



January 20th 2025

Dear Ms. Sofia Alves,

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Kirsten Sydendal, and I serve as Chairperson of the Association of Danish Small Islands (Sammenslutningen af Danske Småøer) in Denmark. I am writing to draw your attention to the critical challenges our remote islands face regarding sustainable public transport, and to seek your advice and support from DG REGIO regarding the financing of carbon neutral ferries.

The Challenge and Opportunity

Our islands depend fundamentally on reliable ferry services to ensure residents' access to employment, education, healthcare, and other essential services. Transitioning from fossil-fuel-based ferries to environmentally friendly alternatives—such as electric, hydrogen, or hybrid ferries—is imperative for meeting both our national climate targets and the broader objectives of the EU Green Deal. It is also necessary to ensure a future economically sustainable ferry service in a longer perspective

However, the required investments are substantial, and there is often a tension between meeting innovative technology requirements in certain funding programs and guaranteeing the long-term stability of operations, that is needed in ferry projects. While innovation is vital, the primary objective must be to secure dependable, continuous service for our remote and sparsely populated island regions.

In this regard, we draw particular attention to the guiding principle set out in TEUF Article 174, which states that:

"In order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Union shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion.

*In particular, the Union shall aim at **reducing disparities** between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions.*

Among the regions concerned, particular attention shall be paid to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent

natural or demographic handicaps such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions.”¹

This principle underscores the need for funding strategies that not only foster innovation but also guarantee the steady operation of essential services, such as our ferry connections.

The Role of the Danish Government

Given these challenges, it is critical that the Danish Government actively works to secure the necessary national as well as EU funding, to support these essential projects. We believe that:

- The government should prioritize identifying EU grants and funds that can be allocated for projects that guarantee service stability in combination with fossil fuel free transportation for our islands.
- It is essential that the available funds not only incentivize technological innovation but also ensure continuity and reliability in ferry operations for our remote island regions.
- Ensuring that our islands remain well-connected is key not only to regional development but also to upholding the territorial cohesion outlined in TEUF Article 174.

Our Request and How We Can Help

In light of the above, I kindly request your support and guidance on the following points:

1. Balancing Innovation and Operational Stability:

How can future funding opportunities be structured to recognize that not all projects require groundbreaking technological innovation, but rather a model that secures reliable operation of carbon neutral ferries—ensuring that our remote communities continue to receive sustainable and vital public transport services?

2. Leveraging EU Cohesion Principles:

Given the commitment outlined in TEUF Article 174, we believe that our islands deserve prioritization in funding decisions. How can we better align our proposals with these cohesion principles to ensure that remote communities receive the necessary support?

3. Opportunities for Dialogue and a Site Visit:

We would be honored to host you on one of our Danish islands to showcase our current projects and further discuss how a balanced approach to funding - one that combines stability and innovation - can be achieved. A firsthand look at the challenges and opportunities in our communities would greatly assist us in refining our funding proposals and overall strategy.

Additionally, we are eager to encourage the Danish Government to actively pursue and prepare proposals for relevant EU funds.

We are convinced that by ensuring both technological progress and service stability, we can secure long-term, sustainable public transport solutions that benefit not only our local communities but also support the broader goals of the green transition and cohesive development within the EU.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12008E174>

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I look forward to your thoughts and hope that we can arrange a meeting or visit soon.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Sydendal
Chairperson

Sammenslutningen af Danske Småøer (Association of Danish Small Islands)

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