



Morag Dornian

CalMac's

Isle of Islay

Back in April 2018, Scottish Ministers announced that Islay would be next in line for new vessels to replace the 3,045gt/1985-built Hebridean Isles that had capacity for 68 cars, 150 lanemetres for freight and 494 passengers. The new vessels, to be operated by CalMac, would complement the 5,626gt/2011-built Finlaggan, which has capacity for 85 cars, or 10 HGVs and 550 passengers. It is worth noting that the car capacity of ferries built 1970s-90s has been reduced steadily due to the increasing size of modern cars. The car equivalent unit (CEU) dimensions are 4.55m long and 1.95m wide. The new design would have a clear focus on freight and sufficient passenger accommodation to meet anticipated demand. The first vessel was expected to be delivered by October 2024 with the second following in early 2025.

A total of 35 interested parties responded to the tender process and on 14 September 2021 the Invitation to Tender stage of the

procurement process involved the Damen Shipyard in Romania, Remontowa Shipbuilding in Poland plus Turkish shipyards Sefine Denizcilik Tersanecilik Turizm, and Cemre Marin Endustri.

On 11 March 2022, after four compliant bids had been received, the preferred bidder was named by Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) as the Cemre Marin Endustri shipyard in Türkiye, following a 10-day standstill period. The £91 million shipbuilding contract was duly signed on 29 March 2022. The Islay vessels form part of a 10-year programme of investment by CMAL, backed by £580 million from the Scottish Government for five years from 2021 to 2026. Plans will deliver 21 new vessels for the fleet and multi-million-pound upgrades of harbour infrastructure over a decade. Further multi-million-pound investment is needed to fund plans from 2026 onwards. The new generation of Island Class vessels and a replacement for

the 3,504gt/1989-built Lord of the Isles come under the 2021-26 and 2026-2031 plans respectively.

Caledonian MacBrayne (CalMac) has operated the ferry route from Kennacraig to Islay in its present form since 26th June 1978. The port, located on West Loch Tarbert, serves as the primary mainland hub for car, freight, and passenger traffic to Port Ellen and Port Askaig, providing essential links to the island of Islay.

Prior to CalMac's exclusive operation of the Islay route, Western Ferries was established in the late 1960s with the 20-car capacity Sound of Islay being built at Ferguson's at Port Glasgow and entered service between Kennacraig and Islay on 7 April 1968. The ship was the first Ro-Ro ferry (stern loading) operating on the west coast of Scotland. The larger Sound of Jura was built in Norway and entered service on 1 August 1969. Western Ferries also opened the Port Askaig (Islay) – Feolin

(Jura) Ro-Ro ferry service in 1969 across the Sound of Jura, thus linking both islands to the mainland with a vehicle service. Today this inter-island service is operated by the Argyle & Bute Council with Western Ferries operating only the highly successful McInroy's Point-Hunter's Quay service on the River Clyde. Caledonian Mac-Brayne positioned a new ferry on the same route from the mainland to Islay in 1974 which, by comparison, was subsidised by the Government leaving Western Ferries unable to compete. The Sound of Jura was sold in 1976 and the company continued with the Sound of Islay until 1981 when the independently operated Western Ferries withdrew from the route.

BOOSTING CAPACITY & RESILIENCE

The newbuild process was the first for CMAL/CalMac since the process to build the Glen Sannox and Glen Rosa, which began in 2015. The 7,272gt Glen Sannox was finally delivered on 19 November 2024 but, at the time of writing, the sistership Glen Rosa was still not operational. It was hoped by many that a fresh approach to the shipyard selection would not see a repeat of delivery delays, but this was more a case of be careful what you wish for. The selected yard, Cemre Shipyard (Cemre Tersanesi) is a facility in Altinova, on the shore of the Sea of Marmara in Yalova Province, Türkiye. Established in 2005, the facility now specialises in low- and zero-emission, battery and hybrid vessels for the world market. The first shipbuilding contract was signed with Havyard Group in 2005, and this delivered the Havila Mars the following year, from a rented yard. They developed their own facilities in Altinova and expanded quickly, reaching 78,000m² by 2009. A second slipway was built in 2012 and a further 78,000m² shipyard, Cemre II was added in 2015. Cemre first moved into the construction of passenger vessels with the delivery of the 7,700gt vehicle ferry Bastø VI in 2016. Offshore support vessels followed, with specialisation in windfarm support vessels and low- and zero-emission, battery and hybrid vessels.

The construction of the two new ferries for Islay, NB1092 and NB1093, officially got underway after the first piece of steel was cut on 3 October 2022 during the traditional steel-cutting ceremony that took place at the Cemre Marin Endustri shipyard. On 13 February 2023 came the news that the new ferries had reached the next construction milestones with the first newbuild's keel being laid and the steel being cut for the second ship, three weeks earlier than planned. A ceremony was held to mark both events. On 18 May 2023 CMAL announced that Isle of Islay and Loch Indaal were the names for the new ships to serve Islay and Jura following a public vote. Over 1,300 votes were cast,



Lounge Deck 5 to Mariners Restaurant Deck 6 | Crew Mess Deck 6

with Isle of Islay being the most popular name, and Loch Indaal and Pioneer in close second and third place.

The keel for the Loch Indaal was laid on 24th May 2023. The two new ferries will have a clear focus on freight, as well as sufficient passenger accommodation to meet anticipated demand, with capacity for up to 450 passengers and 100 cars, or 14 commercial vehicles. This will provide a combined 40% increase in vehicle and freight capacity on the Islay routes and will improve the overall resilience of the wider fleet. Each 6,235gt vessel is 94.8m long with a beam of 18.70m, a design draught of 3.80m and a hull depth (to the main deck) of 6.10m. The net tonnage is 1,870t and the deadweight is 871dwt. On 16 March 2024 the Isle of Islay, the first of two vessels to serve Islay and Jura, was launched at the Cemre Marin Endustri shipyard in Yalova. Morag McNeill, Chair of CMAL, officially launched the ferry. Fitting out of the ship continued at a wet berth with the Loch Indaal being launched a few weeks later, on 8 June 2024. It was clear by now that the

project was running behind schedule but, to place matters into context, the 7,272gt/2026-built Glen Rosa was not launched at Ferguson Marine Ltd on the River Clyde until 9 April 2024 having been ordered 9 years earlier. Originally, the schedule was for the Isle of Islay to be delivered in October 2024 with the Loch Indaal following in early 2025. However, despite all parties involved in the project working very hard to deliver the vessels, the build process had been affected by the challenges that presented themselves from 2023 onwards (Ukraine, Earthquake and Red Sea incursions) and there is very little that can be done regarding avoiding the fall out of global geopolitical events. Very serious issues were faced concerning labour, particularly the availability of specialist commissioning sub-contractors. This continued to set the project and delivery back. To put this in context, the shipyard builds the vessel and installs the machinery, but all manufacturers require their own specialists to commission the systems to ensure warranties are secured.



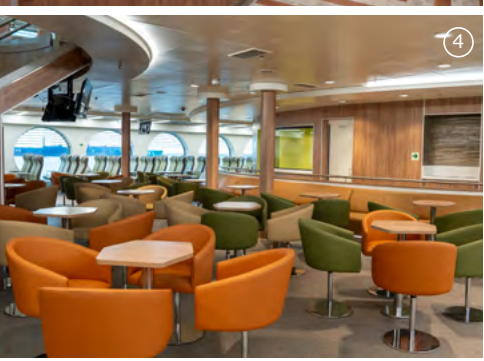
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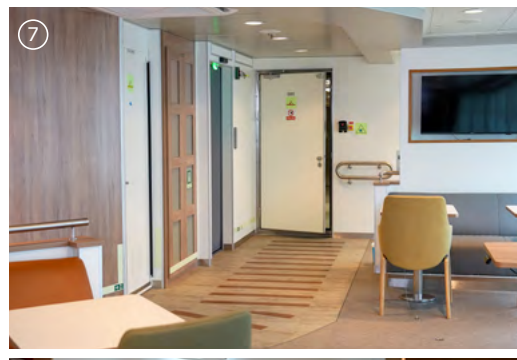
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The lack of commissioning engineers was and is an issue affecting the global ship-building industry and is causing many months of delays in some cases. Once the Isle of Islay was delivered, CMAL expected the Loch Indaal, Lochmor and Claymore to follow a delivery schedule of six-month intervals from the delivery of the initial ship. The contract anticipated intervals of four months, but it was prudent to take the overall situation into consideration.

The Isle of Islay undertook her first sea trials 22-30 May 2025, in the Sea of Marmara, over a year after her launch, with staff from CMAL and CalMac in attendance. A second set of sea trials took place 16-20 July and these included the set-up and testing of the battery energy storage system (BESS), as well as the testing and optimisation of the power management system (PMS) and energy management system (EMS). The Isle of Islay would be one of 12 joining the CalMac fleet 2025-29 and she officially did so on 15 January 2026 when handed over by Cemre Marin Endustri in Yalova, Türkiye. The ship had received Maritime Coastguard Agency (MCA) approval and passenger certification and was then prepared for the repositioning voyage from the Sea of Marmara to the River Clyde initially. To once again make comparisons with the previous newbuild project for the Isle of Arran ferries, the Glen Sannox had only been handed over from her builders in November 2024 when the original contract delivery was October 2018. Considering the countless issues encountered when building the Arran ships, those affecting the new Islay ferries were perhaps far more unexpected and the result of outside influences way beyond the shipyard's or CMAL's/CalMac's control.

During the process to build the Islay ferries a second project had been embarked upon. On 23 December 2022 it was announced that a second pair of ships was to be ordered for CalMac's Little Minch routes between Uig, Lochmaddy and Tarbert (Harris). Back in October 2022, the Scottish Government had prioritised additional funding to enable CMAL to accelerate plans for replacement vessels. The two new ferries would be built to the same specification as the existing ferries under construction at Cemre for Islay. This move was intended to speed up the replacement of the major vessel fleet, boost

Harmony Marine Solutions

- 1 Mariners Restaurant Deck 6
- 2 Mariners Restaurant Deck 6 Self Service
- 3 Mariners Restaurant Deck 6
- 4 Lounge Deck 5
- 5 Quiet Lounge Deck 6
- 6 Galley Deck 6
- 7 Mariners Restaurant Deck 6
- 8 Crew Cabin Deck 6

operational resilience and provide a more standardised vessel type that can be used on a variety of different routes. On 11 January 2023 the contract with the Cemre Shipyard in Altinova was signed, bringing the order book up to 4 sisterships for CMAL/CalMac from Cemre.

It was very much a positive result that CMAL and the Scottish Government had acted decisively in ordering these two new ships dedicated to the services between the Scottish mainland and the islands of Uist and Harris. Beginning life as NB110 and NB101, the keel of the former was laid on 19 September 2023, and the steel was cut for the latter ship that same day. The second two ships are identical to the Isle of Islay and Loch Indaal except that they are being built with raised aft mooring decks to accommodate the higher pier heights at Lochmaddy, Uig and Tarbert. The names selected for these newbuilds were Lochmor and Claymore. The Lochmor was launched on 23 August 2025, and the Claymore was launched on 2 May 2026. Transport Scotland provided £115m of funding for the Little Minch ferries project in 2022, with some of the budget allocated to minor

port improvements to reflect the design of these vessels. Naturally, the delays encountered affected all four ships overall.

The next £147.5m project got underway on 25 September 2025 at the Remontowa Shipyard in Gdansk, Poland, to build seven new Loch Class electric ferries for Scotland's island communities. The steel cutting took place with the first keel laying ceremony following on 16 December, plus the second steel cutting. The first vessel will be named Loch Awe with delivery expected in 2027. The other ferries in the series will be named Loch Etive, Loch Katrine, Loch Maree, Loch Morar, Loch Rannoch and Loch Shiel. They will serve key routes including Colintraive–Rhubodach, Lochaline–Fishnish, Tarbert–Portavadie, Iona–Fionnphort, Sconser–Raasay, Tobermory–Kilchoan, and Tayinloan–Gigha. Through cascading of existing vessels, the Largs–Cumbrae and Oban–Lismore routes will also benefit.

SAILING INTO A NEW ERA

On the night of 22 January 2026, the Isle of Islay bid farewell to the shipyard and began

her delivery voyage to Scottish waters. The voyage was expected to take 2 weeks but bad weather along the way did slow progress and doubled the voyage time. Stops along the way included Catania, Italy (25 January), Gibraltar (1 February) and then a backward step to Almeria after sheltering off North Africa in bad weather. This was not without drama as on 9 February it was announced that the crew of the Isle of Islay was involved in a dramatic rescue off the coast of Morocco the previous week. The vessel had to leave her berth at Gibraltar and take to sea, as conditions were too dangerous to remain alongside. Whilst at sea in Moroccan waters in these stormy conditions, members of the crew spotted a man in the water and within a matter of minutes had deployed the fast rescue craft to recover him and get him onboard. The individual was handed over to authorities in Morocco, after being looked after by crew for a few days onboard. Across several days that week, windspeeds in the local area were consistently higher than 30 knots and gusting at over 50 knots.

It was then onwards to A Coruña in Spain from where she departed on 20 February bound for the River Clyde. The ship arrived at her destination on the morning of 22 February, berthing at Inchgreen dock in Greenock following the 4,400 nautical mile voyage.

Preparations then began to ready the ship for service, including drydocking at the James Watt Dock in Greenock and final fit out. The opportunity for some berthing trials was also taken, including a visit to Stornoway on 21 March plus Troon, Brodick, Colonsay, Oban, Castlebay, Lochmaddy, Tarbert, Uig and Ullapool. She didn't visit Coll and Tiree as she was considered to have too deep a draught. CalMac then announced that the ship would officially enter service on the Islay route to Port Askaig from Kennacraig on the afternoon of 31 March. The ship quickly found herself easing pressures on the fleet as breakdowns were still blighting services. The delays to the Isle of Islay had also caused operational headaches, especially with the Glen Rosa still in build. The new ship effectively replaced the Hebridean Isles but of course the latter bowed out from operational service on 17 November 2024, following a final duty on the Ullapool–Stornoway route. After 39 years of service, the vessel went to Glasgow for component recovery before being towed away to Esbjerg, Denmark, on 27 October 2025, to be recycled.

The Isle of Islay and her sisters bring a new era of capacity and facilities to the Islay and Harris/Uist routes. The ship has 8 decks in total and is 21m high from her baseline. The machinery spaces are on Deck 1 (Tanktop) and Deck 2/Tweendeck.



Andrew Cooke



Navalue

Mariners Cafe | Mariners Cafe Servery

The main engines are located in the aft section of Deck 2 and consist of a quartet of 1,600kW Wartsila 8L20 engines providing a total output of 6,400kW. The 8L20 Engine is 4-stroke, turbocharged and direct injection, in-line engine. The cylinder bore is 200mm, the piston stroke is 280mm, the operating range is 900-1200rpm and the weight per unit is 20t. The size of an engine is 6,030mm long, 2,070mm wide and 2,791mm high. Forward on the starboard side is a battery room housing a 1.1kWh stack of battery cells. The individual cells are listed as 90.4kWh. Leclanché was awarded the contract for a Navius MRS-3TM 1.1 MWh capacity battery storage system for each of the new Islay ships in 2023. The advanced Leclanché lithium-ion batteries enable the vessels to enter the ports quietly and carbon-free in battery mode and the system can also be used for peak shaving when the main engines are under load, thus reducing emissions.

The Isle of Islay and her sisters is fitted with a pair of Voith eVSP26 propulsion units. The electric Voith Schneider propellers are designed for high-efficiency, precise, and quiet propulsion in maritime applications, particularly for Service Operation Vessels (SOVs) and larger ferries. Each unit features an integrated permanent-magnet synchronous motor, eliminating the need for a separate gearbox and reducing overall weight and maintenance. There are 5 blades, the blade orbit diameter is 2,650mm, the standard blade length is 2,300mm, the electrical input power is 1,850kW and the weight (minus oil) is approximately 40,000kg. These units have an oil capacity of 3,200 litres and the housing diameter is 3,450mm. Manoeuvrability is assisted by twin Berg 880kW transverse bow thrust units.

The 997m² main vehicle deck is located on Deck 3 and can accommodate 275 lane-metres for freight in 4 lanes (14 HGVs) or 77 cars on 5 lanes. The car capacity is boosted by 30 cars on two mezzanine decks; 1x double hoistable deck with a 20-car capacity (port side) and a single hoistable car deck with a 10-car capacity (starboard side). The main vehicle deck has a 5.10m clear height with mezzanine decks stowed and 2.9m beneath the deployed mezzanine platforms that form Deck 4 when in use. The clear height above the mezzanine deck when in use is 2.10m. The platforms have a total area of 412m² and the maximum deckload on Deck 3 is 12t for HGVs and 2t for cars. The car capacity in equivalent lanemetres (CEU) is 350lm plus 136lm on the mezzanine decks. The bow/stern access dimensions for Deck 3 are 4m wide/5.50m high for bow ramp entry and 4.6m wide entry at the stern ramp. To make the ship suitable for various berths on the network, the stern ramp is movable in a crosswise direction to allow



Upper Sun Deck

operation at differing linkspans. The stern ramp is around 10m long whilst the folding bow ramp is around 25m long overall. The companionways to the passenger spaces are in the casings outboard of the vehicle deck.

The passenger accommodation is on Decks 5 and 6, 2,350m² in total, which were outfitted by Harmony Marine Solutions. The décor includes wood panelling and various natural shades, parquet flooring throughout and the seating upholstery is shades of greens, browns and other natural pastel shades. The Deck 5 passenger area consists of a 133-seat lounge forward, a 27 seat Pet Owner's Lounge, a Children's Play Area, a Gaming Zone and the passenger entrance hall, which also has 19 seats. There are 3 entrance points on this level for foot passengers to suit the differing berths that the ship can serve. Aft of this area is crew

accommodation consisting of 17 cabins. Above on Deck 6 is the 150-seat Mariner's Self Service Restaurant located forward and the 12-seat Quiet Lounge aft on the starboard side. Beyond the public areas is more crew accommodation aft consisting of 6 crew and 4 officer cabins plus the mess and day rooms. Above on Deck 7 is the navigation bridge, 4 senior officer cabins and the ship's office/meeting space. Situated aft on Deck 7, between the twin funnels, is a 140-seat sun deck. The new ships represent a highly capable and versatile design, and the arrival of the Loch Indaal later in 2026 will provide much needed relief to a fleet that had been under considerable pressure. Initially the new ships may not be able to use the berth at Port Ellen until rebuilding works are complete, so the much-loved 5,626gt/2011-built Finlaggan looks set to remain on the Islay routes for a while longer.

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