Derek MacKay MSP

Minister for Transport and Islands

St. Andrew’s House

Regent Road

Edinburgh

EH1 3DG

Monday 27 April 2015

Dear Mr MacKay

Thank you very much for making time in your busy schedule to visit Uist recently and in particular for attending the meeting hosted by North Uist Development Company on the Wednesday.

The NUDC directors have asked me to write to you to set out a few of the key points which came out of the discussion and on which we hope that we might jointly be able to make progress in the coming weeks and months.

Renewable Energy Development

* NUDC takes the view that political involvement at the highest level is the best chance for securing a solution to the current impasse regarding the MOD’s objection to the North Uist wind turbine project. This must involve the Scottish Government. We therefore welcome your statement that the Scottish Government is committed to supporting the Comhairle’s Uist Development Scoping Exercise, currently in progress, which aims to find constraint-free areas where developments would be possible. As you told the meeting, you will speak to Alex Neill, communities minister, to ensure his continuing engagement in the process.
* We are aware that Fergus Ewing has previously confirmed that the Scottish Government will fund the software upgrade to the Uist Air Defence Radar to make it more tolerant of wind turbines. However we noticed that you were unable to provide a similar assurance that you would assist with an essential upgrade to the Range Control Radar. As was made clear at the meeting, it was this latter radar which was at issue in the context of the NUDC planning application. We would therefore still welcome your comments as to whether you can assist with this radar as well. Installation of wind turbine tolerant Range Control Radar would remove the MOD’s objection to the NUDC development.

Ferry provision into North Uist

* Regarding the proposed new ferry for the Lochmaddy-Uig-Tarbert triangle, you and Graham provided an assurance that there will be full community consultation regarding its design and deployment. To this end, we had been advised that Tom Docherty of CMAL was due to visit Uist for consultation specifically on this subject. We would be grateful if you can assist in ensuring this happens, so we do not suffer a debacle on this route similar to that recently caused by the introduction of the Loch Seaforth on the Ullapool-Stornoway route.
* You indicated that the new ferry, while it would be the biggest that could operate within the constraints of the existing infrastructure, would likely be a temporary solution. In this context you advised that a ‘two ferry solution’ would be considered for the route in the near future.
* You advised that you had no choice but to put the CalMac routes out to tender, but that you would favour tenders which state that they were going to enhance the service. The point was made that there must be a commitment to community consultation within the winning tender.
* It was pointed out that neither CalMac nor the Scottish Government have accurate data on the numbers of sailings which are effectively full (Unavailable to Book Online). The real picture, hitherto masked by the fact that CalMac only record numbers of vehicles left on the pier, has been made available thanks to research carried out by Outer Hebrides Tourism. You advised that the Scottish Government controls the ticketing system, and that a new system is to be introduced in October, which will provide more realistic data to enable better understanding of capacity issues and provide a business case for future ferry provision.
* We would also welcome your further thoughts on building in a community-owned aspect to future ferry contracts, along with community representation on the boards of CalMac and CMAL, and having ferry crews based within the communities which they serve.

We had hoped that our meeting might have been able to take a more business-like approach to these issues, but the inevitable format change caused by the large number of uninvited guests meant that this was unfortunately not possible. However we do believe we have an opportunity to make progress on the above points, and we look forward to working with your department going forward.

Yours sincerely

Mustapha Hocine

**Chair, NUDC**