Introduction
VisitScotland welcomes the opportunity to present written evidence to the Committee.

The following sets out the active role VisitScotland plays in positioning Scotland as a leading nation, both in developing tourism and in driving the visitor economy up the European agenda.

The paper also explains the benefits currently accruing to VisitScotland and the industry through EU membership, offers an update on the business view following the referendum and provides figures on EU employment levels in tourism and hospitality as well as within VisitScotland.

Engagement with the European Commission
VisitScotland, through its Business Affairs department, actively engages with the European Commission and other organisations in Brussels and across Europe.

The European Commission is keen to see tourism develop and grow across all member states and, VisitScotland, with its strong focus on the importance of the visitor economy has been able to present Scotland as a key and leading partner in this enterprise.

Through a programme of activity - highlights of which are outlined below - VisitScotland works to raise the profile of Scotland’s approach to delivering for the visitor economy; builds Scotland’s reputation on the European stage; and enhances its impact by exchanging insight and best practice with key stakeholders.

VisitScotland also maintains close relations with Scotland Europa, the EU engagement body, identifying opportunities for engagement with key stakeholders to create positive profile for VisitScotland and Scotland’s work across a range of key tourism development strategies.

Through this work VisitScotland delivers opportunities for the Scottish Government to present the country as a leader in tourism.

Outline of key activity – Social Tourism
The creation of a bilateral partnership with VisitFlanders, an influential tourism organisation in Brussels, led to a Memorandum of Understanding, with VisitFlanders, sharing its long-standing expertise on social tourism with VisitScotland, enabling VisitScotland to develop the inclusion elements of its corporate objectives more fully.
In return VisitScotland is sharing its expertise on quality with VisitFlanders, inspiring them to revise their own scheme completely and make it more focused on the visitor experience and helping businesses exceed expectations.

VisitScotland and VisitFlanders co-hosted a stakeholder event in Brussels in May 2015, with VisitScotland raising the profile of its innovative approach to delivering for the visitor economy through events and digital partnerships.

**Outline of key activity – engagement with leading tourism groups**

Meetings with key stakeholders across a range of tourism-related organisations regularly take place. These include the European Commission’s Tourism, Emerging and Creative Industries directorate; influential MEPs in the European Parliament’s tourism intergroup; and NECSTouR, the Network for European Regions for Sustainable and Competitive Tourism.

This activity has delivered:

- Profile and a highly regarded reputation amongst key stakeholders in Brussels.
- Influence and the opportunity to demonstrate leadership on key tourism strategies.
- The creation of mutually beneficial bilateral relationships.

VisitScotland sponsored NECSTouR’s 2016 AGM in June, which provided a platform for VisitScotland’s work to senior stakeholders from the European Commission, European Parliament, UNWTO, European Travel Commission, and other leading tourism bodies.

Positive engagement with the European Commission has resulted in a number of speaking opportunities for VisitScotland to raise the profile of approaches to tourism development in Scotland:

- High level conference on Attracting Investment in Tourism, April 2016.
- Panel presentation at Milan Expo 2015 – highlighting best practice in the promotion of Scottish food and drink during Scotland’s Year of Food and Drink 2015.
- VisitScotland’s partnership working to develop marine and coastal tourism.

**Accessing European Regional Development Funds**

VisitScotland currently draws down £11.7 million in European Regional Development Funds for the programme 2015 – 2018. Whilst tourism is not mentioned in the programme, VisitScotland has been able to make it apply to tourism by linking it to support for SMEs in helping them internationalise their business.
Stakeholders within Europe have been keen to understand more about this and Scotland will now have a platform at the EU Commission High Level event on tourism funding at the end of September.

**Tourism businesses / Welcoming European Visitors**

Through VisitScotland’s direct contact with tour operators and businesses and survey work carried out by the Scottish Tourism Alliance, there appears to have been no immediate impact on EU visitors holidaying in Scotland, at this point.

Of course, it remains to be seen how negotiations impact on business, in terms of confidence, costs and investment and on visitors in relation to ease of travel.

**Employment of EU nationals**

The tourism and hospitality industry in Scotland employs in excess of 25,000 EU national workers. Having access to a skilled and motivated labour market remains a priority for the industry.

VisitScotland’s staff base comprises 12% EU nationals, working in a variety of locations and jobs. Their role enables VisitScotland to deliver effective media and marketing campaigns to our priority markets in Europe and, with language skills, assist in welcoming EU visitors to the country.

**Next steps**

VisitScotland will continue to work with the Committee to keep members updated on activity relating to Europe, whether through written evidence or at a parliamentary session.