



Island Policies



Supporting sustainable, permanent communities on Ireland's islands

The Irish Islands Federation is the representative body for the inhabited offshore islands of Ireland. Our aim is to support sustainable, permanent communities on the islands. We currently have 33 member islands, with populations from just one person to 824 and a total combined population of just under 2,900. Our islands are found along the coast from Rathlin in Co. Antrim, through Donegal, Sligo, Mayo, Galway and Cork.

Current Government policy is that it supports island communities in staying on the islands. That there is a Ministry with responsibility for the islands and a dedicated

Islands Section within that Ministry has undoubtedly contributed to improvements in access and the provision of services for islanders.

There has been substantial investment in infrastructure on the islands over the last decade and this, alongside increased subsidisation of ferry and air passenger services and support for health and other essential services, has improved the quality of life for islanders. Under the Islands Sub-Programme of the National Development Plan 2007-2013, the current government has committed €126m for continued development to sustain island communities.

'Cead' Day in Inis Meáin © Nutan

Supporting islanders to continue to live on the islands requires investment from the government and local authorities and also island specific policies which take into account the particular challenges of island living. We set out here our proposals in eleven major policy areas which fundamentally impact on the quality of life of islanders and on the long term viability of island communities. Implementing these policies will require co-operation between islanders and local and statutory agencies and a flexible and imaginative approach to addressing the needs of small island communities. Our experience has been that a

partnership approach, where islanders are centrally involved in policy and project development has produced workable and sustainable solutions.

If you would like further information about our policies and our work, or indeed about the islands we represent, visit our website at www.oileain.ie, call us on 099 75096 or email us at eolas@oileain.ie.

Comhdháil's work is supported by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.



An Roinn Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta
Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs



Access and Transport Policy

Access is perhaps the most fundamental issue of concern to those living on islands – it impacts on every aspect of life. In health and welfare, education, employment, social and family life and in business, access is the lifeline of the islands. Affordable, frequent, safe transport services, including both sea and air transport and safe piers and airstrips are vital to island communities – they are links to the mainland without which islanders could not survive. The viability of island communities will increasingly depend on their having access to the best communications technology and services.



- Essential access infrastructure (piers, airstrips and helipads) must be provided on the islands and this infrastructure must be maintained in good and safe conditions.
- In awarding contracts to passenger ferry/air transport providers, priority should be given to servicing the developmental needs of the islanders, rather than the company tendering the lowest price. These needs include access to employment and education and to essential services.
- Given the disparity between islands in terms of population, demographics, distance to the mainland and difficulty of sea-crossings, the frequency of services must address the needs of particular islands. Schedules should facilitate employment and access to other services and opportunities.

- Passenger fares for islanders need to be kept low in order that they not become a barrier to accessing services and availing of employment and other economic opportunities.
- Freight charges to the islands should be subsidised and kept to a minimum so that islanders face no higher costs than their counterparts on the mainland in bringing goods and materials home.
- Freight charges must be standardized across the islands with a fixed list of prices.
- Provision must be made for transport in the case of emergencies. (Helicopter pads and helicopter services.)
- Community transport must be supported on the islands, with regular services being provided for those without their own transport.
- Parking facilities, toilets and shelter must be provided at piers on the mainland which serve the islands. A certain number of parking spaces must be reserved for exclusive use by islanders.
- Management plans for piers must be developed and implemented, in consultation with local communities.
- Affordable, reliable and fast broadband access is needed to support enterprise, health, education and social initiatives on the islands and should be provided as a matter of urgency. All islanders should also be supported in learning essential ICT skills. Public internet access must be provided at low cost in a public space on the islands (in libraries and/or education centres).
- Video conferencing equipment should be provided in a centre on the island accessible to the public (community centres, libraries, education centres, meeting rooms) so that it can be used for remote meetings, health consultations and education.



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Agricultural Policy

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Many islanders of necessity rely on a number of part-time and/or seasonal jobs in order to sustain their livelihood. Unlike their colleagues on the mainland, island farmers have few opportunities to take up alternative forms of employment. Farming also costs more on the islands: VAT is effectively paid twice, as it is levied on goods at the point of purchase and also on the freight coming into the island; there is also the added cost of taking animals to markets, including sometimes having to house them overnight on the mainland; the cost of veterinary care is also considerably higher.



Driving cattle on Dursley Island © Nutan

The draft National Rural Development Plan (NRDP) and indeed EU directives on the environment and rural development recognise the importance of farming, not only in sustaining rural populations but also in taking care of the environment and ensuring biodiversity. Farmers are crucial to maintaining the landscape on the islands. Where farming ceased in islands in Scotland and France, the land soon returned to scrub and brush.

Island farmers should be supported so that they can, where they choose, continue to work and take care of the land. Those who wish to diversify into new crops and/or other land based activities should also be supported.

- We recommend the inclusion of a fourth category under the Less Favoured Areas scheme – **Land on Offshore Islands** (not permanently connected by a bridge or causeway to the mainland), where compensation would be paid a higher rate than the highest paid at present. EU directives and designations on farming will remain in place until 2010, by which stage the Irish government should designate the proposed new category.

- Payments to farmers under the REPS scheme should be increased to 25% in recognition of the fact that farming on the islands is more costly. The Single Farm Payment should also be increased by 50% for island farmers. The Farm Investment Scheme should be increased by 35% to allow for the higher costs of bringing in building materials and carrying out building work on the islands.

- Island farmers should be supported and encouraged to take part in REPS. Where farmers have difficulty in getting planners to draw up REPS plans for them, they should be facilitated, perhaps by the local co-op or development company employing a planner to draw up an island wide plan, and/or producing plans for a number of farmers.

- Islanders should be supported and encouraged to produce organic agricultural products.

- Islanders should be encouraged and supported in getting involved in Landscaping and other preservation projects.

- Islanders should be encouraged and supported in getting involved in agri-tourism.

- Islanders should be encouraged and supported in producing crops and other products with the potential of being used as fuels.

- Island farmers should come together regularly, at least twice a year to discuss issues of concern and so that they can lobby with one voice.

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Childcare Policy

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Access to childcare is a prerequisite for the full development of island communities as it underpins economic and social development. Enabling parents to work supports access to enterprise and employment, decreases inequality between men and women, increases the lone parent employment rate and contributes to the lessening of child poverty. Island populations and demographics often do not provide the critical mass looked for by funding agencies when assessing applications. Similarly, the number of potential users of childcare services on islands will often not warrant the development of separate, purpose built childcare centres.

The provision of childcare on the islands presents particular challenges which require innovative and flexible responses from funding agencies and service providers.



Little Angels Creche in Clare Island

- Favourable consideration should be given to projects which integrate services for children with other community services, such as those for the elderly, youth etc. Capital funding to be provided for the development of high quality, purpose built centres which support a range of services, including childcare services.

- Staffing grants to be provided long-term for these facilities.

- All childcare staff must be properly trained.

- Supports should be provided to childminders in the home.

- Supports should be available to parents who want to stay at home with their children.

- All childcare services on the islands, including childminding and out of school provision must be subsidised to ensure they are affordable to all parents and meet national quality standards.

- On the Gaeltacht Islands, all community childcare services to be delivered through the medium of Irish. Childcare providers to be supported with adequate training and resources to do this.

- Childcare provision to be part of island development plans.



New Playground in Inis Oírr

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Education Policy

Island schools are subject to all the disadvantages of small, isolated rural schools. The effects of school closure, or of limited subject choice has however far more devastating effects on island communities. Children are the life blood and the future of any community. If schools close or if children have to leave the island to go to school, their families may follow and the island population will fall. The provision of education on islands therefore requires an innovative and flexible approach.

Early Education

- All island children to have access to pre-school education for at least one year prior to entering mainstream education.
- The Department of Education to have island specific policies for the allocation of primary school teachers. All schools should have a minimum of two full-time teachers or one teacher and one other full time classroom assistant.
- The criteria for the allocation of special needs teachers should be amended in the case of island schools to ensure that island children with special needs are not disadvantaged.
- Educational psychologists and speech therapists fluent in the Irish language must be made available on the Gaeltacht islands.



Clare Island National School

Secondary School Education

- Every island child should be able to avail of secondary education while still living on the island.

- The Department of Education should have island specific policies in terms of the allocation of teachers and their ratio to students in island schools. Students expect a broad range of subject choices and where island schools cannot offer these, they may lose students.

- Island schools need to be able to offer not just the mainstream arts and science subjects but also Art and Music and other more specialised subjects. Creative and innovative means of delivering these subjects can be found if the Department shows flexibility and allocates funds where part-time or occasional teaching in these areas can be bought in by the school.

- The possibility of using telecommunications for the delivery of education should be explored, while taking into account the vital importance of face to face interaction between students and teachers and amongst students.

- In service and other training for teachers should be made available on the islands as it is simply not practicable for teachers to travel to the mainland for evening sessions.

- The system of providing scholarships to students to enable them to attend island schools in the Gaeltacht should be developed and expanded. These scholars increase the population of schools, making them more viable. They bring welcome newcomers to island schools, young people who will return to the island as adults and who may even decide to settle on the island in the future.

- If islands not in the Gaeltacht open secondary schools in the future, the possibility of providing scholarships to mainland students to enable them to attend these schools should be explored.

Life Long Education

- Islanders should be facilitated in participating in life long learning, whether on the island, via telecoms or the internet or through attendance at courses on the mainland.

Research

There is a dearth of information and research on the Irish islands. Scholarships for Masters and Doctoral Theses on islands, across the disciplines, should be funded.



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Enterprise and Employment Policy

In order to sustain permanent populations on the islands, island-based micro enterprises, the self-employed and potential entrepreneurs must be supported in creating and maintaining sustainable, attractive employment on the islands. The most sustainable forms of employment on the islands are likely to be small businesses with strong links to the island on which they are based and with a long term vested interest in the future of the island. The creation of attractive employment and enterprise opportunities on the islands will not in itself sustain the populations unless there are also in place adequate basic services.

- Those involved in fishing and farming and other traditional island occupations are to be supported in finding ways of sustaining these activities and/or diversifying into fields where they can use their skills, knowledge and other resources.



Dry Dock on Bere Island

- Those currently involved in enterprises on the islands to be given mentoring support.

- Islanders living on the non-Gaeltacht islands to be facilitated in applying for Enterprise Grants. The ceiling on grants to be increased to take into account the real costs of developing enterprises on islands.

- New attractive employment and enterprise opportunities, in particular opportunities for young people, women and third level graduates to be created on the islands.

- Government departments, local authorities and other statutory bodies to be encouraged to consider outsourcing some of their administrative and research work to the islands.

- Universities and colleges of further education to be encouraged to locate research and study centres on the islands.

- Islanders and non-islanders with donor/mentoring/capital/enterprise potential to be encouraged to donate/invest their resources in the islands.

- An electronic register for those interested in re-locating to the islands and a register for islands where details of employment/enterprise opportunities, housing etc. can be logged to be set up to facilitate relocation to and resettlement on the islands.

- Island co-ops/development companies to be supported in developing a profile of their island with information on services, demographics, skills etc. which would be useful for potential employers/employees/entrepreneurs.

- Island children and young people to be encouraged to envisage a future for themselves in eventually settling on the islands.

- The Minister with responsibility for the Islands should set up an advisory committee to advise on Enterprise and Employment matters on the islands. The committee to consist of islanders with proven entrepreneurial ability and experts on rural development/small business development/economics.



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Environmental Policy

Island environments are special, important to islanders who are the primary custodians of the land and inshore waters and to the many visitors for whom islands offer the opportunity to experience a particular form of rural, coastal life. Islanders' place in and interaction with their environment must be recognised in environmental policies. Islanders have worked the land and inshore waters for centuries and it is their traditional practices which have determined the extent to which bio-diversity has been maintained on the islands and in inshore waters.

- Sustainable, organic and traditional farming of the land and inshore waters should be encouraged and supported. Farmers should be encouraged and supported in participating in REPS. Farming should be carried out in a manner which ensures the greatest bio-diversity.

- Fisheries and aquaculture should be carried out to an extent which the local marine ecosystem can carry and support and in a manner which ensures the greatest bio-diversity.

- Tourism should be developed in a sustainable manner, with the natural and cultural environment being promoted and support being provided for the development of products and services which allow for sustainable use of natural marine and land resources.

- Waste management policies to be implemented on the islands based on the principles of reduce, recycle, reuse and proper and affordable disposal of waste.

- Planning policies for the built environment on the islands should encourage developments which take account of the unique features and communities of the islands.

- Islands are ideal locations for piloting renewable and sustainable energy projects and support must be given to individuals, community groups and businesses seeking to reduce their energy consumption and to use renewable energy sources.

- Waste prevention, water and energy conservation plans should be produced and implemented on the islands.

- Islanders should have access to sufficient, permanent fresh water supplies. Water management policies should be implemented to reduce waste. Innovative projects for increasing the availability of fresh water (including desalination projects) must be supported.

- Island communities should be supported by the relevant statutory agencies in developing and enhancing their outdoor public spaces.



Windmill in Inis Meáin



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Fire and Emergency Services Policy

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Islands, whether viewed as ‘ships at sea’ or exceptional instances of isolated, rural communities, present particular challenges when dealing with emergencies.

The primary challenge is to ensure that trained, properly equipped personnel are on the ground as soon as possible in order to deal with the emergency. Ideally, these personnel should be based on the island in order that they can be at the scene within the shortest possible time. Fire and other emergency services on the islands should be governed therefore by the principle of minimising the time it takes to respond to an emergency and providing training and appropriate equipment for island based responders.

Fire

- All island households to be provided with minimum of two smoke alarms, a fire extinguisher and fire blanket. Islanders to be reminded at least once a year (during Fire Safety Week) to check their alarms.



Fire Station, Árainn Mhór

- Where there are currently no fire services on the islands and where the population can support such a service, the local Fire Authority is to facilitate and support the provision of a service.

- The local Fire Authority to visit the island to establish the personnel and equipment needs of the island, including the location of fire hydrants or other sources of water.

- The Island Community to undertake to provide a list of potential voluntary Fire Officers. Would be volunteers to take into account the need to be available on the island for call out, to be available for regular training and to be sufficiently fit and strong to carry and operate the equipment.

- The local Fire Authority to recruit volunteer Fire Officers, according to their normal criteria, from the list supplied.

- Recruits to receive two weeks Retained Fire Fighter

Training and one week First Responder (First Aid) training and to be paid for this training. Volunteers to receive training on an ongoing basis thereafter.

- The local community to undertake to provide premises to store fire fighting equipment on a short-term basis, until such a time as the local Fire Authority has provided suitable premises on the islands. The local Fire Authority could source funds for the building/renovating of premises from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. County Council workers based on the island could help to build new premises where necessary.

- Local Fire Authorities to provide insurance cover for the local volunteer Fire Officers, on the same basis as it does for retained officers.

- The Local Fire Authorities to provide the necessary equipment, with the Islands Section of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs providing part-funding of the actual cost. The Department’s Small Works Programme could also be used to install hydrants where necessary.

Medical Emergencies

- Voluntary Fire Officers could be asked to act also as First Responders in medical emergencies, as they will have had the training.

- Equipment for dealing with medical emergencies/fatalities (first aid box, body bags, temporary coffins) to be obtained and stored at the local health centre.

- Medico Cork to extend its phone/radio consultation service to the islands in cases of medical emergencies.

- The Ambulance Service should offer training courses to island communities in basic life support, haemorrhage control, treatment for shock and basic burns care.

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Health & Social Services Policy

Access to essential services, including health services, is vital to the sustainability of island communities. Islanders must be afforded health services on a par with their counterparts on the mainland.

- The additional time and costs involved in visiting patients on the islands should be taken into account when allocating workloads and budgets for Public Health Nurses.
- The greater isolation of patients on islands, particularly elderly ones and the consequent need for more regular contact should be taken into account in allocating workloads for Public Health Nurses.
- The HSE should carry the cost of accommodating relief nurses on the islands.
- The additional cost for islanders of availing of particular services (eg Maternity Services) located in cities/towns should be reimbursed by the HSE.



New health centre being built on Inis Oírr

- Island women should be afforded greater choice in maternity care, including visits on the island from a midwife and a number of birth choices.
- Ancillary services, like chiropody should be provided on the islands at regular intervals according to the islanders' needs.

- Health services personnel working on and/or visiting the Gaeltacht islands should be fluent in the Irish language.

Social Services

- Island communities should be facilitated and supported in providing childcare, care for the elderly and for those with special needs, on the island.
- The HSE should work in conjunction with voluntary organisations to encourage the setting up and sustaining of active retirement groups and other activities for the elderly.



Áras Rónáin, old persons home in Árainn

- People with disabilities should be supported in staying on the island.
- The elderly should be enabled to continue to live on the island, with the necessary and appropriate supports, for as long as they wish.

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Housing and Planning Policy

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The availability of affordable, quality homes for permanent residents on the islands is essential to ensure the long term viability and sustainability of island communities. The difficulties faced by those looking to build their homes on an island are often compounded by planning regulations. If refused planning permission on a site on the mainland, one can look to alternative, nearby sites – this is not always the case on the islands and a refusal of planning permission may mean that the person leaves the island or does not settle there.

Housing and planning issues on the islands should be governed by the principle of facilitating islanders to remain on the island, while protecting the environment and preventing over development. Islanders must be consulted and their concerns incorporated into local authority planning policies.



Aerial View of Árainn (Inis Mór)

- County Councils should acknowledge the vulnerability of islands to depopulation and should, when making planning decisions, take account of whether or not the applicant is an islander building their own home. Planning permission for holiday homes on islands with permanent populations should not be given except in exceptional circumstances.

- The potential effect of developments on the use of the Irish language on the island must be taken into account when local county councils are making planning decisions.

- There should be an audit carried out to establish the number, type and condition of housing stock on the islands.

- The possibility of setting up a National Island Housing Association, whose remit would be to buy and build homes for permanent island residents, homes whose ownership would be kept within the community, should be investigated.

- The possibility of such an organisation buying the homes of older islanders, homes which are likely to fall derelict when they die, should also be investigated. (The islanders would of course be free to continue to live in their homes until they die but could benefit from the monies released.)

Such an organisation should prioritise the renovation of old and derelict buildings where appropriate and should use designs which maximise energy efficiency and which are in keeping with the unique features of the island.

- Grant aid should be provided for the renovation of old houses for use as homes.



Renovated Cottage in Inishbofin

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Marine Policy

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Island identity is inevitably bound up with the sea, with sea-faring and fishing and the income from fishing has been an important part of the economies of the islands. It is also an important part of living island heritage. Threats to fishing livelihoods impact particularly severely on island communities who have few other choices in terms of employment or income generation. The one fits all approach taken in EU and national fisheries legislation is inappropriate for small scale island fisheries.



Shooting pots, Inisturk © Nutan

- Investment in infrastructure on the islands should be directed not just at facilitating tourism but also at facilitating fisheries. Provision should be made for suitable piers and harbours, cold storage, ice and for basic processing like filleting.
- National and EU legislation governing fishing and fleet renewal/regeneration programmes should be tailored to take account of the vulnerability of island economies and communities and the realities of scale in island fisheries.
- The Irish government should argue at European level that there be greater flexibility in regulating island fisheries. Particular attention should be paid to the ban on carrying out added value activities on board vessels – eg filleting, the sale of fish directly from fishing vessels, and the ban on catching baitfish, which then have to be brought in from the mainland, adding to costs.
- The potential for island fisheries being awarded Organic, Label Rouge or other labels should be investigated in order that their products achieve higher price.
- There should be a voluntary buy-out scheme for inshore salmon fishing licences.

- Islanders should be centrally involved in the development of inshore management schemes.
- Investment should be made in the development of added value processing on the islands (eg curing, smoking and the production of dressed crab etc.). This investment is likely to be in small scale facilities, appropriate to the island economies and resources.
- Islanders use boats for many purposes – for access to and from the mainland and to make a living. Island fishing vessels, particularly small boats, should be allowed to have dual-licences for fishing and tourism, to facilitate islanders in taking advantage of the opportunities for seasonal work offered by both industries.
- Island co-operatives and development companies should be facilitated in buying fishing licences and/or polyvalent ‘tonnage’, which could then be leased out to island fishermen who wish to enter the industry or to expand their existing operations. Tonnage which comes up for sale should be restricted for sale on the island. Foreshore licences should, when not being used, be ‘banked’ for purchase or use by other islanders in the future.
- Island co-operatives and development companies should be facilitated in applying for licences for aquaculture.
- Island children should be educated about their marine environment.
- In the case of small islands, Integrated Coastal Zone Management is likely to involve the whole territory of the island. Islanders must be consulted when local County Councils are drawing up Integrated Coastal Zone Management plans.
- Island communities must be consulted when spatial planning policies for the seas are being drawn up.

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Waste Management Policy

Waste management on the islands should be governed by the principles of minimisation of waste, maximum recycling, the controlled disposal of waste, an end to dumping, burning and burying and the minimisation of waste left by visitors. Waste management on islands needs to be planned according to individual islands needs. It should also be remembered that the volume of waste increases significantly during the summer months, when visitors and those involved in sailing/boating contribute to the waste left on the islands.

- There should be an ongoing education programme on the islands on the importance and benefits of proper waste disposal and the dangers of improper waste disposal. The programme should target schools, households and those responsible for public buildings.

- All islands should actively pursue a policy of maximum recycling.

- The Department of Environment and Local Government (or the department with responsibility for the islands) should provide funding for waste management on islands where local Councils do not have sufficient funds, eg for the removal of cars and other large waste materials.

- Anti-dumping and anti-litter laws should be strictly enforced. County Councils to look at extending the brief of council workers employed on the islands so that their duties include the enforcement of anti-dumping laws.

- At points of entry to islands, notices should be erected asking visitors not to leave waste behind (except in waste bins) and encouraging them to take their waste home with them.

- Covered litter bins should be provided in public spaces on the islands, where appropriate, taking into account the fact that the provision of such bins may lead to dumping. Where bins are provided, they should be emptied regularly.

- Islanders should be encouraged to compost organic waste. The possibility of setting up community composting schemes, with the capacity to deal with waste from businesses and with a small biogas plant for energy production should be explored.

- The possibility of imposing a surcharge on ferry fares which would contribute to covering the cost of waste management on the islands should be investigated.

Household Waste

All islands should be provided with the following minimum service:

- Collection and removal of landfill waste and recyclables minimum of once a fortnight. Costs to households not to exceed that on nearby mainland.

- All islands with a permanent resident population of 20 or more to have recycling facilities for glass, drink cans and clothes which should be emptied regularly according to usage. Batteries, plastics, chemicals and other hazardous waste to be collected at least once a year from designated collection point on the island. Where feasible, glass grinders should be purchased in order to reduce the volume of glass going out from the islands. The cost of this to be borne by the local authorities/the Department with responsibility for the islands.



Recycling centre on Clare Island

- WEEE Ireland to arrange for collection of 'white goods' from island piers on a regular basis.

- Other large waste items (cars, tyres, metals, building rubble, furniture etc.) to be collected a minimum of twice a year from the island.



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