Rural ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

PROPOSED NATIONAL ISLANDS PLAN

SUBMISSION FROM ROBERT TRYTHALL

I have responded to your response template as follows:-

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, but there cannot be any island's exceptionalism here. These surely are also SG's national strategic objectives. If not ..why not?

Are there any issues which have been overlooked in the Strategic Objectives?
No

Are there any Strategic Objectives that should be given a higher level of priority within the proposed Plan?
Yes  TRANSPORT. It is the motor force of economic activity in the the islands.

Do you think the proposed Plan sets out both a clear strategic direction and practical approaches to delivery of the Strategic Objectives?
NO . There are too many caveats  eg funding and qualified commitments  eg ’ striving ’ , identify action’ ,’consider ’ etc

Do you have any comments on the actions outlined to support effective implementation of the proposed Plan?
See above  re caveats etc

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?
Political cliché

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?
NO Transport  is an obvious example

Does the proposed Plan align with the Scottish Government’s renewed focus on climate change issues, following its announcement of a climate change emergency?
Just because NS declared a climate change emergency does not mean there is one... certainly not in Scotland

Does the proposed Plan deliver against the Scottish Government's own National Performance Framework, and the underpinning Sustainable Development Goals?
How can it deliver? At this stage it only a Proposed National Islands Plan, still to be laid before the Scottish Parliament for consideration.
I will restrict commenting to two aspects of this Plan :- (1) **Gestation** and (2) **Transport**

(1) **GESTATION**. It was an artificial construct during the 2014 Indy Ref, and at the time limited inscope Shetland, Orkney and the Outer Hebrides. Only when the penny dripped with SG was it extended to embrace all Scotland's other islands. This created schisms for various reasons.

(a) **Skye** notwithstanding it is linked to the mainland is deemed an island when it is self evident from its socio-economic development, since completion of the SKYE bridge, that it has it diverged from the socio-economic development of the other other islands, particularly in population growth.

(b) **The adoption of mainland County Councils** (Argyll and Bute, N Ayrshire, Highland Council). This has imposed upon these councils a requirement to change their mind-set to identify unique island issues. N. Ayrshire is essentially a Glasgow suburban council, and Highland Council could not be more geographically displaced from its 'island' responsibilities, based as it is in Inverness.

There is a lack of awareness, in the Proposed Plan, of (1) the tensions which now exist between island communities and their mainland Councils, and (2) how to address and resolve these tensions.

(2) **TRANSPORT**

**Ferry Issues**. Since 2014 I have been in regular contact with SG-TS /CMAL/CalMac /Hitrans on ferry issues. I have had a paper on the Norwegian ferry model presented to SG's Expert Ferry Group (2017).

The presentation of SG's 2013 Ferry Plan in this proposed National Islands Plan is a blatant attempt at being economic with the actualite.

Scottish Govt has failed to invest in its 2013 Ferry Plan. This stipulated 6 new ferries to be delivered by 2019. Instead 2 ferries, **of a design contrary to local island inputs**, were ordered and have yet to be delivered. One may deliver in late 2020, but the other has become an intangible concept. If these ferries deliver it will be at twice the contract price. **World-wide, no new building ferry, of comparable dual fuel design, has incurred such delay in delivery, or added construction costs.**

This a woeful indictment of SG's ferry procurement policy, and its scrutiny.

Nothing could be more 'island proofed' than a Ferry Plan, but with such failure by Scottish Govt to invest in its 2013 Ferry Plan, why can we expect a Damascene conversion, by SG, to invest in the proposed 2022 Ferry Plan?
Why is it taking so long to derive this 2022 Ferry Plan? Its investment decisions, if any will not be taken till the latter stages of the 5 year period of this proposed National Islands Plan.

Why, after the significant 2018 REC ferry sessions into the failures of Scotland's ferry services in terms of investment, resilience, and failure to meet demand, are we left with a proposed National Islands Plan which with regard to ferries is intentionally vague, and at best aspirational.

In contrast in the same period that SG has failed to deliver 2 urgently required ferries, to offer approx 250 car capacity, Norway, via its 4 major private sector ferry operators will, by 2021 have transformed its ferry provision, with significant re-investment in new buildings, offering increased vehicle capacity and operating with zero carbon emissions. One company, Fjord1, since 2017 will, by 2Q 2020, have taken delivery of 25 new ferries. Not only will this be an approx 1/3d increase in Fjord1’s fleet but also offers in excess of 2250 additional car capacity.

All this proposed National Islands Plan offers with regard to ferries is one new ferry, possibly delivered by 2023, adding approx 100 car capacity to an increasingly aged, unreliable fleet. But this new ferry was a commitment long before the Islands (Scotland) Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament.

(ComAL’s Annual Report March 2017: Looking ahead to 2017/18, our priorities include drafting the statement of requirements and concept designs for a new 90 metre vessel to join the fleet. It is expected the vessel will be ordered in late 2018, with an estimated service entry date in 2021)

Summary:
The Ferry content, as laid out in the proposed National Islands Plan, gives no confidence as to the substance, implementation a/o execution of any National Island Plan laid before the Scottish Parliament for consideration.