National Islands Plan Review: Consultation analysis

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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Dawn Griesbach and Alison Platts
Griesbach & Associates

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Abbreviations and terminology

In the tables throughout this report, 'n' at the top of columns indicates the **number** of respondents in each group or sub-group, while '%' indicates the **percentage** of respondents in each group or sub-group.

Other abbreviations

SGIT: Scottish Government Islands Team – the Scottish Government policy team responsible for producing and reporting on the delivery of the National Islands Plan and other islands policies and strategies including the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

ICIA: Island Communities Impact Assessment – a process in which Scottish public authorities must identify the effect that policies, strategies, or services are likely to have on an island community which may be significantly different from the effect on other communities (including other island communities) in the area in which the authority exercises its functions. This duty is often referred to as 'island proofing' and is set out under Part 3 of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

NPF4: National Planning Framework 4 – the national spatial strategy for Scotland which sets out spatial principles, regional priorities, national developments and national planning policy.

Executive summary

1.   The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 (the Islands Act) requires Scottish Ministers to produce a National Islands Plan in consultation with the people who live and work on Scotland's islands. The first National Islands Plan was published in December 2019. It sets out objectives and a strategy for improving outcomes for island communities. The Islands Act requires a review of the plan every five years, and this is currently underway. As part of the review, the Scottish Government has undertaken a consultation to gather the views of the public and members of island communities. A consultation paper was issued, and a series of engagement workshops were held.

2.   The consultation paper contained 11 questions and explored (i) people's knowledge of the current National Islands Plan, (ii) the impacts of the current plan on island communities, (iii) people's views of the contents of the plan, (iv) the progress made against the plan's objectives, and (v) what form any new, or revised, plan should take. The consultation paper was published on 18 July 2023 with a closing date of 7 November 2023 for responses.

3.   The 16 workshops (13 in-person and 3 online), held with people living or working in island communities, addressed three key issues of governance, awareness and focus.

Description of the responses and respondents (Chapter 2)

4.   The consultation received 167 responses submitted by 39 organisations and 128 individuals. Organisational respondents comprised (i) local authorities and other public bodies, (ii) community groups, organisations and trusts, (iii) third sector organisations, charities and membership bodies, and (iv) a small number of 'other organisations' which did not fit into any of the other three categories. Most respondents (82%) said they were permanent island residents.

5.   In addition, 231 individuals participated in the workshops.

Key themes in the responses

6.   The main findings of the consultation and workshops are presented below. Recurring themes, raised both in the consultation responses and at the workshops, were as follows:

- In light of limited awareness of the National Islands Plan, there is a need for improved communication with island communities in relation to it. It was also suggested that other public bodies (in addition to local authorities) need to be made more aware of the plan.

- The plan was seen as comprehensive and ambitious. Its strategic objectives were seen as relevant and appropriate. However, there were concerns about the attainability of some of the commitments included in the document. There were arguments in favour of prioritising the strategic objectives and focusing on a smaller set of achievable commitments.

- There were suggestions (often from community-based organisations and individuals) that priorities should be determined at an island (rather than national) level. At the same time, respondents and workshop participants agreed that certain strategic

objectives (including transport, housing and population) would be seen as priorities in all island communities.

- Respondents wanted any new / revised plan to contain SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timebound) with commitments linked to specific actions, a timeframe for delivery, and clear allocation of responsibilities.

Awareness and perceived effects of the current plan (Chapter 3)

7.   Half of respondents (52%) said they knew a little about the current National Islands Plan and a fifth (21%) said they knew a lot about it. However, a quarter of respondents said they either knew nothing about it, or had heard of it but knew nothing of its content. Organisations were more likely than individuals to say they knew a lot about the plan.

8.   There were mixed views, both among organisations and individuals, about whether the National Islands Plan had had any effect on their lives. Organisations (50%) were more likely than individuals (10%) to say the plan affected them positively. By contrast, individuals (32%) were more likely than organisations (4%) to say it had affected them negatively. Individuals (58%) were also more likely than organisations (46%) to say the plan had not affected their life in any way.

9.   Those who identified positive effects commonly said the plan had (i) led to a greater focus on the significant challenges facing Scotland's islands, (ii) provided a framework for policy development and infrastructure improvements in island communities, (iii) informed the creation of local island plans in some areas, and (iv) provided funding for a range of activities and initiatives.

10.   Those (mainly individuals) who thought the plan had affected them negatively said there had been no improvement in the quality of life of (most) islanders during the period of the plan, and that the plan had raised expectations but not delivered on them.

The contents of the current plan (Chapter 4)

11.   There were mixed views on the contents of the current National Islands Plan, with 37% of respondents saying they had positive views, 36% saying they had negative views, and 27% saying they had no views at all. Organisations (84%) were more likely than individuals (25%) to express positive views about the contents of the plan.

12.   Those who had positive views described the plan as 'comprehensive', 'ambitious', 'effectively presented' and 'clear'. These respondents also noted the extensive consultation that had informed the drafting of the plan.

13.   Those who had negative views focused on (i) its length, style, and perceived lack of accessibility to people living in island communities, (ii) the need for a more localised approach to ensure that solutions are tailored to each island's specific circumstances, (iii) the need to ensure that the plan's objectives and commitments are clear and achievable, and (iv) the need for an effective performance monitoring framework.

14.   The current National Islands Plan has 13 strategic objectives. Around a quarter of respondents (26%) thought the number of strategic objectives in the current plan was just

right, 40% thought there were too many, and 29% had no opinion on the matter. Just 5% thought there were too few strategic objectives. Organisations (33%) were more likely than individuals (25%) to say that the number of strategic objectives was just right.

15. Those who thought the number of strategic objectives was **just right** generally said that all the objectives in the current plan were relevant and together addressed the key challenges facing island communities. Those who thought there were **too many** strategic objectives suggested that the current number was detracting from the Scottish Government's capacity to deliver the plan. This group thought it would be preferable to focus on a smaller number of key objectives and deliver on them. Those who thought there were **too few** objectives suggested that additional objectives were needed – specifically in relation to water and wastewater services, and food security. Respondents who had **no opinion** on the number of strategic objectives argued that the number of objectives was less important than (i) what the objectives were and (ii) ensuring that they can be delivered.

16. The current National Islands Plan contains 134 commitments. More than half of respondents (55%) thought the current plan had too many commitments. Fewer than one in ten (8%) thought the number of commitments was just right, and 5% thought there were too few commitments. A third of respondents (33%) had no opinion on the matter. Organisations (64%) were more likely than individuals (52%) to say there were too many commitments.

17. Respondents who thought the number of commitments was **just right** suggested that the plan needed to be comprehensive in its scope. However, these respondents also thought further detail was needed about how the commitments would be resourced. Respondents who indicated there were **too many** commitments thought it would be better to prioritise – and deliver on – fewer commitments. This group suggested that the plan should have a tighter focus solely on those commitments that would not otherwise happen without the plan. Respondents who had **no opinion** on the matter argued that delivering on the commitments was more important than the number of commitments. There was little comment from respondents who thought there were **too few** commitments.

Assessment of the current plan (Chapter 5)

18. Respondents were asked to assess the extent to which progress had been made over the past five years towards the National Island Plan's 13 strategic objectives. On 11 of the objectives, a majority of respondents thought there had been **no** progress. The two exceptions were Strategic Objective 6 (Digital) and Strategic Objective 11 (Arts, Culture & Language) for which a majority of respondents thought **some** progress had been made.

19. Respondents were most likely to say that no progress had been made in relation to Objective 3 (Transport) and Objective 5 (Fuel Poverty). More than three-quarters of respondents thought **no** progress had been made towards either of these two objectives.

20. Organisations were more likely than individuals to think that **some** progress had been made in relation to all of the objectives apart from Transport and Fuel Poverty. A majority of organisations, like individuals, thought that **no** progress had been made towards these objectives.

21. When asked what they thought had worked well in the current National Islands Plan, respondents noted (i) the importance of the plan in raising the profile of Scotland's islands and providing a framework for planning, (ii) the funding, support and collaboration which had been made available under the plan, (iii) the level of consultation that had informed the development of the plan, and (iv) some aspects of monitoring and reporting.

22. When asked what could have worked better in the current plan, respondents focused on (i) the need to prioritise – and implement – strategic objectives and commitments, (ii) the need to monitor progress, (iii) dissatisfaction with current funding mechanisms, (iv) the need to address a lack of consistency and quality in Island Communities Impact Assessment processes, and (v) the need for greater collaboration, engagement and communication with island communities.

The need for a new plan (Chapter 6)

23. A large majority of respondents wanted to see a new (or revised) National Islands Plan. However, respondents had mixed views on what form a new plan should take. A third (33%) thought the current plan should be refreshed with the current format retained, two-fifths (41%) thought a whole new plan was needed, and a quarter (26%) thought something else was required.

24. Those who favoured a **refresh** of the current plan thought 'the plan is good' and it should therefore be reinforced, not replaced. This group also thought it would be less resource-intensive and more cost-effective to refresh the current plan rather than drafting an entirely new one.

25. Those who favoured a **whole new plan** wanted to see a more focused strategy with a smaller number of measurable, achievable commitments. However, these respondents had two different visions of what a new plan would look like.

- One group (mainly comprising organisations, but also some individuals) thought the next iteration of the National Islands Plan should retain the existing strategic objectives, but be a shorter, more succinct, and more focused plan, with a monitoring framework, proper costings and a funding strategy.

- The second group (mainly comprising individuals, but also some organisations) wanted to see more local or regional plans – linked to an overarching national strategy – rather than a single (national) document. This group thought there could be some prioritisation of objectives such as transport and housing across all island groups, but beyond that, island communities should establish their own objectives and priorities.

26. There was no clear consensus among the respondents who wanted something other than a refreshed or whole new plan. Some in this group were in favour of reducing the plan to a minimal set of objectives. Others suggested there should be no national plan, but that the Scottish Government should work directly with island communities to identify local needs and provide funding to them to deliver their own solutions.

Workshop findings: governance, awareness and focus (Chapter 7)

27.   The workshops addressed questions relating to the **governance** of the National Islands Plan, how to improve **awareness** of it, and what the future **focus** should be.

Governance

28.   Workshop participants identified barriers to the involvement of island communities in the delivery of the National Islands Plan. These included limited capacity among island residents, insufficient information, and lack of opportunities. People's perceptions about whether their voices will be listened to (or not) was also seen as a barrier to engagement.

29.   Workshop participants offered numerous suggestions for improving community involvement in the delivery of the National Islands Plan. These focused on (i) increasing awareness and knowledge of the plan, (ii) improving direct communication between the Scottish Government and island communities, (iii) strengthening local democracy, (iv) supporting localised decision-making and delivery, (v) building capacity for engagement, and (vi) working through existing community representative bodies or service providers.

Awareness

30.   Workshop participants repeatedly said that few members of their local communities were aware of the National Islands Plan. Participants wished to see improved Scottish Government communications with island communities. There was a widespread view that information about the plan should be more accessible and tailored to each island. There was also an emphasis on the importance of two-way communication. Specific suggestions focused on: (i) increasing direct face-to-face engagement, (ii) making greater use of print and broadcast media, (iii) raising the online profile of the National Islands Plan, (iv) disseminating information through local community groups, and (v) establishing a communications team (or officer) within the Scottish Government Islands Team.

Focus

31.   There was no definitive view among workshop participants on whether the current strategic objectives should be prioritised in some way. Broadly speaking, participants said **all** the strategic objectives were important and linked to each other. However, they also suggested that it would be helpful to focus on a more limited set of objectives. Across most of the workshops, there were two main views: that some form of prioritisation of the strategic objectives might be acceptable ('while they are all important, some are more important'); and that all the current strategic objectives should be retained but 'grouped' or 'clustered' in some way. However, at some workshops, participants either did not support or did not suggest any prioritisation of objectives.

32.   Across the workshops, there was a repeated view that, rather than having a national prioritisation of objectives, each island should be able to identify its own priorities. Nevertheless, workshop participants suggested that certain strategic objectives – transport, housing and population – would be at the top of the list of priorities in most island communities. Beyond these, there were differences in opinion about which of the other strategic objectives should be prioritised.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Scottish Government carried out a consultation on a review of the National Islands Plan between 18 July and 7 November 2023. This report presents the findings from an analysis of the consultation responses received.

Policy context

1.2 The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 (hereafter, 'the Islands Act') was introduced to help meet the unique needs of Scotland's islands – now and in the future – by supporting sustainable economic growth and improving outcomes for, and empowering, island communities.

1.3 The Islands Act places a duty on the Scottish Government and other relevant public authorities to 'island proof' their functions and decisions. This means an Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) must be considered when developing policies, strategies and services that are expected to have a significantly different effect on an island community as compared with other communities (both mainland communities and other island communities) in Scotland.

1.4 The Islands Act also requires Scottish Ministers to produce a National Islands Plan in consultation with the people who live and work on Scotland's islands. The plan must set out objectives and a strategy for improving outcomes for island communities. Scottish Ministers are required to publish an annual report on progress toward the objectives of the plan and to undertake a formal review of the plan every five years.

1.5 The first National Islands Plan was published in December 2019, and a review of this plan is now underway. The review will focus on the impacts of the current plan and will consider whether it now needs to be updated, refreshed or renewed. The Islands Act requires a consultation to take place as part of the review.

The consultation

1.6 The consultation paper on the National Islands Plan review was published on 18 July 2023. The consultation was open to the public but was specifically targeted at (i) people who live on Scotland's islands, and any groups who represent them, (ii) people who have an interest in Scotland's islands, and (iii) organisations and people working on and with Scotland's islands, across the public, private and third sectors. The consultation was promoted widely through social media and the press, and through information shared with key stakeholder groups in islands communities.

1.7 The consultation contained 11 numbered questions and addressed the following topics:

- Knowledge of the current National Islands Plan (Q1)
- The impacts of the current plan on people's lives (Q2 and Q3)
- The contents of the current plan (Q4, Q6 and Q7)

- The progress made against the plan's objectives, and what has worked well and less well (Q5, Q8 and Q9)
- Whether there is a need for a new or revised plan (Q10 and Q11).

1.8   The online questionnaire also invited respondents to indicate their connection to Scotland's islands – whether they (i) were a permanent island resident, (ii) were a part-time island resident, (iii) had previously lived on an island, (iv) commuted to an island for work, or (v) had some other type of connection to Scotland's islands. Space was provided for respondents to give further details.

1.9   The consultation paper was published on the Scottish Government's consultation webpage. Respondents were invited to complete an online questionnaire or submit a response by email or post. The consultation closed on 7 November 2023.

1.10   In addition to the online (public) consultation, the Scottish Government carried out 16 workshops. Thirteen of these were in-person workshops, including one which was held at the 2023 meeting of the Scottish Rural and Islands Parliament in Fort William. Three events were held online. Workshops were promoted widely in local communities through social media and the press. Workshop attendees were invited to give their views on six open questions covering three themes: (i) awareness, (ii) focus, and (iii) governance. The workshop questions were different to the questions in the public consultation. The key findings from each workshop were summarised by Scottish Government officials, and an analysis of the summaries is included in this report.

1.11   The islands visited during the in-person events were:

- Arran
- Bressay
- Colonsay
- Cumbrae
- Eigg
- Grimsay
- Isle of Lewis
- Isle of Skye
- Mull
- Orkney Mainland
- Shetland Mainland
- Westray

About the analysis

1.12   Frequency analysis was undertaken in relation to all closed (tick-box) questions and the findings are presented in tables throughout this report. Not all respondents answered all closed questions, and therefore the total number shown in each table is the number of respondents who answered that question.

1.13   Very occasionally, respondents may not have answered a closed question (i.e. they did not tick a box in response to the question), but their comments stated or strongly implied their response to the closed question. In such cases, the response to the closed question was imputed (i.e. added at the analysis stage). Thus, the tables throughout this report include a small number of these imputed responses.

1.14   Qualitative thematic analysis was undertaken in relation to respondents' comments. The aim of the qualitative analysis was to identify the main themes, as well as the full range of views submitted in response to each question (or group of questions), and to explore areas of agreement and disagreement in views between different groups of respondents. A thematic analysis of the workshop summaries was also undertaken.

A caveat about the findings

1.15   As with all consultations it is important to bear in mind that the views of those who have responded may not be representative of the views of the wider population. Individuals (and organisations) who have a keen interest in a topic – and the capacity to respond – are more likely to participate in a consultation than those who do not. This self-selection means that the views of consultation participants cannot be generalised to the wider population.

1.16   For this reason, the approach to consultation analysis is primarily qualitative in nature. Its main purpose is not to identify how **many** people held particular views, but rather to understand the full range of views expressed and any concerns that respondents may have. The qualitative analysis will help in understanding the responses to the closed questions and gaining greater insight into people's views.

The report

1.17   The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 presents information about the respondents to the consultation, and the 16 workshops carried out by the Scottish Government.
- Chapters 3 to 6 present the results of analysis of the responses to the consultation questions.
- Chapter 7 presents an analysis of the workshop summaries.

1.18   In addition, this report includes four annexes. Annex 1 contains a list of the organisational respondents. Annex 2 sets out the response rates for each of the consultation questions, with a breakdown by respondent type. Annex 3 presents respondents' views on the progress made towards individual strategic objectives, by respondent type. Annex 4 provides a thematic collation of comments made at the workshops.

2 Description of the responses and respondents

2.1   This chapter provides information about the responses and the respondents.

Number of responses received, and number included in the analysis

2.2   The consultation received 168 responses. Of these, the vast majority (158) were submitted through Citizen Space, the Scottish Government's online consultation platform; the remaining 10 responses were sent by email.

2.3   One respondent submitted two different responses. These two responses were combined to form a single amalgamated response – and this respondent has been counted only once in the analysis. Where the respondent's answers to closed questions differed between the two submissions, their answers in the latter submission were retained for the analysis. All the respondent's comments, from both responses, are included in the analysis.

2.4   This amalgamation process resulted in the removal of one response, and thus the analysis was based on **167 responses**.

Description of the respondents

2.5   Responses were submitted by 39 organisations and 128 individuals (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Number and percentage of respondents

Respondent type	n	%
Organisations	39	23%
Individuals	128	77%
Total	**167**	**100%**

2.6   There were three main groups of organisational respondents (see Table 2.2)

- **Local authorities and other public bodies** comprised the largest group of organisational respondents (16 out of 39, or 41%). This group included all six island authorities as well as a range of public bodies with national remits.

- **Community groups, organisations and trusts** comprised 23% of organisational respondents (9 out of 39). This group included community councils, community trusts, local steering groups and business support groups.

- **Third sector organisations, charities and membership bodies** comprised 23% of organisations (9 out of 39). This group included a wide range of different organisation types. Some had a charitable purpose while others were membership bodies or forums. Some of these groups had a specific focus on the islands whereas others had a wider national remit.

2.7   A small group of five organisations that did not fit into any of the other three categories comprised the final 13% of organisational responses (referred to as 'other organisation types'). A complete list of organisational respondents is shown in Annex 1.

Table 2.2: Breakdown of organisational responses, by type

Organisation type	n	%
Local authorities and other public bodies	16	41%
Community groups, organisations, and trusts	9	23%
Third sector organisations, charities, and membership bodies	9	23%
Other organisation types*	5	13%
Total organisations	**39**	**100%**

* Includes a hospitality and tourism organisation, higher education institutions, a trade union and a National Health Service Royal College.

Connection to Scotland's islands

2.8   Respondents were asked to indicate their connection to Scotland's islands – whether they (i) were a permanent island resident, (ii) were a part-time island resident, (iii) had previously lived on an island, (iv) commuted to an island for work, or (v) had some other type of connection to Scotland's islands. The wording of this question suggests that it was primarily aimed at individual respondents. However, the question was also answered by most organisations, who may have interpreted it in different ways.

2.9   As Table 2.3 shows, 82% of respondents said they were permanent island residents. The vast majority of individual respondents (92%) were permanent island residents, whereas less than half of the organisations that answered the question (14 out of 33) selected this option. Organisations (including some island local authorities) were more likely to categorise themselves as having an 'other' connection to the islands, either because they had a wider national role / remit, a remit that included mainland communities (as well as island communities), or because their membership was drawn from across Scotland.

2.10   Note that none the respondents indicated that they commute to an island for work, and, therefore, this option is not shown in the table below.

Table 2.3: Respondents' connection to Scottish islands, by respondent type

Respondent type	Organisations		Individuals		Total	
Connection to islands	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Permanent island resident	14	42%	115	92%	**129**	**82%**
Part-time island resident	0	0%	5	4%	**5**	**3%**
Previously lived on an island	0	0%	1	1%	**1**	**1%**
Other (please detail below)	19	58%	4	3%	**23**	**15%**
Total	33	100%	125	100%	**158**	**100%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.
None of the respondents selected 'commute to an island for work'.

Response rates for individual questions

2.11   Response rates for individual questions varied, depending on whether the question was closed or open, and on whether the respondent was an organisation or individual.

2.12   In general, response rates for closed questions were higher, ranging from 83% at the closed parts of Question 5 (which asked about progress towards the National Island Plan's strategic objectives) to 93% at Question 1 (which asked respondents how much they know about the current plan). By contrast, response rates for open questions ranged from 60% at the open part of Question 7 (which asked for views on the number of commitments in the current National Islands Plan) to 85% at the open part of Question 9 (which asked what could have worked better in the current National Islands Plan).

2.13   Response rates were higher for individual respondents compared to organisational respondents. The vast majority of individuals answered **all** closed questions, with response rates for individual questions ranging from 90% to 98% among this group. In most cases, more than two-thirds of individuals also answered each open question. The exceptions were in relation to:

- The open part of Question 7 (which asked for views on the number of commitments in the current plan) – 55% of individuals commented at this question

- The open part of Question 6 (which asked for views on the number of strategic objectives in the current plan) – 63% of individuals commented at this question.

2.14   Organisations had lower response rates than individuals for many of the closed questions – and particularly:

- Question 2 (which asked whether the current National Island Plan had affected your life in any way) – 59% of organisations answered this closed question

- Question 5 (which asked about the progress made by the current plan towards achieving its strategic objectives) – the proportion of organisations answering each of the 13 parts of this question ranged from 46% to 54%.

2.15   In general, organisational respondents were less likely to answer the questions at the beginning of the consultation (i.e. Questions 1–5) and more likely to answer the questions at the end of the consultation (i.e. Questions 6–11). Response rates for organisations in relation to the latter questions (both the closed and open parts) ranged from 69% for the open part of Question 6 (which asked about the number of strategic objectives) to 95% for the open part of Question 11 (which asked what respondents would like to see in any future or revised National Islands Plan).

2.16   See Annex 2 for full details of the question response rates.

Workshop participants

2.17   As noted in Chapter 1, the Scottish Government carried out a series of consultation workshops which provided an opportunity to explore the topics of governance, awareness and focus in relation to the current and any possible future National Islands Plan.

2.18   Altogether, 231 individuals participated in 16 workshops (13 in-person and 3 online).

2.19   Table 2.4 provides an overview of the locations of the 13 in-person workshops and the number of participants at each one. Note that one of the in-person workshops involved attendees at the Scottish Rural and Islands Parliament meeting held in Fort William in November 2023. The table also includes information about the geographical locations of participants in the online workshops.

Table 2.4: Details of workshops and number of participants

Type of workshop		n
In-person, area-based workshops (local authority – island)		
1	Argyll and Bute – Colonsay	11
2	Argyll and Bute – Mull	15
3	Highland – Eigg	20
4	Highland – Isle of Skye	11
5	North Ayrshire – Arran	21
6	North Ayrshire – Cumbrae	16
7	Orkney – Orkney Mainland	19
8	Orkney – Westray	3
9	Shetland – Shetland Mainland	4
10	Shetland – Bressay	5
11	Western Isles – Grimsay	11
12	Western Isles – Isle of Lewis	21
	Total, in-person area-based participants	**157**
In-person, Scottish Rural and Island Parliament workshop		
13	Held in Fort William, as a Scottish Rural and Island Parliament workshop	28
	Total, SRIP participants	**28**
Online workshops		
14	Included participants from Coll, Skye, Iona, Lewis, Orkney, Shetland, Arran, Islay	15
15	Included participants from Cumbrae, Islay, Orkney, Skye, Tiree, Harris, Barra and Lewis	12
16	Included participants from Islay, Bressay, Arran, Barra, Orkney, Shetland, Jura, Stornoway, Uig, Skye	19
	Total, online participants	**46**
Total participants, in-person and online		**231**

3 Awareness and perceived effects of the current plan (Q1–Q3)

3.1   The consultation contained three questions inviting respondents to indicate and discuss the extent to which they were aware of the current National Islands Plan, whether it had an effect on their lives, and the nature of that effect.

Question 1: How much would you say you know about the current National Islands Plan? [Nothing at all / I have heard of it but know nothing about the content / I know a little about it / I know a lot about it]

Question 2: Has the current National Islands Plan affected your life in any way? [Yes / No / Don't know]

Please feel free to expand on your answer in the box below.

Question 3: Has the effect of the current National Islands Plan on your life been positive, negative or not at all? [Positive / Negative / It has not affected my life]

Please feel free to expand on your answer in the box below.

Awareness of the National Islands Plan (Q1)

3.2   Question 1 asked respondents to indicate how much they knew about the current National Islands Plan. This was a closed question with no space for comments.

3.3   Table 3.1 shows that, overall, around half of all respondents (52%) knew a little about the current National Islands Plan and a fifth (21%) knew a lot about it. However, around a quarter indicated low awareness of the current plan: 15% said they knew nothing about it, and 12% said they had heard of it but knew nothing of its content.

3.4   All but one of the organisational respondents indicated that they knew a little or a lot about the current plan. By contrast, awareness among individuals was more variable: although two-thirds of individuals said they either knew a little (55%) or a lot (11%) about the current plan, a third said they had either heard of it but knew nothing of its content (14%) or knew nothing at all about it (19%).

3.5   Among organisations, local authorities and other public bodies were most likely to have a high level of awareness of the current plan, with nearly all of this group (12 out of 13) saying that they knew a lot about it.

Table 3.1: Q1 – How much would you say you know about the current National Islands Plan?

Respondent type	Nothing at all		Have heard of it but know nothing of the content		Know a little about it		Know a lot about it		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Local authorities and public bodies	0	0%	0	0%	1	8%	12	92%	13	100%
Community orgs, groups and trusts	0	0%	1	13%	4	50%	3	38%	8	100%
Third sector orgs, charities and membership bodies	0	0%	0	0%	4	80%	1	20%	5	100%
Other organisation types	0	0%	0	0%	3	60%	2	40%	5	100%
Total organisations	**0**	**0%**	**1**	**3%**	**12**	**39%**	**18**	**58%**	**31**	**100%**
Total individuals	24	19%	18	14%	69	55%	14	11%	125	100%
Total, all respondents	**24**	**15%**	**19**	**12%**	**81**	**52%**	**32**	**21%**	**156**	**100%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Effect of the current plan on people's lives (Q2)

3.6   Question 2 asked respondents if the current National Islands Plan had affected their life in any way.

3.7   Table 3.2 shows there were mixed views in response to this question with 28% answering 'yes', 31% answering 'no' and 42% answering 'don't know'.

3.8   Among the organisations that answered this question, around a third (35%) answered 'yes', a third (35%) answered 'no' and a third (30%) answered 'don't know'. Among individuals, the largest proportion of respondents (42%) said 'don't know', while 26% said 'yes' and 30% said 'no'.

3.9   Among organisational respondents, local authorities and other public bodies were most likely to say that the current plan had had an effect on them, with two-thirds of this group (4 out of 6) answering 'yes' to this question. However, community organisations, groups and trusts were more likely than other organisations to say that the plan had had no effect on them, with more than half (5 out of 9) answering 'no'.

Table 3.2: Q2 – Has the current National Islands Plan affected your life in any way?

Respondent type	Yes		No		Don't know		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Local authorities and public bodies	4	67%	0	0%	2	33%	6	100%
Community orgs, groups and trusts	2	22%	5	56%	2	22%	9	100%
Third sector orgs, charities and membership bodies	1	25%	1	25%	2	50%	4	100%
Other organisation types	1	25%	2	50%	1	25%	4	100%
Total organisations	**8**	**35%**	**8**	**35%**	**7**	**30%**	**23**	**100%**
Total individuals	33	26%	38	30%	55	44%	126	100%
Total, all respondents	**41**	**28%**	**46**	**31%**	**62**	**42%**	**149**	**100%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

3.10   Note that this closed question had a very low response from organisations – in particular, from (i) local authorities and public bodies (6 out of 16 answered the question) and (ii) third sector organisations, charities and membership bodies (4 out of 9 answered the question). The wording of this question may have suggested to these respondents that it was not relevant to or intended for them. Additionally, comments from organisations that **did** answer the question suggested that it was answered in different ways – with some respondents discussing the perceived effects on their island communities, and others talking about the effects on their organisation. Given the potentially different interpretations of this question, the figures shown for organisations in Table 3.2 should be treated with caution.

3.11   Altogether, 148 respondents (22 organisations and 126 individuals) provided comments at Question 2.

3.12   Respondents who answered **'yes'** to this question often went on to discuss **how** they were affected by the plan. Such comments were generally framed in terms of the positive or negative effects of the plan on island life, rather than the effects on the life of the respondent. Moreover, there was a great deal of overlap between these comments and those subsequently made at Question 3, which asked about whether the effect of the current plan had been positive or negative. Therefore, most of these types of comments are discussed together with those made at Question 3. The discussion here focuses on more general points made by those who answered 'yes', together with the comments made by respondents who answered 'no' or 'don't know' at Question 2.

Views of those who thought the plan had affected their life

3.13   Respondents who thought the National Islands Plan had affected their life made a range of points, and the views of organisations were often different from those of individuals. In particular, organisations answering 'yes' at Question 2 generally went on to discuss positive effects, whereas individuals who answered 'yes' often highlighted negative

effects.[1] As mentioned above, the positive and negative effects of the plan will be discussed together with other similar comments at Question 3.

3.14   More generally, some organisations and individuals noted that the plan had given them an opportunity to participate in its delivery – either (i) at a national level, through the National Islands Delivery Group, the Islands Strategic Group or other groups linked to implementation of the National Islands Plan, or (ii) at a local level by applying for and receiving funding available under the Islands Programme, which supports delivery of the plan for local improvement activities and initiatives. Some organisational respondents said they had appreciated and benefited from working more closely with the Scottish Government Islands Team to implement the plan in their area. Some individuals said they had become involved in developing a local island plan for their own community using the National Islands Plan as a framework. Both organisations and individuals said they thought the National Islands Plan had raised (their) awareness of the specific issues affecting island communities in Scotland, and that it had also brought about a greater focus on addressing these issues.

Views of those who thought the plan had not affected their life

3.15   In general, respondents who indicated that the National Islands Plan had **not** affected their life did so because they perceived 'no improvements' in their area. Many referred to a perceived lack of improvement – or even deterioration – in transport services, availability of affordable housing, fuel poverty, educational standards, and / or digital connectivity. Concerns about continued population decline (and / or large influxes of people of retirement age) were also raised.

Views of those who did not know if the plan had affected their life

3.16   Respondents – and particularly organisations – who said they did not know if the plan had affected their life made several points:

- There was a common view that the plan had successfully identified the key challenges for island communities, but there was less certainty about whether the plan had led to improved outcomes.

- In terms of any local improvements made during the period of the plan, some respondents found it difficult to distinguish between the contribution made by the National Islands Plan and the contributions made by other agencies.

- Others suggested that any effect the plan may have had was unclear because of other factors including the Covid pandemic and Brexit.

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[1] A cross-tabulation of Question 2 and Question 3 (which asked whether the plan had had a positive, negative, or no effect) showed that **more than half of individuals** who answered 'yes' at Question 2 went on to indicate at Question 3 that the effects of the plan had been negative. Only one-third of individuals who answered 'yes' at Question 2, answered 'positive' at Question 3. By contrast, **no organisation** that answered 'yes' at Question 2 went on to say at Question 3 that the effects of the plan had been 'negative'. Note, however, that more than half of the organisations that said (at Question 2) the plan had had an effect went on to say (at Question 3) that the plan had had **no** effect. This apparent inconsistency suggests that the findings shown for organisations in the tables for Questions 2 and 3 should be treated with caution.

- It was acknowledged that some island communities / organisations received funding for projects through the plan and there may, therefore, be greater awareness of the impact of the plan among individuals involved in these communities or organisations. However, it was thought that most island residents would be unaware of such projects, or unaware that they were a result of funding under the National Islands Plan.

3.17 Individual respondents who did not know if the plan had affected their lives generally highlighted their lack of awareness of the plan – which meant they did not know what effect it may have had. However, some who answered 'don't know' at Question 2 (like those who answered 'no') pointed to a perceived lack of improvement (or a deterioration) in key aspects of island life – particularly in relation to transport, fuel poverty, population growth, digital connection, road infrastructure, etc.

3.18 Occasionally, respondents who did not know if the plan had affected their life suggested that some of what was in the plan was not relevant for their own island community. These respondents called for (i) improved communication about the plan, and (ii) a greater focus on the specific needs of their island community.

Nature of the effect on people's lives (Q3)

3.19 Question 3 asked respondents about the nature of the effect of the current plan on their lives – specifically, whether it had been positive or negative, or whether it had had no effect.

3.20 Table 3.3 shows that around one in six respondents (16%) said the effect of the current plan on their life had been positive and around a quarter (27%) said it had been negative. However, more than half (56%) said the plan had not affected their life at all.

Table 3.3: Q3 – Has the effect of the current National Islands Plan on your life been positive, negative or not at all?

Respondent type	Positive		Negative		It has not affected my life		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Local authorities and public bodies	6	67%	0	0%	3	33%	9	100%
Community orgs, groups and trusts	4	50%	1	13%	3	38%	8	100%
Third sector orgs, charities and membership bodies	1	50%	0	0%	1	50%	2	100%
Other organisation types	1	20%	0	0%	4	80%	5	100%
Total organisations	**12**	**50%**	**1**	**4%**	**11**	**46%**	**24**	**100%**
Total individuals	12	10%	39	32%	71	58%	122	100%
Total, all respondents	**24**	**16%**	**40**	**27%**	**82**	**56%**	**146**	**100%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

3.21   Organisations (50%) were more likely than individuals (10%) to say the plan had had a positive effect. By contrast, individuals were more likely than organisations to say it had had a negative effect (32% compared to 4%). Individuals (58%) were also more likely than organisations (46%) to say the plan had not affected their life in any way.

3.22   Among the organisations that answered this question, respondents were largely split between those who said the effect of the plan had been positive (12 out of 24), and those who said it had had no effect (11 out of 24). Just one organisational respondent (in the community organisation, groups and trusts category) said the effect of the plan had been negative.

3.23   Note that, as with Question 2, this closed question had a very low response from organisations – in particular, from (i) local authorities and public bodies (9 out of 16 answered the question) and (ii) third sector organisations, charities, and membership bodies (2 out of 9 answered the question). These organisations may not have seen the question as being relevant to or intended for them. Thus, the figures shown in Table 3.3 for organisations need to be treated with caution.

3.24   Altogether, 116 respondents (25 organisations and 91 individuals) commented at Question 3. The discussion below also includes comments made at Question 2 which referred to positive or negative effects of the National Islands Plan.

Positive effects

3.25   Both organisations and individuals who thought the plan had had a positive effect made a range of points, including that the plan had:

- Led to a 'much-needed' focus on the significant challenges facing Scotland's islands which may otherwise have gone unrecognised and unaddressed
- Provided a framework which could be referred to (nationally and locally) when developing policy and planning infrastructure improvements in island communities
- Helped inform (and gave an impetus to) the development of local island plans in some areas, and led to the creation of local steering groups to take forward the priorities of individual island communities
- Provided data that were used to develop performance indicators for local island plans
- Provided funding to island communities for a range of initiatives to address local priorities, including for infrastructure development and pilot projects (examples included a Net Zero pilot scheme, and a Skills Initiative pilot)
- Provided crisis funding after the Covid pandemic (through the Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund)
- Provided funding to support community-based officers to take forward activities.

3.26   However, some of the points made at Question 3 were more specific to particular types of respondents. For example:

- Some local authority respondents highlighted the importance of the plan in enabling them to build relationships with key island partners, stakeholders and anchor organisations – and to work together towards better outcomes in local island communities.

- One third sector respondent thought the plan had led to a more inclusive approach to developing transport in the islands – which had, in their view, been beneficial for disabled people.

- Some individuals focused on quite specific positive changes which they attributed to the plan. These included improvements in broadband / digital connectivity in their areas, funding / support for local housing projects or other specific developments (e.g. redevelopment of a local college), and the provision of free bus travel for young people.

3.27   However, among those who identified positive effects, there was also a recurring view that there was 'still a long way to go' before it could be said that the National Islands Plan was fully addressing the significant challenges island communities continue to face. The point was made that having a strategy does not automatically result in change. There was a view that the links between strategy and action need to be clearer in the future.

Negative effects

3.28   As Table 3.3 showed, those who thought the National Islands Plan had had a negative effect were mainly individuals, with just one organisation sharing this view. This group of respondents repeatedly made the following two broad points:

- There had been no improvement to the quality of life of (most) islanders during the period of the plan. Respondents pointed to a lack of positive change (or a deterioration) in relation to depopulation, fuel poverty, digital connectivity, housing, availability of economic opportunities, educational attainment, health and social care services, environmental protection, and ferry services. Some suggested that island communities felt less empowered than they had been previously.

- The publication of the plan had raised expectations but had not delivered on them. There was a view that it had been largely ignored by some local authorities. Some respondents thought it had not contributed anything tangible to their island community. Others who saw a negative effect from the plan nevertheless were able to identify specific changes in their areas which they thought had been funded by the plan, but they did not think such changes were significant, substantial or widespread enough to attribute an overall positive effect to the plan.

3.29   Additionally, some respondents expressed frustration that island communities had received little benefit – in terms of fuel costs – from the expansion of windfarms in the islands. Others perceived an over-emphasis on tourism to the detriment of local residents.

3.30   However, one respondent in this group suggested that, while the situation in one group of islands in the west of Scotland had worsened over the past few years, this was not necessarily the fault of the National Islands Plan.

No effects

3.31   Table 3.3 showed that around half of organisations and more than half of individuals thought the National Islands Plan had had no effect. The views of these respondents are presented below. It should be noted that some of the organisations that perceived 'no effect' were national membership organisations. In most cases, these respondents reported that their members, living in island communities, had very little awareness of the plan.

3.32   Local authorities and other public bodies often commented that there were many ways in which their island communities had benefited from the National Islands Plan, but they suggested that it was unlikely that **local residents** were aware of the plan's purpose or would associate specific positive changes with the plan. Some in this group also suggested that local changes supported by the plan may have been delivered regardless.

3.33   This view was largely echoed by community organisations, groups and trusts and organisations in the 'other organisation types' category who perceived little significant progress in addressing the 'big ticket items' which affect islanders and island economies. One organisational respondent commented that it is difficult to determine the measures of success of the plan, since so many of its objectives will require investment over years to address.

3.34   There were several recurring points made by individuals:

- Some said they had been unaware of the plan and therefore did not know what, if any, effects it may have had.

- Others said no changes had occurred in relation to the challenges faced by island communities. These respondents highlighted the same issues raised by those who thought the plan had had a negative effect.

- Some said that the plan appeared to be good but, in their view, it had been widely ignored by public bodies that should have had a role in delivering it – and therefore it had not achieved its objectives.

3.35   Some respondents in this group were aware of funding provided under the plan for local projects, but they did not think the plan had had an effect on their own life. Other respondents expressed support for the Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) concept, but thought such assessments were not routinely done by local authorities – or were not done correctly – and therefore, policy decisions affecting island communities continued to be made from the 'top down' without input from local residents. This issue is discussed further in Chapter 5.

4 The content of the current plan (Q4, Q6 and Q7)

4.1   The consultation included three questions which asked for views on various aspects of the current National Islands Plan. The first was a general question, asking for views on the contents of the plan. The second and third questions asked for views on the number of strategic objectives and commitments (respectively) in the current plan.

Question 4: What are your views on the content of the current National Islands Plan? [Positive / Negative / None]

Please feel free to expand on your answer in the box below.

Question 6: There are 13 Strategic Objectives in the current National Islands Plan. What is your opinion on the number of strategic objectives? [Just right / Too many / Too few / No opinion]

Please feel free to expand on your answer in the box below.

Question 7: There are 134 commitments in the current National Islands Plan. What is your opinion on the number of commitments? [Just right / Too many / Too few / No opinion]

Please feel free to expand on your answer in the box below.

General views on the content of the current plan (Q4)

4.2   Question 4 asked respondents to indicate whether their views on the content of the current National Islands Plan were (i) positive, (ii) negative, or (iii) none.

4.3   Table 4.1 shows that, overall, responses to this question were mixed – with 37% saying they had positive views on the content of the plan, 36% saying they had negative views and 27% saying they had no views.

4.4   Organisations (84%) were much more likely than individuals (25%) to indicate positive views. A positive view of the content of the current plan was expressed by some organisations that had previously indicated relatively little awareness of it (i.e. they said they knew 'a little about it' or had 'heard of it but knew nothing of the contents' at Question 1 – see Chapter 3). Among individuals as a group, views were mixed; however, the largest proportion of individuals (43%) had negative views on the content of the plan.

Table 4.1: Q4 – What are your views on the content of the current National Islands Plan?

Respondent type	Positive		Negative		None		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Local authorities and public bodies	13	100%	0	0%	0	0%	13	100%
Community orgs, groups and trusts	5	71%	1	14%	1	14%	7	100%
Third sector orgs, charities and membership bodies	6	86%	1	14%	0	0%	7	100%
Other organisation types	2	50%	1	25%	1	25%	4	100%
Total organisations	**26**	**84%**	**3**	**10%**	**2**	**6%**	**31**	**100%**
Total individuals	32	25%	54	43%	40	32%	126	100%
Total, all respondents	**58**	**37%**	**57**	**36%**	**42**	**27%**	**157**	**100%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

4.5   Altogether, 131 respondents (37 organisations and 94 individuals) provided comments at Question 4.

4.6   It should be noted that:

- Some organisational respondents who selected 'positive' said they would have liked to choose **both** 'positive' **and** 'negative'. In addition, some who selected 'none' or did not answer the closed question said they did so because they were unable to select both 'positive' and 'negative'.

- It was very common for respondents who selected 'positive' (both organisations and individuals) to go on to express caveats, highlight concerns, or propose changes that they thought were needed in the next iteration of the National Islands Plan. These caveats, concerns and proposed changes overlapped substantially with the views of respondents who selected 'negative'. Respondents who selected 'negative' in response to this question did not generally identify any positive aspects of the plan.

4.7   For these reasons, the figures shown in Table 4.1 should be treated with caution. For the same reasons, the analysis presented here does not compare the views of those who selected 'positive' with those who selected 'negative'. Instead, it discusses what **all** respondents saw as the positive and negative aspects of the content of the current National Islands Plan.

4.8   Unless otherwise stated, the views discussed below were expressed by both organisations and individuals.

Positive aspects

4.9   Respondents who had positive views of the contents of the plan described it as 'comprehensive', 'ambitious', 'effectively presented', and 'clear'. These respondents welcomed the plan, noting that it was informed by extensive consultation, and said that:

- Its aspirations are 'good', and its ambitions are 'admirable'.

- It has helped raise awareness of the islands and their unique circumstances both within the Scottish Government and within public agencies.

- It has articulated the key challenges and opportunities for island communities and indicates a commitment by government to addressing those challenges.

4.10   Some noted that the National Islands Plan had informed the development of certain specific local island plans.

4.11   Some respondents (mainly organisations) discussed specific objectives and / or commitments made by the plan which they saw as positive. For example, different organisations commented that the plan:

- Had raised awareness of the challenges faced by island communities in accessing opportunities to participate in and attend cultural and creative activities

- Reflects the priorities of women across island communities

- Recognises the importance of the Gaelic language to many island communities, and the importance of Gaelic-speaking communities to the survival and sustainability of Gaelic in Scotland.

4.12   Other respondents also said they welcomed: (i) the prominence given to nature, (ii) the plan's reference to aquaculture as a means for sustainable economic development, and (iii) the intended outcomes relating to sustainable transport and active travel.

Negative aspects

4.13   Respondents identified aspects of the contents of the National Islands Plan that they did not like or said they felt concerned about. These views were expressed irrespective of how respondents answered the closed part of Question 4.

4.14   Perceptions about the negative aspects of the content of the plan tended to focus on four main themes: (i) its length, style and accessibility, (ii) the need for a more localised / tailored approach, (iii) strategic objectives and commitments, and (iv) a lack of detail on how outcomes would be achieved and measured. Recurring points made in relation to each of these themes are summarised below.

Length, style and accessibility

4.15   Respondents said that:

- At over 70 pages long, the plan is too detailed and is not suitable for engaging with communities. It was suggested that (ii) a 'tighter' document was needed – perhaps

with explanatory notes provided in a separate document, or (ii) a shorter, more user-friendly version could be produced which could sit alongside the main plan.

- The plan would benefit from using simplified language and less jargon. The language used in the document does not reflect the way people in the islands communicate.

- The plan is too 'high-level' and 'strategic'; local people do not see it as relevant to them. While the plan does need to be directed at the Scottish Government and Scottish Ministers, it also needs to be able to speak to island communities, so that they know what it means for them and what they can do to help achieve the strategy.

The need for a more localised / tailored approach

4.16   The need for a more localised / island-specific approach was frequently raised. Respondents repeatedly said that:

- Where islands are concerned, one size does not fit all. The particular challenges they are facing – while similar – are not identical, and the solutions to those challenges need to be tailored to each island's circumstances. Individual islands need to be able to identify their own priorities, which could then be connected with national outcomes.

- The content of the plan was developed through a series of workshops on the islands. This was seen to be positive, but it then failed to involve local authorities in sifting through the many ideas generated to identify the best critical path for their localities.

The strategic objectives and commitments

4.17   Questions 6 and 7 focused specifically on the number of strategic objectives and commitments in the National islands Plan. However, several respondents also focused on aspects of the objectives and commitments in their responses to Question 4 – including how many there were. Various respondents commented that:

- The plan has too many objectives and commitments, which cannot all be delivered.

- The interdependence of the strategic objectives was not clear in the plan. This should be made clearer to avoid the risk of objectives becoming rigid 'silos' / 'strait jackets'.

- The objectives are 'vague' and 'process-oriented'. They need to be tangible and measurable.

Lack of detail on how outcomes would be achieved and measured

4.18   This issue of 'measurability' was a recurring theme in the comments at Question 4 (and elsewhere in the consultation responses). Respondents repeatedly said that the plan lacks detail about how its strategic objectives and commitments would be achieved. Respondents thought that:

- The plan is not clear about how its objectives and commitments will be implemented or funded, and how outcomes will be delivered. The plan also lacks an effective performance monitoring framework.

- Many of the interventions cited in the National Islands Plan annual reports as achievements of the plan would likely have been delivered by partner agencies (national and local) whether or not a National Islands Plan existed. There needs to be a more refined reporting regime so that the contributions of the National Islands Plan and those of other national and local agencies can be distinguished.

4.19   It was also relatively common for respondents who answered 'negative' at Question 4 to say that the plan had not delivered on its objectives or resulted in improvements. This type of comment does not relate specifically to the content of the plan – and has already been discussed previously in Chapter 3.

Views on the number of Strategic Objectives (Q6)

4.20   The current National Islands Plan contains 13 Strategic Objectives. (See Chapter 5 for details.) Question 6 asked respondents for their opinion on the number of strategic objectives.

4.21   Table 4.2 shows that, overall, there were mixed views on this question – around a quarter (26%) said the number of strategic objectives was just right, 40% said there were too many, and 29% had no opinion on the matter. Just 5% thought there were too few strategic objectives. This view was expressed only by individual respondents; none of the organisations thought there were too few objectives. Otherwise, the pattern of responses among organisations and individuals was similar, although organisations (33%) were somewhat more likely than individuals (25%) to say that the number of strategic objectives was just right.

4.22   Among organisations, community organisations, groups and trusts were more likely than other organisations to think that the number of strategic objectives was just right (4 out 8 said this), while organisations in the 'other organisation types' category were more likely to say that there were too many objectives (3 out of 4 said this).

Table 4.2: Q6 – What is your opinion on the number of strategic objectives?

Respondent type	Just right		Too many		Too few		No opinion		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Local authorities and public bodies	5	36%	6	43%	0	0%	3	21%	14	100%
Community orgs, groups and trusts	4	50%	3	38%	0	0%	1	13%	8	100%
Third sector orgs, charities and membership bodies	1	17%	1	17%	0	0%	4	67%	6	100%
Other organisation types	1	20%	3	60%	0	0%	1	20%	5	100%
Total organisations	**11**	**33%**	**13**	**39%**	**0**	**0%**	**9**	**27%**	**33**	**100%**
Total individuals	30	25%	49	40%	7	6%	36	30%	122	100%
Total, all respondents	**41**	**26%**	**62**	**40%**	**7**	**5%**	**45**	**29%**	**155**	**100%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

4.23   Altogether, 108 respondents (27 organisations and 81 individuals) commented at Question 6. The views expressed by respondents who selected each option are discussed below.

Number of strategic objectives is 'just right'

4.24   Respondents who thought the number of strategic objectives was just right generally said that all the objectives in the current National Islands Plan were still relevant and together addressed the key challenges facing island communities. The current list of objectives was seen by this group to represent a 'holistic approach' to achieving sustainability in Scotland's islands. One local authority also noted that the objectives broadly reflected the longstanding aims of public agencies involved in island life.

4.25   Some individuals commented that, while it is helpful to have strategic objectives, it is equally important to achieve them. There was a view that the current number of objectives were achievable. At the same time, there were also suggestions among this group that it may be helpful and appropriate to prioritise the objectives going forward, but there were differences in opinion about how to do this.

4.26   The views on the prioritisation of strategic objectives among those who thought the number of objectives was 'just right' largely reflected the views of those who thought there were 'too many' strategic objectives. Thus, the issue of prioritisation is discussed further below.

There are 'too many' strategic objectives

4.27   Respondents who thought there were too many strategic objectives suggested that the current number was detracting from the Scottish Government's capacity to deliver the National Islands Plan. This group recognised the importance of **all** the current objectives and acknowledged that the list had been arrived at through extensive consultation. However, they thought it would be preferable to focus on a smaller number of key / 'crucial' objectives – and deliver on them – before turning to other objectives. Moreover, it was suggested that having a smaller number of objectives (a subset of the current list) would make it easier to demonstrate progress in relation to each one.

4.28   Different respondents suggested that there should be a maximum of four, five or six strategic objectives. There was also a more general suggestion that the focus should be on issues for which change will not happen without the plan.

4.29   Those who wanted to see fewer strategic objectives often made suggestions about which of the current objectives should be retained and / or prioritised. Although, there was not always agreement about what the priorities should be, **housing** (Objective 4), **transport** (Objective 3), **sustainable economic development** (Objective 2 – some respondents suggested referring to 'enterprise and employment' or, simply, 'employment') and **digital connectivity** (Objective 6) were all mentioned frequently, both by organisations and individuals. In addition, **health, social care and wellbeing** (Objective 7) was widely seen by individuals as a key objective.

4.30   Other respondents thought some of the existing objectives could be 'nested' into grouped with others. For example, there was a suggestion that Objective 5 (fuel poverty) could be incorporated into Objective 4 (housing). Others thought certain objectives could be dropped altogether – for example, one respondent thought that 'population' (Objective 1) should not be seen as an **objective**, but rather an **indicator** (i.e. depopulation will be reversed if other objectives are addressed and achieved). There were also suggestions among this group that Objective 13 (implementation) should not be a strategic objective.

4.31   Finally, two additional recurring views were that: (i) the current objectives could be prioritised at a **local** (island) level, rather than within the plan itself; and (ii) the strategic objectives should reflect or be more closely aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

There are 'too few' strategic objectives

4.32   Just seven individuals thought the current plan had too few objectives. Of these, four offered comments, and only one provided an explanation of what additional objectives they thought were needed. However, two different respondents proposed additional objectives in their comments at Question 4, and these comments are included here.

4.33   Arguments in favour of additional objectives were made as follows:

- One individual highlighted the difficulties that many island communities have in accessing **water and wastewater services**, and the impact this has on the health and wellbeing of people, on the environment and on the development of communities. This respondent argued that access to safe and sufficient water and sanitation services is a precursor to improving housing, and therefore improving access to these services should be added as a separate strategic objective in any future National Islands Plan.

- One organisation and one individual thought that food and drink (and food security) were largely missing from the plan or given too little priority. These respondents suggested that food and drink should be included as a strategic objective in its own right or as a 'cross-cutting theme' relating to multiple objectives.

4.34   Additionally, one respondent suggested that there should be an objective to 'protect the environment and sea from windfarms'. However, this individual's comment was primarily an argument against the expansion of windfarms, rather than an argument in favour of additional objectives in the National Islands Plan.

'No opinion' on the number of strategic objectives

4.35   Respondents who said they had 'no opinion' on the number of objectives (and those who did not answer the closed question) made a range of comments.

4.36   Some organisations and individuals made general statements – saying the number of objectives was less important than (i) what the objectives were and (ii) ensuring they can be delivered. One local authority suggested that the number of strategic objectives should be 'proportionate' and reflect the needs of island communities and the plan's commitments.

4.37   Two organisations made similar comments to those above who thought there were 'too many' objectives. These respondents noted that several of the objectives were dependent on the delivery of others. They went on to highlight what they saw as key objectives (a subset of the current ones) or to suggest a 'clustering' or grouping of objectives. Both these organisations thought a smaller set of more focused objectives could be considered. One referred to the Irish Islands Action Plan, suggesting that the type of integrated approach used in this plan may be of relevance in Scotland.

Number of commitments (Q7)

4.38   The current National Islands Plan contains 134 commitments. Question 7 asked respondents for their opinion on the number of commitments.

4.39   Table 4.3 shows that, overall, more than half of respondents (55%) thought the current plan had too many commitments. Fewer than one in ten (8%) thought the number of commitments was just right, and 5% thought there were too few commitments. A third of respondents (33%) had no opinion on the matter.

4.40   Organisations (64%) were more likely than individuals (52%) to say there were too many commitments. A large majority of (i) local authorities and public bodies (8 out of 13), (ii) community organisations / groups (5 out of 6), and (iii) organisations in the 'other organisation type' category (4 out of 4) thought there were too many commitments in the current National Islands Plan. However, all the third sector, charities and membership bodies organisations that answered this question said they had no opinion on the matter.

4.41   Of the 7 respondents who thought there were too few commitments, all were individuals.

Table 4.3: Q7 – What is your opinion on the number of commitments?

	Just right		Too many		Too few		No opinion		Total	
Respondent type	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Local authorities and public bodies	2	15%	8	62%	0	0%	3	23%	13	100%
Community orgs, groups and trusts	0	0%	5	83%	0	0%	1	17%	6	100%
Third sector orgs, charities and membership bodies	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	100%	4	100%
Other organisation types	0	0%	5	100%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%
Total organisations	**2**	**7%**	**18**	**64%**	**0**	**0%**	**8**	**29%**	**28**	**100%**
Total individuals	10	8%	64	52%	7	6%	41	34%	122	100%
Total	**12**	**8%**	**82**	**55%**	**7**	**5%**	**49**	**33%**	**150**	**100%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

4.42   Altogether, 100 respondents (29 organisations and 71 individuals) provided comments at Question 7. The views expressed by respondents who selected each option are discussed below.

Number of commitments is 'just right'

4.43   Of the 12 respondents who indicated that the number of commitments was just right, four (two public bodies and two individuals) provided further comments. Each of these comments were distinct; the only common theme (in two of them) was the importance of monitoring progress in carrying out the commitments.

4.44   Local authorities and public bodies noted that the National Islands Plan needs to be comprehensive in its scope and each of its strategic objectives should be linked to appropriate commitments. However, they also thought it was important to resource, make progress on, and monitor the delivery of the commitments.

4.45   The individuals commented that:

- Information should be provided about how the commitments will be met.

- The current number of commitments is aspirational (which was seen as positive) but should be (or are likely to be) revised following (the current) consultation.

There are 'too many' commitments

4.46   More than half of respondents thought there were too many commitments in the current National Islands Plan. In general, this group thought it would be better to prioritise – and deliver on – fewer commitments.

4.47   While there was a view that some of the current commitments were 'vague' or 'too general', there was also a contrasting view that the current set of commitments was 'comprehensive', 'well thought out' and 'evidence-based'. However, the large number of commitments had raised expectations among island communities, and respondents questioned whether they all could be reasonably delivered, or even monitored, within the resources available. Several individuals suggested the current list represented a 'wish list' rather than a set of deliverable commitments.

4.48   The point was also made that some of the commitments were not relevant to all island communities. For example, the focus on Gaelic and crofting was not perceived as relevant to the Northern Isles.

4.49   Respondents often had very specific ideas about how the current list of commitments could be reduced. Some respondents argued that there should be no more than five key actions for each strategic objective. Two other public sector organisations noted that:

- Some commitments do not relate to specific outcomes – for example, they express an intention to create an action plan for outcomes that are still to be determined.

- Some commitments are statutory obligations that would happen anyway.

- Some commitments relate to national programmes or policy initiatives that were already underway when the plan was published and thus do not represent anything new or additional.

- Some commitments involve 'working with' other organisations or stakeholders, or they refer to work being carried out by other organisations. Again, it is not clear whether such commitments were bringing anything **additional** to this ongoing work.

4.50   These two organisations suggested that all of these kinds of commitments should be removed, thus leading to tighter focus on work that would not otherwise happen without the National Islands Plan. Other respondents echoed this view.

There are 'too few' commitments

4.51   Seven individuals indicated that they thought there were too few commitments in the current plan. Only four of these provided further comments, and only one expanded on their view that there were too few commitments, by suggesting that the current number of commitments was 'a start'.[2]

'No opinion' on the number of commitments

4.52   Respondents who said they had no opinion on the number of commitments (and those who did not answer the closed question) made a range of comments.

4.53   In general, individuals expressed the view that **delivering** on the commitments was more important than the **number** of commitments. These respondents wanted to see actions with measurable results. Organisations – and particularly the community organisations – often echoed this view.

4.54   Occasionally, organisations said that the current commitments remain relevant and reflect ambition. Some organisations that did not answer the tick-box question suggested that the number of commitments should simply be 'proportionate', 'informed by feedback from the consultation' and 'deliverable' within the context of the plan and the available resources.

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[2] One respondent simply wrote 'too many', suggesting that this individual may have ticked the box for 'too few' in error.

5 Assessment of the current plan (Q5, Q8 and Q9)

5.1   The consultation included three questions which asked respondents for their assessment of the progress made towards the current National Islands Plan strategic objectives, and for their views on what worked well and less well.

Question 5: In your opinion, has the current National Islands Plan made progress towards achieving its Strategic Objectives to address:

- Strategic Objective 1 – Population
- Strategic Objective 2 – Sustainable economic development
- Strategic Objective 3 – Transport
- Strategic Objective 4 – Housing
- Strategic Objective 5 – Fuel poverty
- Strategic Objective 6 – Digital
- Strategic Objective 7 – Health, social care and wellbeing
- Strategic Objective 8 – Environment and biodiversity
- Strategic Objective 9 – Climate change and energy
- Strategic Objective 10 – Empowered communities
- Strategic Objective 11 – Arts, culture and language
- Strategic Objective 12 – Education
- Strategic Objective 13 – Implementation

[No progress / Minimal progress / Satisfactory progress / Progress exceeding expectations]

Question 8: Overall, what do you think has worked well in the current National Islands Plan?

Question 9: Overall, what do you think could have worked better in the current National Islands Plan?

Views on progress towards strategic objectives (Q5)

5.2   Question 5 comprised 13 closed questions asking respondents for their views on the progress made towards each of the 13 strategic objectives set out in the National Islands Plan. Respondents were asked to say, in relation to each objective, whether they thought there had been 'no progress', 'minimal progress', 'satisfactory progress' or 'progress exceeding expectations'.

5.3   Table 5.1 shows that, in relation to 11 of the objectives, a majority of respondents (between 52% and 80% in each case) thought there had been **no** progress. The two exceptions were Strategic Objective 6 (Digital) and Strategic Objective 11 (Arts, Culture & Language) for which a majority of respondents thought **some** progress had been made.

5.4   Respondents were most likely to say that no progress had been made in relation to Objective 3 (Transport) and Objective 5 (Fuel Poverty). More than three-quarters of respondents thought no progress had been made towards these two objectives.

Table 5.1: Views on progress made towards specific Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objectives (SO)	No progress		Minimal progress		Satisfactory progress		Progress exceeding expectations		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
SO 1: Population	89	64%	46	33%	3	2%	1	1%	139	100%
SO 2: Sustainable Econ Development	74	53%	55	40%	10	7%	0	0%	139	100%
SO 3: Transport	115	80%	26	18%	1	1%	1	1%	143	100%
SO 4: Housing	81	58%	53	38%	5	4%	1	1%	140	100%
SO 5: Fuel Poverty	106	75%	31	22%	4	3%	0	0%	141	100%
SO 6: Digital	61	43%	52	37%	26	18%	2	1%	141	100%
SO 7: Health, Social Care, Wellbeing	78	56%	51	37%	9	6%	1	1%	139	100%
SO 8: Environment & Biodiversity	80	58%	40	29%	17	12%	1	1%	138	100%
SO 9: Climate Change & Energy	73	52%	53	38%	9	6%	5	4%	140	100%
SO 10: Empowered Communities	82	59%	41	29%	16	11%	1	1%	140	100%
SO 11: Arts, Culture & Language	59	43%	51	37%	25	18%	3	2%	138	100%
SO 12: Education	74	52%	52	37%	16	11%	0	0%	142	100%
SO 13: Implementation	76	54%	60	43%	4	3%	1	1%	141	100%

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

5.5   However, there were differences between organisations and individuals in the responses to these questions. Organisations were more likely than individuals to think that **some** progress (usually minimal or satisfactory) had been made in relation to all the objectives apart from Transport and Fuel Poverty. A majority of organisations, like individuals thought that no progress had been made towards these objectives. Organisations were most likely to say some form of progress had been made in relation to Objective 6 (Digital), Objective 8 (Environment and Biodiversity), and Objective 11 (Arts,

Culture and Language). That is, they were least likely to say that 'no progress' had been made. See Annex 3 for a detailed breakdown of the findings shown in Table 5.1, by respondent type.

5.6   Note there was a particularly low response rate among organisations in response to all 13 parts of this question. Between 18 and 21 of the 39 organisations answered each part of the question. Caution should therefore be used in interpreting the findings.

What worked well in the current plan? (Q8)

5.7   Question 8 was an open question with no preceding closed question which asked respondents what they thought had worked well in the current National Islands Plan.

5.8   There were four main themes in the responses. These related to: (i) the importance of the plan in raising the profile of Scotland's islands and providing a framework for planning, (ii) funding, support and collaboration provided under the plan, (iii) the level of consultation carried out in developing the plan, and (iv) monitoring and reporting. Each of these is briefly discussed below.

5.9   In addition to the four main themes, respondents also sometimes identified specific improvements which they thought had resulted from the plan. These are summarised below under the heading 'other views about what worked well'.

5.10   Note that there was a relatively common view among individual respondents that 'absolutely nothing' (or 'nothing whatsoever') had worked well. Respondents who expressed this view often said that they had not noticed any completed projects and could not point to any improvements in island life. In addition, a relatively small number of individuals commented that they were previously unaware of the plan but had not noticed any positive impacts that they would attribute to it.

Raising the profile of island communities and providing a framework for planning

5.11   The most common theme in respondents' comments at Question 8 was that the National Islands Plan had raised the profile of Scotland's islands and provided a 'much-needed' focus on the challenges and priorities of island communities. It also demonstrated a commitment by the Scottish Government to address those challenges and priorities. This view was expressed both by organisations and individuals, and among all types of organisations.

5.12   Respondents said that raising the profile of Scotland's islands had led to greater attention on the needs of island communities in a number of policy areas including, for example, in relation to the National Planning Framework 4 and the development of Scotland's Third Land Use Strategy.[3]

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[3] See, in particular, page 35 of the Land Use Strategy.

5.13   Respondents also said that, in setting its strategic objectives and commitments, the National Islands Plan had provided a framework for action, enabling resources to be targeted in a way that is appropriate and deliverable in an island context.

Funding, support and collaboration

5.14   A second common theme – usually raised by organisational respondents – was that the targeted funding provided through the Islands Programme (including the Islands Infrastructure Fund, the Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund, and the Islands Community Fund) had been well received and had contributed to a range of local investments. Some pointed out that their local communities had been involved in deciding how the funding would be used.

5.15   Respondents also highlighted the support that had been available from the Scottish Government Islands Team. Some said members of the Islands Team had been helpful and approachable, and demonstrated a commitment to engaging with island communities and their issues. There was a view among respondents that the positive relationships they had formed with members of the Islands Team had been valuable in developing a mutual understanding of aspirations, plans and constraints. Some said that having a lead officer within the team for specific island groups had been particularly helpful in ensuring good communication and an understanding of local issues.

Consultation

5.16   Some respondents – both organisations and individuals – thought the consultation process which had informed the development of the National Islands Plan was positive. This group appreciated the face-to-face meetings that took place with islanders during its drafting, implementation, and review. Some thought the Islands Team had 'listened' and understood that talking to islanders was the key to making island communities more sustainable. Some organisations said this level of consultation had resulted in an 'evidence-based' plan.

Monitoring and reporting

5.17   Some respondents – mainly local authorities or other public bodies – described the National Islands Plan annual reports as 'comprehensive'. Others noted that they welcomed the yearly publication of these reports which 'clearly show the huge amount of progress that has been delivered during the period'. There were, however, also suggestions for improving the annual reports. These will be discussed together with other comments made at Question 9 (on what could have worked better).

5.18   Respondents also highlighted the importance of the National Islands Plan Survey which allowed findings from individual islands in each island group to be shown separately. Respondents welcomed the commitment to repeat the survey every two years and said this would allow progress over time to be tracked.

Other views about what worked well

5.19   Individuals – and, less often, organisations – also identified specific improvements in their area which they thought had resulted from the National Islands Plan. Most commonly,

individual respondents highlighted improvements in local connectivity, although disappointment was also expressed that fast broadband was still not universal in island communities. Some also highlighted local improvements in housing and future plans in relation to the construction of social housing. Improvements to local bus services (in one area) and the creation of a mental healthcare hub (in another) were also noted, together with positive changes in relation to language and culture (Gaelic in particular).

5.20   Some organisations highlighted specific projects that had been funded during the period of the plan, including projects in Arran and Cumbrae, work on climate change and Net Zero, and progress in relation to renewable energy.

What could have worked better in the current plan? (Q9)

5.21   Question 9 was an open question with no preceding closed question which asked what could have worked better in the current National Islands Plan.

5.22   There were five main themes made in the comments at this question. These related to: (i) the objectives, commitments, and importance of implementation, (ii) the need to monitor progress and measure success, (iii) funding and funding mechanisms, (iv) the use of Island Communities Impact Assessments (ICIAs), and (v) collaboration, engagement and communication. Each of these is discussed below.

5.23   It was also common for both organisations and individuals to highlight specific objectives which they saw as important, but which, in their view, had not been addressed in their island community (or addressed adequately). A summary of these views is provided below under the heading 'Other views about what could have worked better'.

Objectives and commitments and the importance of implementation

5.24   As discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to Questions 6 and 7, some respondents thought the National Islands Plan would have worked better with a smaller – or prioritised – set of objectives, and most thought it would have worked better with fewer, more focused commitments.

5.25   There was also a recurring view that the plan was not clear about delivery. There was agreement among respondents that the plan should have clearly set out the change that could be expected during the period of the plan, together with milestones. The point was made that the Implementation Route Map had not been effective because it had failed to prioritise the 134 commitments or set out a path to delivery. This was seen, in part, to be because many of the current commitments did not belong in the plan. (See Chapter 4, paragraphs 4.49 and 4.50 in particular.)

Monitoring and measuring success

5.26   Following on from the previous point, respondents thought that the plan lacked an effective performance management framework which meant it was not possible to demonstrate progress.

5.27   Respondents wanted to see SMART objectives – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timebound – with each commitment linked to a specific action with a clear

timeframe for delivery. They also suggested it would have been helpful if the plan had identified (i) those responsible for delivery, (ii) measures of success, (iii) appropriate resources, and (iv) links to relevant cross-cutting activities in other initiatives (e.g. the Islands Deal, National Infrastructure Investment Plan, etc.).

5.28   It was suggested that a suite of performance indicators could be assigned to plan deliverables in the future. Suggested indicators included population change, business start-ups, transport disruptions, housing provision, fuel poverty, digital infrastructure, etc. There was a view that the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) was not well suited to use in island communities and that developing a broader set of indicators, or an islands version of SIMD, would be more appropriate. One respondent proposed the use of a 'Minimum Income Standard', which would show what households need to spend to reach an acceptable standard of living. There was also a suggestion that the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework should include indicators and targets relating to the islands, based on the plan.

5.29   While respondents often said (at Question 8) that they valued the National Islands Plan's annual reports, they also suggested (at Question 9) that improvements were needed. Respondents wanted the focus of annual reporting to be more clearly on the real progress achieved in island communities, with some arguing that the publication of another strategy 'does not translate to progress on the ground'. Some also said that attributing the delivery of outcomes by third parties largely to the National Islands Plan can both undermine the credibility of the plan and understate the contributions of other agencies.

5.30   As noted in the discussion at Question 8, the National Islands Plan Survey was seen to be useful for monitoring parts of the Plan. However, at Question 9, respondents said it was not necessarily the entire solution to the need for improved monitoring.

Funding and funding mechanisms

5.31   Funding and funding mechanisms were significant recurring themes in the responses from organisations – and particularly responses from local authorities and other public bodies. In general, respondents wanted simplified, more coordinated funding processes, with less requirement for competitive bidding. They also wanted funding under the National Islands Plan to cover both capital **and** revenue costs. Some respondents highlighted a lack of clarity with regard to the budget available for delivery of the plan over its lifetime, or even on a year-to-year basis. The following points illustrate the type of views expressed:

- It was noted that some actions were implemented through the creation of new funds administered through intermediaries, rather than by providing resources directly to the organisations already working in and with island communities. Streamlining delivery and using existing mechanisms (effectively funded), rather than creating new ones would have a greater impact.

- There was a view from one local authority that improved outcomes could be achieved more effectively by simply allocating the £30m National Islands Plan delivery budget to island local authorities. A second local authority echoed this view, suggesting that the (current) competitive bidding process should be replaced by a guaranteed multi-

year grant allocation with longer lead in times. This type of approach, it was suggested, would offer greater certainty in funding necessary developments.

- While funding under the plan has been welcomed, additional capital funding – and island-specific revenue funding – would have further supported the delivery of the plan's priorities. Funding for island communities needs to reflect the 'premium' costs of living and doing business on the islands.

- There is a need to simplify the 'external funding landscape' linked to the National Islands Plan. Respondents thought there should be better coordination of the Islands Programme with other capital funds and planned initiatives for islands – both at a local authority level and at national level. Funding streams need to complement and enhance ongoing planned investment, and island authorities need to be able to prepare for – rather than react to – the funds available. This will ensure that the available funding provides greatest value for money.

- A fair and consistent methodology should be used to determine the allocation of funds to island communities.

The use of Island Communities Impact Assessments (ICIAs)

5.32   Organisations and individuals expressed concerns about the perceived lack of consistency and quality in the use of ICIAs. There was a view that these assessments are not always being undertaken when they should and / or that they were not undertaken in an appropriate manner. Some respondents suggested that this was because the ICIA process is not well understood. It was thought that (i) greater clarity was needed in relation to the standard that an ICIA should meet, and (ii) a review of the use of this mechanism was needed to ensure that it is fit for purpose. Respondents suggested that ICIAs should be undertaken in relation to any policy development or implementation affecting island communities, and that they should be carried out consistently and effectively, and all potential impacts on island communities should be considered fully, with feedback given on the resultant actions or amendments.

5.33   There were suggestions (and requests) that an accessible register of ICIAs should be established, as this would enable an evaluation of the efficacy of ICIAs from the perspective of the intended beneficiaries (i.e. island communities).

5.34   There was also an argument that there should be an ICIA requirement for businesses as well as statutory bodies. One respondent noted that people living in island communities continue to face disproportionate disadvantages in relation to the delivery and pricing of essential services (including energy, telecommunications, banking and deliveries) by mainland commercial providers. There was also a specific concern that the potential impacts on the Gaelic language are not routinely being considered in ICIA processes (as they should).

Collaboration, engagement and communication

5.35   Both organisations and individuals made a wide range of points on the topics of collaboration, engagement and communication with island communities.

5.36   While some organisational respondents explicitly stated that they had valued (and enjoyed) the level of engagement they had with the Scottish Government Islands Team, others expressed a desire for greater or improved engagement. The following points illustrate the types of comments made:

- The wide scope and membership of the National Islands Plan Delivery Group and the use of online platforms have made meetings difficult to manage and participate in. There was a suggestion that there should be a smaller group format to allow more direct and meaningful engagement. One respondent referred to the approach taken by the Scottish Government's Islands Team to the Islands Bond as an example of how more direct engagement could work. This same respondent also suggested that the Islands Strategic Group meetings worked well.

- Greater engagement needs to take place with health and social care service providers and their representative bodies in relation to the health and social care needs of island communities.

5.37   Some respondents (both organisations and individuals) specifically discussed the need to engage more – and more often – with local residents. It was noted that some members of island communities are aware that an islands plan existed but know little about what it aims to do. There was a view that better promotion of the plan was needed to increase engagement. Moreover, engagement should not end at the point of publication, but be ongoing as the plan is implemented.

5.38   A separate issue was also raised that, although local authorities with responsibility for island communities have engaged with the National Islands Plan, it is less clear how other public sector bodies have engaged with it. Respondents emphasised the need for health and social care, land and forestry, ferry-related companies and SEPA to take consideration of the plan when planning services / initiatives.

Other views about what could have worked better

5.39   Some individual respondents and, to a lesser extent organisations, focused on specific objectives and their view that little or no progress had been made towards these objectives.

5.40   In this regard, transport was a recurring theme. Respondents highlighted 'shamefully inadequate' public transport, poor ferry services, and lack of suitable walking and cycling paths. Specific concerns were voiced about the lack of attention given to replacement ferries for the Northern Isles, the unwillingness to consider the use of catamarans (which were reported to be more reliable and less expensive to run than conventional ferries), and the inequality that some island children face in having to pay to travel to school by ferry, whereas children elsewhere in Scotland can travel to school for free by bus.[4]

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[4] Note that **all** children and young people under 22 in Scotland are entitled to free bus travel. The point being made here is that children on the mainland are able to get to school by bus, which is free, whereas some island children have to travel by ferry to get to school, and they have to pay for this as there is no similar scheme for ferries. This was seen to be unfair and a source of inequality for island families.

6 The need for a new plan (Q10 and Q11)

6.1   The final two consultation questions focused on the need for a new National Islands Plan. Respondents were asked whether they thought a new plan was needed, and if so, what form it should take and what it should include.

Question 10: Do you think there should be a new plan for the Scottish Islands? [Yes / No / Don't know]

Please explain your reasons.

Question 11: What would you like to see in any future or revised National Islands Plan? [Refresh the current National Islands Plan but keep the same format / A whole new plan is needed / Something else]

Please feel free to expand on your answer in the box below.

Views on the need for a new National Islands Plan (Q10)

6.2   Question 10 asked respondents if they thought there should be a new plan for the Scottish Islands.

6.3   Table 6.1 shows that a large majority of respondents (73%) thought there should be a new plan, while 12% thought there should not, and 15% did not know.

6.4   The pattern of responses among organisations and individuals was very similar.

Table 6.1: Q10 – Do you think there should be a new plan for the Scottish islands?

	Yes		No		Don't know		Total	
Respondent type	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Local authorities and public bodies	10	71%	2	14%	2	14%	14	100%
Community orgs, groups and trusts	5	71%	1	14%	1	14%	7	100%
Third sector orgs, charities and membership bodies	5	71%	1	14%	1	14%	7	100%
Other organisation types	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%	4	100%
Total organisations	**24**	**75%**	**4**	**13%**	**4**	**13%**	**32**	**100%**
Total individuals	90	73%	15	12%	19	15%	124	100%
Total, all respondents	**114**	**73%**	**19**	**12%**	**23**	**15%**	**156**	**100%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

6.5   Altogether, 137 respondents (35 organisations and 102 individuals) provided comments at Question 10 to explain their answers. It was evident in the comments that respondents had interpreted this question – and what constituted 'a new plan' – in different

ways. Specifically, most respondents who answered 'no' or 'don't know' made comments that suggested they wanted an updated or revised plan, rather than an entirely new plan or no plan. Thus, most of those who answered 'don't know' were **not** uncertain about the need for a plan. Similarly, some who answered 'yes' also wanted an updated or revised plan, rather than an entirely new plan. Respondents' different interpretations of this question suggest that the figures shown in Table 6.1 should be treated with caution. The key message, however, is that most respondents wanted the National Islands Plan to continue in some form.

6.6   The discussion below sets out respondents' views about why a new / revised plan is needed – or, why it is **not** needed, in the case of those who explicitly said this.

6.7   Respondents also often discussed at Question 10 the changes they wanted to see in a revised plan. Many of these suggestions either repeated those made at Question 9 (which asked 'what could have worked better in the current plan'), or they overlapped with points made at Question 11 (which asked 'what should be included in any future or revised plan'). These points are not repeated here.

Why a new – or revised – plan is needed

6.8   Respondents gave a range of reasons to explain why they thought a new plan was needed. Note that some of these reasons were also given by respondents who answered 'no' or 'don't know' to the closed question at Question 10.

- The original intention for the plan was sound. The plan ensures that the needs and challenging circumstances of islands and island communities are considered and addressed. It is important not to lose the positive aspects of the current plan in any new / revised plan.

- There has been a lack of progress over the past five years in addressing the most pressing priorities of island communities – in some cases due to unforeseen events such as Brexit and the Covid pandemic. A new / revised plan will allow progress to be made (or keep momentum going).

- The need for a National Islands Plan is greater now than it was five years ago, and the coherence of the islands as a group is also greater. Thus, the intentions of any new / revised plan are more achievable now.

- The current plan has made a difference in nurturing cultural life on Scotland's islands. This should continue in any new / revised plan.

- The plan needs to be updated to reflect changes in the policy landscape as well as new opportunities, priorities and additional challenges which have arisen in the past five years. One respondent suggested that, in relation to transport and energy alone, a new / revised plan was needed.

6.9   Some respondents expressed support for the creation of an updated / revised plan, but also qualified their support saying, for example, that a new plan should **only** be developed if action is taken to progress the objectives, or **only** if measurement and audit processes are sharpened.

6.10   Occasionally individuals expressed the view that any revised plan(s) should be written and delivered by island residents. These respondents wanted the Scottish Government to empower and fund communities to deliver their own solutions.

Why a new – or revised plan – is NOT needed

6.11   All of the organisations and some of the individuals who answered 'no' at Question 10 wanted a **refreshed** (rather than an entirely new) National Islands Plan. Their comments are included at paragraphs 6.8 to 6.10 above.

6.12   However, a few individual respondents who answered 'no' said explicitly in their comments that they did not support a new (or revised or refreshed) National Islands Plan. The reasons given by these respondents mainly related to the view that the creation of a new plan would be 'a waste of time and energy'. This group thought no more resources should be spent on replacing it. Instead, they favoured:

- Spending the money on improving existing services / taking action, rather than developing new plans
- Letting local councils plan for the needs of their island communities.

What should be included in any future or revised plan (Q11)

6.13   Question 11 asked respondents what they would like to see in any future or revised National Islands Plan. The initial closed question asked respondents to indicate if the plan should be 'refreshed while keeping the same format', should be a 'whole new plan', or 'something else'.

6.14   Table 6.2 shows that respondents had mixed views on this question: a third (33%) thought the current plan should be refreshed with the current format retained; two-fifths (41%) thought a whole new plan was needed; and a quarter (26%) thought something else was needed.

6.15   However, there were differences between organisations and individuals. Half (51%) of organisations (18 out of 35) favoured a refresh of the current plan compared to around a quarter (27%) of individuals. By contrast, the largest proportion of individuals (44%) wished to see a whole new plan, compared to around a third (31%) of organisations – 11 out of 35.

6.16   Among organisations, the group most in favour of a refresh of the current plan was third sector organisations, charities, and membership bodies (5 out of 6). Around half of local authorities and public bodies (9 out of 17) also wanted a refresh, but the other half were divided in their views about whether a whole new plan – or something else – was needed.

Table 6.2: Q11 – What would you like to see in any future or revised National Islands Plan?

Respondent type	Refresh the current plan, but keep the same format		A whole new plan is needed		Something else		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Local authorities and public bodies	9	56%	5	31%	2	13%	16	100%
Community orgs, groups and trusts	3	38%	3	38%	2	25%	8	100%
Third sector orgs, charities and membership bodies	5	83%	1	17%	0	0%	6	100%
Other organisation types	1	20%	2	40%	2	40%	5	100%
Total organisations	**18**	**51%**	**11**	**31%**	**6**	**17%**	**35**	**100%**
Total individuals	31	27%	51	44%	33	29%	115	100%
Total, all respondents	**49**	**33%**	**62**	**41%**	**39**	**26%**	**150**	**100%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

6.17   Altogether, 122 respondents (37 organisations and 85 individuals) offered comments at Question 11. Comments from some respondents (particularly from organisations) were lengthy and detailed, setting out very specific proposed additions or changes to the current strategic objectives and commitments. It is not possible to fully reflect the contents of these responses in this report.[5] Instead, the focus here is on discussing recurring themes among those who advocated (i) a refresh of the current plan, (ii) a whole new plan, or (iii) something else. The views of those who did not answer the closed question, but who provided comments, have been incorporated into the sections below.

Views of those in favour of a refresh of the current plan

6.18   Respondents who supported a refresh of the existing plan gave two main reasons for their views. First, they thought 'the plan is good'; therefore, it should be reinforced, not replaced. Second, they suggested that producing a refreshed plan would be less resource-intensive and more cost-effective than drafting an entirely new plan. Respondents in this group thought the current consultation would provide an opportunity to check that the current plan's objectives were still relevant and continued to reflect the priorities of island communities. Some argued that a refreshed plan would allow for a greater focus on action / implementation in the next five years.

6.19   Some respondents in this group made specific suggestions about what **form** a refreshed plan should take. For example:

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[5] Copies of responses are available on the Scottish Government's Citizen Space website where the respondent has given consent for their response to be published.

- It should be in a **similar** but not necessary the **same** format as the current plan.

- Given the differences between islands in their priorities, consideration should be given to focusing on a few key objectives for each island or island group. This type of approach may result in greater benefits and generate unique solutions that could be replicated in other island communities.

- The plan should emphasise the interdependencies between strategic objectives. There was a suggestion that a more thematic (or cluster) approach to the strategic objectives might be helpful. Themes suggested by some respondents included Community Wealth Building, Net Zero, Just Transition, Local Living (i.e. 20-minute communities) and Sustainable Transport.

6.20   Some respondents who wanted a refresh of the current plan discussed **resourcing, governance and performance management** issues. For example, they thought:

- The plan needs to be suitably resourced at a national and local level. They wanted to see long-term, multi-year funding which, in their view, would create local opportunities, generate community wealth, build momentum, support change and deliver economies of scale, value for money and social return on investment.

- Any resource associated with the plan should be distributed according to need, with the islands most in need (based on agreed indicators) receiving the most funding.

- The plan needs to have a strong performance management framework, with quantitative measures applied. However, as noted in Chapter 5, the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) was not seen to be well suited to island communities. One respondent suggested the use of 'habitability indicators and associated methodologies' to inform the development of place-based plans and address the challenges of demography, migration, energy supply, economy, etc.

- The commitments (or actions) in the plan should be numbered (as the strategic objectives are) and the organisation responsible for delivery of each action should be clearly stated.

- There needs to be an improved, effective communication strategy, not only when the plan is published, but for ongoing engagement with communities. Respondents suggested that a future communication strategy should include using traditional communication methods (i.e. local newsletters and newspapers, leaflets, posters, etc.), recognising that not all island residents wish to or are able to access digital communications.

- The Scottish Government should make use of the skills available in island communities to draft the plan and support local people to deliver it.

6.21   Respondents who wished to see a refresh (or update) of the current plan made a wide range of very specific suggestions about what the plan should **include** and / or **prioritise**. The points listed below are intended to illustrate the kinds of suggestions made and are not comprehensive. For example:

- The plan should have a greater focus on empowering and providing support to community organisations, community trusts and cultural and creative organisations to carry out projects in their own communities.

- In relation to climate resilience, it was suggested that most islanders are unaware of emergency plans which may be in place to address particular eventualities. It was suggested that every island situation needs to be reviewed, assessed, mapped, and addressed as an integral aspect of the next National Islands Plan.

- The plan should include a commitment relating to the Orkney Island Games (to be held in 2025) and its impact / legacy.

- There should be greater recognition in the plan of the role of island-based higher education institutions in supporting research, innovation, teaching and learning across the strategic objectives.

- The plan should include a greater focus on road safety to encourage active travel.

6.22   Various respondents wanted to see the plan recognise the importance of or include specific actions in relation to topics such as salmon farming, affordable housing, biodiversity and biosecurity, the use of nature-based solutions to create socio-economic opportunities, cultural and heritage tourism, Scots as well as Gaelic, women, education, physical activity and public transport.

6.23   Respondents who advocated a refreshed National Islands Plan also thought the plan should consider and align with recent and upcoming policy changes and national initiatives. Examples of those mentioned related to:

- **Island infrastructure development** – National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), and areas of Crown Estate Scotland activities relating to energy and marine management
- **Scottish Languages (both Scots and Gaelic)** – Upcoming Scottish Languages Bill, National Gaelic Language Plan 2023–28, Report of the Short Life Working Group on Economic and Social Opportunities for Gaelic
- **Energy generation** – Energy and Just Transition Strategy, Scottish Government's Hydrogen Action Plan
- **Historic environment** – Historic environment Skills Investment Plan, and the new national strategy for Scotland's historic environment – Our Past, Our Future
- **Climate change** – Upcoming Climate Change Plan
- **Transport and active travel** – Transport Scotland's Islands Connectivity Plan, the National Walking Strategy, and the NPF4 20-minute neighbourhood principle
- **Physical activity** – Active Scotland Outcomes Framework and planning a legacy from the Orkney Islands Games in 2025.

6.24   While many respondents highlighted policies and strategies that the National Islands Plan should align with, there was also a view that steps needed to be taken to ensure that local decision-makers (mainly local authorities) take account of the National Islands Plan's objectives in the full range of their activities.

Views of those in favour of a whole new plan

6.25   Respondents who supported the creation of a whole new plan wanted to see a more focused plan with a smaller set of measurable, achievable commitments. Some suggested that the current plan was too 'unwieldy'. Others thought that circumstances have changed so significantly in the past five years that a new (rather than refreshed) plan was needed. However, these respondents had two different visions of what a new plan would look like.

6.26   One group (mainly comprising organisations, but also some individuals) thought the next iteration of the National Islands Plan should retain the existing strategic objectives, but be shorter, more succinct, and more focused, with a monitoring framework, proper costings, and a funding strategy. This, they said, will lead to better implementation and deliver the expected outcomes. The new plan should also take account of factors that were unforeseen in 2019 – such as the war in Ukraine, increased fuel and energy costs, and the wider cost of living crisis – and should incorporate any lessons learned from the Covid pandemic.

6.27   Respondents in this group said that the current objectives were still broadly relevant but there should be a greater emphasis on what Scottish Ministers will do to progress islanders' priorities. It was suggested that the number of commitments should be reduced significantly, retaining those that do not refer to the ongoing work of other public bodies. One respondent in this group suggested that the current 134 commitments should be retained for reference, as they document the many challenges faced by Scottish islands, but this number of commitments should not comprise the basis for delivery in a future plan.

6.28   The second group (mainly comprising individuals, but also some organisations) wanted to see more local or regional plans, rather than a single national plan. This group thought there could be some prioritisation of objectives such as transport and housing across all island groups but, beyond that, island communities should establish their own objectives and priorities.

6.29   This group thought local areas should have their own plans which linked to – and underpinned – the overarching national plan. Like the first group (discussed above), this group also wanted to see measurable, achievable objectives attached to any new plan. They thought this type of approach would ensure that the priorities and objectives of communities on different islands were identified and acted upon and that, as a result, outcomes would be easier to measure and deliver.

6.30   Funding and governance were key issues for respondents who wanted a whole new plan, with some providing detailed arguments for introducing change in the way projects are funded, delivered and monitored under the National Islands Plan.

6.31   Public sector bodies who supported the creation of a whole new plan wanted responsibility for delivery – and the delivery budget – to be assigned to local authorities and their partners. They argued that this type of approach would eliminate the significant time and resource spent by local authorities in preparing applications to the Islands Programme funding rounds and would create better conditions for local authorities to be able to commit to necessary capital investments. Several public sector respondents made reference to the Verity House Agreement and the principle 'local by default, national by agreement'. These

respondents thought that decisions about the funding of projects should be taken by those agencies that know the communities best. The point was also made that, if both local agencies and the Scottish Government Islands Team were claiming to be delivering outcomes, there was a risk of duplication.

6.32   One local authority proposed an alternative funding model based on locally developed investment plans, which would set out local priorities over the short to medium term. This model (described in detail in their response) was seen as a way of empowering, and demonstrating trust in, Scotland's island councils, removing bureaucracy, and using limited resources more effectively and efficiently.

6.33   This same local authority also highlighted an issue of 'fairness' in relation to the income received by the Scottish Government from renewable energy schemes around the islands. This respondent argued that this income should be shared in an equitable way with island communities – particularly at a time when island households have some of the highest energy bills in Scotland and are suffering severe fuel poverty. Reference was made to the 2014 paper [Empowering Scotland's Island Communities](#) which states the policy intention that 'local communities across our islands should be the primary beneficiaries from income extracted as rental and royalty payments on activity around their shores'.

Views in favour of 'something else'

6.34   As Table 6.2 above shows, individuals were more likely than organisations to advocate something other than a refreshed plan or a whole new plan. Although both groups often made similar comments, there was no clear consensus among them in terms of what 'something else' would look like. In particular:

- Some were in favour of reducing the plan to a minimal set of objectives (e.g. 'the first six objectives; just 'four or five objectives; just 'transport, housing and education', 'the big-ticket items only') and then delivering on those. This, it was suggested, would make the plan more achievable.

- Some suggested that a **national** plan should not be produced at all, but that the Scottish Government should work directly with island communities (run a 'community-driven process' or a 'grassroots-led process') to identify local needs and provide funding directly to them to deliver their own solutions. This, it was suggested, would ensure that local plans are informed by the people who will be affected.

- Some simply said that they wanted clear and measurable, achievable goals, or that any new plan needed 'teeth' in terms of being mandatory and having sanctions applied where it is ignored.

- There was also a view that the current plan appeared to be geared towards assisting the 'island authorities' because that is easier. Any new plan should consider the complexities of delivering for islands in local authorities which also have responsibility for mainland communities (i.e. Argyll & Bute, Highland, North Ayrshire), and whether any administrative changes may be needed in such situations.

6.35   This group frequently stated explicitly that there is a pressing need for 'delivery' and measurable outcomes.

7 Workshop views on governance, awareness and focus

7.1   During the consultation to review the National Islands Plan, the Scottish Government carried out 16 workshops involving 231 island residents and representatives of island communities. The workshops focused on three topics: Governance, Awareness and Focus. Participants in the workshops were invited to give their views on two questions for each topic.

Governance

Q1: How do you see yourself, as a member of an island community, having a stronger voice in the delivery of the National Islands Plan?

Q2: Are there any organisations that you think should have a greater role in the delivery of the National Islands Plan?

Awareness

Q1: How might the Scottish Government Islands Team better communicate our work to island communities?

Q2: Can you give some examples of island engagement by other organisations which you think have been successful?

Focus

Q1: Would you want to see prioritisation of the Strategic Objectives in the National Islands Plan?

Q2: If so, how would like to see them prioritised and why?

7.2   This section provides a high-level summary of the main themes arising in relation to each of the six workshop questions. This analysis is based on summary reports for each workshop produced by members of the Scottish Government Islands Team (SGIT). Note that, in some cases, points may have been made multiple times across different workshops while, in other cases, points were made just once.

7.3   Detailed points made at the workshops, collated by theme, are in Annex 4.

Governance

Giving members of island communities a stronger voice in delivery (Q1)

7.4   Workshop participants offered a wide range of views on how island communities could be given a stronger voice in the delivery of the National Islands Plan. They highlighted (i) current barriers to community involvement, and (ii) what could be done to improve community involvement in delivery.

7.5	Workshop participants saw four main barriers to members of island communities having a stronger voice in the delivery of the National Islands Plan. These were:

- **Lack of capacity:** Island residents can suffer from consultation fatigue. Not all islands have a strong voice, and this can create inequality when island communities are consulted.

- **People's perceptions:** People can feel their voices are heard, but not listened to. Consultation can feel 'tokenistic' because nothing changes as a result.

- **Lack of information:** People are not aware of opportunities to contribute to the delivery of the plan. They do not necessarily have knowledge of islands policies and may not understand the value of giving their views.

- **Lack of opportunity:** There are not enough opportunities for communities to become genuinely involved in the delivery of the National Islands Plan.

How to improve community involvement

7.6	Workshop participants offered numerous suggestions about how to improve community involvement in the delivery of the National Islands Plan. These suggestions were wide-ranging but were clustered around six main themes: (i) raising awareness and giving people more information, (ii) improving direct communication between SGIT and island communities, (iii) strengthening local democracy, (iv) enabling localised decision-making and delivery, (v) providing support and funding to build capacity for engagement, and (vi) working through existing community representative bodies or community service providers. Key points made in relation to each of these themes are summarised below.

- **Raise awareness and give people more information:** Workshop participants thought people in island communities need to be given information about the National Islands Plan more often and in ways that are accessible and relevant to them. The production of user-friendly, island-specific annual reports instead of (or in addition to) a single large annual report should be considered. Feedback loops should be created to share directly with people what changes have been made as a result of consultation.

- **Improve direct communication between SGIT and island communities:** It was suggested that members of SGIT should be based in the islands. This would not only make them more accessible to local communities, but also give them a greater understanding of the specific challenges local communities are facing. Participatory events were seen as useful mechanisms for engaging directly with island communities.

- **Strengthen local democracy:** It was suggested that one way of enhancing local democracy is to involve local people in setting priorities and making funding decisions. At the same time, democratic structures in communities need to be strengthened to make it possible to gather and 'collate' individual voices. There was concern that individual voices can sometimes obscure the collective community voice, and that efforts should be made to seek out quieter voices in local communities.

- **Enable localised decision-making and delivery:** Island communities will have a clearer understanding of the impact of the National Islands Plan if it is well-aligned with their local priorities. There should be more individual island plans (as there are in Cumbrae and Arran). The creation of individual island plans should feed into the overarching national plan. The Faroe Islands were seen as an example of what works well in terms of localised decision-making and delivery of island priorities.
- **Provide support and funding to build capacity for engagement:** It was suggested that a network of 'island champions' could be created, with a specific role of engaging with communities and feeding back to SGIT. These individuals could have responsibility for an island, or a theme within the National Islands Plan, and could be employed by local development trusts or local authorities.
- **Work through existing local representative groups / agencies:** Workshop participants suggested increasing and strengthening links with community councils, development trusts, community planning partnerships and local Third Sector Interfaces. The Scottish Islands Federation (SIF) and Community Land Scotland were both seen as having an important role in understanding and representing the views of island communities.

7.7   Other points, not related to any of the themes above were that: (i) a model of engagement involving representatives from all populated islands could be challenging to manage, and (ii) there is a need to involve younger people in the delivery of the National Islands Plan.

Organisations that should have a greater role in delivering the plan (Q2)

7.8   There were several recurring themes in the discussion about whether certain organisations should have a greater role in the delivery of the National Islands Plan. The views of workshop participants focused on the roles of (i) development trusts, (ii) local authorities and their community planning partners, (iii) community councils, (iv) the Scottish Islands Federation, (v) other local community forums or groups, (vi) other local third sector organisations, and (vii) private sector organisations. Each of these is discussed briefly.

- **Development trusts:** Workshop participants often said that development trusts and other community anchor organisations could (or should) have a greater role in delivering the National Islands Plan at a local level. However, participants cautioned against relying on unpaid volunteers which they saw as unsustainable.
- **Local authorities and their community planning partners:** Some workshop participants thought local authorities were in the best position to deliver positive outcomes for local communities. However, others (in areas where the local authority had responsibility for both mainland and island communities) thought the delivery role should not be limited to local authorities and said that their own local authority needed to focus more on the islands.
- **Community councils:** Some participants saw community councils as the best organisations to be involved because they are the 'direct representatives of the local communities'. However, not everyone agreed, with some thinking that the community

council model needed to be reviewed and properly resourced before community councils are given significant additional responsibility.

- **Scottish Islands Federation (SIF):** SIF was seen to be a helpful organisation, and SIF's housing group was seen as a positive force in the islands. Participants in one workshop thought SIF needed to engage with **all** community councils and development trusts to ensure a greater community role in delivering the plan. Participants in another workshop thought SIF should be given greater support and funding to enable it to grow and become more agile.

- **Other local community forums or groups:** Workshop participants saw 'grassroots partnerships' as key to securing the voice and participation of communities. There was also a preference for 'direct engagement' with communities, rather than engagement through organisations such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Futures Trust, or even local authorities.

- **Other local third sector organisations:** Workshop participants highlighted the potential for representatives of local social enterprises and local Third Sector Interfaces to have a greater role in local delivery of the National Islands Plan. It was also suggested that local churches could have a greater role in extending the reach of information-sharing and awareness-raising activities.

- **Private sector organisations (local and national):** Some participants thought there was a need to engage local businesses in delivery, as these organisations were seen to be the backbone of communities. Respondents specifically mentioned: (i) major employers and island industries (fishing, farming, etc.), (ii) utilities companies, (iii) communications companies, and (iv) local and regional press.

7.9   A more general point was also made that the organisations that should (or could) have a greater role in delivery might be different across the different islands. However, any organisation or individuals involved in supporting delivery of the plan would need to be properly funded / resourced. It is seen to be unsustainable to rely on volunteers to do this.

Awareness

How might SGIT better communicate their work to island communities? (Q1)

7.10   Workshop participants repeatedly said that few members of their local communities were aware of the National Islands Plan or SGIT. People think nothing is being done through the National Islands Plan because of a lack of communication. SGIT needs to think more about how to raise community awareness of the investments being made through the plan.

7.11   Participants made a wide range of specific suggestions about how SGIT could improve communications with island communities. Some of these were general in nature. For example, it was suggested that:

- The National Islands Plan could be divided into smaller, more accessible sections and written in plain English (no jargon).

- Summaries, short snippets, videos, animations, and infographics could be used more often to communicate with island communities.
- Communications should be tailored to each island. People are more likely to engage on local issues rather than national issues.
- Communication should be ongoing and two-way – consultation once every four years is not a good model.

7.12 Specific suggestions focused on: (i) direct face-to-face engagement, (ii) the use of print and broadcast media, (iii) digital engagement, (iv) disseminating information through community groups, and (v) establishing a communications team (or officer) within SGIT. Each of these is discussed briefly below.

- **Direct face-to-face engagement:** Workshop participants thought SGIT should go beyond meetings with local authorities to engage directly with island communities more often. Suggestions for how / where to engage with communities included: holding local engagement events, with adequate notice given to allow people to attend; attending scheduled community meetings; having a table / stall at local events such as agricultural shows; and using libraries, health centres, village halls and schools to meet local communities.

- **Print and broadcast media engagement:** It was noted that not everyone is able to engage through digital media. Thus, there were suggestions that SGIT should make use of community newsletters, local newspapers (print and online), radio stations, posters on local notice boards and in shop windows, and leaflets to households. SGIT could also produce (and distribute widely) a regular newsletter / bulletin, proving updates on projects funded under the National Islands Plan. Workshop participants thought that any projects funded under the plan should display the SGIT (or National Islands Plan) logo prominently.

- **Digital engagement:** Ideas for digital communications included creating a National Islands Plan (or SGIT) website and / or discussion forum; making more use of Facebook; and holding regular (online) meetings with island communities. However, it was noted that this type of engagement depends on people in island communities having good digital connectivity.

- **Dissemination of information through local organisations, community groups and forums:** Participants suggested that information could also be distributed through local authorities, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Islands Federation, community councils, development trusts, village hall committees, lunch clubs, youth groups, or other local forums.

- **Establishment of a communications team (or communications officer) within SGIT:** A suggestion made relatively frequently across multiple workshops was for SGIT to create a communications plan, and establish their own communications and marketing team, or simply hire a communications officer.

7.13 Finally, workshop respondents suggested things that should **not** be done if SGIT wants to improve communication with island communities. These included:

- NOT arranging meetings with island communities at short notice
- NOT using QR codes to communicate important information
- NOT using jargon and buzz words
- NOT making written communications too long and complex
- NOT relying solely on social media for communication.

Examples of successful island engagement by other organisations (Q2)

7.14 Workshop participants provided numerous examples of organisations which they thought were successful in engaging with island communities, together with details of what those organisations do (or did) well. Those mentioned most frequently were:

- **Highlands and Islands Enterprise:** This organisation was referred to by some participants as offering a model of good practice in engaging with communities. Participants highlighted two specific things that HIE do well: (i) they have local area officers who work directly with individuals and businesses in the local community, and (ii) they produce a good quality regular newsletter.

- **Local development trusts, community development companies and other community partnerships:** Some participants mentioned specific development trusts by name, including Colonsay Community Development Company and Point and Sandwick Trust. Others referred to work on developing local plans or tackling local concerns which was said to have been positive. Examples given by participants included the development of the Visit Arran local plan, community involvement in developments on the Isle of Eigg, work on the development and delivery of the Harris Plan and the community of Cumbrae's work to object to plans for a solar farm. Some of the things that workshop participants thought development trusts / community partnerships do well were: (i) engaging with their communities on a regular basis, (ii) working with communities to identify problems and develop their own solutions, (iii) sharing knowledge with other development trusts / community partnerships, and (iv) providing refreshments to encourage attendance at consultation events.

7.15 Workshop participants identified a wide range of other organisations or other types of engagement that they saw as positive. These are listed in Annex 3. In most cases, these were mentioned at just one workshop.

7.16 More generally, the positive aspects of good engagement by other organisations were seen to involve:

- Group sessions
- Community participation
- Accessibility and approachability
- Acting on what has been said.

7.17 By contrast, forms of engagement that were **not** seen in a positive light involved (i) a lack of direct contact with the community, (ii) a lack of feedback after consultation, and (iii) not acting on what has been said.

Focus

Views on the need for prioritisation of the Strategic Objectives in the National Islands Plan (Q1)

7.18   There was no definitive view across the workshops about whether the plan's current strategic objectives should be prioritised, although there was more of a consensus at some individual workshops. Broadly speaking, participants said **all** the strategic objectives were important and linked to each other, while ALSO often suggesting that it would be helpful to focus on a more limited set of objectives. Across most of the workshops, therefore, there were two main views: that some form of prioritisation might be acceptable ('while they are all important, some are more important') OR that all the current strategic objectives should be retained but 'grouped' or 'clustered' in some way. However, at other workshops, participants either did not support or did not suggest a prioritisation of objectives.

How should the strategic objectives be prioritised – and why? (Q2)

7.19   Across the workshops, there was a repeated view that priorities are likely to be different for every island and that, even within specific island groups, there may be different priorities. Therefore, each island should be able to identify their own priorities, rather than having a national prioritisation.

7.20   At the same time, discussions suggested that certain strategic objectives would be at the top of the list of priorities in most island communities. These were Transport (Objective 3), Housing (Objective 4) and Population (Objective 1). These three objectives were described as 'absolutely key' and 'critical for island existence'. In some islands, the situation in relation to each of these was said to have reached a 'crisis'.

7.21   Beyond these, there were differences in opinion about which of the other strategic objectives should be prioritised. Education (Objective 12), Sustainable Economic Development (Objective 2), Digital Connectivity (Objective 6), Health, Social Care and Wellbeing (Objective 7), Empowered Communities (Objective 10), Energy (part of Objective 9), and Fuel Poverty (Objective 5) were all mentioned as priorities at different workshops. The reasons given for prioritising these objectives are presented in Annex 3.

7.22   The remaining current strategic objectives – Environment and Biodiversity (Objective 8), Climate Change (part of Objective 9), Arts, Culture, and Language (Objective 11) and Implementation (Objective 13) were not proposed for prioritisation by any of the workshops.

7.23   In addition to discussion about existing objectives, two different workshops suggested agriculture, fishing and tourism should be explicitly included within the plan's strategic objectives.

7.24   Finally, the point was made that most of the strategic objectives involve expenditure. It was suggested that there should be more focus in the National Islands Plan on 'income generating' objectives.

Annex 1: Organisational respondents

The consultation received responses from 39 organisations or groups.

Local authority and other public bodies (16)

- Argyll and Bute Council
- Bórd na Gàidhlig
- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
- Creative Scotland
- Crown Estate Scotland
- The Highland Council
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise
- Historic Environment Scotland
- Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS)
- NatureScot
- North Ayrshire Council
- Orkney Islands Council
- The Orkney Partnership (Orkney's community planning partnership)
- Scottish Futures Trust
- Shetland Islands Council
- Sportscotland

Community groups, organisations and trusts (9)

- Arran Island Plan Steering Group
- Coll Community Council
- Community Land Outer Hebrides
- Galson Estate Trust
- Iona Community Council
- North Harris Community Council
- The Orkney Islands Conservation Trust
- South Uist Business Impact Group
- Attendees of the Cumbrae National Islands Plan workshop (collective response)

Third sector organisations, charities, and membership bodies (9)

- Homes for Scotland
- The National Trust for Scotland
- NFU Scotland
- Orkney Renewable Energy Forum
- Paths for All
- Salmon Scotland

- Scottish Islands Federation
- The Scottish Women's Convention
- Sustrans Scotland

Other organisation types (5)

- Auchrannie Resort
- National Union of Rail, Maritime & Transport Workers (RMT)
- RCN Scotland
- Robert Gordon University Orkney
- University of the Highlands and Islands

Annex 2: Question response rates

Respondent type	Organisations		Individuals		Total	
Question	**n**	**% of 39**	**n**	**% of 128**	**n**	**% of 167**
Q1 (closed): How much would you say you know about the current National Islands Plan?	31	79%	125	98%	156	93%
Q2 (closed): Has the current National Islands Plan affected your life in any way?	23	59%	126	98%	149	89%
Q2 (open): Please feel free to expand on your answer in the box below.	25	64%	86	67%	111	66%
Q3 (closed): Has the effect of the current National Islands Plan on your life been positive, negative or not at all?	24	62%	122	95%	146	87%
Q3 (open): Please feel free to expand on your answer in the box below.	25	64%	91	71%	116	69%
Q4 (closed): What are your views on the content of the current National Islands Plan?	28	72%	125	98%	153	92%
Q4 (open): Please feel free to expand on your answer in the box below.	37	95%	94	73%	131	78%
Q5 (all closed): In your opinion, has the current National Islands Plan made progress towards achieving its Strategic Objectives to address:						
• Strategic Objective 1: Population	18	46%	121	95%	139	83%
• Strategic Objective 2: Sustainable Economic Development	18	46%	121	95%	139	83%
• Strategic Objective 3: Transport	21	54%	122	95%	143	86%
• Strategic Objective 4: Housing	20	51%	120	94%	140	84%
• Strategic Objective 5: Fuel Poverty	20	51%	121	95%	141	84%
• Strategic Objective 6: Digital	19	49%	122	95%	141	84%
• Strategic Objective 7: Health, Social Care and Wellbeing	19	49%	120	94%	139	83%
• Strategic Objective 8: Environment and Biodiversity	18	46%	120	94%	138	83%

Respondent type	Organisations		Individuals		Total	
Question	**n**	**% of 39**	**n**	**% of 128**	**n**	**% of 167**
• Strategic Objective 9: Climate Change and Energy	19	49%	121	95%	140	84%
• Strategic Objective 10: Empowered Communities	19	49%	121	95%	140	84%
• Strategic Objective 11: Arts, Culture and Language	18	46%	120	94%	138	83%
• Strategic Objective 12: Education	19	49%	123	96%	142	85%
• Strategic Objective 13: Implementation	18	46%	123	96%	141	84%
Q6 (closed): There are 13 Strategic Objectives in the current National Islands Plan. What is your opinion on the number of strategic objectives?	33	85%	122	95%	155	93%
Q6 (open): Please feel free to expand on your answer in the box below.	27	69%	81	63%	108	65%
Q7 (closed): There are 134 commitments in the current National Islands Plan What is your opinion on the number of commitments?	28	72%	122	95%	150	90%
Q7 (open): Please feel free to expand on your answer in the box below.	29	74%	71	55%	100	60%
Q8 (open): Overall, what do you has think worked well in the current National Islands Plan?	32	82%	98	77%	130	78%
Q9 (open): Overall, what do you think could have worked better in the current National Islands Plan?	34	87%	108	84%	142	85%
Q10 (closed): Do you think there should be a new plan for the Scottish Islands?	32	82%	124	97%	156	93%
Q10 (open): Please explain your reasons.	35	90%	102	80%	137	82%
Q11 (closed): What would you like to see in any future or revised National Islands Plan?	35	90%	115	90%	150	90%
Q11 (open): Please feel free to expand on your answer in the box below.	37	95%	85	66%	122	73%

Annex 3: Progress made towards Strategic Objectives, by respondent type

The tables below provide a breakdown of the findings shown in Table 5.1, by respondent type (organisations and respondents).

Views on progress made towards Strategic Objectives 1 to 5, by respondent type

Strategic Objectives (SO) / Respondent type	No progress		Minimal progress		Satisfactory progress		Progress exceeding expectations		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
SO 1: Population										
Organisations	4	22%	13	72%	1	6%	0	0%	18	100%
Individuals	85	70%	33	27%	2	2%	1	1%	121	100%
Total	**89**	**64%**	**46**	**33%**	**3**	**2%**	**1**	**1%**	**139**	**100%**
SO 2: Sustainable Economic Development										
Organisations	4	22%	11	61%	3	17%	0	0%	18	100%
Individuals	70	58%	44	36%	7	6%	0	0%	121	100%
Total	**74**	**53%**	**55**	**40%**	**10**	**7%**	**0**	**0%**	**139**	**100%**
SO 3: Transport										
Organisations	13	62%	7	33%	0	0%	1	5%	21	100%
Individuals	102	84%	19	16%	1	1%	0	0%	122	100%
Total	**115**	**80%**	**26**	**18%**	**1**	**1%**	**1**	**1%**	**143**	**100%**
SO 4: Housing										
Organisations	6	30%	13	65%	1	5%	0	0%	20	100%
Individuals	75	63%	40	33%	4	3%	1	1%	120	100%
Total	**81**	**58%**	**53**	**38%**	**5**	**4%**	**1**	**1%**	**140**	**100%**
SO 5: Fuel Poverty										
Organisations	12	60%	7	35%	1	5%	0	0%	20	100%
Individuals	94	78%	24	20%	3	2%	0	0%	121	100%
Total	**106**	**75%**	**31**	**22%**	**4**	**3%**	**0**	**0%**	**141**	**100%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Views on progress made towards Strategic Objectives 6 to 10, by respondent type

Strategic Objectives (SO) / Respondent type	No progress		Minimal progress		Satisfactory progress		Progress exceeding expectations		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
SO 6: Digital										
Organisations	2	11%	11	58%	6	32%	0	0%	19	100%
Individuals	59	48%	41	34%	20	16%	2	2%	122	100%
Total	**61**	**43%**	**52**	**37%**	**26**	**18%**	**2**	**1%**	**141**	**100%**
SO 7: Health, Social Care & Wellbeing										
Organisations	4	21%	12	63%	3	16%	0	0%	19	100%
Individuals	74	62%	39	33%	6	5%	1	1%	120	100%
Total	**78**	**56%**	**51**	**37%**	**9**	**6%**	**1**	**1%**	**139**	**100%**
SO 8: Environment & Biodiversity										
Organisations	2	11%	8	44%	8	44%	0	0%	18	100%
Individuals	78	65%	32	27%	9	8%	1	1%	120	100%
Total	**80**	**58%**	**40**	**29%**	**17**	**12%**	**1**	**1%**	**138**	**100%**
SO 9: Climate Change & Energy										
Organisations	4	21%	10	53%	2	11%	3	16%	19	100%
Individuals	69	57%	43	36%	7	6%	2	2%	121	100%
Total	**73**	**52%**	**53**	**38%**	**9**	**6%**	**5**	**4%**	**140**	**100%**
SO 10: Empowered Communities										
Organisations	4	21%	10	53%	4	21%	1	5%	19	100%
Individuals	78	64%	31	26%	12	10%	0	0%	121	100%
Total	**82**	**59%**	**41**	**29%**	**16**	**11%**	**1**	**1%**	**140**	**100%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Views on progress made towards Strategic Objectives 11 to 13, by respondent type

Strategic Objectives (SO) / Respondent type	No progress		Minimal progress		Satisfactory progress		Progress exceeding expectations		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
SO 11: Arts, Culture & Language										
Organisations	1	6%	12	67%	4	22%	1	6%	18	100%
Individuals	58	48%	39	33%	21	18%	2	2%	120	100%
Total	**59**	**43%**	**51**	**37%**	**25**	**18%**	**3**	**2%**	**138**	**100%**
SO 12: Education										
Organisations	3	16%	13	68%	3	16%	0	0%	19	100%
Individuals	71	58%	39	32%	13	11%	0	0%	123	100%
Total	**74**	**52%**	**52**	**37%**	**16**	**11%**	**0**	**0%**	**142**	**100%**
SO 13: Implementation										
Organisations	4	22%	13	72%	1	6%	0	0%	18	100%
Individuals	72	59%	47	38%	3	2%	1	1%	123	100%
Total	**76**	**54%**	**60**	**43%**	**4**	**3%**	**1**	**1%**	**141**	**100%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Annex 4: Detailed points from workshops

In addition to the online (public) consultation, the Scottish Government carried out 16 workshops (13 in-person and 3 online). Workshop attendees were invited to give their views on six open questions covering three themes: (i) awareness, (ii) focus, and (iii) governance. The key findings from each workshop were summarised by Scottish Government officials, and an analysis of the summaries is presented in Chapter 7 of this report as part of the analysis of the consultation responses. This annex provides a collation of detailed points made in the summary reports, collated under each of the themes discussed in Chapter 7.

Governance

Giving members of island communities a stronger voice in delivery (Q1)

The question was: How do you see yourself, as a member of an island community, having a stronger voice in the delivery of the National Islands Plan?

Barriers to community involvement

- **Lack of capacity**
  - Island residents can suffer from consultation fatigue (or overload). Many who are active in their communities – including community councillors – are older volunteers. Asking these individuals to take on more work on a voluntary basis will result in increasing pressure on them and excludes younger people from involvement in delivery. Consultation is complex and time-consuming. It shouldn't be left to unpaid volunteers.
  - Community councils don't have resources to encourage, promote or participate in engagement activities. In addition, concerns were expressed about the extent to which some community councils truly represent the views of their communities.
  - Not all islands have a strong voice. This creates inequality in how individual islands are able to put their voice across.

- **People's perceptions**
  - Participants thought there was a lot of 'bureaucracy' associated with the National Islands Plan. This made them reluctant to engage with it.
  - There was a perception that the current approach to governance is 'top-down', not 'community-centric'.
  - People can feel their voices are heard, but not listened to. Consultation feels 'tokenistic' – nothing changes as a result.
  - People feel that policy- and decision-making happens remotely, and that those making policy and decisions are not familiar with island life.

- **Lack of information**
  - People don't know how they can feed into or contribute to the delivery of a **national** plan.

- o Islanders do not necessarily have knowledge of islands policies, or information about what the Scottish Government Islands Team does. Thus, they do not understand the value of becoming involved in the delivery of the plan.
- **Lack of opportunity**
  - o There are not enough opportunities for communities to become genuinely involved.

How to improve community involvement

- **Raise awareness and give people more information**
  - o Awareness of the National Islands Plan needs to be improved. Give individuals information in ways that are accessible and relevant to them, to enable them to make informed decisions.
  - o The plan can and should be closer to communities.
  - o Keep local communities informed about delivery of the plan and its funding. It is not always possible to know who is responsible for local investments / changes.
  - o Communities should know who represents them on the National Islands Plan Delivery Group. Information on the membership of this group should be widely publicised.
  - o Communities should know who exactly is responsible for delivery so they are able to 'hammer on the right door'.
  - o Information needs to be 'live'. There should be a National Islands Plan website to signpost, share progress, and provide options to subscribe to a mailing list / blog feed.
  - o Feedback loops should be created to share directly with people what was said and what change was made as a result.
  - o Island level reports should be produced, rather than (or in addition to) a large single annual report.

- **Improve direct communication between SGIT and island communities**
  - o Members of SGIT should be based in the islands. This would give them a greater understanding of the specific challenges faced by local communities.
  - o A National Islands Plan Network (similar to the Young Islands Network but for people over 25) should be established.
  - o Consider establishing a mechanism for island communities to alert SGIT about issues that concern them. A 'direct line' to SGIT would be welcome.
  - o SGIT should have a local contact list for islands, so that they can speak to identified individuals before decisions are taken.
  - o There should be more participatory events.

- **Strengthen local democracy**
  - o Democratic structures should be strengthened to make it possible to gather and 'collate' individual voices. There was concern that a focus on **individual** voices may obscure the collective community voice.

- o Ensure that local people are involved in priority-setting and funding decisions. Involve local communities in governance.
- o Give people a reason to engage. Greater devolution of decision-making and budgets will increase local accountability, and result in more local engagement.
- o There should be consultation with island communities before decisions are taken and announcements are made by Scottish Ministers.
- o There should be a more proactive approach to seeking out 'indigenous' or quieter voices.
- o There should be more visits to the islands by Scottish Ministers.

- **Enable localised decision-making and delivery**
  - o Localised approaches would be helpful. The Faroe Islands was given as an example of what works well.
  - o There needs to be better alignment between the plan and local priorities. It needs to be clearer to islanders what impact the plan will have on their community.
  - o Members of communities would find it easier to get involved in decision-making and delivery of **local** plans (rather than a **national** plan).
  - o Communities should have access to island-scale data. This would improve governance and give communities the ability to evidence their priorities and monitor progress and impact at a local level.
  - o There should be more individual island plans (as in Cumbrae and Arran). Individual island plans should feed into the overarching National Islands Plan.

- **Provide support / funding to build capacity and to enable people to engage.**
  - o Funding should be provided to allow a local individual (or individuals, where there are groups of islands) to act as a liaison between communities and SGIT. There was a recurring view that development officers in development trusts could take on this role. Alternatively, the liaison post could be based in a local authority (the example of North Ayrshire Council was mentioned).
  - o Create a network of paid 'island champions' (or liaison officers) whose role is to engage with communities and feed back to SGIT. This person could have responsibility for an island, or a theme within the plan.
  - o Ensure there is community representation on working groups and stakeholder groups (with the resources to support this).

- **Work through existing representative bodies or community-based service providers.**
  - o Connections and existing links with community councils, development trusts, community planning partnerships, and local Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) need to be increased and strengthened. At the same time, participants suggested that not all community councils were necessarily seen to be representative of the views of their wider communities.
  - o The Scottish Islands Federation (SIF) and Community Land Scotland were both seen to play an important role in understanding and representing island communities. SIF could potentially focus more on representing communities that

are harder to reach and which do not have a community anchor organisation in place.

Organisations that should have a greater role in delivering the plan (Q2)

The question was: Are there any organisations that you think should have a greater role in the delivery of the National Islands Plan?

- **Development trusts**

  o Development trusts and other community anchor organisations were frequently mentioned by workshop participants.

  o 'Development trusts are the obvious choice.' However, participants cautioned against relying on unpaid volunteers which they saw as unsustainable.

- **Local authorities and their community planning partners**

  o Some participants thought that local authorities would be in the best position to deliver positive outcomes for their local communities. Those who had this view thought local authorities should have a more prominent role in delivery.

  o Other participants thought the delivery role should not be limited to local authorities, and some argued that their own local authority (which had responsibility for both mainland and island communities) needed to focus more on the islands.

  o Concerns were voiced that elected councillors do not always disseminate relevant information to the community.

- **Community councils**

  o Some participants saw community councils as the best organisations to be involved because 'they are direct representatives of the local communities'.

  o Not all participants agreed with this view. There was a view that the community council model needed to be reviewed and properly resourced before community councils are given significant additional responsibility.

- **Scottish Islands Federation (SIF)**

  o SIF was seen to be a helpful organisation.

  o SIF's housing group was viewed as a positive force in the islands.

  o Participants in one workshop thought SIF needed to engage with **all** community councils and development trusts to ensure a greater community role.

  o Participants in another workshop thought SIF should be given greater support / funding to enable it grow and become more agile.

- **Other local community forums or groups**

  o 'Grassroots partnerships' were seen as the key to securing the voice of communities.

  o There was a preference for 'direct engagement' with communities, rather than engagement through organisations such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Futures Trust, or even local authorities.

- o The work of the Harris Forum (12 local member organisations, including all three local community councils) was highlighted as a positive model. The forum holds regular meetings, invites speakers, and provides members with opportunities to share information.

- **Other local third sector organisations**

  - o This would include: (i) local social enterprises, (ii) local TSIs, (iii) local churches (specifically, in relation to extending the reach of information sharing).

- **Private sector organisations (local and national)**

  - o Some participants thought there was a need to engage more with business as they were seen to be the backbone of communities.
  - o Suitable private sector organisations were seen to be: (i) major employers and island industries (fishing, farming, etc.), (ii) utilities companies, (iii) communications companies and (iv) local and regional press.

- **Other general points**

  - o The organisations that should have a greater role in delivery would be different across the islands. However, any organisation or individual involved in supporting delivery of the plan would need to be properly funded / resourced. It is unsustainable to rely on volunteers to do this.
  - o A model of engagement involving representatives from all 93 populated islands could be challenging to manage.
  - o There is a need to involve younger people in the delivery of the plan.

Awareness

Improving communication between SGIT and island communities (Q1)

The question was asked: How might SGIT better communicate our work to island communities?

General points

- People think nothing is being done through the National Islands Plan because of a lack of communication about what **is** being done. SGIT needs to think about how to better badge the investments made through the plan.
- The National Islands Plan needs to be broken down into easy-to-understand sections. Information needs to be accessible. Use plain English.
- Make use of summaries, short snippets, videos, animations, and infographics. Scottish Government consultations are not always accessible or easy to understand.
- Communications need to be tailored to each island. People are more likely to engage with local, rather than national issues.
- Communication needs to be ongoing. Consultation once every four years is not a good model.

- Communication needs to be two-way. Consultation is largely top down, where the topics of discussion are decided by the Scottish Government. There needs to be a feedback loop. Provide information about how people can contact SGIT if they need to.

Direct face-to-face engagement

- Go beyond meetings with local authorities and engage directly with communities and grassroots organisations. More island visits from SGIT would be welcome.
- Give adequate notice of events so that people can arrange to attend.
- Attend existing community group meetings, lunches or other events. Consultation events can be easily tagged on to these kinds of pre-existing meetings.
- Have a table / stall at local events such as agricultural shows.
- Engage with children and young people in schools and clubs. They are key to the future success of the plan.
- Use libraries, health centres, village halls, etc.
- Host surgeries like MPs / MSPs do, or local councillors could have a role in hosting public meetings.
- Base SGIT members in island communities, even for a short period of time (e.g. one month).
- Vary consultation times to meet the needs of islanders.
- Try to reach the people who don't live in the main population centres.

Print and broadcast media engagement

- Advertise in community newsletters, local newspapers (print and online), by radio, and through posters on local notice boards and in shop windows, and leaflets to households – not everyone is able to engage online or through social media.
- Ensure that any SGIT logo (or National Islands Plan logo) is prominently displayed in any projects funded by the plan.
- Produce a regular newsletter / bulletin covering the projects currently being worked on.

Digital engagement

- Create a National Islands Plan (or SGIT) website.
- Increase social media presence. Create a discussion forum. Use local Facebook pages.
- Provide follow-up communication for those who engaged with the National Islands Plan Review consultation. This could be in the form of an email message outlining collated contributions.
- Hold regular (online) meetings with island communities.
- Ensure there is excellent digital connectivity for all island communities. Poor connectivity is a barrier.

<u>Disseminate information through local organisations, community groups and forums</u>

- Disseminate information through local authorities, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, SIF, community councils, development trusts, village hall committees, lunch clubs, youth groups, etc. (Note that not every area has a community council.)
- Disseminate information through local forums.
- Engage with local [Democracy Matters](#).

<u>Establish a communications team (or communications officer) within SGIT</u>

- SGIT should have a communications plan and their own communications and marketing team (or communications officer).

<u>Other types of communication</u>

- All consultations in island communities should involve community engagement. This may also work for ICIAs and other impact assessments. There should be better engagement with local communities in relation to ICIAs.
- Provide small pots of funding directly to island communities, or route funding through local structures.

<u>What **NOT** to do when communicating with island communities</u>

- Do NOT arrange meetings with island communities at short notice.
- Do NOT use QR codes to communicate important information.
- Do NOT use jargon and buzz words.
- Do NOT make written communications too long and complex.
- Do NOT make sole use of social media.

Examples of successful island engagement by other organisations (Q2)

The question was asked: Can you give some examples of island engagement by other organisations which you think have been successful?

<u>Organisations or types of organisations mentioned multiple times</u>

- **Highlands and Islands Enterprise** – This organisation was held up by some participants as an example of some good practice in engaging with communities. They were reported to engage positively and effectively in the islands.
  - o HIE have local area officers who work directly with individuals and businesses in the local community.
  - o They produce a good regular newsletter.

- **Local development trusts, community development companies and other community partnerships** – Engaging people on local issues is better / easier than engaging them on national plans and strategies. Some organisations that were considered to carry out successful engagement were mentioned by name. These included Colonsay Community Development Company, and Point and Sandwick

Trust. In some cases, participants did not specifically name local community organisations, but said that work on developing local plans or tackling local concerns had been positive. Examples given by participants included the development of the Visit Arran local plan, community involvement in developments on the Isle of Eigg, work on the development and delivery of the Harris Plan (which involved reviewing a wide range of other local plans), and the community of Cumbrae coming together to object to plans for a solar farm. Participants highlighted the things that community organisations do well:

- o They engage with communities on a regular basis.
- o They involve the community in identifying the problem(s) and looking for solutions, and they bring people together to create the change.
- o They share knowledge with other development trusts.
- o They provide refreshments which encourages attendance.

<u>Other examples of successful island engagement by other organisations -- or types of successful engagement – mentioned once</u>

Across all the workshops, participants identified a large number of organisations or individuals who (in their view) have undertaken successful engagement with island communities OR who have demonstrated positive models of engagement in other contexts. In every case, these examples were mentioned once at one event:

- Ireland's recently published Islands Plan. This was suggested as a possible example to emulate in the next Scottish National Islands Plan.
- Funding bodies – Inspiring Scotland and the National Lottery Fund were both named.
- Local authorities in the 1990s – were much more engaged with local communities then.
- RSPB – engaged communities on rat eradication, had clear communication with lots of media and videos.
- Community learning exchanges / online learning exchanges. The example was given of the Scottish Island Federation Marine Litter project.
- The Crofting Commission – specific action resulted from their engagement.
- Hebnet – (internet service provider on the Isle of Eigg) – listened, understood the problem and delivered a solution.
- Emma Roddick (MSP) and Dental Van – came to the island, listened, and got positive communication back.
- Development of Uist Energy Plan – communications and engagement were 'good'.
- Engagement on Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan (Scottish Government) – there were repeated engagement and discussion sessions, with tangible evidence that messages were taken on board.
- Scottish Government agricultural sessions about how funding will progress from the CAP – highlighted as an excellent format.
- Historic Environment Scotland – they have a good balance between their activities elsewhere and in Orkney.

- Senior officer in North Ayrshire Council – helps people in Arran understand 'the landscape'.
- Development of 'Keeping the Promise' – a different context, but there was a focus on lived experience, community engagement, and involvement from independent parties. The review and development of the implementation plan were not rushed, and politics did not feature.
- Example of a good Island Communities Impact Assessment – Western Isles Council on the bus network.

Elements of good engagement

- DO use group sessions.
- DO use participative sessions. They ensure that people do not feel 'talked to'.
- DO act on what has been said.
- DO keep things approachable.

Organisations or aspects of engagement that were not seen positively

- Do NOT limit or avoid contact with the community.
- Do NOT undertake engagement and then give no feedback afterwards about what will be (or what has been) done.
- Do NOT forget to act on what has been said.
- Two organisations were singled out as examples of poor engagement: CalMac and Highlands and Islands Airports Limited. Participants said their approach to engagement has been 'arms-length' and that it has not delivered at an island level.

Focus

Views on the need for prioritisation of the Strategic Objectives in the National Islands Plan (Q1)

The question was asked: Would you want to see prioritisation of the Strategic Objectives in the National Islands Plan?

- There was no consensus on this question **across** workshops, but there appeared to be consensus **within** individual workshops.

- Some workshops thought **all** the strategic objectives were important and linked, but participants also said it would be helpful to focus on a more limited set of objectives.

- At least three workshops did not support, or did not suggest, a prioritisation of objectives.

- Most others thought some form of prioritisation would be acceptable.

- A recurring theme was that every island is different and every island should have (or develop) its own island plan.

How should the strategic objectives be prioritised – and why? (Q2)

Respondents were asked which strategic objectives they thought should be prioritised and **why**. Not all workshops provided that level of detail, but most did identify strategic objectives that they thought were 'key', 'critical' or 'essential'.

Reasons for prioritising (or not prioritising) specific strategic objectives

- **Transport**
  - This was described as 'critical' and 'absolutely key'.
  - Transport is one of the keys to ensuring the success of other objectives – if transport is fixed, everything else will fall into place – without ferries, everything else fails.
  - Islands are surrounded by water, so ferries are important. But transport provision had been getting worse.
  - There were concerns voiced about the cost, frequency and availability of ferries and air transport. Travel to mainland Scotland is unaffordable for most families and workers. Lifeline services are no longer lifeline.
  - Flights, ferries and cabins are impossible to book during the summer months due to tourist bookings.
  - Inner-isle ferries are at crisis point.
  - There are particular issues in some islands regarding transport timetables to support commuting, rather than tourism.
  - Bus timetables do not always connect to off-island services.
  - Boats should be based on the island they service rather than somewhere else, thus giving people more time on their nearest mainland.
  - The amount of freight taking up space on passenger ferries is an aggravating factor. The transport of freight is essential to local economies, but the infrastructure needs to be improved.
  - However, the focus should not just be on ferries, but also on aviation.

- **Housing**
  - This was described as 'essential' and 'critical' for island existence; the lack of housing was seen as a 'crisis'.
  - Housing is one of the keys to ensuring the success of other objectives: without the right mix of housing, keeping people on the islands is difficult. Housing and population growth are closely linked. You cannot have one without the other. If housing is fixed, everything else will fall into place.
  - Young people are leaving the islands because it's impossible for them to get accommodation locally.
  - **Affordable** housing is needed – local people cannot afford local houses.
  - Due to housing shortages, there is a shortage of people working in health and social care jobs. There is no medical provision at all on some islands.
  - Housing was reported to be the number one priority on Mull by the Mull workshop participants.

- Housing shortages were reported by several workshops. At the same time, there is ample space to build houses, but no funding from local authority or Scottish Government.
- This objective should also include home insulation – seen as a priority in the Western Isles.
- Participants would also like to see more of a focus on certain related issues, like people owning second homes.

- **Population**
  - Housing and population growth are closed linked – you cannot have one without the other.
  - Population relies on everything else.
  - Demographics in islands are unbalanced. There are too many older / retired people. Islands need more families and young people.
  - Covid exacerbated population decline.

- **Sustainable economic development**
  - Sustainable economic development should be a main priority.
  - Agriculture could be considered under this objective (or others).
  - Well-paying jobs provide the potential for building homes.
  - Sustainable economic development depends upon the quantity and quality of transport, housing and digital infrastructure.

- **Health, social care, and wellbeing**
  - Islands have large populations of retired people. Island demographics need to be considered more in any future National Islands Plan – especially in terms of planning health and social care services.
  - At the same time, there is a shortage of people working in health and social care services because of the lack of affordable housing.
  - Volunteers are being asked to do more and more because the services are not there.
  - There is no medical provision on some islands (Bressay was mentioned).

- **Fuel poverty**
  - Fuel poverty was seen to be a key issue in the Western Isles.

- **Empowered communities**
  - Arguably, empowering communities is the most important objective. If a community is sufficiently empowered (and, crucially, adequately resourced), they will be able to identify and resolve for themselves the issues affecting their community.
  - All objectives should be delivered through local empowerment.
  - The empowered communities objective should allow adequate prioritisation of localised issues, together with adequate financial support, to enable meaningful changes.

- **Digital**
  - o Improvements in digital infrastructure is key to keeping people on the islands. If you live in an area without full digital connectivity, you are at a disadvantage.
  - o Digital connectively is closely linked to transport – if digital connectivity could be improved, it might reduce the need to travel.
  - o The narrative in the 2022 National Islands Plan annual report suggests 5G is available on Flotta, but there is no 5G on the island, only intermittent 3G and 4G. Broadband and mobile phone suppliers are reluctant to connect to Flotta. The lack of digital connectivity makes it very difficult for working-aged people with children to live on the island.
  - o Poor internet connectivity is a huge issue on some islands, particularly in the summertime with a large influx of tourists.

- **Education**
  - o Better education leads to well-paying jobs and well-paying jobs provide the potential for building homes.
  - o Further education on some islands is being cut due to lack of funding. Young people go south to learn practical skills that are needed in the islands, but they then cannot return due to a lack of housing.
  - o There needs to be more focus on apprenticeships and education to keep younger people in island communities.
  - o There needs to be a tailored approach to island skills requirements.
  - o A lack of childcare and child minders is putting pressure on families.
  - o There are not currently enough young people in some island communities for the community to function properly. Education, childcare and young people moving to or remaining in communities should be prioritised. Mechanisms to encourage local retention of young people is key, as is anything that can support inward migration of young people.

- **Environment and biodiversity**
  - o The conservation of islands is very important; they are special places.
  - o Agriculture could be considered under this objective (or others).
  - o This objective could be amalgamated with the Climate Change and Energy objective.

- **Climate change and energy**
  - o Energy supply was described as 'critical' by the Skye workshop.
  - o Agriculture could be considered under this objective (or others).
  - o This objective could be amalgamated with Environment and Biodiversity objective.

- **Arts, language and culture**
    - o The current National Framework for arts is 'great'.[6] This should not be changed, and the Arts, Language and Culture objective therefore does not need to be considered in the National Islands Plan.
    - o The Arts, Language and Culture objective should include aspects of digital connectivity.

- **Suggested new objective: Agriculture, tourism and fishing**
    - o Tourism needs to be included in the plan. It has a massive impact on island communities – both positive and negative. And the benefits of tourism do not necessarily reach all island communities.
    - o A passenger levy on cruise passengers would be welcome and would link with the Sustainable Economic Development objective.
    - o Tourism should be an additional strategic objective. Despite tourist revenue being significant in some island communities, those communities often don't see any investment back into community infrastructure as a result.
    - o Some island communities do not want to be reliant on tourism and instead want to focus on encouraging a more diverse population with different skills / ages.

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[6] It is not clear which document is being referred to here.

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG