

An independent review of public procurement is badly ne...

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For all those who think all is rosy in SNP Scotland, I hate to disillusion you. It isn't. I [share this from CommonWeal's Ben Wray](#), published this morning, as evidence:

The decision of Calmac, a Scottish Government owned public company, to sue the Scottish Government over its awarding of a ferry contract to outsourcing giant Serco is stunning, and should lead to big questions being asked about the procurement process, and how fit for purpose it is.

The contract, on publicly subsidised routes in the North between Aberdeen and Lerwick and Kirkwall, and from Scrabster to Stromness, is at least six-years long and worth £450 million. So in ferrying terms, it's a big deal. For the Scottish Government to choose to reject a bid that was more competitive on price from a public sector bidder which is already running ferry services on the west coast, and instead accept one from Serco, a company engulfed in scandal, the latest of which is making asylum seekers intentionally homeless in Glasgow as temperatures plummet, is bizarre. When you add in to the equation that the bidding process weights bids 65 per cent on price and 35 per cent on bid quality, then it does start to smell a bit fishy.

Hopefully the court case will reveal exactly why Serco was given the contract. But this fiasco should lead to bigger questions being asked about the procurement process. Why, for example, is the track record of the bidder not apparently considered? What about terms and conditions for the workforce? What about climate emissions?

Then there is a strategic question that should surely be considered. The Scottish Government should be looking to build up its own assets, and one of its assets is Calmac. Choosing to support and subsidise a multi-national that has no long term interest in Scottish ferrying beyond how much zero's it adds to its profits is nonsensical. An independent review of public procurement is badly needed.

The question is, of course, of broader importance. This election is about who should be running public services, amongst other things. And it should also be about how we choose outsourcers when that is necessary. And what this decision highlights is that the

considerable opacity around this process at present leads to very odd outcomes, at the very least.

I agree with Ben: an independent review of public procurement is badly needed.