Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation into the review of parliamentary business. I welcome the debate which the Committee is having about the Parliament’s procedures, to ensure their effectiveness, openness and practicality in the future.

I know that one issue you wish to consider is the parliamentary week. My concerns around this, I will admit, touches on me more than most MSPs, so I declare an interest, as it were.

My only suggestion would be that consideration is given to the effect which any changes to the parliamentary week would have on members representing large constituencies, particularly island constituencies far from Edinburgh.

For example, unlike some members who can easily commute to Parliament, as the member representing the Western Isles the only days I normally have available for constituency work – in a constituency which is spread across fifteen islands stretching a length of 160 miles - are a Monday or a Friday. I should add that getting to some parts of my constituency at the weekend is difficult, and regularly impossible, to reconcile with getting to my house.

I would request the committee to take into account the effect which any lengthening of the parliamentary week would have on constituency responsibilities for island members.

I cannot get back to the islands on a Thursday night, but instead get the 7am Friday plane from Edinburgh to Stornoway (or sometimes a plane from Glasgow to either Benbecula or Barra). To make the best use of constituency time I currently fly down to the Parliament on a Tuesday morning, as much as possible. Depending on what island I am flying from, and whether I am flying into Glasgow or Edinburgh airports, it is often late afternoon on Tuesday before I can get in to Parliament. The alternative is to encroach into Mondays and try to corral all constituency engagements, regardless of how many different islands they are on, into Fridays or Saturdays.

Therefore my request, which I suspect might be shared by MSPs in other island constituencies, would be to ask that any changes to the parliamentary week would not move committees or other parliamentary business into Mondays or Tuesday mornings, or into Fridays.
For island members, any such extensions of the Parliamentary week would make the already immensely complicated task of balancing work in the constituency with work in Edinburgh virtually impossible.

I am grateful for the committee’s consideration of this matter.

Alasdair Allan MSP
15 September 2011