In view of the significant potential impacts on the Highlands and Islands, the Highlands and Islands European Partnership (HIEP)\(^1\) welcomes the opportunity to contribute views in relation to the Article 50 withdrawal negotiations and their implications for Scotland.

HIEP has previously submitted evidence to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee (September 2016) and the Economy, Jobs & Fair Work Committee (November 2016). These responses emphasised the importance of migrant labour to the area and HIEP would request that this is considered in any Scottish Government response regarding the implications for Scotland and EU citizens in Scotland of the Article 50 withdrawal treaty.

Building on this point, HIEP would look for an early agreement on the issue of the rights of EU citizens (Essential Principles on Citizens Rights) resident in the UK as a priority because of its impacts across our area in terms of population growth and the economy. Clarity is urgently required to build confidence and to allow adequate business planning for a range of public and private sectors. If there is curb on migration or tighter controls on the movement of people then it will impact adversely on regional and local economies. Many businesses depend on EU27 nationals and any restriction on these individuals working in the UK could have a considerable negative impact.

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\(^1\) The Highlands and Islands European Partnership has a membership of: Argyll & Bute Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Sìar, Moray Council North Ayrshire Council, Orkney Islands Council Shetland Islands Council, The Highland Council Highlands & Islands Enterprise and University of the Highlands & Islands