

Outer Hebrides Tourism Industry  
Association  
c/o Broad Bay House  
Back  
Isle of Lewis  
HS2 0LQ

Tel 01851 820990

26 May 2009

Dear Mr Cannon

**Sunday Ferry Services to Stornoway and Tarbert**

I am writing to you on behalf of the Outer Hebrides Tourism Industry Association (OHTIA), which represents the tourism industry in the islands, and sits on the Outer Hebrides Ferry Users Group. The membership of the OHTIA is diverse, and includes the major hotel groups on the islands, an Lanntair, Hebridean Celtic Festival, and a wide range of small and medium sized tourism related businesses.

Tourism in the Outer Hebrides contributes £50m pa to the local economy, and provides c1000 FTE jobs. The Outer Hebrides Area Tourism Partnership is currently finalising its strategic plan for 2009 – 2015, and will be aiming for a 50% increase in tourism revenues by 2015.

In response to Calmac's announcement of a consultation process on the start of a Sunday ferry service between Stornoway and Ullapool, and Tarbert and Uig, we embarked on a consultation with our members in Lewis and Harris to ascertain their views.

We invited all 63 member businesses in Lewis and Harris to participate in an online anonymous survey, between 20 and 22 May 2009, asking the following questions:

- Do you support the proposal to start a Sunday ferry service between Stornoway and Ullapool?
- Do you support the proposal to start a Sunday ferry service between Tarbert and Uig?
- What do you think will be the impact of Sunday ferries on tourism in Lewis and Harris?

We had a total of 41 responses, as follows:

- Do you support the proposal to start a Sunday ferry service between Stornoway and Ullapool?

Strongly Support	63.4%
Moderately Support	19.5%
No view	0%
Moderately Against	4.9%
Strongly Against	12.2%

- Do you support the proposal to start a Sunday ferry service between Tarbert and Uig?

Strongly Support	65.0%
Moderately Support	15.0%
No view	0%
Moderately Against	7.5%
Strongly Against	12.5%

- What do you think will be the impact of Sunday ferries on tourism in Lewis and Harris?

Strongly improve visitor numbers and spend	53.8%
Moderately improve visitor numbers and spend	33.3%
No difference	7.7%
Moderately reduce visitor numbers and spend	0%
Strongly reduce visitor numbers and spend	5.1%

This survey clearly demonstrates a very high level of support for the proposed Sunday ferry services, and we look forward to any further consultation on the scheduling and other details of the new services.

In addition, many of our members are also reporting issues with the current high booking levels on the existing services, with some members experiencing accommodation cancellations already from guests who are unable to secure a suitable ferry crossing. We are extremely concerned that the increased level of traffic originating from the islands (due to RET) will fill the limited summer capacity, leaving tourism operators on the islands with empty beds, and willing visitors unable to travel due to a lack of ferry capacity.

This is not just a Sunday service issue, but does contribute to the case for the enhancement of weekday services as soon as practicable. If there is no improvement to services, we face the real prospect of RET damaging the tourism industry of the Outer Hebrides, as the limited current capacity fills with islanders making more mainland trips.

I hope that you find this input helpful, and we can provide any further details as required.

Yours Sincerely

Ian Fordham

Chairman – Outer Hebrides Tourism Industry Association