

Press Release from:

Mull and Iona Ferry Committee
Mull Community Council
Iona Community Council
Coll Community Council
Tiree Community Council
Islay Community Council
Explore Islay & Jura DMO

08/09/2025

Ferry disruption compensation fund unjust, divisive, and not compliant with the Islands Act. Six Argyll islands come together to protest to Islands Minister Mairi Gougeon.

On June 30th Islands Minister Mairi Gougeon announced the details of the “Island Business Resilience Fund”, a £4.4m scheme intended to support Hebridean islands damaged by years of disruption to their ferry service.

The scheme is not open to all affected islands however, and instead can only be accessed by businesses in parts of the Western Isles (North Uist, Benbecula, Berneray, Grimsay, Eriskay and South Uist), Colonsay and Arran.



Mairi Gougeon’s department picked a 15% threshold of service cancellations over the years 2022 – 2024 as the basis for eligibility, resulting in the exclusion of the vast majority of islands served by CalMac. The Argyll islands of Coll, Tiree, Mull, Iona, Jura and Islay fail to meet the 15% cancellation criteria, and have been excluded.

Community groups from all six islands expressed shock, and demanded an explanation from the Minister.

According to a spokesperson for Mull Community Council, “For most of the 2025 season, Mull’s usual vessel (MV Isle

of Mull) was replaced by the much smaller MV Coruisk. For around four months, vehicle capacity was reduced by 33% on those sailings, and passenger capacity by 80%. Does the Minister responsible for islands not know what is going on here, does she really

think that the crisis created by her own government can be measured by cancellations alone?”

Any policy or service that is introduced in Scotland’s Islands is required to be based on meaningful consultation, as detailed in the 2018 Islands Act and subsequent guidance. Government Departments are obliged to undertake a consultative Islands Community Impact Assessment (ICIA) on new policies, service or other measures. A consultative ICIA is required not as tick box, but so that policy makers and relevant authorities properly consider islands’ “particular challenges around distance, geography, connectivity and demography,” and ensure that “islands receive fair and equitable treatment” outcomes that “are tailored to their unique circumstances”¹. None of the community representative bodies who are signatories to today’s letter are aware of any consultation regarding the fund, therefore the scheme has not complied with the Act or Scottish Government’s own guidance.

According to Shiona Ruhemann of Iona Community Council, “This is both sad, absurd and damaging – another example of the Scottish Government Islands Team working against the fundamental purposes and requirements of the Islands (Scotland) Act and associated guidance. We too often experience this part of Scottish Government as perpetuating the top-down, uninformed decision making that the Act and these publicly funded posts exist to redress.”

“What we have here is a scheme that is patently unfair, arbitrary and divisive. It deliberately excludes island communities that have been just as badly impacted as those haphazardly deemed eligible. It is exactly the kind of discrimination that the Islands Act was supposed to prevent, by consulting properly before introducing a new policy. But Mairi Gougeon’s department simply did not do any. That’s the same department that exists to uphold the Islands Act itself, and wrote the very guidance that they have utterly ignored” – Joe Reade, Mull and Iona Ferry Committee

“Tiree Community Council was bitterly disappointed to learn that our island was to miss out on access to the IBRF. We regard the methodology used by HIE to measure the impact of ferry failure in the Hebrides as flawed, and failing to capture the particular problems we face on this island. We are not aware that HIE has reached out to Tiree to collect any data. Our problem has been more to do with a lack of capacity at particular times of year, rather than cancelled sailings as the *Clansman* (launched 1998) is replaced for months on end by the much smaller and less powerful *Lord of the Isles* (launched 1989). We hope that the Scottish Government can reconsider its decision, and expand the programme to compensate businesses on Tiree.” – John Holliday, Tiree Community Council.

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Kirsty MacFarlane of Coll Community Council complained that “We have to travel to the mainland to get access to a dentist, secondary school, care home or council office, to name but a few facilities we don’t have on Coll. In recent years we’ve had more cancelled sailings, regular timetable disruptions and fluctuating ferry capacity and these have often been in order to provide sailings to other islands! Confidence in our unreliable ferry service is now so low that young and elderly people have left the island in recent years, saying that they are either fed up with living a life without reliable transport or nervous of having to depend on it for health care. Certainly, it’s not easy to quantify this kind of damage but to just pick cancelled sailings and specific business sectors as the benchmarks for eligibility is grossly unfair. And the government is inviting criticism by not publishing all the data and analysis it says were used to advise them on their decision. What have they got to hide?”

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Further information:

The Scottish Government web page regarding the IBRF can be found [here](#).

For further comment, please contact Joe Reade of Mull and Iona Ferry Committee in the first instance (joe@islandbakery.scot)