This evidence is in Gaelic. An English translation arranged by the Parliament's Gaelic team follows.

1. Tha am Bile a’ stèidheachadh dleastanas gus Plana Nàiseanta nan Eilean fhoolseachadh agus a chur air beulaibh Parlamaid na h-Alba. Dè ur beachdan air sin?

’S e beachd fìor mhath a th’ ann agus rud air a bheil cruaidh fheum ma thathas airson stad a chur air an gluasad dhaoine – gu h-àraid an fhheadhainn òg is chomasach – air faltb bho na h-eileanan agus gu ruige nam bailtean mòra, gu sònraichte Glaschu is Dùn Èideann. An-dràsta thèid tòrr seirbheisean a’ tarraing gu ruige nan àiteachan sin, m.e. Poileas na h-Alba, seirbheisean-teine, agus ged a tha sin ag adhbrachadh cheann-naidheachd tarraingeachd (… orbaichean air a chruthachadh ann an …) ’s e na sgirean iomallach as mò a dh’fhuilingeas is iad a’ call cothroman-obrach air a bheil cruaidh-fheum. Bhithinn an dòchas gum biodh barrachd aire a thoirt air seo nan robh bile ann a theoidreach dleastanas air gach buidheann poblach beachdachadh air dè a’ bhuaidh a bheireas na ngiomhan aca air na h-eileanan.

Dhèanadh e ciall beachdachadh air a’ bhile seo a leudachadh gus sgirean iomllach eile a ghabhail a-steach, oir ged nach e eileanan a th’ annsta suidheachadh dhaoine ann an àiteachan a leithid Caol Loch Aillse no Geàrrloch ann an doigh gu aonadraithe seo a thuiceas na ghàidhlig as a’ Ghàidhlig agus na seirbheisean teine agus na seirbheisean timcheall a ruigsinn.

A bharrachd air a sin, bu choir aire sònraichte a bhithe air an dàthreachadh is a chomh eile an t-sgìre gus sgìrean eile a bhaoileadh. Bha e gu math follaiseach air a bheil cruaidh-fheum is cothroman-obrach air a bheil cruaidh-fheum. Bhithinn an dòchas gum biodh bho dh’fharadh air a’ mhorraich air eilean, agus gu aon fear a bhith teagamh ann gu a bheil sgìrean eile a bhaoileadh. Tha a’ Ghàidhlig air a bhith a thoirt a’ Ghàidhlig as a’ Ghàidhlig, gu mòr thuigse gu a bheil cruaidh-fheum, gu bhith teagamh ann gu a bheil cruaidh-fheum, gu a bheil cruaidh-fheum, gu a bheil cruaidh-fheum.

2. Fon Bhile bidh aig Ministearan na h-Alba agus cuid a dh’uighdarrasan poblach Albannach ri measaidhean a dhanamh air a’ bhuaidh a dh’fhaoadadh a bhithe aig poileasaidhean air na h-eileanan. A bhith sibh ag aontachadh ris a’ chumha sin? Clamar a bu choir dha obrachadh gu pragtaisgeach nur beachd-se?

Tha mi ag aontachadh ris a’ chumha seo gu mòr. Bha e gu math follaiseach dhomh bho cho-dhùnaidhean a chaidh an dèanamh a thaobh Poileas na h-Alba agus Seirbheas
Tèarainteach Teine, nach eil ministearan no ãghdarrasan poblach a’ toirt cus smuain air na h-eileanan agus a’ bhuaistd orra nuair a n’iad co-dhùnadh-shean. Bha na co-dhùnadh-shean ud cìallach a thaobh sàbhaladh airgid agus dòigh manaidsearadh, ach cha tug iad feart sam bith air a’ bhuaistd a bh uorra ann an sgìrean duthchail, far a bheil bhuaistd nas mò air call deich obraichean na bhithheadh air call de cheud obair ann am baile mòr.

Gu pragtaigeach, bu choir don a’-h-uile poilesaidh a’ dol tro chomataidh aig a bheil flor eòlas air na h-eileanan a thaobh iomadh rud – obraichean, foghlam, a’ Ghàidhlig, bun-structur, buidhnean-poblach is coimhearsnachd, croitearachd msaa – as urrainn measadh a dhèanamh air dè a’ bhuaistd a bhiodh air na poileasaidhean air na cuspairean sin. Bhiodh e math nan rachadh riaghailtean a thaobh leasachdhean eacnamaigeach, ceadan-dealbhaidh agus a leithid tron a’ chomataidh sin cuideachd.

A bharrachd air sin, tha mi cinnteach gun dèanadh e diofair mòr eòlas beagan uairean a bha onaidh air na h-eileanan agus a’ bhuaidh orra nuair a nì iad co-dhùnadh- shean. Bha na co-dhùnadh ud ciotalach a thaobh sàbhaladh airgid agus dòigh manaidearachd, ach cha tug iad feart sam bith air a’ bhuidhean a bha orra ann an sgìrean duthchail, far a bheil buaidh nas mò air call deich obraichean na bhithheadh air call de cheud obair ann am baile mòr.

3. Tha am Bile a’ moladh gun tèid dion a dhèanamh air croichan na roinne-pàrlamaid, Na h-Eileanan an Iar, gus nach tèid atharrachadh. A bheil sibh ag aontachadh ri sin?

Tha, gu mòr. Mar a dh’ainmich mi gu h-àrd, tha sgìre nan Eileanan an Iar a’ fulang call dhaoine gu h-àraid ri linn adhbharan eacnamaigeach. Cha bhiodh e croitearachd idir, idir nan rachadh am peansachadh son sin le bhith gan toirt a-steach do roinn-pàrlamaid eile. A bharrachd air sin ’s e sin an aon sgìre anns a bheil dualchas is cultar na aithdhil agus nan Gàidheal reusanta làidir. Feumaidh sin a bhith air a ghluideadh, gu dearbh mholainn beachdachadh air roinn-pàrlamaid a chruthachadh den Eilean Sgitheanach agus ’s docha cuid de sgìrean aig iomall an iar tìr-mhòr na h-Alba cuideachd.

4. Tha am Bile a’ moladh saoradh bho na riaghailtean airson uàrdan taghaidh riaghaltais ionadail gun an urrainn do sgìrean, sa bhheil eileanan air a bheil daoine a’ fuireach, a bhith taghadh 1 no 2 bhall (an àite 3 no 4 mar a bhios a’ tachairt gu h-àbhaisteach). Dè ur beachdan air a’- mhòladh sin?

’S e moladh math a th’ ann a tha ag aithneachadh air an uàrdan taghaidh riaghailtean airson uàrdan taghaidh riaghaltais ionadail gun an urrainn do sgìrean, sa bhheil eileanan air a bheil daoine a’ fuireach, a bhith taghadh 1 no 2 bhall (an àite 3 no 4 mar a bhios a’ tachairt gu h-àbhaisteach). Dè ur beachdan air a’- mhòladh sin?

5. Cruthaichidh am Bile cumhachd laghail do Mhinistearan na h-Alba far an urrainn dhaibh sgeama ceadhachd mara a stèidheachadh airson uisgeachan faisg air a’
chosta. A bheil sibh ag aontachadh ris a’ chumhacht sin? A bheil beachdan agaibh air mar a bu chòir dha a bhith air a chealachdadh?

Anns an fharsaingeachd ’s e beachd gu math ciallach a th’ ann agus bhithinn an dòchas gum leigeadh e le coimhearsnachdan-mara le taic Riaghiltas na h-Alba barrachd feum a dhèanamh de na goireasan aca, an dá chuid a thaobh iasgach ach cuideachd a thaobh tursachd tro bhòthaichean a bhios a’ tadhail agus daoine a bhiod dol air cuairtean-mara dàibheadh msaa. Dh’fheumte a bhith mothachail air na feumalachdan eadar-dhealaichte sin, cho math ri feumalachdan glèidhteachaidh a th’ aig buidhnean SNH, agus dh’fheumadh rèitire ciallach a bhith ann.

Chunnacas sin bho chionn beagan bhliadhnaichean buair a bha SNH airson sgíre ghlèidhteachas a ghairm far chosta Bharraigh an aghaidh toil iasgairean is a’ mhòr-chuid den t-sluagh ach cuideachd bho chionn goirid nuair a rinn trabhlairean milleadh air grunnd mara faisg air Loch Charoon is a-nis iarritas ann sgíre ghlèidhteachais a dhèanamh dhe. Feumaidh gach taobh èiteachd fhàighinn ach reitire ciallach a bhith ann gus co-dhùnadh a dhèanamh.

Mholainn fhìn na cumhachdan sin a thoirt do chomhairlean coimhearsnachd oir anns a’ bhithteantas ’s e math na sgíre agus na daoine innte a th’ aig cridhe nan co-dhùnadhhean aca. Aig an aon àm bhiodh e cudromach gum faigh buidhnean a tha an sàs ann an dìon nàdair/bheathaichean/ dualchais msaa Èiteachd agus aig amannan ’s dòcha fiù ’s gu bheil cotrom aca stad a chur air planaichean a th’ a’ dèanamh croin air na rudan sin gun a bhith dèanamh feum mòr, mòr dh’ an choimhearsnachd. Gu mi-fiòrthanach, tha an riaghaltaí an-dràsta car dualtach a bhith taobhadh le buidhnean poblach gun cus aire a thoirt dha beachdan nan coimhearsnachdan agus bhithinn car amharasach mu dè am feum a chitheadh na coimhearsnachdan mas ann le Ministearan na h-Alba air fad a bhiodh na cumhachdan sin.

6. A bheil am Bile a’ coileanadh nan amasan aige agus a bheil sibh a’ toirt taic dha san fharsaingeachd? A bheil dad eile ann a tha sibh a’ smaoineachadh a bu chòir a bhith sa Bile, no a bheil dara ann a co-thòirt a thoirt às?

’S e deagh thoiseach a th’ ann ach chan eil iomradh ga dhèanamh air dé a’ phàirt a bhiodh aig a’ Ghàidhlig anns a’ bhill tha seo. ’S e flor dheach thochrom a bhiodh ann an seo soirbhreachadh a leathan eileanan a’ ceangail ri soirbheas agus ath-beoothachadh a’ chàinnes.

7. A bheil beachdan agaibh mun Bhile a thaobh chòraichean daonna no chùisean co-lionannachd?

Tha doigh-beatha eadar-dhealaichte anns na h-eileanan far a bheil tòrr dhaoine an sàs ann an croitearachd, iasgach no iomadh obair aca. Ann an iomdach dùthaich ’s e sin na sgaraidhean a tha eadar buidhnean eitnigeadh agus ’s dòcha gum bu choir Gàidheil a bhith faighinn aithne – agus dion! – mar sin.
1. The Bill creates a duty to publish a national islands plan and lay it before the Scottish Parliament. What are your views on this provision?

This is an excellent idea and one which is much needed in order to stem the outward migration of islanders - particularly young and skilled islanders - who leave the islands to move to the cities, especially to Glasgow and Edinburgh. At present many services are being centralised in those cities, for example Police Scotland, the Fire Service; and although that provides a good headline for the media ( ... jobs created in ... ), the remote areas suffer most with such centralisation as they lose out on job opportunities which are sorely needed. I would hope that this issue would be given more consideration if the Bill placed a duty on every public body to consider what impact their actions have on the islands.

It would make sense to widen the remit of this Bill to include other remote areas. As although places such as Kyle of Lochalsh and Gairloch are not islands, people in those communities in a way face similar challenges to those faced by islanders; and then you have the island of Bute where it is reasonably easy for islanders to travel to Glasgow and access the services in and around the city.

Furthermore, special consideration should be given to Gaelic and its status, and particular consideration should be given to the language in the Western Isles (and in the west of Scotland as a whole). Gaelic has been slowly declining in these areas, and it is clear that the decline can be been linked to the outward migration of people who leave in search of work on mainland Scotland and to the arrival of people from elsewhere who don’t have Gaelic and who are not interested in the language, but who have enough money to buy or build a house and make a life for themselves in these areas. Much more onus should be placed on both schools and public bodies to use Gaelic and promote the language in as many situations as possible and to give priority to Gaelic instead of English. It would also be good if there was a means to encourage private organisations and businesses to use Gaelic, perhaps by awarding funding or awards to those organisations and businesses who have shown that they have considered Gaelic as part of their business plan and that they use it in their day-to-day operations.

2. The Bill will require Scottish Ministers and certain Scottish public authorities, to prepare island impact assessments. Do you agree with this provision? How do you think it should work in practice?

I agree wholeheartedly with this provision. It was very clear to me from the decisions made with regard to Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, that Ministers and public authorities give little thought to the islands and the impact their decisions have on them. Those decisions made sense in terms of saving money and management structures, but there was no consideration given to the impact they would have on rural areas, where the loss of 10 jobs has a far greater impact than the loss of a 100 jobs in a city.

At a practical level, every policy should be scrutinised by a committee which has in-depth knowledge of a wide range of issues which affect the islands - jobs, education, Gaelic, infrastructure, public bodies and community organisations, crofting etc - who can assess the impact of policies on such areas.

I am sure that it would also make a huge difference, if Ministers were to spend more time in remote areas. Not for just a few hours to meet voters, but if they were to actually live in these areas for a time and see the challenges which people face in their daily lives in the
islands, issues which tend not to occur to people who live in cities. As this is unlikely to happen, perhaps remote areas should have more representation at every level of government. Just as the SNP and many other people argue that the parliament at Westminster does not offer fair, representative government due to the MPs from England having a far stronger voice in that parliament, so too Holyrood (although better) gives a much stronger voice to central Scotland in comparison with the rest of the country.

3. The Bill proposes to protect the Scottish Parliamentary constituency boundary of Na h-Eileanan an Iar (the Western Isles) from change. Do you agree with this?

I agree very much with this. As I stated above, the Western Isles are suffering from population decline, particularly due to economic reasons. It would not be fair at all, if they were penalised for that by being incorporated within another constituency. Furthermore, this is the only constituency where Gaelic heritage and culture remain reasonably strong. That must be preserved, and indeed I would recommend consideration of the creation of a constituency for Skye and perhaps some of the remote areas on the west coast of Scotland also.

The same is true for Shetland and Orkney, where there is a similar situation in terms of a very distinct culture (and to some extent language) which should be preserved.

4. The Bill proposes to make an exception to the rules for local government electoral wards to allow areas with inhabited islands to return 1 or 2 members (instead of the usual 3 or 4). What are your views on this proposal?

This is a good proposal which recognises the particular needs of areas and islands with very small populations. Often, the systems and regulations which work for the majority of the population don’t address the needs of such areas; and as the current system of government and representation is based in general on population numbers, it can be difficult for areas and islands with low populations to make their voice heard. I would hope that this proposal would make it easier for them to be heard.

5. The Bill will provide a regulation-making power for the Scottish Ministers to create a marine licensing scheme for coastal waters. Do you agree with this power? Do you have any comments on how it should be used?

In general this is a very sound proposal, and I would hope that is would allow coastal communities, with support from the Scottish Government, to make more use of their resources, with regard to fishing and tourism (through the ships which visit and visitors who go on boat trips, diving etc). Consideration would need to be given to the various issues and interests, as well as the conservation requirements of SNH, and a sensible arbiter would have to appointed to handle matters.

Only a few years ago there was the situation where SNH wanted to establish a conservation area off the coast of Barra against the wishes of fishermen and the majority of the local population, and more recently, following the damage to the seabed near Loch Carron by dredgers, there are now demands to make it a conservation area.

I would recommend giving these powers to community councils, who normally make decisions with the good of the area and the people who live there as their primary concern. At the same time, it is important that organisations involved in nature/wildlife/heritage conservation etc are allowed to contribute and that sometimes they even have the opportunity to halt plans that would cause damage without any significant benefit to the
community. Unfortunately, the government at present tends to side with public bodies with little regard for the views of the communities, and I am unsure as to what benefits communities will see in the end if all of the powers were with the Scottish Ministers.

6. **Does the Bill achieve its aims and are you in favour overall? Is there anything else that you feel should be included or excluded from the Bill?**

   It is a good start, but there is no mention of what part Gaelic will have in the Bill. This is a wonderful opportunity to link successful island communities with the success and revitalisation of the language.

7. **Do you have any comments on the bill in relation to human rights or equalities?**

   The way of life in the islands is very different, with many people involved in crofting, fishing and lots of other types of work. In many countries those are the differences which mark out different ethnic groups and perhaps the Gaels should be given such recognition and protection!