

Response ID ANON-WWGG-JQK4-P

Submitted to **National Islands Plan and Island Communities Impact Assessments**

Submitted on **2019-07-24 15:15:44**

Questions

1 If applicable, which island(s) do you live on or do you relate to?

If applicable, which island(s) do you live on or do you relate to?:

This response has been written by several staff members in SRUC/SAC Consulting*, including some staff who live and work on Scotland's islands.

SRUC/SAC has offices on Shetland, Orkney, Lewis, Benbecula and Skye. The organisation employs a total of 16 professional staff on these islands. The company also covers all other islands through its mainland office structure including Oban, Campbeltown and Ayr. Therefore we have good experience of the challenges and opportunities of living and working in several different island locations.

For some of the initial questions, different responses are included from staff members in different locations, and those locations are made clear. These responses reflect the differences and similarities between islands, and also between individuals, in terms of what is regarded about good about island living, the challenges of living on islands, what could be improved, etc.

Where the responses are not attributed to individuals, they have been compiled by several members of SRUC/SAC Consulting staff.

* Staff who have contributed to this response are from SAC Consulting's local offices in Orkney, Stornoway, Portree, Balivanich and Oban. Contributions were also made by Jane Atterton, Rob Mc Morran and Sarah Jones (SRUC Rural Policy Centre, Edinburgh) and Steven Thomson (Department of Rural Economy, Environment and Society, SRUC).

2 If applicable, what is good about living on your island? Please state 3 things that you like about living on your island.

What is good about living on your island? Please state 3 things that you like about living on your island.:

Three things that are good about living on Orkney are:

1. the unique culture;
2. the sense of community; and
3. possibility of achieving a work/life balance.

Three things that are good about living on Lewis are:

1. The community spirit that exists, which has improved in recent times;
2. Beautiful natural landscape and scenery, and the opportunities to access relatively freely this aspect of the island;
3. Overall safety and security on the island, and a safe place for children to grow up (for the most part).

Lewis staff also mentioned: the existence of lots of clubs, sports, facilities and amenities covering the area of Lewis and Harris; the larger population so socialising and networking are not limited; and the ability to 'get away from it all'.

Three things that are good about living on Benbecula:

1. Culture;
2. Community;
3. Safety for Children.

Three things that are good about living on Skye:

1. Strong community spirit;
2. Beautiful environment, landscape and wildlife;
3. Crofting system.

Skye staff also mentioned: a safe environment for bringing up children.

3 If you've moved away from your island, please tell us why you left (for example, was it for work opportunities or for education).

If you've moved away from your island, please tell us why you left (for example, was it for work opportunities or for education)?:

I left Orkney for University and work, for a total of seven years before returning (Susan Pirie, SAC Consulting, Orkney).

I left Skye to study at University and to volunteer abroad before returning after five years (Janette Sutherland, SAC Consulting, Portree).

These experiences will be similar to many of our professional staff who moved off island for education and or the start of a career, then managed to obtain work back on their home island. We also have staff who were brought up on the mainland and have moved onto an island to work for SRUC/SAC.

4 If you've moved away from your island, please tell us what, if anything you miss about island life.

If you've moved away from your island, please tell us what, if anything you miss about island life.:

When I moved away from Orkney I missed my family, being part of a close knit community and the security of a safe environment (Susan Pirie, SAC Consulting, Orkney).

I missed my family and working on the croft (Janette Sutherland, SAC Consulting, Portree)

5 If possible, please can you give us some examples of good local initiatives/projects/activities, etc.?

If possible, please can you give us some examples of good local initiatives/projects/activities, etc.?:

There are many examples in Orkney, including:

- Orkney Folk Festival;
- St Magnus Festival;
- Agricultural Shows (6 in total);
- and Bag the Bruck (beach cleans).

Examples in Lewis include:

- Hebcelt music festival - a huge draw for locals and tourists from around the world. The spin offs and the development of further cultural events has fed off the energy of this project;
- Stornoway Rugby Club – also has a number of football clubs, martial arts classes/clubs, hockey, outdoor pursuits such as rock climbing, kayaking etc.;
- Regionally-led initiatives – e.g. North Harris Trust guided walks, Stornoway Trust Woodland Café;
- Lews Castle Ground redevelopment project – to promote tourism;
- Harris Distillery – an example of a recent development that now offers local employment to young people with quality jobs, an excellent product and a large tourist draw benefiting many other local businesses;
- Hebridean Seaweed plant - again providing good employment opportunities, large local investment in plant and staff and a positive outlook driven by local people.

Examples in Benbecula include:

- Availability of sports clubs i.e athletics (e.g. North Uist Athletics Association), squash (Squais Uibhist), riding (e.g. Uist Community Riding School), badminton, football, basketball, dancing, music clubs and pipebands;
- The Cuimhne Project, which provides support for people that have been diagnosed with dementia along with their carers and families
- Grow your own community – hubs within the communities to grow their own food.

Examples in Skye include:

- Local agricultural shows (Dunvegan and Portree);
- CrossRoads home helps for older people;
- After lobbying efforts, health provision improvements i.e. a nurse in Raasay and extra beds/longer opening hours in Portree hospital;
- Support groups for Alzheimer's and people who had strokes

6 The Islands (Scotland) Act lists a number of areas that are relevant for islands and island communities. Please rank these in order of priority for you, with 1 being the highest priority.

6 - Depopulation:

10

6 - Economic development:

6

6 - Environmental protection:

1

6 - Health and wellbeing:

3

6 - Community empowerment:

7

6 - Transport:

2

6 - Digital connectivity:

8

6 - Fuel poverty:

9

6 - Land management:

4

6 - Biosecurity:

5

No

7 If you answered no, is there anything else that you believe the National Islands Plan should address?

5. If you answered no, is there anything else that you believe the National Islands Plan should address? :

The ranking in Question 6 was completed by Susan Pirie, SAC Consulting, Orkney).

Climate change is an issue that should be a priority in the islands. This is particularly the case given sea level rise and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events. This is a much broader set of issues than would be included in 'environmental protection'.

The area of 'land management' could be expanded to include land use and land ownership. It is worth noting that the Western Isles is now 60% community owned. This is totally unique in Scotland in terms of the scale and impact of this form of ownership. Community land ownership is less of a dominant issue in Orkney and Shetland, for example, but is a feature of many islands off Scotland' west coast (e.g. Eigg, Rum, Tiree, Gigha, Mull, etc.).

In terms of land use and land management, visitor management aspects are increasingly important as there are growing numbers of tourists putting pressure on islands' infrastructure (including roads, public services, etc.).

In Skye, in contrast to some of the other islands, the population is rising but the working age population is not. The tourism sector does not offer particularly secure, year-round jobs and this can cause issues when rental properties are scarce and expensive. A car is essential in Skye as public transport is poor, but private car ownership is challenging for those on insecure, low incomes. Fuel poverty is a major challenge on the Island.

It is also worth noting that Skye is an island within a larger mainland council area. This can result in fewer, or even a lack of, bespoke solutions (e.g. for recycling) when compared to island-only authority areas.

The National Islands Plan should address a range of other issues, including:

- Reliance on fossil fuels for heating, power and transport;
- Access to markets (i.e. cost of transporting goods, especially the cost of shipping)
- The speed/reliability of broadband and other communication infrastructure
- The lack of abattoir facilities, especially given the reliance of many of the islands on agriculture. There are now challenges arising from the need to locally slaughter and dispose of animals that are not fit to travel.
- The disposal of waste products, such as plastic. The cost of shipping such waste to a central pick-up point (e.g. on Orkney mainland) and then to mainland Scotland is extremely prohibitive for small family farms.
- The challenges faced by small agricultural and crofting businesses – where their small scale means it is very difficult to complete and costs per unit of production are high.

We observe that there is a risk that centrally-decided legislation and policies are uninformed by the practicalities of how they might work or be delivered in island locations (there is more discussion of this point in later questions).

8 If applicable, are there any specific challenges about living on your island? Please state 3 challenges about living on your island.

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Challenges to living on Orkney include:

- the cost of freight to and from the islands; and
- technological disadvantages such as the lack of reliable, high speed internet.

Challenges to living on Lewis include:

- Transportation: limited ferries and competition for space on them; the expense of travelling to and from the island; and air fares are expensive, even with the air discount scheme;
- Access to markets: linked to the transport challenges; travel in and out, even with support funding (i.e. ASD, island ferry tariff) is a deterrent to market development; costs are high and hold back investment.
- Climate: the island is windier and wetter than much of mainland Scotland;
- Cost of living: including fuel, materials, resources; this is also part of transport issue, shipping goods to the island commands a higher premium at purchase stage, meaning it is much more expensive than much of the mainland; from an agricultural perspective this puts pressure on crofters and local food suppliers that requires support to ensure the continuation of the crofting culture and community activity.
- The lack of opportunities;
- Lack of diversity which can lead to narrowmindedness
- Under investment in tourism infrastructure to support a rapidly growing market of people visiting the island.

Challenges to living on Benbecula include:

- Transport expenses to and from the island;
- Fuel prices; and
- The cost of living (especially high food costs).

Challenges to living on Skye include:

- Poor roads – with many pot holes;
- Weak private rental housing market which causes housing issues, especially with regard to long-term housing rental;
- Integration of newly arrived residents;
- Lack of public transport;
- No airport so more remote from Glasgow and Edinburgh than other islands with air connections to the mainland;
- Distances between villages on island.

Research conducted by SRUC in 2015 for the Scottish Government (Remoteness: Cost Impact Study – funded through AA211 Special Economic Study of the Veterinary and Advisory Service Programme - report available upon request) examined additional transport costs faced by agricultural businesses in Scotland's

Islands and remote parts of the mainland:

- Outer Islands – Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles;
- Inner Islands – Mull, Islay, Arran and Bute;
- Remote Mainland – Caithness, Wester Ross, Skye and Lochaber, Argyll;
- Semi-remote Mainland – Central Highlands, Southern Uplands;
- Central Mainland – based on Central Belt.

The study found that, compared to farmers in the Central Belt, farmers and crofters in the Outer Islands were paying over £30/tonne extra in haulage costs for key inputs of fertiliser, feed and forage, £24/head extra for cattle haulage and £5 per head extra for sheep haulage. Those in the Inner Islands also faced similar additional transport costs, although the extra costs were found to be marginally lower than in the Outer Islands.

The study showed that these additional costs have significant impacts on the Gross Margins of agricultural enterprises. For example, in the Outer Islands:

- Upland suckler cow gross margins were £73 (-37%) per cow lower than the mainland;
- Improved hill sheep gross margins were £9 (-145%) per ewe lower;
- Crossbred sheep gross margins were £14 (-40%) per ewe lower.

Under the existing EU rules governing support for Less Favoured Areas, peripherality, per se, cannot be accounted for even though islands can be delimited and different support rates provided. Future support schemes for agriculture and rural areas should account for peripherality and the additional costs in purchasing supplies from and selling products to distant markets. These additional peripherality costs apply to both agricultural businesses and the wider business base in these areas.

9 If you've moved away, please tell us about any challenges that you experienced whilst you were living on your island.

If you've moved away, please tell us about any challenges that you experienced whilst you were living on your island.:

NA

10 If applicable, what could be done to make living on your island better?

What could be done to make living on your island better?:

Living on Orkney could be improved by reducing the cost of living, which is higher than elsewhere (Susan Pirie, SAC Consulting, Orkney).

Living on Lewis could be improved by:

- Cheaper transportation costs and improved/easier transport options to link to the mainland, including: more ferries; a tunnel; a bridge; cheaper and more regular flights. These options need to fit better with the uncertainty of everyday life, such as emergency slots for departure (e.g. for hospital appointments);
- Lower delivery charges;
- Investment in the tourism sector, and support funding to develop flexible accommodation. The extremes are either high end or not enough capacity with a lengthening season;
- The development of a "Hebridean" brand for our exceptional food, drink and seafood. This would assist crofters, small food producers and local fishermen;
- A skills-based approach to training locally to retain young people in our communities; The island is heavily focused on University/College education which sees a one way migration but many opportunities exist in retaining these educated young people to enhance island life and retain population.

Living on Benbecula could be improved by:

- Investment to create employment for the younger generation so that they have a choice about leaving the Island for employment or gaining employment on Island.

Living on Skye could be improved by:

- Investment in roads and facilities for tourists;
- More rental homes for working age people and young families;
- Investment in schools i.e. Broadford and Dunvegan
- Better public transport;
- More houses for rent.

11 How do you feel the National Islands Plan should address and respond to the distinctive geographical, natural heritage and cultural characteristics (including the linguistic heritage) of local island communities, including the needs of Gaelic speakers within those communities?

How do you feel the National Islands Plan should address and respond to the distinctive geographical, natural heritage and cultural characteristics (including the linguistic heritage) of local island communities, including the needs of Gaelic speakers within those communities?:

It is important to remember that there is no Gaelic spoken in Orkney, and never has there been. While this is a highly important matter for the Western Isles, it is not part of the heritage of the Orkney Islands. Orkney is highly agriculturally productive and has a high number of people directly employed in the sector and indirectly in related activities (more so than the other island groups).

Inter-island transport and connectivity is also an important topic. It cannot be assumed that what is good for one island is necessarily good for another as each has its own unique challenges. For example, some Orkney islands still do not have ro-ro ferries. Those who lack this service do tend to have a good air service, but getting a seat during the school term time is difficult as many are taken up by teaching staff.

The closing of the abattoir in Orkney (and the cost ineffectiveness of re-opening another) has put the status of Orkney's quality beef and lamb in jeopardy.

For Gaelic speaking islands/communities, BBC Gaelic radio is an important service to maintain Gaelic as a living, working language.

General Questions Section

12 What should be the main objectives for the National Islands Plan?

What should be the main objectives for the National Islands Plan?:

A key issue is ensuring that when policies are put in place that suit mainland Scotland, they are appropriate for the island context.

The NIP should set out the over-arching priorities and framework for Scotland's islands. As well as highlighting issues on which the island locations differ from non-island locations, it should set out specific island policies and initiatives. It must, however, recognise the need for flexibility due to the diverse circumstances, issues, opportunities, challenges, etc. across Scotland's varied islands.

13 What should be the key priorities for the Scottish Government in relation to the National Islands Plan?

What should be the key priorities for the Scottish Government in relation to the National Islands Plan?:

It is challenging to identify priorities from amongst a long list of potential issues (including challenges and opportunities), which are all strongly inter-connected in terms of how they affect peoples' lives on the islands, and how they should be tackled through policy and practice interventions. The National Islands Plan needs to recognise these inter-connections, and needs to be flexible enough to take account of the diverse circumstances across the islands.

The retention and/or re-attraction of people is critical. Related to that, access to good quality jobs locally (with training and careers prospects) is vital, as is access to affordable housing, education and health care.

However, thinking more broadly, retaining 'communities' is perhaps the most critical priority. This goes beyond ensuring 'X' number of people living locally, who could be retired (who may be keen to remain economically and/or socially active), or even the 'older old'. It is perhaps more critical that communities are strengthened through support for capacity-building, youth retention, initiatives to attract young families, etc. Community hubs are also a very important aspect of living in the islands, as demonstrated by the focus on hubs by many community initiatives.

14 What should be taken into account in terms of the functions of relevant authorities within the National Islands Plan?

What should be taken into account in terms of the functions of relevant authorities within the National Islands Plan?:

There is a need for clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders involved in Scotland's islands, in order to avoid confusion, duplication, etc. These roles and responsibilities may need to be regularly reviewed as they may change over time. Establishing roles and responsibilities should take into account the resources and levels of capacity of different organisations.

15 How can we measure outcomes in relation to the National Islands Plan?

How can we measure outcomes in relation to the National Islands Plan?:

It is vital that up-to-date and accurate data is available in order to measure outcomes appropriately. Local-level data is also critical in order to ensure that differences within islands can be explored, as is consistent long-term data to ensure change over time can be monitored.

Outcomes to be measured should include a wide range of 'hard' and 'soft', economic, social and environmental issues and they must be clearly identified and a clear rationale for measuring them provided. It is vital that 'softer' outcomes, such as wellbeing and community capacity are included as outcomes, and innovative approaches may be required to achieve appropriate measuring and monitoring.

The assessment of outcomes should not be overly top-down as this may miss important place-specific and community-driven aspects. For example, ongoing work on community resilience within the Strategic Research Programme at SRUC and the James Hutton Institute* suggests that any community 'assessments' which are outcome-related should involve qualitative aspects. Where possible, they should be community driven or directly involve communities within the assessment process in order to ensure a degree of self-evaluation and reflection and local level investment in the process and outcomes, and then in addressing these outcomes. Top down data driven monitoring has useful applications but it is limited with respect to capturing locally-specific qualitative outcomes such as community cohesion, network-building, social capital, capacity, confidence etc. This requires locally developed and facilitated approaches e.g. workshops, etc.

* For more information, see: https://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120671/our_projects/1806/strategic_research_programme/4

16 If you have any further comments or points that you think should be taken into account in the development of The National Islands Plan, please state these below.

If you have any further comments or points that you think should be taken into account in the development of The National Islands Plan, please state these below.:

It is striking that many people in Scotland have not visited, and do not plan to visit, the Scottish islands and instead have travelled (often much) further afield as an alternative. While this limits visitor numbers and therefore has some benefits in terms of impacts on infrastructure, it also leads to large numbers of people having a poor understanding of Scotland's islands, their uniqueness and cultural value and position within Scotland.

The National Islands Plan might also have a useful role to play in raising awareness of, and highlighting the value of, Scotland's islands.

Economic development and community development are linked to attractiveness but in socio-economic terms as well as aesthetic/quality of life terms. There is a

careful balance to be struck in the islands between these elements in ensuring community retention and development long term.

Island Communities Impact Assessment

17 Can you name any policies, strategies or services that don't work very well for your island? Why do you feel they don't work well?

Name one policy or law you can think of that doesn't work very well for your island because the impact on the island was not properly assessed?:

NA

18 On the other hand, can you name any policies, strategies or services that DO work well for your island? Please tell us what it is about these that works so well.

On the other hand, can you name any policies, strategies or services that DO work well for your island? Please tell us what it is about these that works so well. :

Early indications from ongoing work to review LEADER for the Scottish Government suggest that LEADER, as collaborative, bottom-up grant funding initiative is well suited to the Western Isles due to the existing community structures/trusts etc. and associated community cohesion and experience of community development.

At the same time, the emerging evidence suggests that there have been challenges with LEADER, including it being over-complicated and applications and claims taking too long to process. Any future scheme needs to be simpler, especially for smaller amounts of funding, which might just help to pump prime a business to get it off the ground.

19 How can Scottish Ministers and other relevant authorities involve island communities in assessments?

Online surveys, Focus groups, Public meetings, Paper documents, Other

If you answered other, please specify: :

A range of methods may be appropriate, with different approaches useful in different circumstances depending on the community and its characteristics and experience of engagement, the issue to be discussed, etc. For example, engaging with young people on- or off-island may be best achieved using digital methods.

It is always important to consider how the least engaged communities, or members of communities, can best be engaged. These individuals/groups may be unable and/or unwilling to participate in public meetings, for example. Moreover, using online/digital methods to engage people may not be appropriate in locations where digital infrastructure is slow/unreliable and/or digital skills are lagging behind.

It may be useful to consider using existing networks and information channels to engage with communities rather than establishing new mechanisms, such as the Scottish Rural Network, Community Land Scotland, etc. Although it should be remembered that many such networks are issue-specific (e.g. community land ownership) so will only target individuals/groups with specific interests/experiences.

20 Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?:

NA

Island Communities Impact Assessments: General Questions Section

21 What should be the main objectives for Island Communities Impact Assessments?

What should be the main objectives for Island Communities Impact Assessments?:

Islands Communities Impact Assessments (ICIAs) require public authorities to take into account island communities from the outset of devising policy, strategy or service. Where a policy, strategy or service is likely to have an effect on an island community which is significantly different to its effect on other communities, an ICIA must be prepared.

The process of island proofing is therefore about identifying potentially 'significantly different outcomes' for island communities, exploring them in more detail (through analysis of existing data, community consultations, etc.), and where necessary, and importantly, making changes to the policy, strategy or service to ensure there are no negative effects for island communities.

ICIAs must not become a 'checkbox exercise' and involving island communities in identifying and potentially mitigating/removing any negative effects is critical. This will clearly have resource implications for the public authorities concerned so appropriate guidance, templates, etc. will be required to support them.

Clarity of roles and responsibilities, and monitoring and reporting mechanisms, are also critical. Learning lessons over time (once ICIAs are formally implemented) will help to ensure that the process of completing ICIAs becomes more robust and streamlined (but still meaningful) over time.

22 What do you think needs to be considered in the guidance and templates which will be developed to support the carrying out of Island Communities Impact Assessments by relevant authorities?

What do you think needs to be considered in the guidance and templates which will be developed to support the carrying out of Island Communities Impact Assessments by relevant authorities?:

Providing guidance and templates to support relevant authorities in carrying out ICIAs is important. These should be subject to revision over time as more

experience is obtained in undertaking them. Three templates (and associated guidance) would be useful for authorities to use: first, in instances where they deem an ICIA not required (to set out how and why they reached that decision for reasons of clarity and transparency); for an ICIA itself; and for reporting ICIA/s completed.

The templates and associated guidance need to set out a robust methodology for undertaking an ICIA (including signposting to relevant data, consultation methods, etc.) but not be overly burdensome or onerous for public authorities to follow, especially at a time of tightened budgets and staffing resources.

There is the potential to learn from experiences of other kinds of 'proofing', with rural proofing (e.g. in England, Northern Ireland, Canada and New Zealand) perhaps being the most appropriate (although there are differences between rural proofing in these countries and the ICIA process as set out in the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018) that should be taken into account.

23 What should be taken into account in relation to the reviews of decisions of relevant authorities relating to Island Communities Impact Assessments?

What should be taken into account in relation to the reviews of decisions of relevant authorities relating to Island Communities Impact Assessments?:

A range of issues should be taken into account, including the type and extent of consultation with relevant stakeholders, including island communities, to reach decisions relating to ICIA's.

24 If you have any further comments or points that you think should be taken into account in the development of Island Communities Impact Assessments, please state these below.

If you have any further comments or points that you think should be taken into account in the development of Island Communities Impact Assessments, please state these below.:

Please refer to a recently completed draft report by Jane Atterton (Rural Policy Centre, SRUC) for Scottish Government (Erica Clarkson) entitled 'Learning lessons from early Islands Communities Impact Assessments' for most discussion of ICIA's.

About you

What is your name?

Name:

Rural Policy Centre

What is your email address?

Email:

rpc@sruc.ac.uk

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

SRUC (Scotland's Rural College)

The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response only (without name)

We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

Evaluation

Please help us improve our consultations by answering the questions below. (Responses to the evaluation will not be published.)

Matrix 1 - How satisfied were you with this consultation?:

Slightly satisfied

Please enter comments here.:

Matrix 1 - How would you rate your satisfaction with using this platform (Citizen Space) to respond to this consultation?:

Slightly satisfied

Please enter comments here.:

The online portal works efficiently and effectively. Its generally easy to upload text although often formatting is lost when text is copied over from word (e.g. bullets, numbering, etc.) and it is usually the case that graphics (e.g. tables) cannot be uploaded.

However, it can be challenging for organisations, where multiple individuals are usually contributing to responses, to respond online. Therefore it would be helpful if the consultation questions could always be made available as a word document too, so that we can collate all of the responses, and then upload them to the online system once the document is finalised.