RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

SOUTH OF SCOTLAND ENTERPRISE BILL

SUBMISSION FROM ANNA JOHNSON

I very much welcome the establishment of a dedicated Enterprise Agency for the South of Scotland. Responding to the particular challenges of the region through the development of appropriate and sustainable opportunities is essential to the Agency’s proposed leading role in delivering ambitions for the area and supporting the rural economy.

I am however disappointed that the natural environment, one of the most important strengths of the area and the foundation on which much of its economy is based, does not appear to be adequately recognised in the draft Bill.

This omission is surprising since landscape, the natural environment, and land use were raised as key issues and themes during the consultation events held across the area in the summer – as detailed in the responses contained in the ‘SoSEA Consultation Analysis Report’.

In particular, the response from Dumfries and Galloway Council highlights the rural landscape and environment as one of the area’s biggest assets – key drivers behind people choosing to live and work in the area and an important pull factor in attracting business investment and visitors. More fundamentally, it provides the rich natural resources on which the main industries of agriculture, forestry, renewables, fisheries and tourism are based.

I would urge the Committee to query this startling omission from the draft SoSEA Bill, and use its influence to ensure that a healthy and productive natural environment is sustained as the heart of the economic prosperity of the area.