



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 9 March 2017

Session 5



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
6th Meeting 2017, Session 5

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)

*Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP)

*Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

*John Scott (Ayr) (Con)

*Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Wands

LOCATION

The Adam Smith Room (CR5)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 9 March 2017

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decisions on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the sixth meeting in 2017 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. I remind everyone to switch electronic devices to silent.

Under item 1, the committee is asked to agree to take item 6 in private. That item is consideration of a complaint report from the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thank you very much. Under item 2, the committee is asked to decide to consider in private at a future meeting the commissioner's report and the committee's draft report on the complaint. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Cross-party Group

10:00

The Convener: Item 3 is evidence on a proposed cross-party group on fishing. I welcome to the meeting Stewart Stevenson MSP, who is co-convener of the proposed group and invite him to make an opening statement.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Thank you very much, convener. The other co-convener, who was chosen at the initial meeting that we held to organise the group on 7 February, is my colleague Tavish Scott. We offered other interested parties the opportunity to be co-convener, but that is what we have ended up with.

Since 1999, when the Scottish Parliament resumed, there has never been a cross-party group on fishing. Perhaps the profile that fishing has in light of the substantial changes that the catching sector in particular expects when we leave the common fisheries policy has drawn together a diverse group of interests in the industry. We have people with environmental interests—we have made sure that they are included—from the catching sector and from the processing sector.

Fishing is an important industry for many people in specific areas of Scotland but one that will probably pass by many other areas. We have never had particularly good-quality information flowing from the industry to members of the Parliament when we have debates, and we see an opportunity to get the diverse group of people to whom I referred, who often fundamentally disagree with one another, together in one room to ensure that parliamentarians are much better informed.

I am delighted that, at our first meeting, representatives from all the political parties were prepared to sign up for membership. At the moment, the exception is the Greens but that was purely because the person who might be interested happened to be unwell. I cannot commit other people to sign up but I expect that there will be a further sign-up.

I hope that the group will better inform Parliament and provide a structure for the many different parts of the industry to talk to one another in a way that is moderated by their being under the beady eye of Parliament. The industry has surprisingly few opportunities to meet together in all its diversity and we might be creating such an opportunity for the first time.

I am happy to take any questions that members have.

The Convener: Thank you very much, Mr Stevenson.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I have a simple question for clarification. The name of the group refers to just “fishing”, but the description and membership seemed to imply that the group is about commercial fishing—the fishing industry—and will not touch on issues that relate to fishing by individuals as a pastime. Have I got that right? Did you consider a name that would clarify that the group is about commercial fishing rather than the kind of fishing that individuals might choose to participate in?

Stewart Stevenson: You are correct that the group is about the catching of wild fish—we do not seek to cover the commercial salmon farming industry or similar industries. However, it does not exclude people who catch wild fish offshore on a non-commercial basis, although we have not sought to include them because there does not appear to be an organisation with which we can make contact.

In using the term “fishing”, we are covering quite a wide range of activity. However, in essence, it is restricted to catching wild fish off our shores and to those people in the related processing industry. It covers the commercial side, but it does not seek to exclude people who have non-commercial interests. Indeed, we want to ensure that we have environmental interests covered through the membership—and people in that field are keen to be involved. There is a balance between people who are there because they have commercial interests in the industry and those who do not.

Patrick Harvie: You do not intend to cover recreational angling or inshore fishing, for example.

Stewart Stevenson: We are content to include offshore fishing, but we have not found a way of making contact with people. However, we have had only one meeting and we are very open to people with that interest coming to and participating in our meetings, because it is an important interest. A piece of secondary legislation touching on precisely those people’s interests will shortly come to a committee of the Parliament. It is not a trivial matter; it is quite proper to raise it.

The Convener: You said that you are not looking at salmon farming. However, in ecological and other ways, salmon farming can impact on wild salmon fishing. Why would offshore salmon farming be excluded from the remit?

Stewart Stevenson: We are not actively trying to exclude it; we simply have not included it, if I can put it that way. In part, that is because the offshore fishing industry is complex. It has many strands, which compete with one another. We have simply attempted to come up with a remit

that is as narrowly focused as possible, but we would not exclude those who are involved in farming offshore and in our lochs if there was a feeling that they were not finding a proper way to communicate with Parliament.

The salmon farming industry in particular is important—I think that it brings £300 million to £400 million a year into Scotland. It has effectively worked with Parliament, but the offshore industry has not, hitherto, found an effective way of dealing with Parliament and parliamentarians, so that has been our initial focus.

We do not seek to exclude anyone; we will be delighted if other people want to come and join the group, if the committee approves its establishment.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I declare an interest as one of the co-conveners of the cross-party group on food. The member has, I think, inadvertently understated the output of the fish farming industry—the figure is a great deal more than the one that he gave. Notwithstanding that and the focus on representing the interests of wild fishing, do you see a crossover with the cross-party group on food?

Stewart Stevenson: Yes. Our focus is not directly on food, but there would be a crossover of interests—for example, the Scottish Seafood Association is a member of the proposed group.

I am delighted to hear that I have underestimated the value of the salmon farming industry. I really love that product and I hope that it remains very successful—in an environmentally proper way.

In practice, there is no evidence so far that we will talk about food as our core activity. We are part of the supply chain that enables Scotland to have an important role in food and drink both domestically and internationally.

The Convener: As there are no further questions, I thank Mr Stevenson for his attendance at the committee. We will take a decision on the proposed group under our next agenda item, and the member will be informed of that decision as quickly as possible.

Stewart Stevenson: Thank you very much, convener.

The Convener: Agenda item 4 is a decision on whether to accord recognition to the proposed cross-party group on fishing. Are there any comments?

John Scott: The proposed group has identified a gap that should have been filled long ago. Now that the topic has been identified, that gap is staring me in the face and I am surprised that there has not been a group covering the area

before. It is a good proposal. I wondered whether the remit should be extended to cover molluscs and mussels and that sort of thing, but I resisted the temptation to ask.

The Convener: That is interesting. I am sure that the issue will come up in the group's ecological discussions, given that we are farming the sea bed.

Do members agree to approve the establishment of the cross-party group on fishing?

Members *indicated agreement.*

10:10

Meeting continued in private until 10:34.

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