

CalMac Ferries Ltd

Submission on a National Plan for Gaelic

Public Consultation, August – November, 2006

Introduction

CalMac Ferries Ltd welcomes the notification of Caledonian MacBrayne by Bòrd Na Gàidhlig under Section 3 of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, requiring the Company to work with the Bòrd to prepare and implement a Gaelic Language Plan in 2007/8.

CalMac background

Caledonian MacBrayne operates passenger and car ferry services on 26 routes to the islands on Scotland's West Coast. The services are lifeline services, which require Deficit Grant funding from the Scottish Executive. In 2005/6, the subsidy was £31.4m.

The Company is rapidly approaching a tendering process to service the Clyde and Hebridean Ferry Services (CHFS) that it currently operates. In the run-up to the tender process (which is expected to start before the year end, 2006), the Company needs to consolidate and develop its brand positioning as Scotland's leading ferry operator - a reliable, safe ferry operator which is customer focused and committed to the communities it serves. It also needs to find new ways to increase passenger footfall and revenue, thus reducing the level of subsidy required, within its markets; both islander and in particular, within its discretionary leisure markets.

In 2005/6, the Company's turnover was £83.5m and passenger footfall has grown steadily over the last 5 years, reflecting changes in marketing strategy and a significant increase in resources. The Company has continued to invest in vessels and infrastructure in order to increase passenger capacity and improve the customer experience. The brand enjoys high levels of awareness, reaching 88% in the latest brand tracking studies.

In preparation for the tendering exercise for the Clyde and Hebridean Ferry Services, Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd was restructured on Sunday, 1 October 2006.

A new company, CalMac Ferries Limited (SC 302282), has been set up. With effect from 1 October 2006 the business of running Clyde and Hebrides ferry services has been transferred to CalMac Ferries Limited. Like its predecessor, Caledonian MacBrayne Limited, CalMac Ferries Limited is ultimately owned by Scottish Ministers. The ownership of the vessels and ports remains with a new asset-owning company, Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited (CMAL), also created as part of that restructuring. Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited will also be owned by Scottish Ministers and will be based in Port Glasgow, Inverclyde.

All employees of Caledonian MacBrayne Limited, with a small number of exceptions, transferred their employment to CalMac Ferries Limited with effect from 1 October 2006. The transfer will have no impact upon employees' terms and conditions. There will be no alteration in ships' livery or branding.

CalMac employs a significant proportion of its seagoing staff from the communities it services. CalMac has two wholly owned subsidiaries which manage staffing and crew resources. All seagoing employees are employed by CalMac Crewing (Guernsey) Ltd. The second subsidiary company, CalMac HR (UK) Limited, which is based in Gourock, provides comprehensive HR services to Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd and also assists Caledonian MacBrayne Crewing (Guernsey) Limited in providing HR, payroll and crew resources.

Population statistics show that the decline in population in the Western Isles in particular may be slowing down, if not reversing. There is also good evidence that key islands such as Arran and Skye are performing very well economically.

This combination of geographical location, historical tradition and continuity of service, along with its singular status as a provider of lifeline ferry services, places CalMac in an ideal position to make an impact as a public organisation supporting Gaelic in a meaningful way, enhancing the status of the language, whilst contributing to the Company's legal obligations under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005.

In further recognition of the Company's obligations, whilst the Managing Director is responsible for the overall delivery of the Company's Gaelic Language Plan, CalMac has already designated the lead officer in the process of developing and implementing the Plan - the Head of Communication and Customer Care, Dr Hugh Dan MacLennan.

Dr MacLennan is a fluent Gaelic speaker and has been closely involved in Gaelic development for a number of years. He has been responsible for coordinating all the work done to enhance the Company's Gaelic profile since 2001. He is a member of the Company's Directors' Group, which is the key body charged with administering the business on a daily basis, and reports directly to the managing Director on Communication, Customer Care and Office Services.

CalMac's commitment to Gaelic

Currently, CalMac names all its ships in Gaelic and has moved significantly to providing a high level of Gaelic signage on ships and in terminals throughout the network. CalMac is also committed to providing written responses in Gaelic to communication received in Gaelic, and supports a number of Gaelic events, primarily the Royal National Mod, that has enjoyed a beneficial relationship with CalMac as main commercial supporter since 2002.

Most of the new Gaelic work being planned, if resources allow, will be focused in the following key areas: customer interface; literature, human resources; signage; and internal and external communication through all media.

The contents of this submission are subject to review in light of any commitments and obligations placed on the operator of Clyde and Hebridean ferry Services in the forthcoming Invitation to Tender (ITT). The Draft ITT issued some time ago indicated, for example, that an operator would be required to have at least one Gaelic member of staff in customer-facing parts of the operation employed on each ship in Gaelic-speaking areas.

CalMac looks forward to receiving detailed Guidance from the Bòrd on the preparation and delivery of the Plan within the national context. In the interim, CalMac supports the aims and aspirations of the Act and will build on the many successes the Company has already achieved through positive links with the Gaelic dimension of the communities served through lifeline ferry services.

CalMac is strongly of the view that facilitation and not coercion will enable Bòrd na Gàidhlig to achieve the aims and aspirations of the Act. It is vital that there is a national, strategic vision for the language, which identifies a number of priorities, which are achievable and sustainable.

Cal Mac's Gaelic Language Plan will reflect the aspirations of the National Plan for Gaelic, and will be designed to enable Gaelic users to access public services in their own language more often. The Company will endeavour, wherever possible, to ensure that Gaelic is given equal respect and that all sectors of the Gaelic community throughout the network, are offered the chance to contribute to the national Plan, through CalMac's own initiatives.

The Company will, as a priority, incorporate consultation on the customer's aspirations for a CalMac Gaelic Plan into its ongoing process of engaging with the communities which are served through lifeline ferry links. This will provide the basis for the development of a coherent strategy and deliverable plan, which will form the basis of a 5/6 year rolling development of facilities and support mechanisms, through service delivery, internal functions, external engagement and policy development.

The Company will encourage customers to use Gaelic in our daily operation where appropriate and will expand our Gaelic services and resources by various means including a heightened awareness of Gaelic related issues amongst our shore-based and seagoing staff.

In time, in line with the Bord's own aspirations, this should mean that there are more opportunities to communicate in Gaelic, more services available through the medium of Gaelic, and a more visible promotion of the language through signage, literature and new media.

This is a critical time for the Caledonian MacBrayne group of companies in a rapidly changing business environment and structure which is detailed below.

CalMac's involvement in the process of normalizing the Gaelic language through its shipping operation will require a number of additional resources which are not currently available and this paper is being presented to Bòrd na Gàidhlig as an application for support, to enable the Company to maintain and develop the work currently being undertaken to support the language.

In so doing, the Company recognises that its aspirations, whilst in line with those of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, will, of necessity, have to be reasonable, achievable and deliverable.

To help encourage and support organisations such as Caledonian MacBrayne, the Board is encouraged to address the following as a matter of priority:

- 1 Training of translators
- 2 Standardisation of fees for consultancy and translation
- 3 Best practice in key areas such as website presentation
- 4 The possible establishment of an Association of professionals involved in translation work
- 5 The facilitation of seminars for organisations listed by the Board, to enable problem solving and cost effectiveness in terms of planning and funding applications
- 6 Professional advice and back-up in terms of the interpretation and implementation of the Act

Conclusion

CalMac believes that as an organisation with its roots and operational existence firmly placed in many of the strongest areas of the Gaelic speaking community; it is uniquely placed in terms of delivering a Gaelic Plan, which will have genuine and sustainable impact.

Given the nature of our greatest asset, our seagoing and shore-based staff, and the environment in which they deliver lifeline ferry services, the six key action areas identified in the Draft national plan for Gaelic offer a framework which would enable the Company to make a major contribution to the development of Gaelic through the workplace and interactivity with our million and more customers.

The Company's visibility in, and importance to the communities of the west coast of Scotland in particular offers a unique opportunity to normalize the use of Gaelic in daily communication, formally and informally, as an internal mechanism and one of engagement with the travelling public and other agencies such as local authorities, media, business sectors and voluntary organisations.

Much will depend on how the various listed organisations engage with Bòrd na Gàidhlig itself and how the Bòrd will support initiatives through resources other than direct funding such as mentoring and advice, facilitation and not coercion.

In summary, therefore, CalMac confirms:

- 1 The Company's support for the aims and objectives of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 and the work of Bòrd na Gàidhlig.
- 2 The Company's endorsement of the need for a National Language Plan.
- 3 The Company's acknowledgement of its obligations following its designation as one of the organisations which will be expected to deliver a Gaelic Language Plan in 2007/8.

Leis gach deagh dhurachd,

Lawrie Sinclair
Managing Director
CalMac Ferries Ltd

October 1, 2006.