RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

ISLANDS (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM THE ORKNEY GREENS

The Islands (Scotland) Bill (‘IB’) is a significant and welcome piece of legislation that could mould the future of Orkney and other Scottish islands for decades to come. In particular it should complement the powers secured under the Orkney County Council Act 1974; and it should ensure that OIC as presently constituted shall continue to enjoy all such special powers and legal status as we have at present. We would appreciate your advocacy and support for the following priorities in the Parliamentary stages ahead:

• **An Islands Authority:** The ‘island-proofing’ contained in Part 3 s7 (1) of the IB is welcome and an essential component of the IB. However for Orkney to fully control our future we suggest that a Single Purpose ISLANDS AUTHORITY be acknowledged within the IB, and created to (1) mould island policy and co-ordinate the delivery of services and (2) realise the cost efficiencies that will be essential ahead. The First Minister has already been publicly supportive of this approach in her programme for government for 2017-18. Initial implementation should focus on the 5 statutory authorities of HIE; NHS Orkney; OIC; Police Scotland; and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. NHS Orkney and OIC Care and Social Services are already partly integrated through the new Integrated Joint Board.

• **Island Impact Assessments:** Contained in s8 (1) of the draft IB are welcome, and would apply to all mainland-based agencies following the creation of SPAs. An appeal process we consider to be essential, and should be included in case of dispute, with CoSLA perhaps considered as an independent arbiter.

• **Islands Authorities** should be recognised as statutory consultees as a formal part of the IB’s ‘island-proofing’ clauses.

• **Marine Economic Development:** The draft provisions contained in the IB are also welcome, but need careful dovetailing with the control over the functions of the Crown Estate, which is subject to a further Bill in this Parliament, and which has potential to further increase island powers. The concept of Marine Partnerships should be introduced in general in the IB, and in detail through further supplementary guidance.

• **A National Islands Plan:** (‘NIP’) Contained in Part 2 of the IB is welcome and should integrate Development and Community Plans, in addition to the strategies of the various statutory agencies comprising a SPA and relevant others. It must also contain important demographic information to underpin policy.

Examples of issues that an Orkney Islands Authority would deliver better as part of the NIP include:

• **Ferry Services** Funding, procurement and other policies should be added to the IB and NIP. Immediate reviews should consider the financial and other arrangements for the long-term delivery of both external and internal ferry services. Note that OIC requires an immediate £5 million pa from the Scottish
Government (SG) for internal ferry services. It is an unfair burden relative to mainland and other island councils, as ferry services provided by the islands councils of Orkney and Shetland are deficit funded by the local authorities to the detriment of other services they provide, compared to Calmac run services which are fully funded, underwritten, and have vessel replacement by the SG through Transport Scotland.

- **Home Care & Social Services** Recruitment of staff and costs of specialist care services including Self-Directed Support and the future Carers Act requirements are much higher in an island context and present particular problems such as un-funded growth. Qualification and Training Agendas for staff (often part-time or family members) cause practical difficulties.

- **Social Housing** and other infrastructure costs are much greater in the islands, and future Government benchmarks should recognise this. Island-proofing needs a practical application. Greater freedom is also required over local government taxes (should be included as a general power of competence).

- **Fuel Poverty** is a pernicious and pressing issue in Orkney, where sadly we top the league table, with 85% of elderly households affected. The IB should recognise this issue in principle (as it is common to all island authorities), and ensure that the NIP precipitates the return of Improvement, Repair and Refurbishment grants to Islands Authorities to help resolve this issue. Electricity from renewable sources should also be permitted in island locations for SAP Calculations required under Building Regulations. Deprivation indices should also be created which correctly reflect the challenges of island communities.

- **Digital Connectivity** Scottish Government targets are welcome and essential to island development: an Island Authority would quickly address the 4G mobile coverage 'not spots' in Orkney; and implement R100 to deliver 100% access to superfast broadband of 30Mbps to all homes and businesses in Orkney by 2021.

Orkney Greens
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