



## Harris Report



Island: Harris

Date: 23 and 24/04/2019

*This report has been produced by the Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance (SCELG) and Scottish Island Federation (SIF) in the framework of their collaboration with the Islands Team of the Scottish Government. The goal of this report is to capture the essence of the discussions that have taken place at consultation events on Harris. The report will be sent out to participants who authorised us to do so in order to receive further comments and feedback. The report is not to be considered as an indication of what will ultimately go into the National Island Plan, but it will inform the latter. The report is also not to be considered as an indication of the position of Scottish Government on any of the points mentioned therein.*



## Introduction

On 23 April a focus group took place at the community hall in Tarbert and on 24 April 2019 a consultation event took place at Tall na Mara between 7:30pm and 9:30pm. Overall, the events were attended by 11 people and the goal was to capture both what works well on the island and the challenges faced by the community on Harris. The consultation is required by the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, as a means to inform the National Islands Plan that Scottish Government will be presenting to Scottish Parliament on 4 October 2019.

## Harris as a great place to live

The consultation highlighted the following things that make living on Harris great:

- Very safe / Low crime / safe environment
- Clean air / environment / island ecology / temperate climate / wildlife and nature / Lovely scenery
- Good community / People's generosity / voluntary organisations
- Importance of young people and involvement of kids
- All generations work together, there are no age boundaries
- Unique culture (Gaelic) / traditions / island spirit / feeling an islander
- Space
- World wide heritage
- People are open and accepting of others
- Harris is dynamic
- There is positive development in the community
- There are more confident people coming into the community
- Tourism helps people earn a living / creative businesses
- Education / small class sizes
- The RET and air discount schemes are good
- Good medical and dental services



There are so many things that make living on Harris great. However, the events did highlight that the community enjoys the natural environment and the sense of community, including the safety that people sense. There is a feeling of space and “islandness”, which becomes a truly cultural and heritage component, and needs to be fully understood, appreciated and protected.

### **Challenges on Harris**

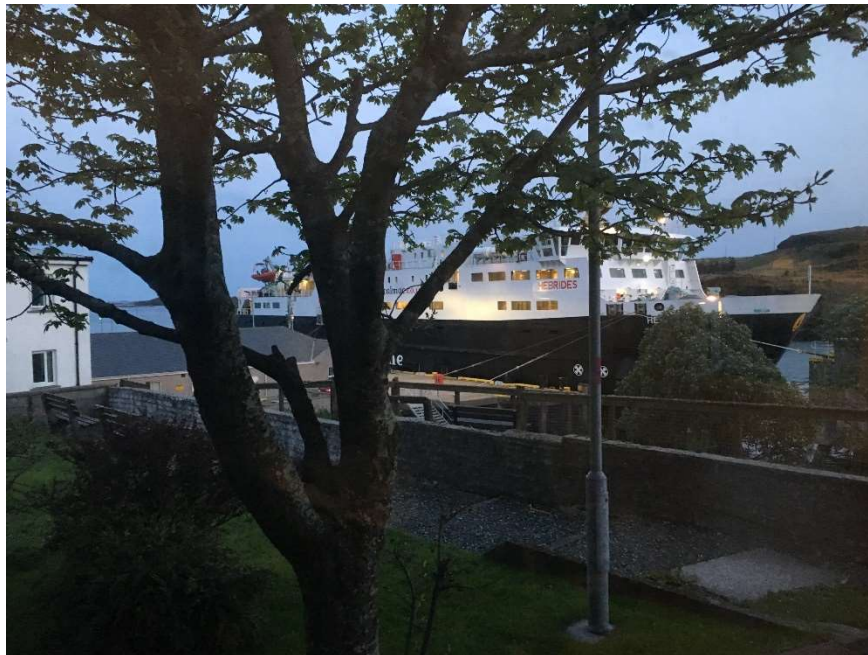
The consultation moved on to discuss the current challenges on Harris and the main concerns of the island community. The following are the main issues that were shared by the participants at the event (see Annex for more details):

- Increasing Population Levels
- Economic Development
- Environmental Wellbeing
- Transport
- Digital Connectivity





- Land Management
- Biosecurity
- Education
- Delivery charges
- Tolerance of different religious views
- Tourism
- Secondary education
- Housing



### **The National Islands Plan and the Response from the Participants**

During the consultation, several key challenges were discussed in greater detail. We wish to make it very clear that a more in depth focus was undertaken for the purposes of the face-to-face consultation, and should not be considered as any indication of prioritization in the framework of the National Islands Plan.

The areas discussed more in depth were:





- Housing
- Depopulation
- Economic Development (lack of business space)
- Digital Connectivity
- Tourism
- Environmental Wellbeing

For each, participants were asked to provide more details about the challenge, their proposed solution, next steps, who should undertake these next steps and when. The following are the suggestions that we believe stemmed from the participants present at the consultation on Harris:

Challenge	Suggestion from participants
<b>Housing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rethink housing policy in such a way that it recognizes the right to live where you want</li> <li>▪ Policy acknowledgement that the housing challenge on the islands is critical and urgent and different from the mainland, although it shares similar traits.</li> <li>▪ Recognizing the positive ripple effect that an island focused housing strategy will have on the sustainability of the islands and their repopulation – it will make them more resilient.</li> </ul>
<b>Depopulation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Policy acknowledgement of the distinctive realities on each island</li> <li>▪ The release of grants has to take into account the added costs on islands – financial provision to island communities needs to reflect the higher costs (for example of building)</li> <li>▪ Revision of taxation policy to accrue financial resources from second homes / Higher council tax for second homes that are not rented out year long</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of a recruitment campaign for childcare professionals on the island and career development support</li> </ul>
<b>Economic Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revision of economic development policy with a focus on islands with a possible suggestion of the creation of a new agency that focuses solely on Scottish islands (separating the Highlands element)</li> <li>Developing, promoting and supporting an island wide brand without diluting the already existing island specific brands</li> <li>Create an island business forum (get together) and organize an annual island business event that has an international appeal</li> </ul>
<b>Digital connectivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revise digital connectivity policy to discuss with service providers connectivity as a right/lifeline rather than just as an economic service (develop legally binding minimum standards that take such nature into account)</li> <li>Develop more resilient infrastructure (more masts and less fiber optic)</li> <li>Revise education policy with connectivity to ensure an education level playing fields for kids regardless of where they live</li> </ul>
<b>Tourism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a new marketing campaign focused on non-mainstream tourism on Harris</li> <li>Link the campaign with a stronger more varied Harris brand</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental wellbeing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen partnerships with the industry so that a balance is struck between keeping the jobs and the industry operating and protecting the environment (fish farm)</li> <li>Explore opportunities for investment in the community by the industry (fish farm)</li> <li>Work with island communities to promote the benefits of recycling (recycling)</li> </ul>



- Funding to develop a realistic business circular economy opportunity based on the opportunities stemming from recycling
- Promotion of environmental protection awareness (recycling)
- Privately owned renewable energy schemes need to fully take into account concerns of the community and explore opportunities to invest in to the community
- The island communities impact assessment should have sustainability embedded into it (there should be a clear link between the ICIA and the outcomes improved by the NIP)

### **Harris Vision**

Island communities know probably even more than communities on the mainland that good governance requires an integrated and holistic approach to policy. We wish to stress once again that the National Islands Plan and its implementation will not address specific issues in isolation, but rather will consider all factors together whilst taking into account their crosscutting nature. In addition, each island has its own unique character and its own unique challenges. From the consultation on Harris we have identified the following specific traits to Harris:

Firstly, digital connectivity and housing have ripple effects. What this means is that if measures are put in place to deal with these “specific” issues, it will inevitably have wider positive effects. In other words, by improving digital connectivity and housing, economic development will benefit thanks to improved job opportunities (due to remote working possibilities) and as a result of the possibility of a house for staff working on Harris. More opportunities and increased economic development will, in the long term, stop depopulation. Digital connectivity requires a combination of policy reform (minimum legal standards based on islands and not the mainland) and more resilient infrastructure (masts vs fibreoptic where necessary). Housing requires radical changes to policy emphasizing the right to housing and promoting financial and other incentives to those house owners who put their second homes on the long-term rental market.



Secondly, there needs to be a balance between economic development and community development and environmental protection. Whether it is a specific industrial sector (fish farms) or individual homeowners, those who benefit from the land should also be incentivized (if not under an obligation) to contribute to the community. Renewable energy community schemes show (when managed appropriately) an option to balance these interests.

Thirdly, tourism is a key driver for Harris and needs to be sustained, but also managed properly. A key factor identified is the need to develop tourism year round and one way of doing this is by developing together, with the community, a marketing strategy around a strong and cohesive Harris brand that goes beyond tweed and food and beverage, which is capable of attracting tourism year round.



### **What now?**

First and foremost we wish to thank those who attended the consultation events on Harris. We encourage you to fill in the on-line consultation at <https://consult.gov.scot/agriculture-and-rural-communities/national-islands-plan/>. You can find the consultation document that





provides background information about the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, the National Islands Plan and the Islands Communities Impact Assessment at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-islands-plan-islands-communities-impact-assessment-guidance-consultation/>.

More importantly, please send us any comments/feedback on this report at [n.crook@strath.ac.uk](mailto:n.crook@strath.ac.uk)

The National Islands Plan will only be useful if it is truly informed by the island communities and by all those who have an interest and a stake in Scottish islands. Thanks to your participation in the consultation event and your comments and feedback, we are confident that the work being undertaken towards the National Islands Plan is capturing the voice of island communities. We are also sure that this is only the beginning and that, together, we can make sure that the National Islands Plan is not just “another” plan, but “The Plan” that works for island communities in Scotland.

*Useful links:*

- *On-line consultation* - <https://consult.gov.scot/agriculture-and-rural-communities/national-islands-plan/>
- *Consultation document* - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-islands-plan-islands-communities-impact-assessment-guidance-consultation/>
- *Islands (Scotland) Act 2018*
- *Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance (SCELG)* - <https://www.strath.ac.uk/research/strathclydecentreenvironmentallawgovernance/>
- *Scottish Island Federation (SIF)* - <http://www.scottish-islands-federation.co.uk/>
- *SCELG portal on the consultation* - <https://www.strath.ac.uk/research/strathclydecentreenvironmentallawgovernance/ourwork/research/labsincubators/eilean/islandsscotlandact/consultations/>



## Annex

### Challenges about living and working on Harris

#### Focus group on Tarbert

<p><b>-Depopulation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ there is a risk that people are living because they cannot work</li> </ul>	<p><b>-Economic Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ lack of business space</li> </ul>	<p><b>-Transport</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ no space on the boat because visitors are booking all the spaces.</li> <li>➤ Deliveries of goods are more expensive and unfair.</li> </ul>
<p><b>-Digital Connectivity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ no fibre optic broadband on the East Coast.</li> <li>➤ Makes things like homework difficult.</li> <li>➤ No mobile phone reception.</li> </ul>		



## Annex

### Challenges about living and working on Harris

#### Consultation event at Talla na Mara

<p><b>-Increasing Population</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Housing (including for seasonal workers)</li> <li>➤ Childcare (lack of qualified childcare workers)</li> <li>➤ Not enough babies</li> <li>➤ Too many holiday homes, second homes and empty houses</li> </ul>	<p><b>-Economic Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Infrastructure to support industry and tourism</li> <li>➤ Business planning</li> <li>➤ Year about employment</li> <li>➤ Incentive to extend the season (ferry fares)</li> </ul>	<p><b>-Environmental Protection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Environmental levy on fish farms</li> <li>➤ Control of the industrialised landscape</li> </ul>
<p><b>Biosecurity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Fish farms pollution</li> </ul>	<p><b>-Land Management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sale of crofts to the higher bidders (problem)</li> <li>➤ Absentee landlords</li> </ul>	<p><b>-Transport</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Public transport (more and better)</li> <li>➤ Better reliability of the ferries</li> </ul>
<p><b>-Digital Connectivity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mobile phone reception</li> <li>➤ Fast broadband for all</li> <li>➤ Public video conferencing facilities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Education</b></p>	<p><b>Delivery charges</b></p>



<b>Tolerance of different religious views</b>	<b>Better infrastructure for tourist</b>	
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