

## **UNISON Scotland**

### **Future Islands Bill consultation response**

#### **Introduction**

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union representing over 150,000 members in Scotland. We are the main trade union in the islands representing staff employed in local government, the NHS, police and other public services.

We welcome the consultation on a Future Islands Bill and our response to the questions is set out below.

#### **Question 1**

Is the concept of 'Island-Proofing' something the Scottish Government should consider placing in legislation through the proposed Islands Bill?

Yes

*This approach works well with other legislative assessments and can help to ensure that the islands are at least considered by officials at the draft stages of legislation and by MSPs when legislation reaches parliament. It would be helpful if the Bill could clarify if this provision will include secondary legislation.*

#### **Question 2**

If you answered 'Yes' to question 1, do you agree that Scottish Ministers should have the power to issue statutory guidance to other relevant public bodies related to Island-Proofing which they would be required to adhere to in exercising their functions and duties.

Yes

*For the same reasons as set out in (1) above.*

#### **Question 3**

If you answered 'Yes' to question 2, please state which public bodies, and what specific decisions this statutory guidance you think this should relate to?

*All NDPB's including Scottish Heritage. Public Corporations including Calmac and Scottish Water.*

#### **Question 4**

Are there any other areas that you feel the policy of Island-Proofing should cover?

*Scottish statistics do not always sufficiently cover the islands, including ONS classifications on population.*

#### **Question 5**

Do you agree that the current powers Island Councils, and Councils with Island responsibilities presently have are sufficient to deliver positive outcomes for their local island communities?

No

*Greater fiscal devolution including an end to ring fencing of council allocations and funding linked to outcomes that are not necessarily appropriate for the islands. Any additional powers must come with devolved funds*

**Question 6**

If you answered 'No' to question 5, please outline what additional powers you feel they require to benefit or better protect the island communities they serve, and explain the reasons for your answer.

*See above.*

**Question 7**

Do you feel there is a requirement to make any additions to the existing Zetland and Orkney County Council Acts of 1974?

No

**Question 8**

Should any of the powers currently set out in the Zetland and Orkney County Council Acts of 1974 be extended to the Western Isles and other relevant Councils?

Yes

*Development control over a greater territorial sea area around their coast line as per Orkney and Shetland, as well as similar financial powers to borrow, invest and participate in business.*

**Question 9**

Do you think the Scottish Government should introduce a 'National Islands Plan'?

Yes

*For similar reasons as set out in island proofing legislation above. In addition, a plan takes a longer term look at the needs of the islands and encourages citizen engagement.*

**Question 10**

Are there any specific areas you feel the plan should cover and report on?

*Economic development including energy generation and the interplay with reserved powers. It should not give Scottish Ministers the power of direction that might conflict with local decision making.*

**Question 11**

If such a plan was introduced, what in your view would be an appropriate life span for the plan – e.g. 3 years/5 years/other?

*5 Years or longer.*

**Question 12**

Do you agree that statutory protection should be given to the Na h-Eileanan an Iar Scottish parliamentary constituency?

Yes

*Prior to the inception of the unitary islands authorities the Isle of Lewis was part of Ross and Cromarty and Harris, Uist and Barra were part of Inverness-shire. Whilst Lewis fared reasonably well compared to mainland areas of Ross and Cromarty the other islands which are now part of Eilean Siar were significantly behind in terms of capital spend on infrastructure, transport links and secondary school education. For many years following the inception of the council there was a much higher level of capital spending on infrastructure in the islands south of Lewis to bring improvements.*

*Pre 1975 pupils from Harris and Uist and Barra who were planning to remain in school for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year would move to mainland schools residing in hostels and only coming home at the end of term. Post 1975 new 6 year community secondary schools were built in Barra and Uist allowing pupils to remain in their own local area for 6 year secondary education.*

*Prior to 1975 the car ferry links between North Uist and Harris were via the Cal-Mac ferry which served the link between Uig-Skye, Lochmaddy, North Uist and Tarbert, Harris and in the south. Post 1975 the council decided that the main transport road link in the islands would stretch from the Butt of Lewis in the north to Barra in the south and since that time has delivered major improvements in the road/ferry transport links to enable easier travel between the islands of the Outer Hebrides. This included new causeways and inter-island car ferry links.*

*The strengthened links facilitated by a shared unitary authority have brought the islands back together and strengthened our ties both economically and socially.*

*Our members throughout the islands would welcome legislation that enshrines the constituency in law, ensuring that the islands stay together in future. This provides the best protection for us all, even in difficult economic times, as we have a single voice.*

### **Question 13**

Should the Scottish Government consider amending the Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 to allow the LGBCS the power to make an exception to the usual 3 or 4 member ward rule for use with respect to populated islands?

Yes

*Parts of the islands have sparse populations that do not easily fit into the three or four member ward model. There should be the scope for one or two member wards to avoid having to group islands or to include them in mainland wards.*

### **Question 14**

Please provide details of any additional issues, not addressed in your other responses, that you think should be considered in relation to the introduction of a future Islands Bill and its potential provisions.

*Spending cuts as a consequence of austerity economics hit the islands even harder than many parts of the mainland because the public sector is proportionately more important.*

*We would support the devolution of the Crown Estates to the islands authorities.*

*Grid connections are important to the renewables industry, but we remain sceptical that this is ever going to be viable, especially after the UK subsidy to onshore wind ends in April 2016.*

*We support new fiscal arrangements to allow the islands to benefit more directly from the harvesting of local resources, including renewable energy and fisheries.*

*We agree that there should be a clear recognition of the status of the three island groups in the new Scottish Constitutional Settlement and within the European Governance framework.*

**For further details contact:**

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