

# Islands Briefing

June 2020





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## Section A – Immediate Priorities

### 1.1 Key Activities and Deliverables 2020

The following table sets out a summary of the areas for immediate action, key deliverables and work streams where a Ministerial decision may be required within the next three to six months. More detail on each of the items and actions is provided in the comprehensive Ministerial briefing document. Additionally, there may be some revision of this list in the coming weeks of the listed items and actions to ensure alignment with the new Programme for Government.

Gaeltacht		
Policy Area	Area for action/Ministerial Decision	Timeframe
National Development Plan	Progress priority marine infrastructure project at Inis Oírr pier including agreement of 3-year finance for the project	6 months
Policy for the Islands	Complete stakeholder consultation process, including bilateral meetings with stakeholders Approve policy and prepare action plan for implementation	3 months 6 months
Transport Services to the Islands	Approval by European Commission of new PSO for the air service to the Aran Islands. Award long-term contract for service	6 months 6 months

## 1.2 Programme for Government Commitments

The Programme for Government (PfG) contains detailed commitments that fall within the remit of the Gaeltacht Division. This document sets out an overview of relevant commitments and statements from the PfG.

Category	Programme for Government - "Our Shared Future"
Gaeltacht and Islands Divisions	
Islands	The PfG commits to publishing the Islands' Action Plan this year, so that action can be taken on improving connectivity, transport links, education, job creation and fully exploiting the potential for tourism on our islands.

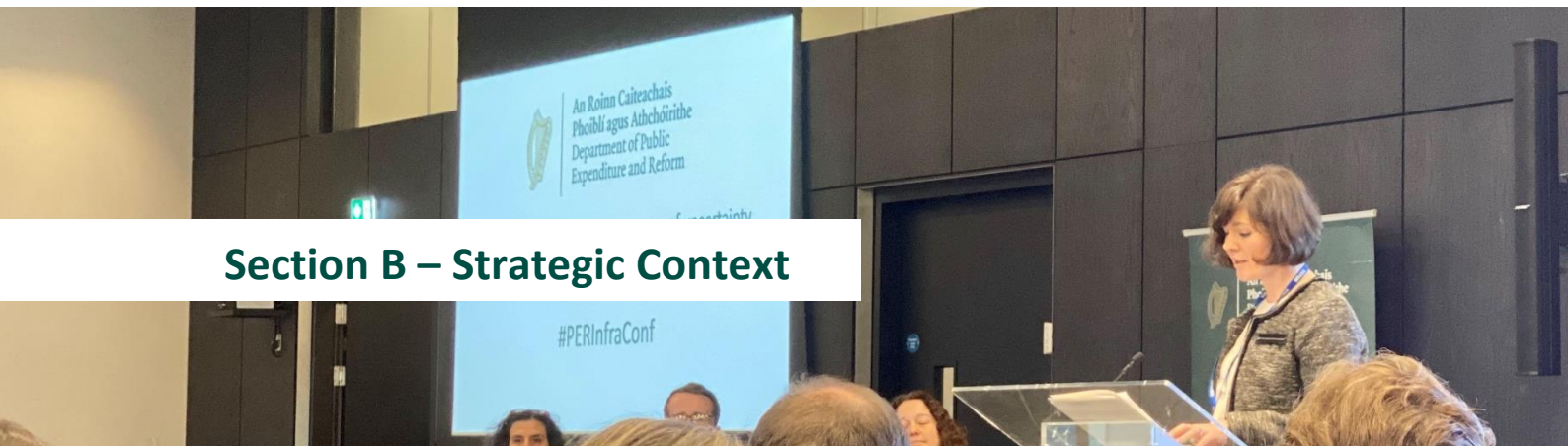
## **1.3 COVID 19 Response**

### **Assessing the impacts**

- The Department supports transport (sea and air) to almost 30 offshore islands supporting some 3,000 residents. Transport services to the islands are lifeline services; islands are not self-sufficient and require delivery of food, medicines etc. and the Department has closely monitored services throughout the Covid-19 emergency.

### **Mitigating the impacts**

- The Department is working with community representatives and ferry operators to ensure the continuance of services following public health restrictions of 27 March (travel to the Islands is limited to residents).



## Section B – Strategic Context

### 2.1 Key Policy and Strategy Documents and Legislative Framework

The Oireachtas has conferred a number of functions, duties and powers on the Minister through legislation which are supported by a framework of policies, strategies, and action plans. This framework of legislation, policy and strategy directs and informs the work of the Division. A summary of the key legislation, policy and strategy documents for the Unit is provided in the tables below:

#### Cross- Government strategy – National Development Plan

Legislation/Policy/Strategy	Summary
Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage – 2018 to 2027 (Project Ireland 2040)	<p>A ten-year plan setting out the Government's commitment for capital investment of almost €1.2 billion in Ireland's culture, language and heritage.</p> <p>The strategy includes €27 million to invest in infrastructure, including transport infrastructure, to the Islands.</p>

#### Gaeltacht and the Islands

Legislation/Policy/Strategy	Summary
<b>Policy &amp; Strategy</b>	
Cross-Government policy for Island Development	The policy and proposed action plan is being progressed by an Interdepartmental Committee on Island Development and through public consultation.





## 2.2 Project Ireland 2040 –Islands Capital Investment Plan

*Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage, 2018-2027* prioritises capital spending across three themes - Culture, Heritage, and Language and the Islands with a 10 year funding envelope of €27 million for islands infrastructure, including transport infrastructure.

*Indicative allocation for the Islands, 2018-2027*

Gaeltacht Investment Programme	Allocation (2018-2017)	2018	2019	2020
Islands infrastructure	€ 27m	€1m	€3m	€1.64m



## Section C– Programme

### 3.1 Business Units and Responsibilities

The Islands Unit is based on Na Forbacha, Galway.

#### Islands Unit

<b>Principal Officer:</b>	Sorcha de Brúch
<b>Staff:</b>	16 Officials
<b>Location:</b>	Na Forbacha, Contae na Gaillimhe

#### Responsibilities:

- Initiatives and measures aimed at supporting the social, cultural and economic development of the islands, including island transport services, investment in essential infrastructure, supporting island based local development groups, and the development of a Cross Government Islands Policy and Action plan.

## **3.2 Details of Islands Expenditure**

The 2020 REV allocation for the Islands is €8.983 million, of which €7.339 million is current and €1.644 million is capital. The current provision is essential to support a range of contracts for transport services to the islands (outlined further below), while the capital investment is linked to Project Ireland 2040, as well as programmes of minor works to islands infrastructure.

### 3.3 Islands Policy Consultation

<b>Responsible Business Unit</b>	Islands Unit	<b>Budget</b>	€7.3m Current €1.6m Capital
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Following a Memorandum to Government in July 2019, Government noted the intention to establish a cross Departmental committee for Island development which would develop a new cross-Government policy for the Islands. The inaugural meeting of a Cross Departmental Committee for Island Development was held on 24 September 2019. This committee comprises representatives from all of the relevant Government Departments. A consultation process was launched on 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2019 aimed at formulating a new national policy for the future development of the islands. This will be the first cross-Government policy developed for the islands in 24 years and will set a roadmap for the long-term sustainability and development of our offshore communities. The voices and views of islanders will be central to the process.

Consultation workshops have been held with island communities, allowing local groups and individuals to have a direct input as the policy is developed and will be completed following the lifting of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Submissions from individuals and interest groups are also welcomed.

The business unit will also be meeting with relevant stakeholders, including Comhdáil Oileán na hÉireann, Comhar na nOileán, relevant Local Authorities, Education Groups and Government Departments.

#### ***Immediate priorities for the coming months***

- 
- Completion of island consultation process
  - Completion of first round of bilateral meetings with relevant stakeholders
  - First draft of policy document

### 3.4 Transport Services to the Islands

<b>Responsible Business Unit</b>	Islands Unit	<b>Budget</b>	€7.3m
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The Islands Programme supports island communities by providing subsidised transport services between a number of inhabited islands and the mainland to ensure the continued viability of these communities. These services involve ferry services, air services and, in some cases, ancillary bus services to main towns. Over the period 2008 to 2018, these subsidised services have delivered the following outputs which are considered essential in sustaining island communities: -

- There have been 410,880 sailings on subsidised services;
- 3.95 million passengers have been carried on these sailings, of which 40.8% were islanders and 59.2% were visitors; and,
- 162,000 tonnes of cargo have been transported to the islands as well as 274,000 vehicles.

The following table illustrates the contracts currently in place:

*Current Transport Service Contracts*

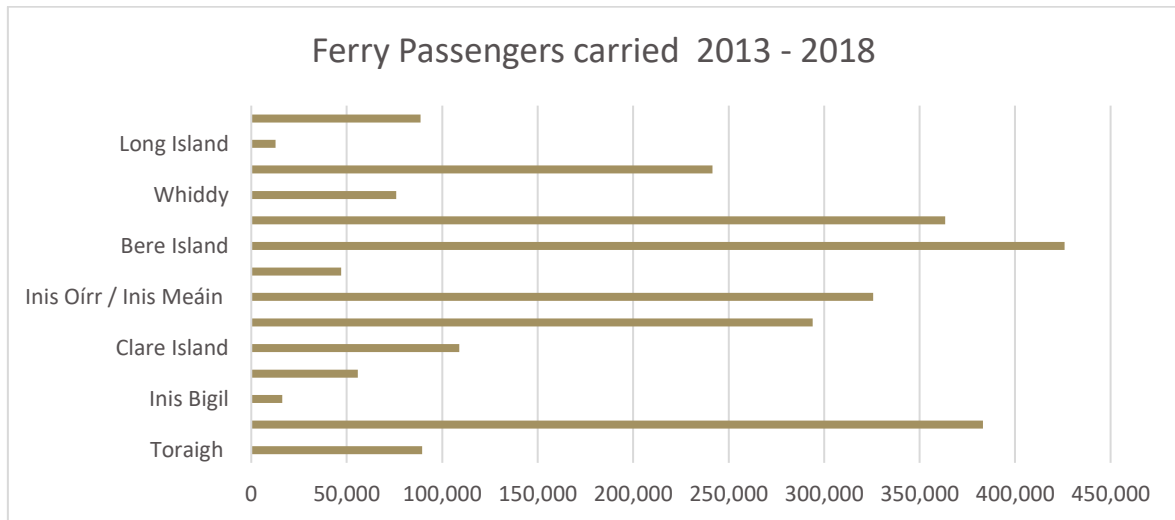
	<b>Island</b>	<b>Contract Term</b>
<b>Dún na nGall</b>	Toraigh	01/04/2018 – 31/03/2023
	Árainn Mhór	01/09/2019 – 31/08/2024
	Toraigh	01/06/2018 – 31/05/2020
	Toraigh	11/10/2019 - 10/04/2020
<b>Maigh Eo</b>	Inis Bigil	01/10/2014 – 31/03/2020
	Inis Toirc	01/12/2017 – 30/11/2022
	Cliara	01/07/2016 – 30/06/2021
	Inis Toirc/Cliara	01/08/2018 – 31/07/2023
	Inis Laidhre, Cláinis & Collainn Mhór	01/05/2018 – 30/04/2020
<b>Gaillimh</b>	Inis Bó Finne	01/01/2020 – 31/12/2024
	Inis Bó Finne	01/08/2018 – 31/07/2023
	Gaillimh – Oileáin Árann	01/07/2018 – 30/06/2023
	Ros an Mhíl – Inis Oírr/Inis Meáin/Inis Mór	01/12/2017 – 30/11/2022
	Na Mine – Oileáin Árann PSO	21/12/2018 – 31/03/2020
	Aeradróim Oileáin Árann, Inis Bó Finne & An Chlocháin	01/10/2019 – 30/09/2020

	Aerphort Chonamara	01/01/2017 – 01/09/2021
Corcaigh	An tOileán Mór	01/11/2018 – 31/10/2023
	Inis Arcáin	01/05/2016 – 30/04/2021
	Faoide	01/11/2015 – 31/10/2020
	Cléire	01/02/2019 – 31/01/2024
	Inis Fada	01/04/2015 – 31/03/2020
	Inis Uí Drisceoil	01/10/2017 – 30/09/2022
	Cléire, Inis Arcáin, Inis Uí Drisceoil, Inis Fada	01/07/2018 – 30/06/2021
	Oileán Baoi	01/09/2019 – 31/08/2021
	Faoide	01/03/2019 – 28/02/2021
	An tOileán Mór	01/05/2018 – 30/04/2020

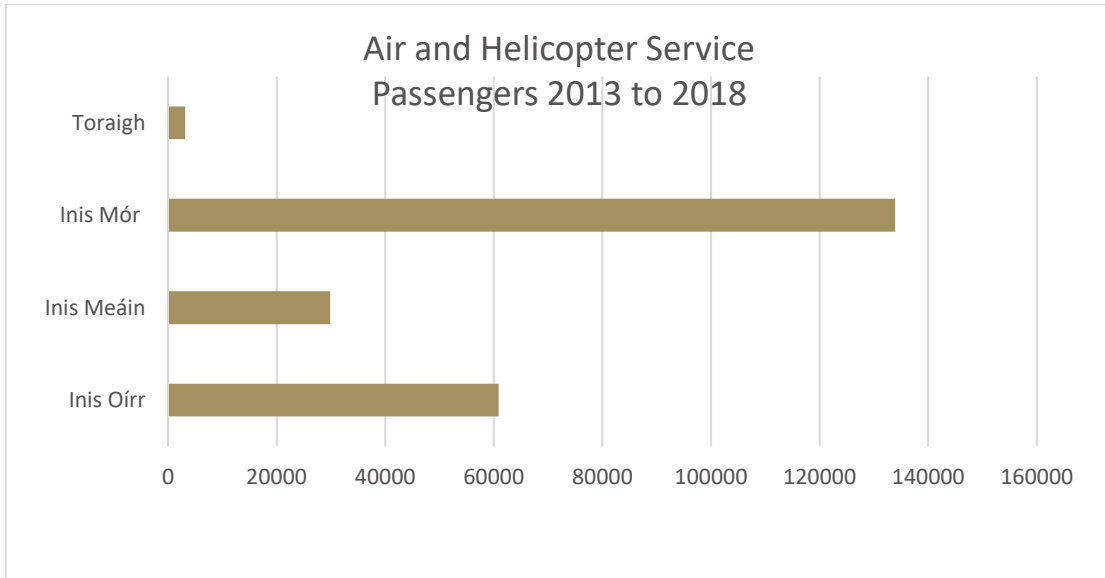
The below charts provide passenger details for various island transport services.

Over the period 2013 to 2018, the Department supported 2.53 million passengers travelling to and from the islands broken down in the following chart:

*Ferry Passengers carried 2013-2018*



*Air and Helicopter Service Passengers carried 2013-2018*



***Immediate priorities for the coming months***

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- Application to the European Commission for Aran Islands PSO status to be completed, and contract awarded.
- Ongoing renewal of ferry contracts, as required.

### 3.5 Project Ireland 2040 – Island Marine Infrastructure Programme

<b>Responsible Business Unit</b>	Islands Unit	<b>Budget</b>	€1.6m
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Under the Department’s Project Ireland 2040 investment programme, €27 million has been set aside of the period 2018 to 2027 to support enhancements to transport infrastructure to the islands. The following sets out a short summary of the key projects included under that programme, with additional information on the strategic acquisition of Aerfort Chonamara in the following section (3.6).

#### **Inis Oírr Pier**

Led by Galway County Council, preliminary work in relation to the development of Inis Oírr Pier continues. Planning permission is in place for the pier on Inis Oírr, which has seen significant growth in passenger numbers over the years and requires upgrading. The appointed consulting engineers (Punch Consulting Engineers) are actively engaged in carrying out surveys and securing permits for the work to be undertaken.

Galway County Council has engaged with relevant stakeholders to ascertain their priorities with regard to a number of issues relating to this development including, development of bye laws for the pier, and a compulsory purchase order process for land required for the duration of the build.

The original projected costs for the pier development were estimated in the mid 2000s and require updating. Galway County Council has been carrying out a reappraisal of the project. The Department is working closely with the County Council to complete this work and to progress the project as quickly as possible.

#### **Caladh Mór Pier, Inis Meáin**

Phases I & II of the development of Caladh Mór Pier on Inis Meáin were undertaken in the last decade, funded through the Department and developed in conjunction with Galway County Council. These phases saw the pier being developed and extended and a breakwater provided. It was proposed that further works would be undertaken (Phase III) but this did not go ahead due to the economic downturn.

It is now intended to progress Phase III, which will address issues such as pier capacity and provision of an enhanced slipway.

Galway County Council is currently engaging with relevant stakeholders to ascertain their priorities with regard to the development, and this process will inform the Council as it prepares its development proposal for submission to the Department. Galway County Council is also working



with maritime expertise to model the port and conduct simulation tests with regard to the proposed development. This work, when completed, will inform the next steps in the project.

#### **Pier at Machaire Rabhartaigh**

The Department has held initial discussions with Donegal County Council with a view to progressing this project through the appraisal stage under the Public Spending Code. It is understood that the Council are drawing up tender documents for engagement of consultants with regard to this development and the Department is awaiting progress on this.

#### **Bespoke ferry for Toraigh Island**

Department officials have held discussions with the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland to learn from their experience of delivering similar projects. Officials along with a delegation from Tory have visited Rathlin Island and Doolin to learn from their experience of developing new ferries. The Department is developing plans to tender for a consultant to advise on this project.

#### ***Immediate priorities for the coming months***

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- ▶ Publishing tender documents for the design and build stage of Inis Oírr pier
- ▶ Produce imaging of Caladh Mór, Inis Meáin to inform next steps for this project.

### 3.6 Aerfort Chonamara and Aran Islands Public Service Obligation

<b>Responsible Business Unit</b>	Islands Unit	<b>Budget</b>	€7.3m
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Three separate contracts are held between the Department and Aer Nasc Teo:

- The PSO Air Services to the Aran Islands (2018 – 2020)
- The management of Connemara Airport (2017 – 2021), and
- The management of the aerodromes on the Aran Islands, Inis Boffin and Cleggan (2015 – 2020)

On 5 June 2018, the Department received notification that Galway Aviation Services Ltd (GASL), trading as Aer Árann, would be withdrawing from the PSO Agreement as of 6 December 2018. Further notification was received on 11 June that GASL would be withdrawing from the contract with the State for the use of Connemara Airport as of 6 December 2018. On 5 June, the Department also received notice that GASL would be issuing High Court proceedings against the Minister.

Meetings were held with representatives from the Aran Islands and public representatives from Galway West on a number of occasions, as part of the commitment given to engage with island representatives on an ongoing basis in order to resolve these issues. Communications between the owner of Connemara Airport and the Department through legal channels and through officials gave an indication that it (GASL) would be open to selling the facility to the Department.

In December 2018, Heads of Agreement were signed between the Department and the owner which sets out a process whereby the purchase of the airport could be pursued. In parallel, a short term contract for provision of the air service covering from December 2018 to 30 September 2019 was agreed, and a further extension of 6 months is in place at present.

The purchase of Aerfort Chonamara by the State was completed in December 2019, and work is progressing on all of the associated management and air service contracts.

GASL was recently purchased by a company called Aer Nasc Teo which now operates the contracts formerly held by GASL.

#### ***Immediate priorities for the coming months***

- 
- Completion of short-term air service and airport management contracts.
  - Undertake process to develop and publish tender documents for Public Service Obligation service to the islands.

### 3.7 Inishbofin and Cleggan Airstrips

<b>Responsible Business Unit</b>	Islands Unit	<b>Budget</b>	€1.6m
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In July 2013, as a result of the recession, and in light of the pressure on the Department's budget, a decision was made not to continue with the development of the two two airstrips which had been built by the State on Inishbofin and Clifden.

Both sites are currently managed as part of Aer Nasc's contract with the Department for management of aerodromes. The landing strips are not open at present and are not licensed for use by the Irish Aviation Authority. The airstrip at Cleggan was made available for use by a number of small planes during the Alcock and Browne centenary celebrations during the summer of 2019.

A public consultation process was undertaken in 2017 whereby the Department sought submissions from interested parties in relation to the future use of the airstrips and surrounding sites. A total of 113 submissions were received and they can be viewed on the Department's website. The broad thrust of the submissions is that the sites should be kept in public ownership.

The Department has received applications in relation to the use of the sites – from the HSE regarding development of a Primary Care Centre on Inishbofin and from the Coastguard regarding development of a Coastguard Station at Cleggan.

The Department is in contact with both the HSE and the Irish Aviation Authority with regard to the construction of a replacement primary health centre on Inishbofin and progress is being made. The Department has informed the HSE that it will make a site available and that the HSE should seek to progress the matter. The site of the airstrip on Inishbofin is owned by Galway County Council and steps are being taken to transfer ownership of the site to the Department.

With regard to the airstrip at Cleggan, planning permission was initially granted for the site for the purpose of providing air access to Inishbofin. The Department has written to Galway County Council seeking clarity as to whether this would impede any other use of the site.

#### ***Immediate priorities for the coming months***

- Seek expressions of interest whereby groups may be given access to the airstrips (e.g. flying clubs).
- Conclude discussions with the Coast Guard to develop a station at Cleggan. Any such development will not impact future plans to have a scheduled air service running from this airstrip.
- Conclude discussions with Galway County Council about ownership of Inishbofin site.

