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The *William Fraser* has made its first trip to the Chatham Islands

A FAMILY AFFAIR AT SEA

BY MARGARET WIND

McCallum Bros has given the *William Fraser* a new job on the Chathams run. With the first cattle shipment delivered and a purpose-built ship under construction, the family is looking well beyond the next sailing.

When the *William Fraser* brought 331 cattle from the Chatham Islands into Napier in September, two of the people caring for them were McCallum Bros managing director Callum McCallum and his son Nelson. You can't get more hands-on than that.

Father and son had joined the ship's eight New Zealand seafarers as stockmen for her first livestock voyage. Nelson, an engineer involved in developing the company's next ship, was getting some very practical experience of the trade she will serve.

The 68m landing craft has been converted to carry cattle in partnership with the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT). Her immediate task is to help move livestock off the Chatham Islands while a new supply vessel is built to replace the *Southern Tiare*. Now approaching 40 years old, the existing supply ship has experienced repeated service interruptions caused by unscheduled maintenance.

For island farmers, a missed sailing can mean keeping animals longer than planned, finding more feed and waiting for income. Having another ship available gives them more options now, while the larger vessel promises greater capacity ahead.

A FAMILY BUILT AROUND BOATS

McCallum Bros began in 1904, when William Fraser McCallum and his three brothers formed a partnership with a 40-tonne wooden scow, *Pakihi*.


William Fraser with her bow ramp lowered and temporary shelter fitted for livestock voyages

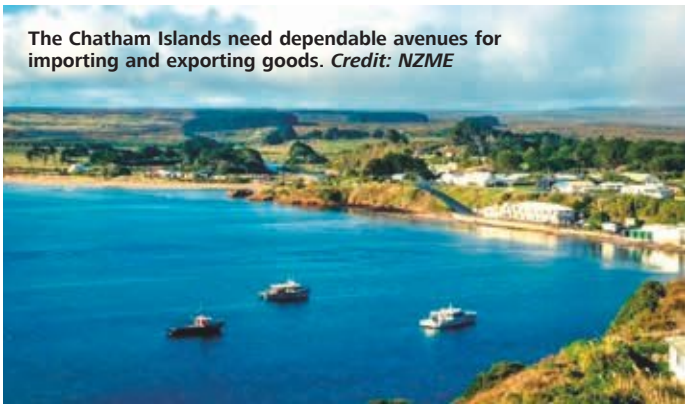
Coastal freight and the growing trade in red shingle kept the early fleet busy around Auckland and the Hauraki Plains. Loading was hard work: shingle went into wheelbarrows, which were pushed up planks to the hold. More scows followed, then tugs, barges and steel vessels as the business developed.

Today, Callum represents the fourth generation, with Fraser, Nelson and their sister Anna continuing the family's involvement. The wider group includes Clevedon Coast Oysters, where Anna works, and the McCallum Residence accommodation and wedding business, run by their mother, Jan.

Shipping remains very much part of family life. Fraser and Nelson stay closely involved while working overseas, and Nelson's employment with joint-venture partner Nova Marine Carriers has brought him into the design and development of the new Chathams vessel. ▶



McCallum Bros managing director Callum McCallum, who joined the first cattle voyage as a stockman



The Chatham Islands need dependable avenues for importing and exporting goods. *Credit: NZME*



From cattle to rock: *William Fraser* takes on her next coastal cargo at Port Tarakohe

Even *William Fraser*'s name carries that history. The company says she honours both its founder and the late 'Uncle Bill' McCallum. Built by Berjaya Dockyard in Miri, Malaysia, she was launched in 2019, with the project overseen by McCallum Bros' Mike Haynes.

MAKING ROOM FOR CATTLE

Originally built for sand extraction, aggregates and project cargo, the *William Fraser* already had the space and access needed for a useful working ship.

She measures 68m in length with a 16m beam. Her cargo area measures 43m by 10m, with access through an eight-metre-wide bow ramp. Twin Caterpillar C32 main engines, each rated at 746kW, drive fixed-pitch propellers, while a 250kW bow thruster assists manoeuvring. Her design speed is 10 knots.

Auxiliary machinery includes another Caterpillar C32 and a Cummins QSM11-M – a substantial machinery installation overall.

Preparing her for livestock involved a significant conversion of the cargo bin. Aluminium pens, dairy matting, troughs, fodder bins and freshwater supplies have all been installed, together with temporary roofing and shelter. The wider conversion programme also included livestock loading ramps and additional crew accommodation.

For those looking after the cattle, the crossing means feeding, watering and checking the animals as the ship makes her way back to the mainland.

At the time of the first voyages, MPI approval covered cattle only. Sheep were not included.

The first shipment was completed on 19 September. By later that month, *William Fraser* was already heading back towards the Chathams with fencing materials, quad bikes and general cargo, preparing to collect another load of around 330 cattle.

She had visited the Chathams before, carrying fuel on an emergency supply run in 2024, and her new role provides an ongoing backup service that will remain available even after the new ship arrives.

THE NEXT SHIP TAKES SHAPE

McCallum Bros and Nova Marine Carriers formed 44 South Shipping LP to deliver the long-overdue replacement service. Their agreement with the Government provides for at least 20 years of shipping to the islands, with the Crown contributing $24.3 million towards the new vessel and the partnership funding the balance.

Steel cutting for the new vessel began in China in September, with delivery to New Zealand expected in late 2027. MCERT's involvement supports both the immediate service provided by the *William Fraser* and the longer-term replacement.

At approximately 77m long and 16m wide, the new ship is being designed around the variety of cargo an island community needs. Containers, refrigerated goods, vehicles, general freight, fuel and livestock all have to fit into the operation, with enough flexibility to meet changing demand in the years ahead.

The current design provides three livestock decks, roll-on/roll-off capability, 10 reefer connections and a hold that can also accommodate break-bulk cargo.

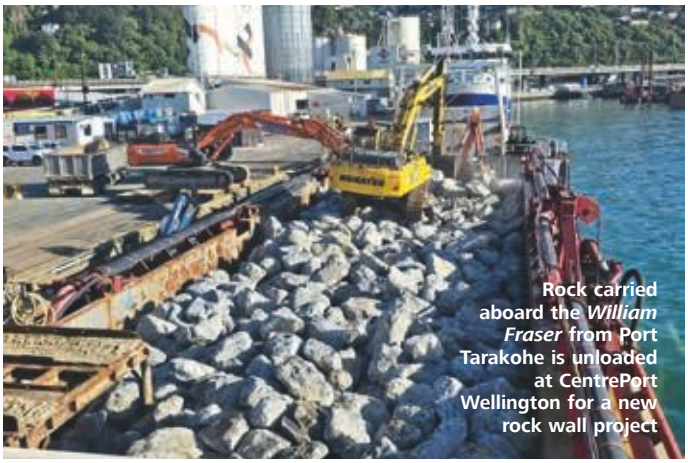
A 40-tonne cargo crane will give her the ability to handle freight without depending entirely on shoreside lifting equipment. A smaller secondary crane is planned for transferring cargo to the Pitt Island barge.

The arrangement plan specifies twin Wärtsilä 6L20 main engines, each rated at 1,200kW, and a service speed of 12 knots.

Ventilation has received particular attention. An August project update reported that the livestock ventilation design had been completed, including backup arrangements to maintain airflow if machinery failed. For a ship carrying animals on several decks, it is an essential part of the design.



Callum McCallum said cattle on board the *William Fraser* were well looked after



Rock carried aboard the *William Fraser* from Port Tarakohe is unloaded at CentrePort Wellington for a new rock wall project



Crew members prepare for the Chathams run aboard the *William Fraser*

The vessel will be New Zealand flagged and crewed. The company expects eight crew, with an additional stockman or cadet bringing the normal working complement to nine.

LOOKING ALONG THE COAST

The family's plans for more coastal work are already taking shape. Following her second trip to the Chathams, *William Fraser* is now carrying rock from Port Tarakohe, at the top of the South Island, to CentrePort Wellington for a new rock wall project.

Carrying cattle on one voyage and rock on another is a good example of the range of work she can take on.

Other opportunities include moving livestock between the North and South Islands, servicing other island communities, and carrying containers and general cargo around the coast. A direct sea passage could give some farmers and transport operators an alternative to long road journeys and Cook Strait ferry bookings.

"We are passionate about coastal shipping and we want to grow our shipping capabilities around the New Zealand coast," Nelson says.

There is a practical commercial reason for keeping that outlook broad. Weather will continue to influence the Chathams timetable, and other coastal work could help keep the vessels employed between island voyages.

The most exciting aspect of all this is seeing a New Zealand shipping family prepared to invest in both an immediate solution and a new vessel for the years ahead.

After more than 120 years in coastal shipping, the McCallums are still finding new work for their vessels. This time, it means helping island farmers get their stock to market and building a service they can plan around.

There will be plenty to talk about when the new ship arrives. In the meantime, the *William Fraser* has cattle to carry, rock to shift and plenty of coast to cover.

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