RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

PROPOSED NATIONAL ISLANDS PLAN

SUBMISSION FROM THE ORKNEY PARTNERSHIP

1. Do you think the 13 Strategic Objectives in the proposed National Islands Plan are the right ones to meet the needs of island communities?

Yes, the first 12 of the Strategic Objectives are all areas of concern to islanders. We note the addition of Arts, Culture and Language, Education, and Climate Change and Energy to the original list. This makes for a large number of objectives covering virtually every policy area. Prioritisation will be important to avoid losing focus. We do not feel that “Implementation” belongs in this list as a strategic objective in itself. We would have expected to see a strategy and schedule for implementation within the Plan. Without an outline timescale for implementation the plan will lose momentum. One solution is suggested below at question 5.

2. Are there any issues which have been overlooked in the Strategic Objectives?

We feel that the Strategic Objectives are not consistently clear in what they are aiming to achieve, some of them being merely an expression of intent to support or improve a given policy area. We would have liked to see clearly stated outcomes in the Plan and, especially, an emphasis on equity of outcomes between islanders and residents of mainland Scotland.

In general, rather than issues being overlooked, we feel that there may be rather too many included in the Plan, with 21 proposed actions under Strategic Objective 2 alone. Many of these are things which are already being addressed elsewhere. It would be more effective to focus on things which other players cannot achieve on their own, without input from the Scottish Government, rather than attempting comprehensive coverage of everything that is happening with an islands dimension.

In the interest of balance, we would suggest that the current and potential role of some of our higher education institutions appears under-represented. There is a strong focus on the University of the Highlands and Islands but the
plan doesn’t recognise the role of other higher education institutions which have a strong physical base in the isles, notably Heriot-Watt & Robert Gordon universities.

As a potential case study, RGU Graduate Apprenticeships have proved extremely popular in Orkney since their foundation last year. We now have 17 Graduate Apprenticeships across 10 companies in Orkney. Partners include: Casey Construction, Heddle Construction, Orkney Builders, OIC, NHS Orkney, Northlink, Northwards, Streamline, Orkney Distillery and EMEC. We also have students on the programme in Shetland and Western Isles. The programme enable students to gain an undergraduate degree in partnership with their employers, and aids employers in shaping their future workforce.

3. Are there any Strategic Objectives that should be given a higher level of priority within the proposed Plan?

At present there is no attempt in the Plan to prioritise the 13 objectives. Realistically, there will be only limited resources to support the many proposed actions and prioritisation will be necessary. Each island will have its own priorities and we would have expected the consultation analysis to have identified which themes emerged most often as the top priorities for islanders.

The Orkney Partnership’s Locality Plan for the Non-Linked Isles 2018-21 was developed using the Place Standard, which identified the following top priorities for isles residents:

1. Digital connectivity
2. Work and local economies
3. Housing and communities
4. Influence and engagement
5. Getting around the islands

These approximate to the NIP’s Strategic Objectives for:

- Digital Connectivity
- Sustainable Economic Development
- Housing
- Empowered Island Communities and Strong Local Partnership
- Transport
Since the non-linked isles are Orkney’s most fragile communities, we would like to see a high priority given to these Strategic Objectives.

SEPA advises that both Climate Change and Sustainable Economic Development should be given a higher priority in the Plan, with a focus on mitigation against the effects of climate change. Islands are particularly vulnerable to sea level rise and may require external support to reinforce their resilience. Strategic planning now is likely to be more cost effective than deferring decisions to a later date.

4. **Do you think the proposed Plan sets out both a clear strategic direction and practical approaches to delivery of the Strategic Objectives?**

The strategic direction of the proposed Plan is not entirely clear. The Plan contains no target or outcomes, so it is not clear where it is aiming to get to. The proposed actions listed under the Strategic Objectives are not SMART and contain very few quantitative targets, so even if we knew its destination, it would be difficult to monitor its progress or judge when it had got there.

With regard to practicality of delivery, the Plan has far too many proposed actions in it to be able to achieve even a small proportion. Many of them are too vague to pin down, or they express an intent to “work with” bodies which are already doing something. It would surely be better to focus on a few important things which can be done only by Scottish Government and not by any other parties.

We accept that it is a complicated picture but the purpose of the National Islands Plan should surely be to bring order and clarity to that picture, rather than simply document it. We would envisage the National Islands Plan as the strategic part of the exercise, setting out (i) where we are coming from, (ii) where we want to go and (iii) our strategy to get there. It does (i) very comprehensively, but having no outcomes is not clear on (ii). Strategic Objective 13 is currently fulfilling the role of (iii).

5. **Do you have any comments on the actions outlined to support effective implementation of the proposed Plan?**

The Plan refers at Strategic Objective 13 to the creation of an Implementation Strategy in support of effective implementation of the Plan. There appears to be some confusion between action plans and strategies. We have noted above that an implementation strategy should
be part of the National Islands Plan itself and would propose that Strategic Objective 13 be reframed as an Implementation Strategy and retained in the Plan. That would clear the way for a SMART Implementation Plan setting out how to achieve the proposed actions listed under the existing Strategic Objective 13. Given the exhaustive consultation that the Plan has already undergone, and that islands have also done for their own local plans, we would be wary of supporting yet another round of island-based focus groups to develop the action plan. There is already a strong consensus as to what needs doing. What is needed now is a commitment of resources to achieve it. There will be little appetite on the islands for further workshops if there is no guarantee that the actions they formulate will be properly resourced or indeed happen at all.

| 6.  | Do you think the proposed Plan adheres effectively to its stated principles that it is “fair, integrated, green and inclusive”? If not, how might its adherence to any or all of these principles be improved? | Yes, we think the Plan demonstrates these principles very well. |
| 7.  | The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 sets out longer term timescales for Scottish Ministers to report on and review the Plan. Does the proposed Plan have sufficiently clear targets and measurable indicators by which to measure its performance? | As noted above we feel that the Plan is lacking in clear targets Performance indicators have yet to be worked up as part of the Implementation Plan. We proposed in our original consultation response that the Plan should utilise the National Performance Framework. The outcomes in the NPF are equally as valid for islanders as for mainlanders, but they will be more difficult to achieve. We see a key role of the Plan as helping to bridge that gap. It is good to see that the National Performance Framework is referenced as a possible source of indicators, but it is the outcomes which are more important. We would like to see the NPF outcomes cited at the start of the Plan along with a commitment that the Scottish Government will seek to achieve parity of outcome between residents of Scotland’s islands and mainland. |
More work will be needed in the course of developing the Implementation Plan to determine which of the NPF suite of indicators can be made to work for islands, and which will need to be adapted or new ones developed, depending on the availability of data at island level. It will be important to avoid indicators which place a burden on local authorities or partner agencies in the form of new requirements for data gathering or reporting.

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<td><strong>8.</strong> Does the proposed Plan align with the Scottish Government’s renewed focus on climate change issues, following its announcement of a climate change emergency?</td>
<td>Yes, we noted above that Climate Change and Energy has been added as a new Strategic Objective and feel that is is helpful to bracket these two issues together. Orkney’s focus on innovation in renewable energy generation will be a significant factor in helping Scotland’s move towards net zero carbon.</td>
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<td><strong>9.</strong> Does the proposed Plan deliver against the Scottish Government’s own National Performance Framework, and the underpinning Sustainable Development Goals?</td>
<td>We feel there is some way to go to achieve an optimal tie-in between the NPF and the Plan, as detailed at question 7 above. Given that they are a significant policy driver, it would be good to see the Sustainable Development Goals cited at relevant parts of the Plan, rather than added in as an afterthought.</td>
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