

ENTERPRISE AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 9 May 2006

Session 2

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CONTENTS

Tuesday 9 May 2006

	Col.
TOURIST BOARDS (SCOTLAND) BILL: STAGE 1	3063
NATIONAL ANTHEM	3068
ANNUAL REPORT	3073

ENTERPRISE AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

13th Meeting 2006, Session 2

CONVENER

*Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green)

*Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)

*Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)

*Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

*Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green)

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)

David Mc Letchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Kirsten Davidson (Scottish Executive Education Department)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Douglas Thornton

ASSISTANT CLERK

Seán Wixted

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Enterprise and Culture Committee

Tuesday 9 May 2006

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:02*]

Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Convener (Alex Neil): I welcome everybody to the 13th meeting of the Enterprise and Culture Committee this year. We have a quorum, so we can start. I remind everybody to switch off their mobile phones. I have received an apology from Shiona Baird. She expects to be late, but she will be here.

Our first item is consideration of the Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill. I welcome the Scottish Executive bill team, led by Kirsten Davidson. She will introduce the rest of the team and make some introductory remarks.

Kirsten Davidson (Scottish Executive Education Department): With me today are Gaynor Davenport, from the Executive's tourism unit, who has been taking the lead on the bill, and David Kemp, our solicitor. I will say a few words about the bill, although I will not spend too long going through it, as it is a short, technical bill. If members could bear with me, I will go through the main things that the bill does.

First, it changes the legal name of the Scottish Tourist Board to VisitScotland. The board has been trading under that name for the past couple of years but, legally, it is still the Scottish Tourist Board. It makes sense, now that it is agreed that VisitScotland is the name that it should trade under, to take this opportunity to change the legal name.

Secondly, the bill repeals those sections of the Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994 that require that there be area tourist boards. The statutory instruments that were used to set up the two network tourist boards can then be repealed. That way, we can have a fully integrated tourism network across Scotland. The bill makes consequential provisions for the transfer of staff from those network tourist boards to VisitScotland, so that they can transfer according to their current terms and conditions.

Finally, the bill increases the size of the board of VisitScotland. At the moment, there are six board members plus the chair. We want to increase that

to a maximum of 11 board members plus the chair. For the foreseeable future, we would want or need there to be only nine members of the board, but this legislative opportunity allows for the introduction of some flexibility. Those are the main things that the bill does. I am happy to take questions.

The Convener: As Kirsten Davidson said, the bill is technical and formalises in legislation what has already happened. The committee has spent a fair bit of time going through the reorganisation process with the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport and others. We are probably up to date with what is happening, but I invite members' questions to the bill team.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): I have a couple of questions arising from evidence from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I am not sure whether you have had time to read that. The first page of COSLA's evidence addresses the subject of the name change and whether changing fashions for branding might require a subsequent alteration. Could you talk about the decision formally to rename the board VisitScotland, and could you explain how any subsequent change, if required, might be made?

Kirsten Davidson: There has been a recommendation that VisitScotland is a more appropriate name or brand for the organisation and we are taking this opportunity to change the name legally. As I said, it has been trading as VisitScotland for the past couple of years, even though it is legally still called the Scottish Tourist Board. If fashions changed and it was decided to change the name, we would not need further primary legislation to do that. The organisation could simply trade under a different mark, while legally remaining VisitScotland.

Christine May: My second question is on the partnerships—with local authorities, enterprise companies and other organisations—that are required to deliver tourism. To what extent is that aspect implicit in the bill, if at all?

Kirsten Davidson: As you can see, that is not set out anywhere in the bill. As the integration process of VisitScotland was happening, it was clear that there would need to be partnerships with other organisations, particularly local authorities, but also with other public sector organisations such as the enterprise networks. That process will continue after the bill has been passed. VisitScotland views those partnership arrangements as important.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I was interested to hear your response to Christine May's question about the name. Surely the logic would be to carry on calling the organisation the Scottish Tourist Board, given that it is able to trade

under any name. I am not sure why we have to change the board's official title by legislation.

Kirsten Davidson: We certainly could just keep the legal name as the Scottish Tourist Board and allow it to continue trading under the name VisitScotland. However, the name and brand of the Scottish Tourist Board belong in the past, and it is recognised that VisitScotland is the appropriate brand for that marketing organisation. As we are legislating to get rid of the requirement that there be area tourist boards and so to get rid of the network tourist boards, and to set up an integrated network, it seems a good opportunity to change the name legally.

Murdo Fraser: If the bill goes through, would there be anything to stop another body subsequently calling itself "the Scottish Tourist Board"?

Kirsten Davidson: VisitScotland is currently in the process of ensuring that it can use that trademark.

The Convener: I think that that covers everything. I thank Kirsten Davidson and her colleagues. That was very helpful.

We now move to item 2, the committee's consideration of its approach to the Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill at stage 1. An approach paper in my name, detailing what it is that we need to decide, has been circulated. It is a short, sharp, essentially technical bill. By way of clearing the decks, I have informally suggested to both the Minister for Parliamentary Business and the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport that, if they brought forward stage 1 of the bill from the end of June to an earlier time, we could probably get stage 2 completed by the summer recess, given the nature of the bill, thus leaving us with a bit more time for the Bankruptcy and Diligence etc (Scotland) Bill after the recess. That is obviously subject to the committee's approval, but it would seem to be a sensible approach.

I should also draw to the committee's attention the fact that the call for evidence has so far resulted in only two submissions. We have received a response from VisitScotland—unsurprisingly, it supports the bill. We also have a submission from COSLA, which supports the bill in principle. COSLA's major recommendation is that the local authorities should, by right, be represented on the board. However, the advice that we have received is that that would be in contravention of the spirit and letter of the law on public appointments in Scotland—we will just have to live with that. In any case, in nominating people for the board, it is up to ministers to take cognisance of the role of the local authorities in any appointments that they make to the board.

We will go through the options that are set out in the paper. Before we do so, does any member

have strong feelings one way or another about the bill?

Murdo Fraser: Not on the bill, but on our evidence taking. We visited the question of tourist board reorganisation on a previous occasion and in some detail. If I am right, the changes have now been in place for a year and should therefore have bedded in. Although I do not want to spend a lot of time in evidence taking, there may be some merit in having one evidence-taking session as a catch-up session on where the industry has gone, subsequent to the changes. We could also take the views of the industry on the extent to which the changes are a success. Such a session could act as a follow-on from the work that we did on the tourist board reorganisation—from memory, it was about 18 months ago.

The Convener: That is a fair suggestion.

Christine May: The suggestion is a reasonable one. The only caveat is that, where it holds strong views, the tourism industry is not slow in making those views known. For example, the Scottish Tourism Forum was vociferous in its evidence giving. I hesitate to put words into its mouth, but I assume that the forum has not responded to the call for evidence because it accepts the position as it is.

Further to Murdo Fraser's suggestion of an evidence-taking session, we should call the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport. We could discuss with her any views that the industry has expressed—including the issue that COSLA has raised of local authority representation. We could also discuss with her the possibility of accelerating the bill process in order to get through stage 2 before the recess, as suggested. If there is a view that the industry wants to present to us, I see no reason why we should not ask to hear it.

The Convener: The clerk has advised me that he contacted the Scottish Tourism Forum—which in the main but not exclusively represents private sector operators—but it declined our offer of appearing before the committee. The forum appears to think that that is not necessary.

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): Although it is always interesting to hear how things have developed, particularly some time after the sort of in-depth examination that we undertook of the developments in the tourism network in Scotland, it is not appropriate for us to have the kind of session that Murdo Fraser suggested as part of our formal committee business. I have several reasons for making that comment.

First, we need to be careful not to confuse wider discussions on a series of interesting issues with our specific consideration of the bill, which we should keep clean and clear. Secondly, there are

better ways for the Parliament to get that sort of update; ways that do not necessarily take up the time, cost and resource of the formal committee process. In the main, where there is an appetite to do so, the tourism industry has been very good at engaging with members by way of informal briefings and the like.

Perhaps, as we have done in other instances, we could facilitate an informal session that would allow a range of stakeholders the opportunity to have the kind of conversation with the committee that Murdo Fraser suggested. However, in proceeding with our consideration of the bill, my preference would be for us either not to take further oral evidence or to have a brief evidence-taking session, but only from the minister. After all, part of the conversation that members have proposed needs to be held with the minister. That said, I also think that we should try to stay fairly strictly within the bill's parameters. I realise that tourism is a major issue, and that many questions arise from our wider deliberations, but I do not think that this is either the time or the place to address them.

14:15

The Convener: When we carried out our work on tourist board reorganisation, we agreed to check progress from time to time. Perhaps we should keep that work separate from our deliberations on the bill. I suggest that we think about building into our work programme for September onwards a progress review, using either of the modus operandi suggested by Susan Deacon and Murdo Fraser, but that this afternoon we concentrate on how we proceed with consideration of the bill. Are members agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Is the consensus that we take evidence only from the minister?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I believe that a brief session with the minister has been pencilled in for next week.

Christine May: Will we discuss with her the proposals to accelerate consideration of the bill?

The Convener: Yes. I am not saying that that will be easy; I merely made the suggestion to the minister, and it is up to the Executive to find out whether it can be facilitated. I hope that, if we can take evidence from the minister next week, we can agree a stage 1 report. Are members agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

National Anthem

14:16

The Convener: We move to item 3, which concerns a request to discuss a national anthem. At this point, I hand over to my fellow baritone, Michael Matheson.

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): This issue was on the agenda for a previous meeting, but it had to be deferred because of an overrun.

During the recent Commonwealth games in Melbourne, there was some debate about a Scottish national anthem, largely because a number of songs were being used as our national anthem. However, in recent discussions on the matter, no consensus was reached, other than on the point that we should have a national anthem.

The Convener: I want to be clear that you are talking about a Scottish national anthem.

Michael Matheson: Of course. The discussions showed that we need a national debate to find the song that should become Scotland's national anthem. Indeed, the First Minister himself has said that that debate must take place.

I do not believe that it is up to this committee or any other group of politicians to decide on the song that should become our national anthem. However, we might have a locus in the matter. For example, who will facilitate a national debate? How will people reach, and then take forward, a view on the matter?

Now that the First Minister believes that we need a national debate and given the national consensus on the matter, I think that we can take a number of different approaches. For example, the debate could be directly facilitated by the committee, a civic organisation or, indeed, by a non-Executive body. The matter could then be passed to Parliament for a formal decision.

I am happy to discuss with the Executive, civic organisations and any other interested parties the different ways of facilitating a national debate and then to bring the options back to the committee as a catalyst to ensure that the debate happens.

The Convener: Thank you. I believe that Murdo Fraser wants to say a word or two.

Murdo Fraser: I admire Michael Matheson's tenacity in bringing this perennial issue back to the committee. We have a national anthem in Scotland: it is "God Save the Queen", which is played at official ceremonial events and usually when members of the royal family are present. The debate is really about whether we should have an anthem that we play, possibly at official events, but certainly at sporting events.

Michael Matheson rightly said that there is no consensus as to what, if any, anthem should be chosen. That is the first objection that I have to the approach. There are a number of songs—"Flower of Scotland", "Scotland the Brave" and "Highland Cathedral"—and, for one reason or another, they are all inappropriate. "Flower of Scotland" is inappropriate because some of the sentiments that are expressed in it are jingoistic and anti-English; "Scotland the Brave" is inappropriate because, although it is a good tune, it does not have words that match the upbeat nature of the music; and "Highland Cathedral" is a good tune, but it has no words at all.

Even if we were to agree in principle that we should have a Scottish national anthem, the practicalities of agreeing which tune we might use—whether any of the three that I have mentioned or any other—would be difficult. I am not sure what mechanism could be put in place to do that. However, I have a more fundamental objection to the approach. Michael Matheson said that we need a national debate, but that has already been tried in the recent past. I remember that at least one newspaper tried to stir up a debate about what the national anthem should be and, as usual, did not come to any great conclusion.

Philosophically, it is not for politicians to try to dictate what song should emerge as our new anthem if we want one. The Scottish Football Association used to play "God Save the Queen" before Scottish international matches, but it stopped doing that because it became clear that people on the terraces wanted to sing "Flower of Scotland", so the SFA adopted that as the anthem that it played before Scottish international matches and the Scottish Rugby Union followed suit. Both those instances are cases of sporting bodies reacting to public opinion.

If we are to get a new anthem for Scotland—and none of the current candidates fits the bill—a song will emerge in time, it will be adopted by the people, who will start singing it on the terraces and stands and we politicians will take our lead from the people and adopt it as our anthem. We need a bottom-up approach, not a top-down one and, although I admire Michael Matheson's persistence, the committee should not trouble itself with the matter any further.

The Convener: You are not suggesting a referendum, then.

Murdo Fraser: Not on this issue.

Susan Deacon: I will resist the temptation to express my preference for any song, words or tune or to engage with any of Murdo Fraser's analysis in reaching his conclusion. However, I reach the same conclusion by a different route. I

fundamentally disagree with Michael Matheson's assertion that there is a national consensus that there should be a national debate on the issue. I mix in wide and varied local and national circles, and I can think of several dozen other issues on which people would rather have a national debate. That is not to say that there should be no discussion about a national anthem. There will inevitably be further discussion about it and, no doubt, we will continue to receive surveys and phone calls from national newspapers asking about our personal preferences. It is absolutely fine that we, as citizens of Scotland, engage in that discussion, but, to my mind, it is—I shall say this politely—inappropriate that the committee should spend valuable parliamentary time debating the matter.

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): I apologise for being late.

The Convener: I meant to say that we have received apologies from Jamie Stone as well. He will also be a bit late.

Shiona Baird: There is obviously a desire to have a song that we can agree is Scotland's song, but we have competing songs and are not quite certain which one we should use. In a way, Murdo Fraser has emphasised that point. The fact is that we have a Scottish Parliament and are trying to strengthen our identity as a nation. We can still be a nation within the UK—it does not matter how members want to view the nation politically—but, because we are trying to establish clarity on what we are about, there is a need for such a debate. We do not have to spend a great deal of time on it. I would really like to know how other countries resolved the issue of having a national song. How was that chosen in the past, and who was instrumental in arriving at the decision? If we find that it was a political decision, we may not feel quite so awkward about discussing the matter. There needs to be a real conversation. I see no reason for the Scottish Parliament not to lead that.

Christine May: I am sure that members of the Scottish Parliament agree with Michael Matheson that we should have the debate that he proposes. However, I agree with Murdo Fraser and Susan Deacon that it is entirely wrong to bring such an issue down to the level of individual committees, made up of individual politicians. First, I suspect that we would not get consensus, even around this table, on what the song should ultimately be, or even on how we might go about creating a shortlist from which to choose. Secondly, I come back to Susan Deacon's point that such decisions come about with better public support when they are taken organically and result from a genuine wish by people to sing a particular song. I have been to various events with which a theme song is associated and watched people mouthing an

approximation of the words, which is cringingly embarrassing. That is the case with national songs. I see national teams across the world, made up of people from all kinds of nations, trying to sing a national song that is not in their first language or for which they do not know the words—it is awful. Let us have a more organic process. I do not think that it is appropriate for the committee to deal with the matter.

The Convener: Perhaps the issue could be aired in the Parliament at a members' business debate.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): We could have a wee singing competition.

The Convener: We could bring in Katie Boyle.

Christine May: As long as we do not bring in the convener.

The Convener: I would prefer a wee Cliff Richard number.

Karen Gillon: Hear, hear!

Christine May: We're all going on a summer holiday.

Michael Matheson: When I intimated that I would write to the committee on the matter and submit a short paper to initiate the discussion, I was conscious that some of my unionist colleagues would have difficulty with that. Although they like the mantra that Scotland is the best small nation in the world, for some strange reason they do not think that we should have a national anthem. That is a matter for their conscience, rather than anything else.

Members recognise that a debate is taking place. Sadly, Christine May misunderstood what I said and what I have written in my paper. I am not suggesting that the committee should lead the debate. Many people are saying that there should be a national debate—I say to Susan Deacon that the First Minister thinks that there should be one. No one seems to be leading that debate. I am not suggesting that this committee or any other committee of the Parliament should necessarily do that. However, we should try to provide some focus on the issue of who should lead the debate. It could be a range of organisations and individuals, but at the moment there is no such focus.

I am conscious that some colleagues seem to oppose my proposal for some strange reason. However, I have no doubt that the debate will emerge. I am sure that the people of Scotland will identify with the new song much more closely than with the draconian "God save the Queen" that we have at the moment.

Murdo Fraser: In what way is it draconian?

The Convener: With its anti-Scottish sentiment.

Karen Gillon: I am with the convener in wanting a Cliff Richard number, to be commissioned by a task force—following focus groups and a special inquiry by an expert working group—to come up with a new song for Scotland.

Far be it from me to suggest that even Michael Matheson has retreated into the silo from which we all come and made this a debate about whether members are unionists or nationalists. A new song will emerge. In my view, "Highland Cathedral" is the best tune, but it does not have the appropriate words. This afternoon I conducted a small survey among members of the Parliament and came up with a wide range of suggestions, ranging from Adam and the Ants to "Scots, wha hae". There is no consensus, even in the Parliament.

14:30

Michael Matheson: Did you conduct the survey at your group meeting?

Karen Gillon: No, among the wider public.

The Convener: What about "Things can only get better"?

Karen Gillon: "Simply the Best" was obviously a favourite. However, the time has come to say, "Thanks, Michael, but no thanks."

The Convener: I think that that is the majority view.

Michael Matheson: I was going to push it to a vote, but I think that I will leave it.

Annual Report

14:31

The Convener: Item 4 is consideration of our annual report, a draft of which has been circulated. Do members have any comments? It is fairly straightforward.

Christine May: It is very short for such an awful lot of work.

The Convener: They all are. I am told that there is a word limit.

Karen Gillon: The Conveners Group raised with the Procedures Committee the issue of the role and purpose of the annual reports. There is nothing in the rules that prescribes how an annual report should be presented, although there is something in the guidance that is given to clerks. If committee members are of the view that the annual report does not accurately reflect the work that we have done or give the public a flavour of what we are doing, we may want to take up the issue with the Conveners Group, so that the guidance from the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body can be changed.

The Convener: I am happy with the draft and see no need to change it.

Christine May: Although my remark was light-hearted, I suggest that we are better having a shorter report. It is more likely to be read and covers the main elements of our work over the past year.

The Convener: Members are happy with the report. For item 5, we move into private session.

14:32

Meeting continued in private until 15:48.

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