SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH RUGBY

Scottish Rugby welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scotland Bill Committee’s call for evidence. Scottish Rugby is the national governing body for the sport of rugby union in Scotland. It oversees all levels of the game from grassroots and schools, through youth, club, professional and representative teams, together with coaching, refereeing and volunteering. We would be willing to give evidence to the committee on the issue and would be happy to discuss any aspects of our submission should you have any questions.

We have confined our response to the issue of broadcasting. Scottish Rugby has been active in lobbying the UK Government, Scottish Broadcasting Commission and the BBC Trust to increase and improve coverage of rugby for Scottish audiences. Growing the sport of rugby is a key strategic aim of Scottish Rugby but despite rugby’s growing popularity in Scotland, there are major gaps in the broadcast coverage in Scotland, particularly on terrestrial television.

8. What is your view on the Scottish Government’s call for more influence in the regulation of the reserved matter of broadcasting? How might such increased influence advantage or disadvantage Scotland (a) culturally and (b) economically?

Scottish Rugby would welcome greater devolved power of broadcasting regulation to Scottish Ministers as this increased influence could advantage Scottish viewers if more Scottish sport was broadcast. Scottish Rugby believes that increased coverage would lead to several advantages both culturally and economically:

Cultural advantages
As we have entered a decade of sport it is vitally important that we capture the opportunities that both major and community based sporting events offer, thus ensuring that a lasting legacy is secured for the benefit of the whole population. However, to achieve this, sports coverage in Scotland must become diverse and not solely dominated by football.

With the Commonwealth Games fast approaching, which includes rugby as a core sport and with rugby 7s re-entry into the Olympics, we have further reason to ensure the sport is profiled appropriately to Scottish audiences.

Scottish Rugby believes that increased coverage of club rugby (including our professional teams, Edinburgh and Glasgow Warriors) and of grassroots rugby will lead to an increase in popularity and demand for the sport. However, no comprehensive
coverage of the domestic leagues in Scotland is currently offered by any of the broadcasters.

We have found BBC Scotland in particular to be lacking in its support particularly when compared to BBC Wales. We believe an inequitable distribution of resource is being adopted by BBC as an organisation when investment by BBC Scotland and BBC Wales is compared.

The development of a Scottish Digital Channel could offer benefits for grassroots rugby by broadcasting local games, helping to link communities by sport. This would also help deliver a sustainable future for both club and professional rugby teams in Scotland.

Economic advantages
Rugby is a well-loved sport in Scotland. More than 67,000 fans pack Murrayfield for the average RBS 6 Nations international matches and millions more watch on television thanks to the BBC’s continued coverage of the tournament.

The impact of events at Murrayfield Stadium in the past year was worth nearly £130m to the Scottish economy, of which some £72.9m was spent in the Edinburgh area.

Scottish Rugby has successfully lobbied the UK Government, along with the other home unions, to ensure that the RBS 6 Nations remains off the category A events list, thereby ensuring that the rights can be acquired in a competitive market place. Scottish Rugby notes the Scottish Government’s wish to have the power to add or remove events from the list and would ask that the requirement is protected if any future new powers were granted.

Scottish Rugby believes that there would be merit in the devolved nations having this control in order to maintain a list more relevant to Scottish audiences. Scottish Rugby would argue that important fixtures in the domestic league and events such as the Melrose 7s could be protected on a future Scottish list.

Conclusion
Broadcasting coverage improved in season 2010/11, further to our extensive lobbying and liaison with new and established broadcasters, with games being televised live on BBC Scotland and BBC ALBA covering professional rugby matches live.

Furthermore, we have in recent years supported and funded programmes on STV including assisting production of the STV Rugby Sports programme. This programme also covered the Glasgow and Edinburgh back-to-back derbies during the festive
seasons in recent years. STV have been a willing partner however their constant position has been one of the finance required to get rugby on TV rather than a genuine willingness to invest in acquiring rights and assisting us in growing the game through promotion and investment.

However, we welcome the willingness of select media groups, the Scottish Government and politicians of all parties to work in partnership with Scottish Rugby to put further pressure on broadcasters. There remains a need for all broadcasters to give greater commitment to the game at all levels in Scotland during this decade of sport. This was recognised by all Holyrood parties in manifestos and statements in the run up to the recent Scottish Parliament elections and could be benefitted if Scottish Ministers had greater regulatory control over broadcasting.

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