

Industry welcomes Cook Strait ferry certainty, but scant detail and long wait detracts

12th December 2024 By Natasha Jojoa Burling | natasha@tourismticker.com | [@tourismticker](https://twitter.com/tourismticker)

The tourism industry has welcomed the government's commitment to replacing the ageing Interislander fleet but one leader is surprised at the scant details after a year's wait.



New ferries to replace the current ageing fleet are expected in 2029

The government said on Wednesday that two new Cook Strait ferries were **expected to be operational by 2029** but it was keeping the cost confidential as it proceeded with procurement. It cancelled the original replacement programme, Project iRex, a year ago **because of a cost blowout to over \$3bn.**

Tourism Export Council of New Zealand chief executive Lynda Keene said she was pleased to see some progress but disappointed at the lack of detail a year after the original plan was scrapped.

“We were surprised that not more detail was announced yesterday about the type of vessel, size of ship, how many passengers, vehicles and tour coaches the ships will host... and what the cost will be,” she said.

“The industry would have preferred to have new ferries much earlier than 2029.



TECNZ CEO Lynda Keene

“Five years is a long time when we could have had new ferries operating in early 2026 [with Project iRex].”

Keene said inbound tour operators who sell New Zealand up to two years in advance needed more detail to share with their offshore travel partners to ensure the Cook Strait visitor experience remained on itineraries.

“If or when the ferry experience is disrupted or taken off itineraries the economic impact affects Wellington, Marlborough, Nelson-Tasman, Kaikōura and West Coast itineraries and visitor flows.

“The sooner more detail is announced, the more confident ITOs, prospective international visitors and New Zealanders can put the Cook Strait ferry experience back into their travel plans and keep New Zealand connected.”

Tourism Industry Association chief executive Rebecca Ingram said the inter-island ferry connection played a critical role for New Zealand tourism.

“Industry and our members across the country will be very happy they now have more certainty about how our visitors travel across the Cook Strait,” she said.



TIA CEO Rebecca Ingram

“And we’re delighted there’s a plan for locals and our overseas visitors to continue to travel in a safe and reliable way.

“With an outlook for continuing growth of international tourism, the demand for quality infrastructure remains.”

Interislander operator KiwiRail said the announcement gave its regular passengers and freight customers some certainty.

“It is pleasing that the government has chosen to invest in the future of Cook Strait ferry services by deciding to procure two brand new ships, which will safeguard reliability into the future,” KiwiRail chief executive Peter Reidy said.

“Between now and the new ships arriving, KiwiRail will work with all parties to support the procurement and smooth introduction of the new ferries when they are ready to enter service for our customers.”

He added that the specifications the government indicated meant the new ships would be larger than the current vessels, so there would be room for future growth.

The government has released a procurement question and answer sheet, which can be read [here](#).