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Fifteenth network report 2005-2006

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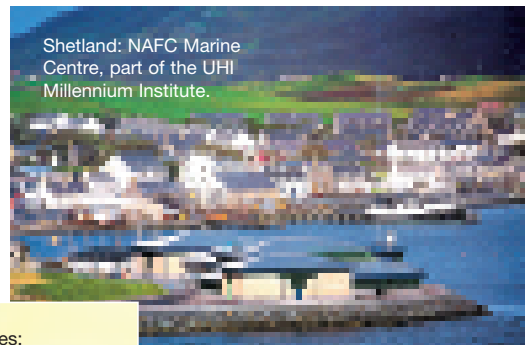
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Chairman's review

The Highlands and Islands have assets that are envied around the globe but bring their own special challenges. By working to bring out the best in this diverse part of the world for those living here, we have a unique opportunity to contribute to the wider environment

William Roe chairman



Shetland: NAFC Marine Centre, part of the UHI Millennium Institute.



Western Isles: Promoting construction skills to young people.



Argyll: The European Centre for Marine Science at Dunstaffnage is a national centre of research excellence.

Over the last year, the HIE network has once again shown dedicated constancy in its willingness to change. Technological advances have influenced economies, cultures and politics across the globe at an unprecedented speed over the last 10 years. As national boundaries are being leapfrogged by everything from climate change to free markets to world music, it is becoming increasingly important for regions to establish their stake in this competitive environment.

HIE has been making changes to ensure it is properly equipped to lead this area into a strong position on the world's fast-moving map. Following the launch of our new strategy last year, 'A Smart, Successful Highlands and Islands' and after consultation with the Scottish Executive, it was decided to compact the number of local enterprise companies covering the region from ten to nine.

The assumption of the area covered by Ross and Cromarty Enterprise into two neighbouring enterprise companies was identified as a beneficial strategic move and I applaud the hard work and professionalism shown by staff at Skye, Inverness and very particularly at Invergordon which has made this transition progress so effectively.

Other changes this year have seen the commitment to fully integrate Careers Scotland within the HIE network. It's an ambitious process but our board recognises that to fully implement our plans to grow our gross domestic product, to attract young people and to invigorate our economic activity, we need to commit wholeheartedly to the world of the workforce.

By working in partnership to drive UHI Millennium Institute through to full university title in 2007, we will be creating the chance to gain degree qualifications at campuses right across our geographic spread, from Shetland to Argyll.

With our new university and an emerging, locally qualified, skilled workforce, quality industries such as the already burgeoning life sciences sector will become increasingly important elements in our economic landscape.

Consolidating this progress, we have seen the exciting development of the Centre for Health Science take shape in Inverness – a unique symbiosis of private and public health related strands that will share ideas and resources in a brand new building financed by HIE. The first phase will open this year and, at the conclusion of its three elements, the £22m project will offer a state-of-the-art facility for healthcare and biotechnology research, education, training, treatment and business development. It will provide a model project for other countries to emulate.



Inverness: HIE's premises hosted a number of parliamentary visits, including the Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, chaired by Sarah Boyack MSP (centre).



Unst, Shetland: PURE (Promoting Unst Renewable Energy) has developed innovative ways to store energy from wind power.



Dingwall: Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Allan Wilson MSP takes part in Ross County FC's football academy.

This confidence that we can lead the way in being smarter and more successful is being evinced in many more locations than the Highland capital. Our community energy company assisted no fewer than 22 local energy projects which must truly be the ambition of every settlement across the world – environmentally friendly sources of energy produced at close quarters.

2005-06 has also seen continued investment in the pioneering wave and tidal technologies being tested at the European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC) in Orkney, the important advances being achieved by Promoting Unst Renewable Energy in Shetland and the fascinating inventions for 21st century living that we are exploring with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The expertise in nuclear decommissioning being gained at Janetstown in Caithness, and the world's focus on Dunstaffnage in Argyll for the research being conducted into climate change at the Scottish Association for Marine Science continue to contribute to the Highlands and Islands' reputation as a place of quality.

We look forward to 2007 from a position of knowledge and clear understanding of our goals. We want to promote the encouraging trends we are now seeing in our economy, we want to support our partners who seek to improve our transport links, to make road and rail journeys more efficient and to build on the phenomenal year that our airports have enjoyed.

Next year will see Scotland celebrate its Highland culture. All that is best in our environment, heritage, language, science, sport and arts will be showcased during Highland 2007. Not only will it be a chance for us to see some great performances, but it will draw people into the area, perhaps for their first time, and we'll be working to ensure that they want to come back again and again.

We can't ignore the particular challenges that this region poses, but Highlands and Islands Enterprise is going forward into the next 12 months carrying a reputation for integrity, energy and innovation. I am confident that I will be representing an organisation that will continue to grow in stature within Scotland, in Europe and beyond... making this an envied location across the world.

Board members at 1 April 2006



William Roe
HIE chairman



Sandy Cumming CBE
HIE chief executive



George Campbell



Wilma Campbell OBE



Lyn Forbes



Stewart Graham



Duncan MacInnes MBE



Angus Mackenzie



Drew Ratter



Andrew Rogers



Grant Sword



Susan Torrance