



## Whalsay Report



Island: Whalsay

Date: 06/06/2019

*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 the consultation event on Whalsay. 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 6 June 2019 a consultation took place on Whalsay between 7:30pm and 10:00pm. The event was attended by 26 people and the goal was to capture both what works well on the island and the challenges faced by the community on Whalsay. 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.

## Whalsay as a great place to live

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

- Community spirit
- Safety
- Natural environment
- Fishing industry
- Aquaculture
- Local tradesmen (eg plumber/electrician you call upon in hour of need)
- Very nice ferry men (do the best they can with the resources they've got)
- Shops (well stocked)
- Services and facilities
- Medical and dental
- Generations mix
- Health
- Education
- Being an island
- Low unemployment
- Tradition
- Culture and heritage



Whalsay is a great place and is home to a vibrant community. While fishing is clearly an important aspect of the island's life and history, the island features a hub of activities from a wide range of the local community. The facilities are excellent and the availability of local tradesmen and women allows services to take place on the island. Medical services are great and the schooling system is excellent. There is a wide range of people representing different age groups on the island and this makes Whalsay an even more vibrant community.



### **Challenges on Whalsay**

The consultation moved on to discuss the current challenges on Whalsay 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):

- Depopulation
- Economic Development
- Environmental Protection
- Health and wellbeing

- Community empowerment
- Transport
- Digital Connectivity
- Fuel Poverty
- Food and accommodation facilities  
(not just for tourist)
- Bigger nursery
- Care services
- Financial equality



### **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 prioritisation in the framework of the National Islands Plan.

The areas discussed more in depth were:

- Community empowerment
- Digital connectivity

- Transport
- Economic Development
- Food, accommodation and tourism

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 focus group on Whalsay:

Challenge	Suggestion from participants
<b>Community empowerment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a system of accountability for the outcomes that will be included in the National Islands Plan that goes beyond the reporting exercise required by the Islands (Scotland) Act</li> <li>• Explore past and present consultation exercises to develop good practices               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Boost local democracy by considering community polling for decisions that affect an island community</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Digital connectivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deployment of funds to boost digital connectivity infrastructure on the islands</li> <li>• Frame digital connectivity as a lifeline service, which will allow to retain people on an island and to attract more business and opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>Transport</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update feasibility studies of the possibility of fixed links (tunnels) between islands on Shetland – not only from a technological and financial perspective but also undertaking studies on the social-welfare impacts that fixed links could have.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop consultation practices that enable to discuss topical matters such as fixed links in a community oriented way, but allowing all voices to be heard</li> <li>• Deploy necessary funding for the upgrade of existing ferry fleets and infrastructure</li> </ul>
<p><b>Economic Development</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake studies of the ripple effect that fixed links and/or better harbor could have on the economic development and well-being of Whalsay</li> <li>• Develop a plan for the upgrading of historical dwellings as a means to boost further facilities on the island and attract tourism</li> <li>• Frame affordable childcare as a lifeline service, which leads to gender equality in the workplace and promotes active working men and women on the island</li> </ul>
<p><b>Food, accommodation and tourism</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a plan for the island that can boost its attractions for visitors – understand and build on good practices elsewhere</li> <li>• Explore with the island community the possibility to develop a community based tourist service (hotel/restaurant) that could attract interest from people on the mainland, but also service the desires of people on the island</li> </ul>

## Whalsay 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 Whalsay we have identified the following specific traits:



Firstly, Whalsay is a stunning island with a vibrant community. It has so much to offer and just the shops and leisure centre speak by themselves of a well-organised and thriving community. However, the island could benefit from receiving more visitors, but also from more food and beverage leisure facilities for the island community itself. While more tourism could be boosted through improved transport links, what is also needed is a long-term strategy and plan to boost the island as a place to come, enjoy and visit. In addition, the possibility of setting up a restaurant or a hotel could be considered with community input so those wishing to stay can have a suitable accommodation and stay on Whalsay.

Secondly, the consultation showed that transport and economic development are highly intertwined. With better transport links more people could commute faster to the mainland and more opportunities could arise. However, transport is not the only key element to boost economic development. Affordable and quality childcare was mentioned as an area around everything else could be wrapped around. With childcare more families with kids will consider staying or moving to Whalsay. Without childcare families may consider leaving altogether.... Returning to transport, fixed links from Whalsay to mainland Shetland were discussed as an important option to further boost sustainable economic development. is one of the few islands where the discussion about fixed links was very advanced with projects on the table almost ready to be implemented. While the participants to the event appeared to be generally in favor of fixed links, there needs to be a further discussion about its wider benefits and impacts, not just in terms of transport, but also of the overall well-being towards the community. Contrary to what heard elsewhere, fixed links were said to possibly bring more people to use the excellent health services on Whalsay, rather than the health service disappearing from the island. It is also important that those on the island who work or depend on the current ferry system can participate in open and participative forums where a long-term transport sustainability plan can be discussed. An interesting point was made as to the long-term lower environmental impact of fixed links compared to any different kind of transport. Moving back to economic development, the island had a thriving aquaculture sector and fish processing. There were suggestions that both could be brought back to Whalsay. However, what this reveals is the strong historical and



present link of the island with the sea. Suggestions about an improved harbour were also discussed, capable of accommodating bigger fishing boats, which could lead to more jobs on the island. Over-reliance on one employer and economic sector does have potential risks, so it is important that increased diversification is further considered on Whalsay when it comes to sustainable economic development. One further element was raised as an enhanced of economic development: digital connectivity. As elsewhere the service is not always great on parts of the island and better connectivity would allow more people to consider working remotely, education could be boosted through on-line teaching and safety issues when connectivity is down would be resolved.

Thirdly, while transport, digital connectivity and sustainable economic development are all integrated, the discussion had one further important point, which is crucial for the participants at the consultation on Whalsay. Community empowerment understood as securing accountability not only for those in power and with a mandate to take decisions that will affect the island, but also for consultation processes like this one. Too often people on Whalsay have experienced consultations masterfully geared by the organisers to an already decided output that needed community rubberstamp. This leads not only to consultation, but to apathy and bitterness towards the political processes as a whole. The participants are requesting a higher degree of accountability to be embedded in the National Islands Plan. While the latter will be reported upon every year by Scottish Government in terms of progress (or lack of) towards the outcomes in the Plan, there needs to be further accountability structured within the Plan. There will also need to be a clear link between the Plan and the provision of island communities impact assessment so that the two can work hand in hand so that island proofing and stronger voice for island communities in national politics.







### **What now?**

First and foremost we wish to thank those who attended the consultation events on Whalsay. 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 Whalsay

-Depopulation	-Economic Development	-Transport
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Working opportunities</li> <li>➤ Support for industry</li> <li>➤ Better broadband speed</li> <li>➤ Affordable housing</li> <li>➤ Wrap around childcare</li> <li>➤ Harbor development for better development of industry</li> <li>➤ Fishing, sustainability</li> <li>➤ Supported living opportunities</li> <li>➤ Sustain population</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increase job opportunities</li> <li>➤ Value community learning</li> <li>➤ Remote working office</li> <li>➤ Fish processing plant (return of)</li> <li>➤ New piers</li> <li>➤ Improved harbour</li> <li>➤ Employment choice (diversification)</li> <li>➤ More money distributed to SIC from SG</li> <li>➤ Tourism</li> <li>➤ Heritage Centre Redevelopment phase 2</li> <li>➤ Restore and revitalize Laird's outlining buildings for tourist attractions for community use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Transport infrastructure lifeline services</li> <li>➤ Better, affordable transport links</li> <li>➤ Better weekend ferry service</li> <li>➤ Tunnel</li> <li>➤ Fixed links</li> <li>➤ Fixed links public vote</li> <li>➤ Better transport links – tunnel or better ferries</li> <li>➤ Increase ferry crossing – late night sailings</li> <li>➤ Secure, dependable transport</li> <li>➤ Better road maintenance</li> </ul>



<p><b>-Digital Connectivity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Better digital connectivity</li> <li>➤ Better broadband</li> <li>➤ Better communication links</li> <li>➤ Variety of job opportunities available on the island but working elsewhere using technology (remote working and transport)</li> <li>➤ Not having to travel to Lerwick – admin work (remote working)</li> <li>➤ Better mobile network</li> </ul>	<p><b>- Environmental protection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Road to Ward of Clate – the facilities at summit for tourist</li> </ul>	<p><b>Food and accommodation facilities (not just for tourist)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Café restaurant</li> <li>➤ Better tourist facilities</li> <li>➤ Tourist accommodation</li> </ul>
<p><b>-Community empowerment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Better representation and local democracy</li> <li>➤ No school closure threat</li> <li>➤ Meaningful action from consultations</li> <li>➤ Better support for community assets</li> </ul>	<p><b>-Fuel poverty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Renewables develop sustainability</li> <li>➤ Tidal power for community</li> <li>➤ Lower energy prices</li> </ul>	<p><b>Staff for work places</b></p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ More community learning (variety of courses and funding)</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Health and well-being</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Future security of services for school, health and fire</li> <li>➤ Future security of amenities – stop cuts to opening times</li> <li>➤ Special needs facilities and employment</li> <li>➤ More for young people</li> <li>➤ Permanent doctor</li> <li>➤ Creche facilities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Bigger nursery</b></p>	<p><b>Care services</b></p>
<p><b>Financial equality</b></p>		

