

Official Response

SUBJECT: Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Bill - Stage One Call for Evidence
REQUESTED BY: Local Government and Regeneration Committee, Scottish Parliament
REFERENCE: OR-2014/09
DATE: 29 September 2014
SUBMITTED BY: David Bradwell, Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer

Preamble

This is a joint submission is made on behalf of:

- The Baptist Union of Scotland
- The Catholic Parliamentary Office
- The Church of Scotland, Church and Society Council
- The Methodist Church
- The Salvation Army
- The Scottish Churches Anti-Human Trafficking Group
- The Scottish Episcopal Church, Mission and Ministry Board
- The United Free Church of Scotland, Church and Society Committee
- The United Reformed Church, Synod of Scotland Church and Society Committee

Response

1. Thank you for the invitation to contribute to the scrutiny of these proposals. Our main interest in this Bill relates to Section 68 and the regulation of Sexual Entertainment Venues. A joint response to the Scottish Government consultation was made by the Baptist Union of Scotland, the Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church, the Salvation Army, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the United Reformed Church, which can be found here: <http://www.actsparl.org/media/159989/or-ecu-sexualentertainmentvenues-sept13.pdf>
2. We have opted not to respond directly to the questions posed in the Call for Evidence as our concerns are of a general nature and restricted to only one part of the Bill. The points we wish to make broadly relate to questions 9, 50, 51 and 52 of the Call for Evidence.
3. The Churches support the establishment of a separate licensing regime for sexual entertainment venues in the terms set out in the Bill. The nature of sexual entertainment is significantly different from other forms of public entertainment. It is, therefore, entirely appropriate that it should be the subject of separate licensing from other forms of public entertainment.
4. Churches acknowledge that sexual entertainment is a legal activity; we are of the view that it should be well regulated to allow for communities' views to be taken into consideration. Our main concern is that we believe that sexual entertainment demeans the human person

as it presents the body as a commodity; this is in contradiction to the principles of love, humanity and justice which we share with many people in Scotland.

5. The potential for sexual entertainment to be a driver for violence against women, in all its forms, and as a stimulus for human trafficking, are real and contemporary issues which the churches and wider society continue to struggle with; there are clear implications for human rights and equality issues. Regulation alone can only achieve so much, we are also committed to working to change attitudes and behaviours by providing information and improving understanding of the human condition. Our work in this area includes the advocacy and awareness-raising work carried out by the Scottish Churches Anti-Human Trafficking Group.
6. The Churches agree with the creation of a new power for local authorities to determine the appropriate number of sexual entertainment venues in their area, and that this can be set at zero. This mirrors a 'no casino' power that local authorities have under the Gambling Act 2005. Local authorities should be required to consult widely in the formation of a policy statement and in reviews of existing policy.
7. We do not support the exemption from licensing for venues which only have fewer than four sexual entertainments in any one year period. The Government have not explained the rationale for this proposal and we have concerns that it simply allows for the continuation of sexual entertainment activity which is unregulated. We should like to hear from the Government, from local authorities, the police and groups working with victims of human trafficking and to combat violence against women if they believe that this is wise, and what evidence they have to back this up; we would urge the Committee to consider exploring this question in particular. We have a broader concern that this exemption could completely undermine a local authority's decision not to have any sexual entertainment venues if performers could work different clubs, bars, pubs and other places to get around the wishes of the locally elected authority.
8. The argument to regulate sexual entertainment venues is compelling and therefore all venues providing sexual entertainment should be licensed. The issue of strip-o-grams is of concern because they may be encountered by members of the public in venues which do not normally provide sexual entertainment, e.g. when booked to attend a restaurant or bar by a hen or stag party. In the proposed Section 68 (3) we firmly believe that this is a form of sexual entertainment and should, therefore be subject to regulation. We also have a concern for members of staff who might not wish to view or be part of a sexual entertainment performance taking place in an unregulated venue for conscience reasons; a supplementary question we have is what protection and information are employees being offered?

Information requested by the Committee

1. Please supply your name and contact details:

David Bradwell

Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office, 44 Hanover Street, Edinburgh EH2 2DR, Scotland.

2. Please confirm that you have read and understood the Scottish Parliaments "Policy on the treatment of written evidence by subject and mandatory committees":

Yes.

3. Please confirm whether you are content for your name to be published with your submission:

Yes.

4. Which of the three categories below best describes your interest in the Bill (please tick only one)?

Personal

Professional ✓

Commercial

5. Do you wish your email to be added to the Committee's distribution list for updates on progress of the Bill:

Yes.

6. Invitations to give oral evidence to the Committee on the Bill will be based on the submissions received. If you wish your submission to be included amongst those considered for possible invitation to give oral evidence, please indicate here.

Yes; if you would like a Churches representative please contact the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office who will be able to arrange for the most appropriate persons to give evidence.

7. You may answer questions on the entire Bill, or on any part of the Bill. Please indicate which parts of the Bill you are responding to? (You may select as many options that apply).

Civic licensing – sexual entertainment venues.