

SNP delays ferry fare reductions indefinitely

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The Scottish Conservatives have criticised the SNP after it emerged that reduced ferry fares to Orkney will be indefinitely delayed.

The SNP has already missed the deadline to implement ferry fare reductions on Orkney ferries by 10 weeks, and in a written response to Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP the SNP Minister Paul Wheelhouse confirmed that the delay is now indefinite.

The Scottish Conservative MSP said that the SNP has left Orcadians 'disadvantaged' compared to Scotland's other island communities.

Reduced fares were introduced for routes to and from Shetland at the beginning of July this year, when the roll-out to Orkney ferry services was also due to take place.

No agreement has yet been found with ferry operators for the Orkney route.

In his letter, the Minister also confirmed that further discussions with the ferry operators will not be considered as a complaint has been made to the European Commission regarding the Scottish Government's proposals. Mr Wheelhouse continued that he may give full notification of the scheme to the European Commission, a process which "normally takes around 18 months" but there is no definitive timescale.

Highlands and Islands MSP, Jamie Halcro Johnston said:

"The SNP promised to introduce reduced fares to Orkney and it has failed.

"Two and a half months after the SNP's deadline to introduce reduced fares to Orkney, which would reduce the disparity between Shetland and the Western Isles, the scheme has been delayed indefinitely.

"While in previous statements, Ministers said they would consider re-opening talks with ferry operators, it is now clear that will not happen any time soon. As a result, Orcadians are left disadvantaged compared to Scotland's other island communities.

"It is clear that the SNP Government's approach was flawed from the very beginning, leaving too little time to find agreement with operators, failing to engage with representatives from the islands and imposing deadlines that they couldn't meet.

"I will continue to press Ministers to ensure that action is being taken to

introduce lowered fares for Orkney, in line with their promises made to the islands.”