Written response to SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT FERRY INQUIRY

Respondees; Islay & Jura Ferry Company Ltd
Per the Chairperson (Mr D.E.Darroch)

OVERVIEW;
The Islay & Jura Ferry Co Ltd is a private company funded by residents of the Islands of Jura & Islay. The group's main aim is to establish a short sea crossing which would provide the islanders of Jura with a lifeline link to the mainland, something they have not been allowed for thirty years. Over a long period of time several planning applications have been submitted, (one in-situ at this time) Argyll & Bute Council has either declined these or the company has been forced to withdraw them due to requests for further environmental audits. Public support for the project has risen and fallen dependent upon the desires and needs of the island population at that particular time. The general perception is that the route is unfeasible due to the objections by the statutory bodies, Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland. Whilst the demands of both agencies has been restrictive to the development over the years, it has to be noted that at this time they have been more open to discussions on how to overcome some of their objections. Perhaps the major reason the proposed ferry route has been rejected is due to apathy by Argyll & Bute Council and lack of support from the previous Scottish Executive. One feels this may stem from their desire to control all ferry services to the islands.

FERRY ROUTES;
The Island of Jura is denied a lifeline link to the mainland despite the fact it lies 4 miles from the mainland at the nearest point. At present residents are required to take a five-minute ferry journey to the neighbouring Island of Islay and then a possible 28-mile sea journey (dependent on departure port) to the mainland. This regime is restrictive to residents, local business and visitors in time and financial cost. For a typical islander it will take in the region of 3 ½ hours in travel and waiting time to reach the mainland. The proposal we had put forward for a short sea crossing would incur approximately 1½ hours of travel and waiting time. There would also be a substantial saving in cost to Jura inhabitants.

The route we wished to operate is the historical ferry route from Lagg, in mid Jura to Keilmore on Knapdale, Argyll. This would involve a 35 minute ferry crossing. The public roads on either side are single track class B. Much has been made about the poor quality roads being unsuitable for traffic but Argyll & Bute Council have conceded that additional passing places would allow the throughput of traffic desired. Due to the nature of the road the route would be restricted to cars and light vehicles only. It is envisaged that residents and visitors to Islay would on occasion also make use of the ferry, which is why in the past it has been called the 'overland route'. The company would be responsible for the building of low profile causeways with snub ended slipways, which are much more economical to construct and have less environmental impact than a conventional slipway which extends well under water. Dolphins on each side will provide guidance and a berthing face for the vessel, which will also allow the ferry to lie overnight on the Jura side. Enabling the first run of the day to start from the island. It is considered that a Cal-Mac type ferry consumes 15 to 20 times more fuel and emissions than a car on a similar length of road. A shorter sea crossing must have more environmental benefit.

This route has been reviewed several times by public/governmental groups all of which have favoured the short sea crossing. The Highlands & Islands Enterprise commissioned two reports by EKOS


ii. September 2000- Proposed Overland Ferry Route: Option Appraisal.
The Jura Initiative at the Edge committee instigated a study into, Jura to mainland links on behalf of the island community.

i. “Jura Direct Ferry Link” - 2005 Undertaken by Steer, Davies, Gleave, as a STAG appraisal, stated at “Clause 11.1 This report has concluded that the most appropriate option for enhancing links between Jura and the mainland would be a dedicated vehicle ferry on a route between Lagg and Keillmore.”

The present lack of ferry options and frequency are seen, by many, as a disadvantage to the future existence of viable communities on Islay and in particular Jura. Both islands are disadvantaged in comparison to similar sized islands such as Mull and Arran each of which, have two ferry routes. Yet this group is denied support to make this link. It is unbelievable that despite the research studies undertaken as above, an independent operator is blocked from operating these very routes. We cannot continue to curtail development of the islands by restraining them to ferry routes, which are no longer suitable for the present day.

FREQUENCY & TIMETABLES;
Shorter sea crossings allow a higher degree of frequency, which in turn provides residents, visitors and business with more opportunities and freedom. Possibly the major constriction on development and repopulation of the islands is lack of easy access. At present islanders are constrained to two to four (dependent on the time of year) possible ferry links to the mainland. The proposal from this organization is for a minimum of six return trips rising to eight to ten in the summer.

Since the expensive refurbishment of Port Askaig pier the link between Jura and Islay (which at this time is the only link) has diminished with reduced sailings. This is now causing major disruption to the Jura economy.

Freedom of choice is of major importance to the modern day islander, many of who are not natural islanders and feel impeded by the lack of frequency of ferry trips, which increases the feeling of being on the peripherality. A short crossing which allows frequent sailings provides the opportunity for residents to commute. We see that on the Jura to Islay link at present, where some of the nurses in Islay Hospital and some teachers commute from Jura to Islay daily. In the reverse Islay builders etc commute regularly to Jura.

For the modern business man/woman, ease of access and cost are a requirement if the business community is to survive and develop.

CAPACITY;
Despite the fact that there are four connections out of Islay during the summer, there are a number of occasions when no spaces are available. The same can be true at peak periods during the winter. This lack of capacity restricts travel opportunity for residents, businesses and visitors alike. Clearly an increase in frequency would help alleviate this problem. We feel that the present tendency to build larger vessels is not conducive to a modern day ferry service. By their nature larger vessels require to be used on longer runs, which in turn means less trips.

Our proposal for a 12-15 car ferry running regularly on the short Lagg to Keilmore crossing would provide a much needed impetus into ferry services to Jura and Islay.

INTEGRATION;
Linking timetables for ferries, buses, trains etc is difficult due to the fact that ferries are very weather dependent. However the Cal Mac service from Islay to Kennacraig does cooperate well with the corresponding bus links to Glasgow. Where there is a will there is a way.

For the short and frequent sea crossing as we are proposing it may be more appropriate for the bus to travel right through on the ferry. We believe such a proposal is on hand for the Kirkwall to
Inverness link. Many of the bus routes on the west coast are subsidized but that is not to say that there are not opportunities for small-scale independent operators.

COMPETITION;
It is our belief that there needs to be a more diverse range of ferry operators on the west coast. It is fact that some services must always be reliant on subsidies but we seem to be stuck with rigid timetables and static attitude to routes and ferry designs. The public sector seem to be under the illusion that all routes have to be operated by a state owned organization. As far as we understand both Western Ferries and Pentland Ferries operate successfully both in a financial capacity and in the service they provide.

There are ample opportunities for 'round tickets' between the islands, which are a great attraction to visitors. If the airline industry can have a single ticket which takes you round the world with different operators the same is possible in the Scottish islands.

Cal Mac has objected to our proposal for a new link between Jura and the mainland, yet they do not directly serve Jura. It is agreed that they may lose some trade, but as we have pointed out, evidence shows in other areas, that an increase in ferry frequency and secondary routes actually increase traffic overall.

CONCLUSION;
Our proposal is to establish a short, frequent all year round vehicular ferry service with a realistic fare structure. This would allow the residents of the Island of Jura direct access to a mainland port, something they have not experienced for three decades.

This service will also supplement the Islay to Kennacraig service by providing an alternative route for residents on the Island of Islay.

Independent operators need to be allowed to run ferries on new routes if the islands are to thrive.

The specific island problems, which this service will help address can be summarised as follows: -

- Restricted shipping services with rigid timetables and high fares, which have a significant influence on basic services on the islands.
  - Declining population.
- Restricted opportunities for existing and new businesses.
  - Restricted range of job opportunities.
    - Lack of opportunities for school leavers who wish to stay on the islands.

This local initiative will provide the impetus to reverse the decline in the islands whilst generating employment and income for the community, which it serves.