



## **NEWS RELEASE**

# **Government must clarify future support to island hauliers post-RET**

**Use: Immediate**

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The Scottish Crofting Federation want the Scottish Government to clarify, as a matter of urgency, how they are going to support island hauliers who are set to lose their entitlement to the road equivalent tariff (RET) on island ferries.

The SCF's call comes amidst widespread concern that crofters and other islanders may lose out heavily as a result of the proposed changes to the RET announced by Government at the end of last month.

As part of a pilot scheme which began in 2008, CalMac have lowered their ferry fares to the Western Isles to a charge equivalent to the cost of travelling the distance by road.

Last month the government announced that, although the RET scheme is to be extended, they would "replace RET for larger commercial vehicles on the Western Isles, Coll and Tiree, with an enhanced pre-RET discount scheme".

The Scottish Crofting Federation's Uist and Barra area secretary, David Muir, said that the government's plan to reintroduce a version of the previous discount scheme is creating a great deal of concern in the islands.

Mr Muir explained that the average differential in discounts provided by Calmac under the pre-RET system was in the region of 15 to 20 per cent, but that this differential was not evenly spread among hauliers.

He said: "Because of the way the old system was set up it is very hard to know exactly what discounts were being given to hauliers. However, while for smaller firms it was often less than 10 per cent it is believed that among the larger hauliers it might at times have been more than double that figure. That old system was unfairly skewed in favour of bigger firms, towards those transport companies that used Calmac ferries most frequently. The RET was to have addressed this unfairness.

"If the differential remains in the new scheme and Calmac only offers the greater discount to the most frequent users, even an "enhanced" discount will bring back the unfair competition which previously existed before RET between the smaller and larger hauliers."

A Government report into the pilot scheme published earlier this year noted that under the RET system hauliers had reported ferry fare savings of some 50 per cent.

Mr Muir said: "The SCF are calling on the Government to provide urgent clarity on the situation as we are concerned that a reintroduced discount system could take away a great deal of the support that RET has brought to smaller hauliers. Any resulting increase in ferry fare cost will be passed on to customers, including crofters who rely on winter feed being supplied from the mainland. To support the fragile island economy what is needed is a fair system of ferry fares

which levels the playing field for larger and smaller hauliers and retains the cost savings for hauliers and other commercials gained in the RET scheme.”

## NOTES TO EDITORS

A summarised version of the evaluation of RET can be found at:

[http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/files/documents/water/ferries/Evaluation\\_of\\_RET -  
\\_Final\\_Evaluation\\_Report\\_-\\_Executive\\_Summary\\_-\\_Final\\_Version.pdf](http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/files/documents/water/ferries/Evaluation_of_RET_-_Final_Evaluation_Report_-_Executive_Summary_-_Final_Version.pdf)

The claim that hauliers were reporting ferry fare savings of some 50 per cent is on page six of the summary.

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