Statement of Conclusions and Intent on Developing a Common Digitalisation Strategy for EU Islands

Whereas INSULEUR has met to discuss how the difficulties faced by islands can be overcome through the deployment of technology and to propose a way forward with respect to a common and concrete strategy which would help insular economies on EU islands to prosper and make the best use of digitalisation.

The Conference recognises that:

- Digitalisation can serve as a roadmap for small and insular islands to tackle the difficulties that are generally associated with their geographical isolation by developing stronger links with the main centres of economic activity, developing innovative products and services and diversify business activity.

- Islands have a significant potential to function as laboratories for technological, social, environmental, economic and political innovation. Apart from niche industries, islands lend themselves well as proving grounds for new and innovative models targeted at physically bound communities.

- Accessibility attained through digitalisation in islands is bi-directional whereby island communities may find themselves vulnerable, especially if they are not well prepared for what lies on the other side.

- Digitalisation in island communities can better start with a shift in mind-set, a thorough understanding of the digital business practices, services, and technologies available on the mainland, and legislation to allow the successful transition of island dwellers to the mainstream.

- Guiding the digital transformation of island communities can be challenging for policy makers unless legislation is in place to restrict access which may in turn have undesirable and unpredicted consequences on the freedom of participating communities.

- The Digital Europe Programme together with other EU initiatives contribute significantly towards the creation of a thriving data economy, promote inclusiveness and ensure value creation by reinforcing Europe's capacities in high performance computing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and advanced digital skills and ensure their wide use across the economy and society.

On the basis of its proceedings the Conference recommends that EU islands should:

- Educate the community to understand the key differences between analogue business practices and the very different digital equivalents.

- Develop a clear understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of opening up access to the world-wide web through infrastructure and incentives prior to putting these critical elements in place.

- Introduce changes in curricula in order to upskill their human resources and meet the demands of the digital economy.

- Ensure equality of opportunity through robust, fast data communication infrastructure.

- Find a delicate balance to allow for sustainable innovation and introduce legislation in order to protect sensitive ecosystems and ensure digital security.

- Work jointly across borders to develop unified projects.

- Transform insular Chambers, SMEs and their traditional models through the exploitation of new and innovative technologies, data and connections among people, businesses and things. Chambers should offer platforms for their member SMEs to position themselves in the digital global era to be able to adapt in the ever-changing environment and ensure awareness about disruptive technologies among their members.

- Develop place-based strategies to take concrete actions and promote their territorial potential based on a bottom-up approach.