

Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee

**14th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6),
Wednesday, 4 May**

Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 – Islands plan annual report

Introduction

1. This paper seeks to inform members ahead of their consideration of the annual report required under the [Islands \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#).

Background

2. The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 was passed by the Parliament on 30 May 2018 and received Royal Assent on 6 July 2018. One of the purposes of the Act is to make provision for a national islands plan, the aim of which is “to set out the main objectives and strategy of the Scottish Ministers in relation to improving outcomes for island communities that result from, or are contributed to by, the carrying out of functions of a public nature” (section 3(2)).
3. Section 3(3) sets out that “improving outcomes for island communities” includes—
 - (a) increasing population levels,
 - (b) improving and promoting—
 - (i) sustainable economic development,
 - (ii) environmental wellbeing,
 - (iii) health and wellbeing, and
 - (iv) community empowerment,
 - (c) improving transport services,
 - (d) improving digital connectivity,
 - (e) reducing fuel poverty,
 - (f) ensuring effective management of the Scottish Crown Estate (that is, the property, rights and interests to which section 90B(5) of the Scotland Act 1998 applies),
 - (g) enhancing biosecurity (including protecting islands from the impact of invasive non-native species).
4. The [islands plan](#) was published on 27 December 2019. The plan sets out 13 strategic objectives—

1. To address population decline and ensure a healthy, balanced population profile;
 2. To improve and promote sustainable economic development;
 3. To improve transport services;
 4. To improve housing;
 5. To reduce levels of fuel poverty;
 6. To improve digital connectivity;
 7. To improve and promote health, social care and wellbeing;
 8. To improve and promote environmental wellbeing and deal with biosecurity;
 9. To contribute to climate change mitigation and adaption and promote clean, affordable and secure energy;
 10. To empower diverse communities and different places;
 11. To support arts, culture and language;
 12. To promote and improve education for all throughout life; and
 13. To support effective implementation of the national islands plan.
5. Section 5 provides that the Scottish Ministers must publish an annual report setting out the extent to which the outcomes have been improved and, where an outcome has not improved and what steps the Scottish Ministers are taking to address this. The [2021 annual plan](#) was published on 23 March 2022. A [SPICe blog post](#) on the annual report was published on 24 March 2022.
6. Section 6 requires the Scottish Ministers to review the islands plan before five years have passed since it was first published. The deadline for this review is 27 December 2024.
7. Section 28 requires the Scottish Ministers to publish a report on the operation of the Act before four years have passed since the day after the Act received Royal Assent. The deadline for this report is 7 July 2022. The report on the operation of the Act covers all the provisions of the Islands Act, whereas the annual report relates solely to the islands plan.

Previous committee consideration

8. The Committee took evidence on the islands plan and also held a roundtable discussion covering the key issues facing island communities at its [meeting on 6 October 2021](#).
9. The Committee considered how it wished to include the Islands Act in its work programme at its meeting on 27 October 2021. The Committee agreed to focus its budget scrutiny around the Scottish Government's spending commitments to support the implementation of the Islands Act and the islands plan. The Committee agreed to take evidence on the annual report and pick up any themes of interest, including the associated spending commitments, for any inquiry work; the conclusions and recommendations would make up the Committee's pre-budget letter, usually sent in late October.

10. It was intended this approach would give a tight focus to the Committee's budget scrutiny and, over the course of the session, provide a comprehensive overview of the policies, and associated funding, relating to the implementation of the Islands Act and islands plan.

11. The Committee has also discussed the possibility of looking at issues around the depopulation of rural Scotland. The Committee commissioned a SPICe briefing to give an overview of the work of previous committees on this issue, as well as related Scottish Government initiatives and strategies.

For decision

12. Members are invited to—

- Take evidence from the Cabinet Secretary and Scottish Government officials on the 2021 annual report (agenda item 2); and
- Discuss possible future scrutiny as part of the work programme discussion (agenda item 5).

**Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee clerks
April 2022**