

March 2012

Colin Grieve
Ferries Unit
Transport Scotland
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh EH6 6QQ

Dear Mr Grieve

As a resident of Sleat, I wish to express my dismay that previous arguments for the development and enhancement of the Mallaig to Armadale service have been largely disregarded in the Scottish Ferry Services Draft Plan for Consultation. Building on the success of the recent improvements to this route, with the introduction of weekend sailings during the winter period, the ambition for the Sleat community would be the introduction of a dedicated vessel for this route to service the proven, growing demand.

I understand the Government's need to plan and fund an appropriate ferry service for the whole network in a very challenging economic climate. However, I believe that there is a fundamental inconsistency with the stated aim of "*maximising the economic and social potential of rural communities*" and looking to make a quick, opportunistic saving by cutting the summer subsidy for the Mallaig – Armadale route.

The fact that the summer service is being largely used by tourists rather than residents does not mean that residents are **not** the principal beneficiaries of this service. Our main economic activity in Sleat, and indeed in Skye, is tourism which represents 35% of direct employment on the island and, in reality, an even greater percentage which includes many of the local businesses and suppliers who support the tourism sector. There is scarcely a business on Skye that is not in some way touched by tourism.

Another stated aim of the Government's Review is the promotion of social inclusion but the report does not offer a solution as to how that might happen for either Lochaber or Sleat. Yet, an increased summer service from Mallaig, particularly with the possibility of later sailings, would allow this ambition to be realised as communities could meet more frequently, and enjoy social, educational and cultural events on either side of the Sound of Sleat. It is impossible to accept how a reduction in subsidy to the summer service might enable this route to grow further.

We welcome the recent press statement from Dave Thompson MSP in which he informs residents of Sleat and Skye that he has received assurances from the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment, Alex Neil, that "*when the contract is renewed the service will continue with no threat whatsoever, no increase in fares and no reduction in the level of service*". We would like, as residents of Sleat, to hear more specific and positive ideas - not just about the maintenance of existing levels of service - but the growth and development of this vital connection from the mainland to our island.

Yours sincerely