

**Public Petitions Committee**

**PE1516 on Referenda for Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles**

**Written Submission from the Scottish Government**

Dear Ms Peat

Thank you for your letter of 4 June to my colleague Ian Cox seeking the Scottish Government's views on petition PE1516.

The Scottish Government is clear that Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles are much valued parts of Scotland and have been so for many centuries, including prior to the Treaty of Union in 1707. That would continue in the event of independence.

The Scottish Government has been engaging in discussions with the three Islands Councils of Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles to consider how, with the powers of independence, the needs of our island communities could be recognised. The Scottish Government published *Empowering Scotland's Island Communities* on 16 June 2014. In the prospectus, the Scottish Government has committed to implement a range of proposals, including:

- To bring forward a Bill for an Islands Act upon independence to place a duty on the Scottish Government and other public bodies to 'island-proof' their functions and decisions, and to create a post of 'Minister for Island Communities';
- To extend to 2020 the duration of the Enterprise Areas at Arnish, Lyness and Hatston, and support the establishment of Island Innovation Zones, to help sustain job opportunities;
- To allocate, upon independence, 100 per cent of the net income from the islands' sea bed leasing revenues to island communities rather than to central government;
- To ensure Islands Councils' representation on a new strategic energy committee upon independence, and explore ways to mitigate any adverse community impacts from oil and gas activities consistent with our commitments made to the industry in Scotland's Future;
- To develop a 'planning brief' approach for aquaculture to underpin further development and growth of the sector, and develop a 'Community Benefit Charter' with the Islands Councils, the aquaculture industry and those involved in the regulatory framework;
- To ensure that island communities have a stronger voice and representation in Europe

This is a substantial proposition of additional powers, responsibilities and resources that will empower Scotland's islands.

In relation to the petition request for a second referendum in the islands, the committee may find the attached annex setting out the timescales involved in establishing the independence referendum useful.

I hope you find this information helpful in considering the petition.

Yours sincerely

Steve Sadler  
**Head of Elections and Referendum Team**

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- The framework under which the Scottish independence referendum will be run has been in development since 2012 when, following a consultation which attracted over 26,000 responses and then discussions between the two Governments, the Edinburgh Agreement was signed by the Scottish and UK Governments. The Agreement, and the associated section 30 Order which was approved by the Scottish and Westminster Parliaments, confirmed that the Scottish Parliament would legislate for the referendum.
- The Scottish Parliament subsequently passed two pieces of detailed legislation – the Scottish Independence Referendum Act 2013 and the Scottish Independence Referendum (Franchise) Act 2013, which set out the arrangements for running the poll. Together, the Edinburgh Agreement, s.30 Order and the two Referendum Acts set out the complex legislative framework under which the referendum will be run.