris	Harris	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Tarbert, Loch Fyne	Kintyre	Tarbert (Loch Fyne) Harbour Authority
Tayinloan	Kintyre	Argyll and Bute Council
Tiree	Tiree	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Tobermory	Mull	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited
Uig	Skye	The Highland Council
Ullapool	Ullapool	Ullapool Harbour Trust
Wemyss Bay	Inverclyde	Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited

Northern Isles: List of NIFS ports and owners

Port	Location	Owner
Aberdeen	Aberdeen	Aberdeen Harbour Authority
Lerwick	Shetland	Lerwick Port Authority
Kirkwall	Orkney	Orkney Islands Council
Stromness	Orkney	Orkney Islands Council
Scrabster	Caithness	Scrabster Harbour Trust

Annexe L - Teckal Exemption

Case C-107/98 **Teckal Srl v Comune di Viano and Azienda Gas-Acqua Consorziale (AGAC) di Reggio Emilia**

Summary of the Judgement

1. Preliminary rulings — Jurisdiction of the Court — Extraction of the relevant points of Community law — Jurisdiction of the national courts — Application of provisions as interpreted (EC Treaty, Art. 177 (now Art. 234 EC)) I - 8121 SUMMARY — CASE C-107/98

2. Approximation of laws — Procedures for the award of public supply contracts — Directive 93/36 — Scope — Contracts awarded by a contracting authority to a distinct and independent body — Covered — Where the successful tenderer is itself a contracting authority — Irrelevant (Council Directives 92/50, Art. 6, and 93/36)

1. Where, under the procedure provided for by Article 177 of the Treaty (now Article 234 EC), questions are formulated imprecisely, the Court may extract — from all the information provided by the national court and from the documents concerning the main proceedings — the points of Community law requiring interpretation, having regard to the subject matter of the dispute. In order to provide the national court with a satisfactory answer, the Court may deem it necessary to consider provisions of Community law which the national court has not mentioned in its question. On the other hand, by virtue of the division of functions provided for under the above provision, it is for the national court to apply the rules of Community law, as interpreted by the Court, to a specific case. No such application is possible without a comprehensive appraisal of the facts of the case.

2. Directive 93/36 coordinating procedures for the award of public supply contracts is applicable in cases where a contracting authority, such as a local authority, plans to conclude in writing, with an entity which is formally distinct from it and independent of it in regard to decision-making — which is not the position where the local authority exercises over a legally distinct person a form of control similar to that exercised over its own departments and, at the same time, the person carries out the essential part of its activities together with the controlling local authority or authorities — a contract for pecuniary interest for the supply of products, whether or not that entity is itself a contracting authority. The only permitted exceptions to the application of Directive 93/36 are those which are exhaustively and expressly mentioned therein. That Directive does not contain any provision comparable with Article 6 of Directive 92/50 relating to the coordination of procedures for the award of public service contracts, which excludes from its scope public contracts awarded, under certain conditions, to contracting authorities.

Glossary and abbreviations

A guide to terms used in this report

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Stands for
CHFS	Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services
CMAL	Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd
NTS2	National Transport Strategy
RET	Road Equivalent Tariff
STPR2	Strategic Transport Projects Review 2
SVRP	Small Vessels Replacement Programme

- 1 UK Government. (2019). [Clean Maritime Plan](#).
- 2 Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee. 12th Report, 2020 (Session 5). [Construction and procurement of ferry vessels in Scotland](#). (SP Paper 879)
- 3 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 8 November 2022, Col 19 and written Submissions from [Highlands and Islands Enterprise](#) and [Beatrice Wishart MSP](#)
- 4 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Minutes](#), 15 March 2022
- 5 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Meeting Papers](#), 28 June 2022
- 6 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 1 November 2022, Col 13, [Official Report](#), 8 November 2022, Col 5, 6 and 7, and [Official Report](#), 31 January 2023, Col 4
- 7 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 28 June 2022, Col 6
- 8 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 28 February 2023, Col 36
- 9 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 8 November 2022, Col 3
- 10 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 28 June 2022, Col 26 and written submission from [Mull and Iona Ferry Committee \(declining weather\)](#). This was also an issue raised on our visits and at engagement events.
- 11 Written submissions from [Jack White](#), [Chrisina Brown](#), and [Lewis and Harris Sports Council](#). This was also an issue raised on our visits and at engagement events.
- 12 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 28 June 2022, Col 3, 4 and 7. This was also an issue raised on our visits and at engagement events.
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- 14 Written Submission from [Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland](#). This was also an issue raised on our visits and at engagement events.
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- 16 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 28 June 2022, Col 3 and 4 and [Official Report](#), 8 November 2022, Col 3, 4, 13 and 27
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- 19 Written submissions from [Highlands and Island Enterprise](#) and [Beatrice Wishart MSP](#)

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- 50 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 31 January 2023, Col 43
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- 81 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 28 June 2022, Col 4, 7 and 8, and [Official Report](#), 15 November 2022, Col 7
- 82 [Letter](#) from CalMac to Convener of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee in response to further questions on ferry data - 21 February 2023
- 83 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 7 February 2023, Col 25 and written submissions from [Orkney Ferries Ltd](#) and [Comhairle nan Eilean Siar](#)
- 84 Written submissions from [Auchrannie Resort](#) and [Orkney Ferries Ltd](#)
- 85 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 28 February 2023, Col 18
- 86 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 1 November 2022, Col 18
- 87 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 28 February 2023, Col 18
- 88 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 1 November 2022, Col 13, 15 and 18, and [Official Report](#), 15 November 2022, Col 3
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- 91 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 31 January 2023, Col 2
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- 93 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 28 June 2023, Col 6 and 15, [Official Report](#), 31 January 2023, Col 4
- 94 Written submissions from [Highlands and Islands Enterprise](#) and [HITRANS](#)
- 95 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 28 February 2023, Col 25 and 35

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- 100 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 21 February 2023, Col 38
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- 108 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 1 November 2022, Col 21, [Official Report](#), 15 November 2022, Col 5 and 19, [Official Report](#), 21 February 2023, Col 40, [Official Report](#), 15 November 2022, Col 5 and 19-20, [Official Report](#), 31 January 2023, Col 45 and [Official Report](#), 21 February 2023, Col 36
- 109 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 15 November 2022, Col 19 and 20
- 110 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 28 February 2023, Col 34
- 111 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 31 January 2023, Col 45
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- 117 [Letter](#) from NorthLink to Committee in advance of evidence session - 30 January 2023

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- 470 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 1 November 2022, Col 32
- 471 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 31 January 2023, Col 38,
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- 473 [Letter](#) from NorthLink to Committee in advance of evidence session - 30 January 2023
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- 474 [Letter](#) from CalMac to Committee in advance of evidence session - 31 January 2023
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- 480 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 7 February 2023, Col 20
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- 482 Written submissions [Beatrice Wishart MSP](#) and [Liam McArthur MSP](#)
- 483 Written submission from [Liam McArthur MSP](#)
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- 513 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 8 November 2022, Col 3, [Official Report](#), 7 February 2023, Col 55 and 56 and written submission from [Transport Salaried Staffs' Association \(TSSA\)](#)
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- 517 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 15 November 2023, Col 17
- 518 Written submission from [SPOKES: The Lothian Cycling Campaign](#)
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- 520 Written submissions including from [Beatrice Wishart MSP](#) and [Laurence Odie \(Yell Community Council\)](#)
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- 552 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 31 January 2023, Col 2
- 553 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 28 June 2022, Col 7 and written submission from [Mull and Iona Ferry Committee \(Demand Management\)](#)
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- 632 Scottish Government. [Local Government Revenue](#)
- 633 Written submission from [HITRANS](#)
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- 669 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 15 November 2022, Col 18
- 670 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 8 November 2022, Col 15
- 671 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 8 November 2022, Col 14 and written submission from [HITRANS](#)
- 672 Written submissions from [Shetland Islands Council and ZetTrans](#), [Shetlands Regional Transport Partnership](#) and [Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland](#)
- 673 Written submission from [Comhairle nan Eilean Siar](#)
- 674 Written submission from [Shetland Islands Council and ZetTrans](#), [Shetlands Regional Transport Partnership](#)
- 675 Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [Official Report](#), 8 November 2022, Col 16 and written submissions including from [Mike Protts](#) and [The Tartan Road Limited](#)
- 676 [Letter](#) from the Minister for Transport to the Committee providing further information following the evidence session - 31 March 2023

