Response by The Scottish Castles Association to The Historic Environment Scotland Bill (SP Bill 47)

1. The Scottish Castles Association welcomes the clear statement of the policy behind the Bill, namely “Understanding, Protecting and Valuing the Historic Environment’ and is generally supportive of the its specific provisions.

2. We welcome the Functions of HES in Part 1.2 including the recognition that it should ‘contribute as appropriate to the development and delivery of policies and strategies in relation to the historic environment’ Para 1.2.5(f).

3. However, we would like to see the inclusion of ‘a specific responsibility to use its expertise to promote the reuse of historic buildings so that their long term future may be assured’. While the primary aim of HES must be to maintain the historic environment, it cannot conceivably ensure its survival alone or in combination with other public bodies, for there are too many historical buildings for them to look after, particularly bearing in mind the destructive effects of nature. Alternative uses and sources of finance may therefore need to be sought to ensure the survival of many of these buildings and this may, for example, necessitate the incorporation of the historic structure within a substantially new building. This would challenge some of the orthodox approaches which have prevailed in Historic Scotland in the past and which led to much criticism e.g. in relation to Castle Tioram. We feel that HES should have a legal duty to facilitate reuse of a historic building in a suitable and sympathetic way if it cannot finance its preservation, rather than simply having the powers to obstruct its development, particularly if the proposal has a lot of local support.

4. We suggest that membership of the board of HES should be advertised in the same way as all other public appointments and that the specific criteria for selection should be made transparent by publishing them.

5. We welcome the continuation of the power to award grants but would like clarity over how an organisation with a budget of £80m and employing 1100 staff could find much slack to make more than a few awards each year. This concern is reflected in our support for alternative private funding in certain circumstances (see 3 above).

Submitted by Dr John Hunter OBE, Chairman, SCA
22nd April 2014

Chairman Dr John Hunter OBE