

TECNZ: Now govt must meet Interislander delivery deadlines...

20th November 2025 By Natasha Jojoa Burling | natasha@tourismticker.com | @tourismticker

**The government must now focus on delivering the two new Interislander ferries on time, says Tourism Export Council of New Zealand.**



A rendering of what the new Cook Strait ferries will look like. Image: Ferry Holdings

The government announced on Wednesday that its Ferry Holdings has signed a \$596m fixed price contract for two new road and rail-enabled Interislander ferries from Chinese company Guangzhou Shipyard International.

The new ferries are due to be delivered to KiwiRail in 2029 with the cost more than the \$551m earmarked under the abandoned iREX project, but the government said the overall cost, including port infrastructure, will be less than \$1.7bn.

“It is great to hear more detail about the two new ferries and expected timeframes for portside infrastructure development, delivery, and commissioning into service for the ferries, one in early 2029 and one later in 2029,” TECNZ chief executive Lynda Keene said.

“From an inbound tour operator perspective, the most critical thing for New Zealand’s reputation is that we hit the timeframe deadlines.



TECNZ CEO Lynda Keene

“This is because ITOs are selling the country and its products [and] experiences offshore two years in advance and ITOs need to have reliable and accurate information to share with offshore partners. Certainty and hitting the key dates is paramount for ITOs to continue to sell the ferry and sailing experience between the North and South Island with confidence.”

Keene said that if in one or two years the arrival or the operational dates for the new ferries were pushed out, “this will hugely impact on future visitor itineraries and flows, which could impact recovery and growth in several regions”.

Rail Minister Winston Peters said the finalised cost of the project was significantly cheaper than that proposed by the iREX programme.

“Spending less than \$1.7bn means the taxpayer has saved \$2.3bn while still getting the ferries and infrastructure they want, because we have done away with the expensive consultants who hijacked the project by adding more and more infrastructure until Treasury warned the project would cost \$4bn,” he said.

“Funding spent on infrastructure will be recovered over the life of the new Interislander ferries and infrastructure through port fees paid from Interislander revenue, and

Interislander will be expected to build sufficient reserves to buy new ferries again in 30 years – or put simply, structured like a normal business.”



The new road and rail-enabled Interislander ferries will be delivered in 2029. Image: Ferry Holdings

In July, the government announced **much of the existing port infrastructure would be reused**, apart from a new wharf, overbridge and linkspans at Picton and a wharf extension in Wellington.

Peters said that Ferry Holdings “will be in the driving seat for the infrastructure, ably and contractually backed by CentrePort, Port Marlborough and KiwiRail, and accommodations will be made to minimise disruption to Interislander and Bluebridge”.

He said he will travel to Guangzhou next week with Ferry Holdings’ leaders to acknowledge the agreement, not just between the shipyard and Ferry Holdings, but also as a contribution to economic relations with China.