



## South Uist and Eriskay Report



Island: South Uist and Eriskay

Date: 18/06/2019

*This report has been produced by the Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance (SCELG) and Scottish Islands 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 the consultation event on South Uist. 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 the 18<sup>th</sup> of June 2019, a consultation event took place on South Uist. The event was attended by 15 people and the goal was to capture both what works well on the islands and the challenges faced by the communities on South Uist and Eriskay. 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.

## South Uist and Eriskay as great places to live

The consultation highlighted the following things that make living on South Uist and Eriskay great:

- Community
- Family
- Economy
- Environment
- Landscape
- Freedom
- Wildlife
- Culture
- History
- Gaelic
- Traditions



It is evident that there are many things that make South Uist and Eriskay fantastic places to live. The list above only affords a glimpse, but it does highlight that there is a true sense of a community between the residents, and that they value what the unique environment affords them in terms of landscape and wildlife. .’ The culture and history of the islands are also seen as crucial to island life.



## Challenges on South Uist and Eriskay

The consultation moved on to discuss the current challenges on South Uist and Eriskay, 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):

- Stopping Population Decline
- Economic Development
- Environmental Protection
- Health and Wellbeing
- Community Empowerment
- Transport
- Digital Connectivity
- Housing
- Education
- Gaelic
- Lack of available crofts
- Need for more tradespeople
- Recognition of rural lives



## 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:

- Transport
- Community Empowerment
- Environment
- Health

The following are the suggestions that we believe stemmed from the participants present at the consultation on South Uist:

Challenge	Suggestion from participants
<b>Transport</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review transport policy so that it fully takes into account the fragility of island communities (transport for island communities is not just a service, it's a lifeline, it's a right).               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This includes the possibility of exploring options for the use of environmentally friendly fuels</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Explore the possibility of introducing priority booking for islanders for both ferries and air travel.</li> </ul>
<b>Community Empowerment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consider revising the current democratic process to ensure that islands are properly represented by guaranteeing that the process is appropriately island proofed.</li> <li>▪ This should include the promotion of gender diversity to ensure a fair representation at both council and local level</li> </ul>





	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase funding routes and opportunities for local democratically elected groups to take on a greater decision-making role and promote involvement within the community</li> </ul>
<b>Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consider specific funding stream to ensure that vulnerable Scottish islands have sufficient adaptation measures in place to deal with rising sea levels.</li> <li>▪ Support and invest in the revision of current island infrastructure (travel and energy supply) to better support the greening of the island economy.</li> <li>▪ Support a marketing campaign to encourage reduction of carbon use holding the likes of the Uists as a hub of innovation.</li> </ul>
<b>Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Revise current health service to ensure it is 'island proofed' for local communities             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This includes reversing the decentralisation trend, and ensuring that crucial services are kept within the locality.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Focus on ensuring that on island elderly care is available to ensure that 'cradle to grave' practices can be implemented.</li> <li>▪ Consider the possibility of implementing a strategy that promotes a direct link between further education and local, on island apprenticeships.</li> </ul>

### South Uist and Eriskay Vision

Island communities know 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 South Uist we have identified the following specific traits to South Uist and Eriskay:



The transport sector highlights the discrepancy and ineffectiveness of policies adopted and sought by non-islanders. There is a need to revise this sector to ensure that it is driven by island communities, and that it is recognised as being a 'lifeline' service for islanders rather than just an economic service. This reveals a wider dissatisfaction with community empowerment and local governance.

A revisal of the current democratic process to ensure islanders have a say in decisions directly related to them would be transformative for island communities. At present, the participants feel that the decision-making process is very much undertaken from 'The Centre' (Stronoway), by people that do not fully understand the nuances of life on South Uist and Eriskay. This results in an overload of policy and programs that fail to reach their full potential, and put additional strain on an already overworked third sector.

The gradual centralisation of the current health service is also of key concern to island residents. Local solutions have been proven to work due to their intrinsic knowledge of community needs. However, the value of this has been lost and replaced by top down government strategies which do not provide an adequate service for the islands. At present, a health care strategy day is held once a year which results in a Western Isles Healthcare Strategy. However, there is a current lack of resources to enact this strategy in a meaningful way. Consequently, it is crucial that the current health service is revised to ensure that it provides adequate 'cradle to grave' care for island communities.

Finally, participants highlighted challenges regarding the environment and particularly the imminent threat of climate change, with the feeling that there is a general lack of urgency and understanding regarding this issue. Community projects, such as off-grid renewables and the promotion of reduced carbon living, should be supported by the Government, with adequate funding provided to ensure that an active, forward thinking communities are able to thrive, but not at the detriment of the health and wellbeing of its already extremely busy residents.



### **What now?**

First and foremost we wish to thank those who attended the consultation event on South Uist. 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 South Uist and Eriskay

<p><b>-Depopulation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing led solutions</li> </ul>	<p><b>-Economic Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career progression &amp; job flexibility</li> <li>• Employment plan</li> <li>• Good quality, well paid jobs</li> <li>• Including public sector leading the way</li> <li>• Salary vs. cost of living</li> <li>• Housing as an economic driver (which can't be social housing list led as not accurate)</li> <li>• Recruitment and retainment</li> </ul>	<p><b>-Transport</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roads/infrastructure</li> <li>• Cheaper air travel</li> <li>• New ferries</li> <li>• Improved bus transport</li> <li>• Better connectivity between islands&amp; mainland</li> </ul>
<p><b>- Community Empowerment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect to centres of power</li> <li>• For local knowledge and voice</li> <li>• Decentralised services from SG to LA</li> <li>• More localized decisions</li> <li>• Gaelic language promotion schemes</li> </ul>	<p><b>- Environmental protection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Darker skies (less artificial lighting)</li> <li>• Lower sea levels</li> <li>• Flood defences</li> <li>• Monitor coastal erosion</li> </ul>	<p><b>-Health and wellbeing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social care</li> <li>• Medical care</li> <li>• Access to health services care provision</li> <li>• Local led solutions that are properly funded</li> <li>• Security of basic services</li> </ul>
<p><b>-Fuel poverty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fuel poverty in homes</li> <li>• Reduce fuel costs</li> </ul>	<p><b>- Digital Connectivity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Improve connectivity (broadband and mobile)</li> </ul>	<p><b>-Biosecurity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> </ul>
<p><b>-Other</b></p>		



- More affordable housing
- Trade persons
- Availability of crofts
- Recognition of rural lives
- Education including resources & staff
- Gaelic is unique on each island

