

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

PROPOSED NATIONAL ISLANDS PLAN

SUBMISSION FROM THE SCOTTISH ISLANDS FEDERATION

The Scottish Islands Federation (SIF) welcomes the proposed National Islands Plan (NIP) and is delighted to have played a constructive role in its development. The consultation process has been well received by islanders and we are pleased to see so many of the points made across the islands reflected in the proposed Plan.

Looking back at the consultation on the Islands (Scotland) Bill, many of the aspirations outlined by our members and others have been taken forward including the establishment of the Islands Team which has already achieved so much.

The implementation plan and the Island Community Impact Assessment (ICIA) will be key to how the NIP will move from aspiration to delivery and we look forward to helping island communities engage with this in due course.

1. Do you think the 13 Strategic Objectives in the proposed National Islands Plan are the right ones to meet the needs of island communities?

While each island might prioritise the objectives according to their own unique local circumstances, in general terms we recognise that the specified objectives fairly reflect the scope of expressed needs and concerns of island communities.

2. Are there any issues which have been overlooked in the Strategic Objectives?

Higher costs of island living are significant and many island communities lack parity of access to services. These issues do not appear to be directly addressed within the strategic objectives.

Land reform, community ownership of land and assets and community-led development have become some of the most successful drivers for positive change and innovation in island communities and should feature strongly within the objectives and actions.

The Scottish Crown Estate is covered through a different part of the Islands (Scotland) Act but given its significance to island communities, strong community engagement supporting more effective management of island coasts and shorelines might reasonably be recognised within the strategic objectives.

As Island Community Impact Assessments may be critical mechanisms for delivering positive change to island communities, some mention within strategic objectives might be appropriate.

Also, the damaging impact of uncertainties concerning Brexit is acknowledged

within the Plan and could be added to given the massive significance of EU funding to infrastructure projects throughout the islands, as well as support for community initiatives, agriculture and business activity in recent decades. These challenging realities now facing islands are further explained within the Scottish Government's report on [Brexit vulnerabilities](#).

3. Are there any Strategic Objectives that should be given a higher level of priority within the proposed Plan?

Relative priorities may vary between islands, and also over time, so any definitive ordering of priorities could prove problematic. However, there is a sense in which every objective is ultimately concerned with islanders' wellbeing.

4. Do you think the proposed Plan sets out both a clear strategic direction and practical approaches to delivery of the Strategic Objectives?

Yes, the strategic direction is clear but the ultimate success of the Plan necessarily depends upon practicalities of its implementation. Notwithstanding details of ICIA processes yet to be developed, and unknown public spending and resource implications associated with Brexit, so far so good.

5. Do you have any comments on the actions outlined to support effective implementation of the proposed Plan?

SIF looks forward to further collaboration with island communities and the Scottish Government to support implementation of the NIP. In reviewing proposed actions associated with each objective, SIF recognises some scope for cross cutting activities which address more than one objective.

To address population decline and ensure a healthy, balanced population profile:

Appropriate action to address population decline might also support sustainable growth and demographic change. We particularly like the proposal for a Young Islanders Network and would welcome support for young people and the Network in this context.

To improve and promote sustainable economic development: SIF recognises community-led development, enterprise and ownership of land and assets as a proven driver of sustainable economic development on islands, and would also welcome commitment to supporting arts, culture and creative industries in this context. Renewable energy schemes have particular potential to generate sustainable income streams for some islands.

To improve transport services: SIF concurs with the need for a strategic long term focus on vital ferry links and would welcome action to reduce costs of freight and commercial transport which could have a major impact on economic development, spanning fuel, house building, business overheads and high costs of island life. We agree in principle with action to better integrate transport schedules and also recognise benefits of investment in air

travel, improved roads, fixed links, public and community transport. SIF recognises islands with renewable energy generation potential but grid constraints limiting energy exports as well placed to pursue decarbonisation of island transport through EVs in some situations, subject to appropriate support.

To improve housing on Scottish islands: in addition to the regulations around short-term lets we believe there is a need to also island proof short-assured tenancies and consider land use and ownership within the island housing context. Reduction of housing stock available to working islanders through purchase of vacant island homes as business investments for absent owners can be problematic in some situations.

To reduce the level of fuel poverty currently present on Scotland's islands: SIF welcomes the inclusion of a minimum income standard uplift specific to islands and an ICIA for the Fuel Poverty Strategy and believe this should involve island communities as well as their local authorities. Actions around support for community-led initiatives and innovative low carbon solutions to tackle fuel poverty (linking to education, economic development and climate change) could be valuable additions within this objective.

To improve and promote health and well-being: community-led initiatives make an enormous contribution to island health and well-being and could feature within the actions. Also, the potential to develop and island proof education, training and career paths for the care sector.

To ensure that Scottish islands are at the forefront of contributions to our ambition to end climate change: this objective and actions presents huge potential for island communities and is a topic that SIF has worked on with members as well as our partners in the European Small Islands Network, most recently through the Clean Energy for EU Islands programme. We would like to see these valuable networking and collaborative links continue beyond Brexit.

To empower diverse communities and different places: the strong commitment to work with and involve island communities is very welcome. Additions here could include a role for communities within the actions around the Crown Estate, and within the delivery of ICIA's – going forward the ICIA could be a key tool in giving island communities a stronger voice and say over things that affect them. Also, limited community capacity can often be a barrier to empowerment and voice and could be addressed within the actions.

6. Do you think the proposed Plan adheres effectively to its stated principles that it is “fair, integrated, green and inclusive”? If not, how might its adherence to any or all of these principles be improved?

Yes, we believe it does.

7. The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 sets out longer term timescales for Scottish Ministers to report on and review the Plan. Does the proposed

Plan have sufficiently clear targets and measurable indicators by which to measure its performance?

SIF welcomes the strong commitment to developing specific actions, clear targets and measurable indicators and look forward to seeing the detail of these as the implementation phase develops.