European and External Relations Committee

The EU referendum and its implications for Scotland

Written submission from The National Trust for Scotland

Introduction

Following the recent referendum on membership of the European Union, the Scottish Parliament’s European and External Relations Committee issued a call for evidence on the implications for Scotland.

The National Trust for Scotland is Scotland’s leading conservation charity, independent of government, and committed to the conservation of our natural and cultural heritage, and encouraging access, enjoyment and learning. Conservation is not the prevention of change, but the thoughtful management of change to ensure what we value most is sustained. This paper outlines some of the key concerns following the referendum result, and our recommendations for future action.

Environmental protections

Membership of the EU resulted in the development of robust systems and processes for the protection of the natural environment and the most significant natural heritage sites in Scotland are protected by a series of EU directives, covering both marine and terrestrial fauna, flora and habitats. The Birds Directive and the Habitats Directives are considered to be cornerstone pieces of legislation for conservation across the European Union, particularly in terms of enforcement.

While the majority of EU legislation would most likely remain in effect immediately after withdrawal from the EU, there is real concern that over time these key pieces of legislation would be weakened, through the lack of supranational enforcement, and failing to keep pace with EU developments.

Another area of concern relates to EU-wide obligations to carry out Strategic Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment to manage impacts on people and on the wider environment. Again, while the transposed legislation should not be immediately affected by leaving the EU, over time there is a risk that these protections are seen as “red tape” and reduced or removed.

One area where exit from the EU could potentially bring opportunities for improved environmental protection is in the movement of diseases and pests. At present, the single market favours the free movement of materials and it is difficult to exclude products from infected areas. Revised border controls could allow for more stringent quarantine measures.
**Recommendations:**

- The value of participation in an EU-wide system of environmental protections is recognised.
- That any new environmental provisions continue to provide comparable, or improved, measures for effective and enforceable conservation.
- That the impacts of development are duly considered and suitable measures to reduce or eliminate these are applied.

**Agriculture and fisheries**

Agricultural policy is currently devolved to the Scottish Parliament, but the framework for agricultural subsidies is set at EU level. Funding schemes under the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) are guaranteed until 2020, but there is significant uncertainty over what happens after this period and what Scotland’s funding will be. Fisheries is a reserved matter for the EU institutions. The EU’s Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is a management system that attempts to consider the full ecosystem on an international level, but is not without issue.

Following any exit from the EU, Scotland, and/or the UK, may have to establish a new framework for the management of our farmed environment and our sustainable management of our fisheries. We would argue that sustainable resource use is made the basis of public policy, and the opportunity is taken to link public support to identifiable public benefits.

Consideration should be given to the impacts of withdrawal from the EU on the schemes relating to geographical indications and traditional specialties i.e Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographic Indication (PGU) and Traditional Specialties Guaranteed (TSG). Amongst other reasons, these schemes were developed with a view to promote products with specific characteristics, particularly those based on traditional practices, and coming from less-favoured or rural areas and to encourage the retention of population in rural areas.

**Recommendation:**

- That any new subsidy schemes consider the public benefit of farming schemes and the impacts on the environment.
- Ensure consideration is given to agricultural schemes that support regional communities and promote Scotland’s natural and cultural heritage.
- That any new controls relating to fisheries provide protection not only for fish stocks and the marine environment, but the wider ecosystem that relies on healthy seas.

**Movement of people**

The 2014 NTS visitor survey found that 12% of NTS property visits were by overseas visitors. The countries providing the greatest number of visitors were America (33%), Australia (17%), Germany (16%) and Canada (11%). The UK currently permits citizens
of designated countries, including America, Canada and Australia to enter without a visa if visiting for tourism reasons. An alternative to EU membership that impacts on free movement of workers or the ease of recreational travel within Europe, could have a detrimental impact on tourism and visits to heritage sites within the UK and Scotland. It is not currently known how much the possible alternatives to EU membership would affect the tourism experience in Scotland.

NTS currently hosts staff and volunteers from a number of EU countries, who sustain our ability to provide access to and enjoyment of Scotland’s heritage. While unrestricted movement may not be fully possible, ensuring continued entry to Scotland for non-UK staff and volunteers is highly important for cultural organisations generally, both to allow access to specialist heritage skills, and to support knowledge exchange.

Recommendation:

- That any new controls relating to movement of people give consideration to allowing ease of visiting, or does not hamper tourism. The impact on the exchange of skills and experience should also be considered.

Research funding

While the NTS has not historically undertaken collaborative research with Higher Education Institutes, which would allow access funding schemes such as the Horizon 2020 programme or ERASMUS, research activity on the Trust estate, and the quality of the knowledge base more generally, may reduce if new schemes are not put in place. If Scotland was to remain part of the EEA, access to EU funding should continue as long as buy-in to the scheme occurred. Any other alternative membership would probably not allow access to the funding scheme since one of the key components is that free travel between countries must be allowed. Such movement between institutes and countries is key to academic advancement and enrichment. Many other organisations, including those from the third sector, rely on such funding to survive and the impact on this sector could be damaging.

Recommendation:

- That an agreement allowing continued access to EU sources of research funding is sought.