

Community Information Session – New Marine Vessel

Date: 17 March 2026

Location: Lord Howe Island Public Hall

Facilitator: Naomi Stephens, Chair LHIB (NS)

Presenters: Serco and IMC Naval Architects, Project Team

Note takers: Luke Phillips-Page, Anna Connor

Session time: 10:10 – 11:08

1. Purpose of the Session

- Update the community on the proposed new marine vessel, including design, construction timeline and operations.
- Provide an opportunity for community questions and feedback.
- Outline how the project will support a sustainable and reliable marine freight service over the next 40 years, including supporting tourism and strong biosecurity outcomes for Lord Howe Island.

2. Introduction (NS)

- Thanked community members for attending the information session with Serco, the projects ship builders.
- Noted significance of project – vessel will service the island for 40 years.
- Ship builder team Serco / IMC has met with key community members: Peter Riddle, Jack Shick and Gower Wilson as part of the PCG (Project Control Group), and the Lord Howe Island Board.
- Discussions were held over the previous few days covering vessel design, associated marine infrastructure and community concerns on the new marine vessel and its operations.
- PCG will be involved in reviewing detailed design plans for the vessel over the coming months.

3. Project Partners and Roles

Serco

- Global government services provider with approximately 55,000 staff.
- Maritime design and engineering focus in Australia and New Zealand.
- Designed, built, modified, and introduced 129 vessels into Australian government service since 1997.
- Operate across a variety of ship types including ferries, cargo vessels, icebreakers, and large Navy vessels.



- Designed, built and operates the RSV Nuyina icebreaker for the Australian Antarctic Division.
- Responsible for vessel oversight, governance, quality assurance, and long-term operation and maintenance.

IMC Naval Architects

- Naval architects designing vessels from 10–125 metres.
- Over 15 years' experience working with Serco.
- Responsible for vessel design, focusing on flexibility, longevity (40-year life) and island-specific needs.

Shin Yang Shipyard

- Large shipyard at 193 acres and located in Sarawak, East Malaysia.
- Shipyard has constructed more than 420 vessels, including similar vessel types.
- Has previously worked closely with IMC Naval Architects on detailed vessel design and construction, delivering four vessels together.



4. Vessel Overview

- Multi-purpose vessel capable of both Ro-Ro (roll-on/roll-off) and Lo-Lo (lift-on/lift-off) operations.
- Stern ramp for Ro-Ro operations; ship-mounted crane for Lo-Lo operations.
- Cargo will include containers, break-bulk freight, dangerous goods, equipment and vehicles.
- Undercover weather-tight cargo area forward under the wheelhouse with forklift access.
- Indicative capacity of up to 36 x 10-foot containers (double stacked), including approximately six refrigerated units (to be confirmed).
- Dimensions overall 40metre length, Beam of 10.8m and Design Draft of 2.3m. (fully laden).

5. Construction Timeline

- Contract signing and commence detailed design – February 2026
- Steel cutting: August 2026
- Keel laying: October 2026
- Launch (Malaysia): May 2027
- Lord Howe Island Sea Trial and Delivery – September 2027

6. Biosecurity Approach

- Multiple layers of biosecurity control, including inspections prior to ramp deployment.
- Investment in mainland infrastructure to reduce biosecurity risks before loading.
- Dedicated biosecurity inspection and quarantine room incorporated into landside infrastructure (unstuffing shed)

7. Key Community Themes

- Need for long-term flexibility (Ro-Ro and Lo-Lo) over a 40-year vessel life.
- Wharf interface, mooring dolphins, and safe maneuvering in varying sea state conditions.
- Capacity, efficiency, and comparison with the current vessel.
- Biosecurity robustness and risk mitigation.
- Cost, maintenance responsibilities, and freight impacts.



8. Summary of Community Questions and Answers

Cargo Handling and Capacity

Question: Can containers stowed forward be moved aft to benefit from the crane lift?

Answer summary: Yes. A cargo loading plan will be used and the vessel may carry a small onboard forklift to reposition break-bulk or containers under the crane hook as required. An upgraded crane with carrying capacity to lift the most forward containers is in consideration.

Question: What is the maximum size of uncontainerised building materials that can be carried?

Answer summary: Undercover cargo will be stowed via doorway approximately 5 metres wide, matching the stern ramp width. On the open deck, longer items can be carried provided crane lifting limits and safe stowage requirements are met. Discussed investigation of maximizing the doorway opening as much as possible during detailed design phase.

Question: Does the new vessel have greater capacity than the current vessel?

Answer summary: Vessel designed to operate at full load draft of 2.3 m. This is 300 mm shallower than the current vessel.

Analysis of past 5 years of ship manifests indicates:

- Capacity meets approximately the 97th percentile of historic cargo volumes and weights
- Only 2 voyages in 5 years would have exceeded this design capacity

Designing 100% of historic peak loads would require:

- A longer vessel
- Larger supporting infrastructure (e.g. berthing / landside interface)
- This was not considered value for money given the infrequency of peak events

Operational approach for peak loads:

- This could be managed via back-to-back voyages or,
- Loading beyond design draft capacity and sitting deeper in the water than 2.3m (reminder that the Trader has a 2.6m draft)

Important clarification on capacity vs design draft:

- The vessel is not physically limited to the 2.3 m design draft.
- Exceeding the nominal cargo capacity simply means the vessel will sit deeper in the water. At a 2.30 m draft, the tonnes per centimetre (TPC) is 3.73 t/cm, meaning an additional 0.10 m of draft equates to approximately 37 tonnes of additional cargo capacity.
- By comparison, only an additional 18 tonnes would be required for the new vessel to carry 100% of the past five years' manifest cargo.
- Where tidal conditions, vertical centre of gravity (VCG), and windage allow, the vessel can still safely access the port at drafts greater than 2.30 m, up to the load line (the load line is the maximum permitted draft of a vessel, defining the deepest it can safely and legally sit in the water under specified conditions).
- This provides operational flexibility beyond the nominal design specification without requiring a larger vessel.

Ramp, Crane and Wharf Interface

Question: If the crane works well, why is a stern ramp still needed?

Answer summary: The vessel is being designed to provide maximum long-term flexibility over its 40-year design life. The inclusion of the ramp supports future construction requirements, enables efficient roll-on/roll-off of heavy equipment and wheeled cargo and reduces reliance on costly barging operations. Overall, it ensures the island retains flexibility to respond to evolving and uncertain cargo demands over time.

Question: Is there enough wharf space for the vessel to back in?

Answer summary: 20% engineering design drawings illustrate the maximum development envelope required for environmental approvals, including the use of mooring dolphins. The project team considers that the vessel may be able to operate closer to shore and will further assess opportunities to minimise or avoid the need for dolphins, pending further investigation by the marine infrastructure contractor. An appropriate balance between operational functionality and visual impact will be pursued.

Question: Will the ramp work across the full tidal range?

Answer summary: This will be resolved through detailed design with the shore-side marine infrastructure contractor and requires further consultation.



Biosecurity

Question: How is biosecurity being addressed with the new vessel?

Answer summary: The vessel specification has been informed by the Biosecurity Technical Advisory Group in collaboration with LHIB Biosecurity, ensuring that biosecurity considerations have been incorporated into the vessel design wherever practicable. In addition, biosecurity risks are managed through multiple layers of control, including improved mainland measures and inspections undertaken prior to ramp deployment.

Costs, Operations and Maintenance

Question: Will the running costs be higher than the current vessel?

Answer summary: The aim is to keep operating costs as low as possible. While the vessel has more power and can travel faster when needed, it is expected to be more efficient at equivalent speeds.

Question: Who is responsible for maintenance and how will this affect freight costs?

Answer summary: Maintenance responsibilities and operating costs will be finalised through the tender process for an operator. Freight rates are still to be determined.

