

Press release

Our Living Islands: Minister Humphreys launches National Islands Policy and Action Plan

From [Department of Rural and Community Development \(/en/organisation/department-of-rural-and-community-development/\)](/en/organisation/department-of-rural-and-community-development/).

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- ambitious new 10-year policy along with 80-point action plan to support vibrant and sustainable island communities
- focus on improving housing and water infrastructure, better access to essential services in health and education, delivering high speed broadband, and developing outdoor amenities and sustainable tourism
- Vacant Property Grants: Supports under Croí Cónaithe to be increased by 20% to bring back vacant and derelict properties on offshore islands as long-term homes
- forthcoming planning guidelines for rural housing to recognise unique challenges facing our offshore island communities
- supports for remote working facilities and development of integrated local plan for islands
- Minister Humphreys also announces almost €2 million for minor capital works on islands off Donegal, Sligo, Mayo, Galway and Cork

Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys, has today launched Our Living Islands, an ambitious new ten year national policy designed to support vibrant and sustainable island communities.

Our Living Islands also contains 80 commitments under a three-year action plan with a real focus on improving housing and water infrastructure, better access to essential services in health and education, delivering high speed broadband, supporting remote working and further developing outdoor amenities and sustainable tourism.

Among the highlights of the Action Plan:

- additional levels of support through the government's Property Refurbishment Grant Scheme **Croí Cónaithe** as part of a major effort to turn vacant or derelict buildings on islands into long-term homes. Under this measure, the existing grant ceilings will be increased by 20% in recognition of the additional costs involved in construction on offshore islands
- Vacant Home Officers will identify vacant and derelict properties on our islands
- the government's forthcoming planning guidelines for rural housing will recognise the unique challenges that island communities face
- E-Health Pods will also be piloted on our offshore islands to give residents and families improved access to health appointments
- supports will be provided to Remote Working Facilities on islands so that people can live and work within their own community
- the delivery of high-speed broadband to island-based schools, digital hubs and Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) to ensure a reliable connection to the internet for both education and remote working
- supports for Outdoor Recreation Activities such as cycling and swimming, and expanding the Walks Scheme to more island projects
- working with partners and government agencies to increase job opportunities, including Apprenticeships on islands
- investment in infrastructure such as piers and roads, and the completion of the upgrade of coast guard stations of units servicing islands
- support the development of Waste Management Plans for island communities

Our Living Islands is the first whole-of-government policy for the islands to be published in 27 years.

The ambitious policy has been developed following an extensive consultation process with island communities and other stakeholders, which enabled them to express their views as to the challenges and opportunities associated with living on islands.

This new policy is accompanied by Action Plan for the period 2023-2026 and includes 80 new time-bound actions which have been agreed with and will be implemented by various stakeholders, led by a nominated government department or State agency.

Minister Humphreys launched Our Living Islands during a visit to Árainn Mhór island in County Donegal today.

Launching the policy, Minister Humphreys said:

“I’m delighted to launch ‘Our Living Islands’, which is our new ten year National Islands Policy and our first in 27 years. ‘Our Living Islands’ contains 80 actions which are designed to support and empower our island communities and the people living there. It’s all about improving housing, better access to essential services in health and education, delivering high speed broadband, and further developing our outdoor amenities, which will in turn increase tourism and support sustainable island communities. It’s about ensuring our islands have proper infrastructure in terms of water, roads and piers. And it’s about supporting island communities to develop remote working facilities, ensuring people can live and work in their own community. And I’m particularly pleased to have worked with my colleague, the Minister for Housing Darragh O’Brien, to provide additional funding under Croí Cónaithe to support islanders who wish to turn vacant and derelict properties into homes. ‘Our Living Islands’ is an ambitious ten year policy – recognising our commitment to supporting our island communities so that they have a bright and sustainable future.”

The Minister continued:

“As a result of delivering this policy, we will see more people living on the islands and more people working on our islands, with good career prospects, regardless of where their employer is headquartered. We will see islands contributing to, and benefiting from, the transition to a low-carbon economy and a climate-neutral society. And we will see our Island communities, and especially young people, having an active role in shaping the future for their own islands.”

Minister Humphreys added:

“The implementation of the measures set out in ‘Our Living Islands’ will have a real and transformative effect on our islands and improve the lives of the people and families living there. Our aim is to build resilient and sustainable island communities and economies through real and tangible investment and improved supports and services. The policy also advocates a holistic, place-based approach to rural development, which encourages and supports island communities to develop their own plans to meet their long-term needs and to help them realise their vision for their own particular area.”

Minister Humphreys also today approved capital funding of €1.9 million across 5 local authorities as part of the first tranche of minor capital works on island infrastructure projects around the country.

The Minister concluded:

“Under Our Living Islands, we are committed to ensuring our islands have proper infrastructure such as piers, roads and playgrounds. I am therefore delighted to approve this funding of €1.9 million to support improvements to vital infrastructure such on islands in Donegal, Sligo, Mayo, Galway and Cork.”

[Our Living Islands \(/en/policy-information/a7188-our-living-islands/\)](/en/policy-information/a7188-our-living-islands/)

Notes

Appendix 1

The islands policy is underpinned by five high-level Strategic Objectives, identified by islanders themselves as being of key importance for the sustainable future of their communities:

1. Revitalise population levels on the islands
2. Diversify island economies
3. Enhance Health and Wellbeing services
4. Empower Island Communities
5. Build smart sustainable futures

The Policy aims to reverse the population decline witnessed on most of the islands while building sustainable futures for island communities as well as empowering them in developing their own islands.

The outcomes of delivering this policy will see:

- more people living on the islands
- more people working on our islands, with good career prospects, regardless of where their employer is headquartered
- islands contributing to, and benefiting from, the transition to a low-carbon economy and a climate-neutral society
- island communities, and especially young people, having an active role in shaping the future for Ireland's islands

Some of the specific measures in the Action Plan to deliver these outcomes:

Support people to live on islands

- additional grant support under The Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant (Croí Cónaithe) to encourage utilisation of existing properties for the provision of long term residential accommodation. The maximum grant for island properties will be 20% higher for vacant properties (€60,000 compared to €50,000 on the Mainland). And for derelict properties, the grant provided will be up to €84,000 compared to €70,000 on the Mainland. This will come into effect from 1 July and will be applied retrospectively to any existing applications
- acknowledge the unique challenges and characteristics of offshore islands in the forthcoming Draft Revised Planning Guidelines for Rural Housing
- develop long-term solutions to improve water services and supplies to islands
- progress the priority island infrastructure projects (i.e. piers) in the NDP
- further develop outdoor recreation amenities and activities on the islands

Support people to thrive on the islands

- deliver high speed broadband to broadband connection points (BCPs), digital hubs and schools on islands under the National Broadband Plan (NBP)
- develop and support remote working hubs to drive an increase in remote working from the islands while having good career prospects
- Pilot eHealth Pods on islands and utilise BCPs/remote working hubs to improve access to online health appointments (acute and community)
- increase the capacity for remote and blended learning to enable people access further and higher education courses through online learning while living on islands
- support social enterprise and the development of craft and design and agri-food sectors on the islands with a focus on sustainable, artisan and organic produce
- create experiences for visitors that are sustainable and positively impact the islands, integrating the Irish language with music, arts, crafts, and traditions of the islands

Support island communities to shape their future

- establish and support a forum for ongoing dialogue between Local Authorities, relevant stakeholders and island communities (island groupings)
- ensure participation of island representatives in Comhairle na nÓg, LCDRC, PPN
- provide funding to island communities (island groupings) for the development of Integrated Development Plans, to maintain sustainable communities and to leverage other funding streams
- provide grants and supports for energy-efficiency community projects, including Energy Master Plans for islands, through relevant SEAI schemes

Appendix 2

Minor Capital Works Programme 2023 – tranche 1 approvals

Island	Details of works	Grant
Donegal	Total grant to Donegal County Council	€471,622
Árainn Mhór	Resurfacing – Ring Road/Screig Link road	€292,500
Árainn Mhór	Resurfacing – Staca Mór Pier to Leadhb Gharbh	€58,500
Árainn Mhór	Surface Dressing Works	€32,400
Árainn Mhór	Playground safety works	€16,222
Toraigh	Playground safety works / boundary wall	€72,000
Sligo	Total grant to Sligo County Council	€11,700

Coney Island	Replacement of ramp to access beach from pier	€5,400
Coney Island	Replacement of existing pier guards/barriers	€6,300
Mayo	Total grant to Mayo County Council	€207,000
Inishturk	Road surfacing and drainage works	€180,000
Inishturk	Pier improvement Works – main pier	€18,000
Inis Bigil	Doran’s Point carpark improvement works	€9,000
Galway	Total grant to Galway County Council	€806,474
Árainn (Inis Mór)	Resurfacing – L-5200-115 Eoghanacht	€298,464
Árainn (Inis Mór)	Resurfacing – L-52008-0 Low Road	€233,325
Árainn (Inis Mór)	Resurfacing – L-5200 Cill Mhuirbhígh / Gort na gCapall	€138,175
Árainn (Inis Mór)	Resurfacing – L-5200-31 Cill Rónáin	€90,610
Árainn (Inis Mór)	Works at Cé Chill Mhuirbhígh	€35,100
Inis Meáin	Coin operated telescopes	€6,300
Inis Oírr	Railings for Lifeguard Safety & Hut improvements	€4,500
Cork	Total grant to Cork County Council	€399,256
Bere Island	Asphalt concrete surfacing and drainage improvement works prior to taking in charge – road adjacent to L8959-0	€122,000
Bere Island	Asphalt concrete surfacing – L-49227-0	€94,500
Bere Island	Asphalt concrete surfacing and drainage improvement works – L-49227-0	€54,000

Heir Island	Installation of pontoon – East Pier	€24,005
Sherkin Island	Asphalt concrete surfacing – sections of L8202-0 and L4201-0	€46,665
Sherkin Island	Asphalt concrete surfacing – sections of L8202-0 and L4201-0	€35,100
Sherkin Island	Dock Pier slipway – concrete works / safety railings	€22,986
Total	Total grant funding approved across 5 counties	€1,896,052

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