



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 21 September 2023

Session 6



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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
15th Meeting 2023, Session 6

CONVENER

*Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con)

*Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP)

*Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Katy Orr

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 21 September 2023

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Martin Whitfield): Good morning. I welcome everyone to the 15th meeting in 2023 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. Under agenda item 1, does the committee agree to take item 4, which is a discussion about the committee's work programme, in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Cross-Party Group

09:30

The Convener: Under item 2, I welcome Karen Adam, who is a potential convener of the proposed cross-party group on fisheries and coastal communities. Karen, will you explain to the committee the purposes of and intent behind the proposed CPG?

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Yes. Thank you, convener, and good morning. As part of my opening statement, I want to get across the importance of our fisheries to our country and the economy as a whole. Our fisheries and wider blue economy are an essential part of Scotland's economy and culture. The seas and shores are a part of the rich tapestry of Scotland's history. As a representative of a coastal constituency, I know at first hand the important contribution that fisheries and coastal communities make to Scotland.

As much as I love to boast about Banffshire and Buchan Coast, I have some stats for you—in case anybody is a bit of a statistician—that show that 48 per cent of the Scottish Parliament's constituencies are coastal. If we include estuaries, the figure is 60 per cent. All but one of the Scottish Parliament's electoral regions touch the coast. That means that 93 MSPs represent coastal communities, including estuaries, which is 72 per cent of our Parliament. We know from recent debates, both in and outwith the Scottish Parliament, that policies that affect fisheries and coastal communities are matters of great importance and have been highly politically sensitive.

Scotland boasts the United Kingdom's largest fishing port and Europe's largest white fishing port. Our fisheries and wider blue economy are rapidly evolving, and it is abundantly clear that our food and drink sector, particularly our seafood sector, plays a leading role in supporting Scotland to thrive at home and abroad. At the local level, the opportunities that fishing provides are invaluable, from catching to processing and from packing to marketing. Our blue economy offers huge opportunities in abundance. The Scottish fish sector is also essential to brand Scotland and it is a key component of Scotland's soft power on the world stage.

There are a number of issues that fisheries and coastal communities face. We have climate change, the spatial squeeze with offshore and inshore renewable energy, and restrictive policies on fishing. Those are just some of the issues that we hope to look at across party lines. I hope that

the committee will approve the establishment of this vital cross-party group.

The Convener: Excellent—thank you very much. I hope that you are open to questions from the committee, which I will kick off.

This is not specifically in relation to your application, but you will be aware from your inbox and your involvement in other CPGs of how many groups there are at the moment. The committee has seen evidence that some CPGs have struggled to maintain their cross-party nature and to comply with the requirements for meetings—the posting of minutes and agendas, giving notice and so on. I note from our committee papers that there might be support by way of a secretariat. However, are you content to take on that responsibility if you are elected as the group's convener?

Karen Adam: Yes, absolutely. I have the support of the Fishmongers' Company, which will provide secretariat support via a company called Pagoda Public Relations, which is based in Edinburgh. The Fishmongers' Company provides such support for the all-party parliamentary group on fisheries at Westminster as well.

I am a member of a few CPGs, but the nature of this one is different. As a new parliamentarian who has been bedding in over the past two and a half years, I have found that there are gaps where I need to have conversations. There needs to be a forum where certain industries can come together and where we can talk across parties in a more politically neutral environment. We need places where we can really get to the crux of important issues, bash them out and get some action points. I think that the proposed CPG will enhance my work and not add to the workload. It will support my on-going work and that of other MSPs who have come forward to say that they want to join.

The Convener: That is helpful. You articulate one of the important elements of cross-party groups, which is the opportunity for the MSPs who are responsible for creating and running them to meet people from outside the Parliament to talk about the issues that they cover.

Other than the secretariat, there is no mention of non-MSP members of the group. Can you update the committee on who they will be?

Karen Adam: I have had conversations about that and I can list a few non-MSP members. Besides the Fishmongers' Company, there is the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, offshore wind companies, a number of individual fishers, the Salamander offshore wind project, SSE and Peterhead Port Authority as well as representatives of community groups. A vast array of different industries are covered because I did not want it to be only a

fisheries CPG. I want it to extend to coastal communities because of all the pressures that are affecting them at the moment.

The Convener: That is helpful. Do members of the committee have questions?

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): Thank you for your helpful presentation, Karen. It is obvious that there is a lot of commercial interest in the area, and you mentioned that, if the group is approved, you may cover politically sensitive policy areas. How will you ensure that the CPG is not co-opted by commercial interests?

Karen Adam: That is an important point. Individual fishers have spoken to me about the agendas of some of the potential members of the CPG and how they would affect the group's work. As convener, I would have to be attuned to that and ensure that we kept true to what the cross-party group is meant to be about, which is supporting coastal communities and fisheries and ensuring that their voices are heard, above all. I always go on about lived experience, but I will definitely highlight that and give it the most voice on the CPG.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): It is astonishing that there has not been a cross-party group on fisheries and coastal communities until now.

Karen Adam: Yes.

Stephen Kerr: Have you tried to raise those issues in any existing CPGs? What has been your experience over the past two and a half years?

Karen Adam: I have looked, but I have not found a forum for the issues. Over the past two and a half years, they have obviously come up in my constituency work and my work on the rural committee. We had a round-table discussion with fishers from the pelagic sector and people from the processing and inshore fisheries sectors. That was beneficial, but it was only one occasion.

You will appreciate how packed our workloads can be, but I feel that we need additional space for more people to come forward. The fisheries sector keeps talking about the renewables industry and the impacts on ports and service vessels, and I do not think that there is a joined-up or collaborative approach yet. Some offshore wind companies have had discussions with fisheries, but only in bits and pieces. If we have a national overview, we will be able to set a standard for best practice on communication between all the relevant industries.

Stephen Kerr: Thank you for that. It is amazing that there is not such a group yet.

The Convener: We have found the elusive missing group. We have all these CPGs, but there are still areas that are not covered.

Stephen Kerr: We have all these CPGs, but not one for something as obvious as this.

The Convener: Absolutely. As members have no further questions, I thank you for your attendance, Karen. The committee will consider recognition of the proposed group under the next agenda item, and the clerks will be in touch with you in due course.

Karen Adam: Thank you, everybody.

The Convener: Under agenda item 3 we will, as anticipated, decide whether to grant recognition to the proposed cross-party group on fisheries and coastal communities. Do members have any comments?

Stephen Kerr: As a member who represents Central Scotland, I have to be honest that the issue of fisheries has not always been at the top of my inbox or on my casework agenda, but I repeat that fisheries are a vital—in fact, a totemic—part of Scotland's economy, and it seems extraordinary that we have not had a cross-party group to look specifically at the issue. I am therefore, as you can probably tell, very sympathetic to the proposed group. It highlights that, despite there being however many cross-party groups there are—

The Convener: There are 126.

Stephen Kerr: —clearly still gaps and there is still interest from those outside Parliament in engaging with parliamentarians to talk about issues in an environment free from the drama of the chamber.

The Convener: That is helpful.

It was helpful of Karen Adam to highlight specific groups that would be interested in contributing to the cross-party group's work. She mentioned a wide range of groups. It was also helpful that she indicated that the cross-party group would talk not just about fisheries, but about the communities.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I was quite amazed by the statistic that she gave about how many MSPs represent coastal communities. That, in itself, shows that the CPG is needed.

The Convener: That is helpful.

Evelyn Tweed: It was good to hear Karen Adam talk about the breadth of the groups that would be involved. I am still a bit concerned that those with commercial interests might try to dominate, as they sometimes do on CPGs, but I think that she is aware of that. She talked about the politics of the issue, so I am content.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): There is clearly a need for the group, and it is clear that Karen Adam has thought about the different

aspects and understands what is required, so I am supportive of the group.

The Convener: That is helpful.

The committee has been concerned, as Stephen Kerr said, about the number of CPGs that exist and the workload that they put on MSPs, given their obligations. We will return to that issue and look at the state of the CPGs when we consider our annual report on them. However, Karen Adam clearly indicated an understanding of the obligations that she would be taking on, which I found helpful.

Is the committee prepared to officially recognise the proposed cross-party group that Karen Adam presented today?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I am grateful for that.

09:42

Meeting continued in private until 10:58.

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