



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Devolution (Further Powers) Committee

c/o Clerk to the Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
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26 November, 2015

Dear Secretary of State,

Re. Scotland Bill 2015-16

Thank you for your letter dated 24 November. We welcome your comments regarding the Committee's scrutiny and how this has been an invaluable contribution to the process to date.

At our meeting this week, members of the Committee discussed your response as part of our discussion of our future work programme. Our earlier letter to you, the contents of which we stand by was the culmination of our near year-long detailed and extensive inquiry since the publication of the Smith Commission's report. This work has involved taking expert testimony from numerous witnesses representing a very wide range of Scottish society, as well as the consideration of over 80 written submissions of evidence. It is their views that have underpinned our assessment of the Bill and it is their issues or concerns that have helped shape our view of where the Bill currently stands.

Given the contents and tone of your response to our assessment as set out in our letter, it is clear that there is little scope for further substantial progress to be made in seeking to improve the Bill at this stage. Nevertheless, we will continue to keep track of the progress of the Bill as it progresses through the House of Lords.

Our main focus will now be on preparing for a future assessment of the Fiscal Framework should both governments reach agreement on this matter in due course. As we know you are aware, the Fiscal Framework is a critical document and, as we have said previously, is of equal importance alongside the provisions in the Bill itself when it comes to determining whether this Committee will make a recommendation to the Scottish Parliament to give its required legislative consent to the Bill.

Any assessment - by this Committee or the general public in Scotland – of whether the Scotland Bill has delivered the Smith Commission’s agreement in full can only realistically be made when the detail of a final draft Fiscal Framework has been made available by both governments.

We are preparing the ground now for a future assessment of the Fiscal Framework and looking at criteria against which we will judge whether any agreement represents a fair and sustainable settlement for a future Scottish Parliament.

Given the importance that all members of this Committee attach to parliamentary scrutiny of a final draft Framework, we expect extensive co-operation from both Scotland Office and HM Treasury ministers and officials in the coming weeks in terms of any requests we may have for information or for appearances before the Committee. We would welcome your assistance in this regard as to date, we are still awaiting a response to our request for HM Treasury officials to brief the Committee on the Fiscal Framework.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce Crawford". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bruce Crawford MSP
Convener