RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

ISLANDS (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM JANET MACDONALD

Question 1: I agree that there should be a National Islands Plan. I note that the BBC and others seem to think it amusing that Skye is still considered to be an island even though they have a bridge. I quite understand that the people of Skye like to think that they live in the Isle of Skye, but, at the end of the day, in an emergency, they can travel to hospital, or elsewhere without the need of a ferry, lifeboat or helicopter, whereas those of us who live in real islands cannot!

Also, if, like Mull, Skye did not have nursing home provision, people could still drive to see relatives at any time, day or night. Residents in Mull who have elderly relatives in a nursing home on the mainland cannot, but have to travel by ferry, and then get a bus or taxi to visit them.

By the way, I’d like to thank John Mason, MSP, for raising this point at a committee meeting, and I am sorry that it was not treated with the importance it deserved.

Question 2: I agree with the provision of island impact assessments, but don’t have the knowledge to say how it should work in practice!

Question 3: I agree

Question 4: In my local ward of Argyll & Bute Council, which comprises an area of mainland Argyll and the islands of Mull, Coll, Tiree, and the smaller islands off Mull, four councillors are elected to serve the ward; it is a matter of luck whether or not any of these four are resident on any of the islands. At the moment, one councillor lives in Mull, but we have on many occasions been represented by four councillors resident on the mainland. Whether or not areas with inhabited islands have 1 or 2 members instead of the usual 3 or 4 is quite irrelevant if the islands are represented by mainland councillors.

On the subject of Local Government, I believe that the islands of Argyll & Bute are at a huge disadvantage compared with authorities which are wholly comprised of islands. I visit Comhairle nan Eilean Siar regularly, and can see immediately the advantages they have in governing themselves. Argyll & Bute, however well intentioned, will always prioritise their large landward area, which contains most of the population of the Council area. They do not appear to receive the same level of special funding other island councils receive, even though there are more schools on islands in Argyll and Bute than there are in any of the other island authorities. The cost of maintaining a small school on a small island must be far greater than maintaining a mainland school, but there does not seem to be any special provision for this. In the other island authorities, the decision makers live in the islands, and therefore have the mentality of islanders; the decision makers in Argyll & Bute live on the mainland, and do not have the same understanding of island life.

What I am trying to say is that I believe the islands of Argyll should have an authority of their own (or perhaps a sub-authority?) making decisions which are relevant to
islanders. Each island could have one representative on this sub-authority (or more if possible) so that the views of every different island can be heard and discussed. I think this suggestion deserves serious consideration in conjunction with the Islands Bill.

Question 5: I don't know enough about this to comment.

Question 6: I am in favour overall, but would like my comments to be given serious consideration!

Question 7: No

Janet MacDonald
September 2017