

Petition: **UNIQUE POSITION OF ISLANDS ACROSS THE UK AND COVID-19**

To the House of Commons.

The Petition of the residents of the UK

Declares that the economic fortunes and sustainability of our island communities across the UK such as the Isle of Arran and the Isle of Cumbrae in my constituency of North Ayrshire and Arran are much more precarious than mainland communities, not least because of the higher number of older people in such communities.

Lockdown has been extremely challenging for all businesses and support from the UK and devolved governments has been greatly appreciated. However, our island economies are fragile and need particular and additional support to survive this crisis.

The exiting of lockdown for islands has to be, by definition, slower than on mainland communities as ferry capacity must be restricted to ensure social distancing and public health and that capacity is expected to be initially limited to less than 20% on some routes. This presents an unprecedented economic threat and clearly leaves the islands at a disadvantage relative to the rest of mainland UK.

The double economic whammy of COVID-19 has seen visitor numbers collapse overnight on islands reliant hugely on tourism. Islands need to emerge from lockdown more slowly with social distancing restrictions on visitor numbers on ferries to and from our islands in order to continue to safeguard public health, will be devastating for island economies. Many prominent businesses that are profitable in normal times could collapse, increasing the likelihood of island depopulation.

As the Government prepares to reduce support from 01 August for companies with furloughed workers, we know that this will inevitably lead to an increase in unemployment, with the Institute of Directors revealing that a quarter of employers using the furlough scheme are expected to be unable to afford to make any contribution at all, inevitably leading to redundancies. These challenges will be magnified on our islands and will result in significant and catastrophic job losses. For example, on Arran, significant employers such as the world-class Auchrannie resort, which employs 171 people from a total island population of 4,600 is in a genuine fight for survival.

In order to save jobs and the way of life on our islands, which are directly linked to the future sustainability of islands across the UK, the Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the UK Government to urgently bring forward special measures to support our island economies at this critical time and ensure furlough extension specifically for our islands until those island economies are back on their feet.

And the petitioners remain, etc.