RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

SOUTH OF SCOTLAND ENTERPRISE BILL

SUBMISSION FROM KAREN MORLEY

Land Use, the Natural Environment and Climate Change

The consultation document on a new enterprise agency for the South of Scotland showed a surprising lack of awareness of the role of the natural environment play in the economic and cultural prosperity of the south of Scotland. Similarly, there was little comment on the need for sustainable economic development, crucial given the potential current and future threats to our environment from a changing climate and globalisation.

These themes and omissions were noted and raised at a number of the public consultation events. In fact land use issues figured highly in the summery report on the consultation exercise. ‘Land Use’ was identified as one of 19 ‘key areas of focus’ (page 7), and, on p7 and p11, ‘Land Use’ is shown to be fourth highest frequency of response (89 comments). Admittedly, ‘Land Use’ is a ‘theme’ category, grouping comments on subjects such as Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Land Reform and Management, Natural Heritage and Environment, Coastal, National Parks, Landscape, Ecosystem services, Sustainable Development and Sustainability (from pages 8 and 23-26), however this shows how the natural environment underpins so many issues which are important to the communities and businesses of the south of Scotland. ‘Land use’ is expanded on in ‘Section 3 Main Concerns’ (pp23-26) : One of the four ‘key messages’ is “Land was seen to be a significant asset to South Scotland and one we needed to make more sensible use of.” Perhaps this key message was missed? e.g. ‘The value/benefits (including to our economy) of our high quality natural environment need to be acknowledged and this strength enhanced’. Given the above, it was very disappointing to read the draft bill, supposedly influenced by the consultation responses, and to note there was very little mention of the sustainable use of our natural environment, the safeguarding of natural capital and ecosystem services. The need for a strong and balanced land use strategy for the region given potential significant changes to agriculture and forestry has been ignored. The connection between these changes and tourism, biodiversity, flood relief, food security, water quality and many more issues are crucial. Rural land use effects many areas of life in the south of Scotland. It effects the production of our raw materials, agricultural and forestry products, effects the value added ‘quality’ image of our region, the health and wellbeing of our communities, the attractiveness of our region to tourism and attracting new businesses to rural areas. A progressive economic agency needs to understand and focus on the whole of the chain not just the end product, if it is to achieve sustainable economic growth, which should be our ultimate goal for the region.

A healthy, productive and diverse natural environment should be at the top of any new agencies priorities, unfortunately it receives scant attention in this bill.
The first aim 1(b) shows promise by including the environment of the south of Scotland but while 1(a) is further defined and expanded there is no further mention of 1(b), without this further clarification we are unable to comment further on the bill aims or effectiveness when it comes to the ‘environment of south of Scotland’ except to say I think it is poorly represented and its value is not recognised in the bill. Suggested definitions for 1(b) include:

(a) promoting responsible stewardship of the natural and built environment

(b) encouraging responsible resource management including balanced land use

(c) encouraging and enhancing community and visitor access to our natural environment’

1(a) when further defined in (2) includes no reference to sustainable economic development I would suggest that in the list under (2) the first line should be something along the lines of (a) supporting inclusive, sustainable economic growth

Climate change mitigation and adaptation – this new agency and bill come into existence at a time when globally and locally we face increasing risk from climate change and other environmental pressures.

This bill should address this reality and seek to have the awareness of environmental change and potential impacts at its heart, both in terms of mitigating further climate impact and in ensuring the south of Scotland’s economy adapts to this changing environment. This message should run right through the legislation and the ethos of the resulting agency. The Scottish Government sees the importance of this so how has this bill been drafted with no reference to this? Even the list of legislation to which the bill relates fails to acknowledge the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009

In conclusion, I hope the committee will robustly question the lack of reference to sustainable economic growth, sustaining a healthy and productive natural environment and mitigating and adapting to climate change when they consider the content of the draft bill and the remit of the new agency.