

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 23 September 2008

Session 3

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

15th Meeting 2008, Session 3

CONVENER

*Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)

*Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD)

*Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

*Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP)

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con)

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Shirley Bell (Robert Burns World Federation)

Marie Christie (EventScotland)

Denise Hill (VisitScotland)

Stewart Laing (Scottish Development International)

Nick Larkin (South Ayrshire Council)

David Williamson (Scotch Whisky Association)

CLERKS TO THE COMMITTEE

Lynn Tullis

Simon Watkins

ASSISTANT CLERKS

Lewis McNaughton

Lucy Scharbert

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Tuesday 23 September 2008

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:01*]

Interests

The Convener (Malcolm Chisholm): I apologise for being one minute late. Welcome to the 15th meeting this year of the European and External Relations Committee. We have received apologies from Patricia Ferguson.

Today, we welcome a new member to our committee. I invite him to declare any interests that are relevant to the remit of the committee.

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): I have some farming interests, and have previously been a director of the NFU Scotland and Scottish Enterprise.

Homecoming 2009

10:02

The Convener: Our main item today involves the Scottish year of homecoming. We will take evidence on that important event—although it is not just one event, so that is probably not quite the right way to describe it.

At our meeting on 24 June, we agreed to invite key partners and stakeholders to a round-table discussion. I therefore welcome Marie Christie, from EventScotland; Denise Hill, from VisitScotland; Nick Larkin, from South Ayrshire Council; Shirley Bell, from the Robert Burns World Federation; David Williamson, from the Scotch Whisky Association; and Stewart Laing, from Scottish Development International.

At our evidence-taking session in June, the committee heard that the main focus of activity in promoting homecoming 2009 will happen in North America, Australia and New Zealand in October and November this year and then again between January and March 2009. It would be useful if the committee could be updated on what promotional work has been undertaken so far and what is planned in the lead-up to 2009.

Denise Hill (VisitScotland): As you said, the work began some time ago. About two years ago, we started to feed in messages about homecoming to the long-lead intermediaries, such as the tour operators and wholesalers across all our global markets, and to the long-lead press—both the consumer press and the trade press. That has been an on-going process involving tartan week and Scotland week earlier this year, our own activity in Toronto this spring and a major trade fair in Australia last year.

We are now moving into the next part of the campaign, which involves the consumer-facing elements. Normally, we might begin work on those elements at the front end of the year—January through to March and April—but we are beginning the major homecoming campaign earlier, not least because one of our focuses is on the longer-haul markets. Some early consumer advertising has been placed in the diaspora media in North America, Australia and New Zealand. The elements that are concerned with the broader market, which has a broader interest in our traditions and our cultural heritage—including Burns, whisky and golf—are kicking off now and will roll from October, right through into the spring of 2009 and beyond.

Marie Christie (EventScotland): VisitScotland is taking the lead in marketing and promoting Scotland, and EventScotland is working alongside VisitScotland, the Scottish Government and a

range of stakeholders and partners to deliver the year of celebration. I am pleased to report that, since we took on the responsibility in November last year for the delivery phase of homecoming, we have been engaging hundreds of individuals, organisations and groups in the efforts to make the homecoming year a success for Scotland.

The committee will have noted the launch of the programme that was fronted by the First Minister in June, which highlighted more than 100 events that are taking place across the country, from Burns night to St Andrew's day. We are developing that programme and will issue a new release of the programme around Christmas that will include about 200 events. We are on track to deliver the original project plan, in partnership with VisitScotland.

Stewart Laing (Scottish Development International): We are working closely with VisitScotland and EventScotland and are, obviously, specifically targeting the business market in Scotland and overseas, because we want to encourage people to bring their meetings to Scotland. One of the key themes of the year of homecoming is great Scottish minds and innovation, which sits closely with our position in terms of attracting investment from overseas. The two aspects complement each other well.

The Convener: Some people have been critical of the focus of the promotion, not because they feel that North America, New Zealand and Australia are not crucial, but because they feel that the focus should be a bit broader. Do you have a view on that, Denise?

Denise Hill: I should perhaps have addressed that matter at the end of my first answer. Promotion is not limited to those markets, although they are the major focus. At the end of the day, we have a big tourism yield target for the project, and those markets will deliver higher-yield visitors for us. However, we recognise that there are segments of the broader European markets that are particularly interested in certain strands, such as German and Swedish golfers; the Latin market, with its interest in whisky; and the Russian market, with its interest in Burns. There are pockets in those markets that offer good opportunities for return, and we are not ignoring them.

It is also important to say that our United Kingdom and Ireland marketing team is targeting the home market, including the Scottish market, because we want the Scottish people on board as well.

The Convener: Does anyone else want to speak about promotion?

David Williamson (Scotch Whisky Association): The diaspora markets are crucial to the Scotch whisky industry—the United States of

America is our largest market and accounted for more than £400 million of exports last year. Targeting those markets and the visitors from them is important. We also see an opportunity to use the homecoming initiative as a way of reaching out to emerging markets that could become key commercial opportunities for Scotch whisky. We are already marketing Scotch whisky in India, China and Russia. We think that it is a good idea to use Scotch whisky—in partnership with other organisations—as something that can attract people from those markets to Scotland.

Nick Larkin (South Ayrshire Council): Golf provides a huge element of South Ayrshire's income throughout the year, and represents a fantastic opportunity for us and for other local authorities in 2009.

There has been a slight nervousness about the North American market, given the currency exchange rates at the moment. It has been hugely helpful to us that our VisitScotland colleagues and other stakeholders have recognised that in their promotion work. They recognise the strength of the euro against the pound, and their marketing in the countries concerned has been extremely helpful to us and will, I am sure, be so next year. It is not just a one-trick pony—there is a recognition that, while one market might go up, another might go down.

Shirley Bell (Robert Burns World Federation): The Robert Burns World Federation has been promoting 2009 for a number of years. This is obviously a crucial year for our organisation, and we have been encouraging our members from overseas and from south of the border to come to Scotland during 2009. There is a feel-good factor about what will be happening in Scotland in 2009. Lots of events are taking place in other parts of the world, too—not just in Scotland—to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): Nick Larkin has partly answered my question already, but I will widen it out a little. The promotion of the year of homecoming has been a long-term initiative. To what extent has volatility among airlines—with Zoom Airlines going bust, and so on—impacted on your marketing and promotions? Is it too early to tell? Do you have contingency plans to tackle those problems, as well as the situation vis-à-vis the value of the dollar, to which Nick Larkin alluded?

Denise Hill: It is probably too early to say as far as the American and Canadian markets are concerned. Nick Larkin alluded to the fact that, over the past year, and indeed for some years before that, we have been investing more in the European markets. As we followed the developing situation we knew to put more of our money into European marketing this year. We are hedging our

bets and are spreading the risk as far as our marketing expenditure is concerned.

On the idea of risks that are posed by the economic situation in North America, I would say that the homecoming could not, in fact, have come at a better time. It provides us with the most fantastic imperative. There will be so many people who, under current circumstances, might well have decided against a long-haul trip to Europe in 2009 if it was not for the homecoming. The homecoming programme presents the most fantastic imperative—people must come in 2009, for all the wonderful reasons connected with the homecoming and because of the many things that will not happen at any other time. In marketing terms, what we always look for is an imperative—something that is unique—which will make people choose our destination over the alternatives.

The programme has been hugely welcomed by our partners on territory, by the airlines and by the tour operators, who have grasped eagerly at the opportunity. They, too, are worried about the risks, but they see the homecoming as being an important opportunity to tackle them. We are seeing that with major airlines in Canada and the US investing cash in our campaigns. They are keen to get on board with the programme. Wholesalers and tour operators are creating their own homecoming Scotland packages, which we are helping to market.

Jim Hume: Focusing on genealogy, many of our Scottish names are found all over the place, especially in Australia, New Zealand and Canada, and there are many family and clan associations. Has anyone on the panel been working with the clan associations, informing them of all the events that are going on? I am thinking of the clan Home, of course.

10:15

Denise Hill: Marie Christie will wish to say something about the clan gathering, but I will first mention two things that we have been doing. The most obvious is highland games. We have been supporting our specialist travel agents in attending highland games, selling their products and selling the idea of homecoming.

It is particularly exciting that we have been working with Scottish Development International, the Government's international team, the Robert Burns World Federation and clan chiefs. We have pulled together what is probably the biggest ever database of Scottish interest and affinity groups, which has been a massive task. One might have imagined that such a database must already exist somewhere, but no such database has been created. All of us have worked together to create what we call our gatekeepers database. The

gatekeepers are the people who run websites and newsletters for various groups, be they clan societies, highland games societies, Scottish country dancing societies or Burns federations, and they all communicate with their members.

We now have about 2,400 gatekeepers on the database, whom we have been e-mailing frequently since January—since Burns night this year. We have promised to keep the gatekeepers up to date with what is going on, and we have been encouraging them in their activities. Each of them has access, through their own communication channels, to perhaps 100, 1,000, many thousands or tens of thousands of further prospects for homecoming. Through the database, which includes Friends of Scotland—we are working with SDI so that it might do something similar with globalscot—we are ensuring that everyone is abreast of what is happening for homecoming.

Marie Christie: Denise Hill has highlighted how we are communicating to those groups; it is also important to highlight the strength of the programme that provides the offer for those groups, especially from a genealogy perspective. The biggest clan gathering is planned for July next year, and it is doing very well in terms of advance ticket sales. The gathering has been promoting itself for some time now. Over the past couple of years, communication has been extending out to highland games and various organisations all over the world.

We are also working with organisations such as the National Archives of Scotland and ScotlandsPeople to create projects to link homecoming clearly with our archive resource in 2009. We are working with the University of Strathclyde, which is creating a new international genealogy festival and conference. The whole year will have a programme of activity, which we hope will be attractive to the various groups that we are extending out to. The offer goes beyond that, of course, with the wider activities around Burns, whisky, great minds and innovations and so on.

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): I have a couple of questions about the written evidence that EventScotland and VisitScotland have presented. Forgive me if the questions have been asked and answered in previous meetings—as a new committee member, I do not know whether they have. I see that a key objective of homecoming is to ensure an additional £40 million of tourism spending. How many additional tourists coming to Scotland, above and beyond the normal level, does that figure represent?

Denise Hill: I am unable to tell you that. We focus very much on yield as a target, rather than on the number of individual travellers. We are

confident in relation to the returns on investment that we have been able to deliver in previous campaigns. Considering the strength of the homecoming programme and how targeted the marketing is, we should be able to deliver that £40 million target. I would need to go away and do a calculation to work out the actual number of people. For us at VisitScotland, it is always about yield, rather than numbers of people

Jamie Hepburn: It might be helpful to have that calculation, if it could be done.

The current economic circumstances have been touched on as they present a challenge for encouraging additional tourists. You have said that the year of homecoming could act as a counterweight to those circumstances. I appreciate that, but surely current circumstances will prove to be a challenge, nonetheless. How are you responding to the current economic climate? How is Scotland placed to compete with other international destinations, which might be easier or cheaper to get to for the markets that you are targeting?

Denise Hill: The first point to make is about segmentation. Scotland is not a cheap destination and should not position itself as such. It offers excellent value as a quality destination, which is very much how we position it. The trick is to ensure that we target potential travellers who have money and who are less affected by current circumstances than other people are. That has long been VisitScotland's strategy, but we must focus on such people more keenly than we have before. Therefore, as I said, we are focusing on the North American market. There is high-end potential from the US market, and the Canadian market is faring better and has shown good growth during the past few years. In every market in the world we are looking for the higher-yield individuals.

Everybody likes to think that they are getting good value—even the high spenders on whom we are focusing want a good deal. That is why it is critical that the travel-trade specialists in my team work with wholesalers, tour operators and retail travel agents—we have special Scottish agents in our North American and developing markets—to ensure that we furnish people in all our markets with the right product and a quality, value proposition. When we have done that, we must get the message out there. All the groups that I mentioned have routes to market, but we have additional routes for them. We are getting good-value deals out to prospects through our monthly e-communications plan. Deals are on our website and we ensure that they are included in public relations material as well as in advertising campaigns. We use all those channels to ensure that the message about good value gets across.

At the same time, we must get the message across about what is unique and imperative about homecoming, because if we do not do that people might hang back and wait for another year before visiting Scotland. As I said, we are delighted that we have something as special as the year of homecoming to offer, which will provide an imperative for people to come to Scotland in 2009 and will create a legacy that keeps people coming thereafter. Homecoming is a godsend. A difficult year is coming up, but it would be a worse year for Scotland if we did not have the opportunity that the year of homecoming provides.

Jamie Hepburn: Do you remain confident that targets can be reached?

Denise Hill: I absolutely do.

Jamie Hepburn: You mentioned the legacy. The written submissions from EventScotland and VisitScotland list key project objectives of homecoming, one of which is to provide

"Through data capture and research ... the means to develop a legacy programme for continued engagement with and greater understanding of the Diaspora post 2009 for the benefit of Scotland."

That sounds good, but what does it mean?

Denise Hill: We will have our biggest-ever campaign in our long-haul markets, and we will invest in European and UK markets. Through that work we will develop databases of hot prospects, by which I mean the people who stick up their hands, give us their names and addresses—often e-mail addresses, these days—and invite us to communicate with them about Scotland. A big key performance indicator for us will be generation of hot prospects, so that we and our partners can exploit the database in the future.

Stewart Laing from SDI talked about the importance of business tourism. The returns from engaging with intermediaries in the business community will come not necessarily in 2009 but in the decades thereafter. Leads that we pick up as a result of the homecoming message will deliver conferences and business opportunities far into the future.

I mentioned the gatekeepers database, which previously did not exist in its current format. We will all work on that, because when we have captured people on the database we will have a cost-effective way of communicating with thousands—even millions—of people who can help us, not least by being fully engaged ambassadors. We are creating a raft of ambassadors of all shapes and forms, who perhaps had a latent interest in Scotland but are becoming much more engaged with us. We want to encourage such enthusiasm to continue beyond 2009.

The Convener: The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee suggested that there should be a diaspora database. You sound positive about the initiative. Do other witnesses want to comment?

Stewart Laing: In the context of homecoming, the globalscot network, which comprises more than 800 business leaders, is being encouraged to promote homecoming in its interactions with businesses throughout the world. There are different levels of activity.

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): On a different aspect of promotion, logos or mascots are attached to many international events. Will memorabilia be produced for people to take home from Scotland? Are there plans for a corporate mascot or logo?

Marie Christie: It is worth pointing out homecoming's cross-promotional value. Homecoming is one of the largest initiatives: it will involve many events and bring together many organisations. We are working with everyone from community groups who are hosting community Burns events to professional events organisers and the Edinburgh International Festival. The key point is that all those organisations have their own databases and communications channels, which will carry the homecoming Scotland mark in 2009. That network of organisations will help us to promote the homecoming Scotland brand.

Did you ask about merchandise?

Gil Paterson: Yes, and about whether there will be a single symbol for the event, which people will be able to take home, such as a cuddly toy. Most international events have a mascot that is readily identifiable.

Marie Christie: The programme is so diverse that every event that visitors and Scots engage with, such as the gathering 2009, will create its own merchandise, which will carry the homecoming Scotland mark. Take-homeables will be developed for events when that is appropriate.

Denise Hill: There is also a homecoming tartan, so people will have an opportunity to buy a kilt or scarf, for example.

Gil Paterson: Many sponsors are marketing their products through homecoming Scotland. Are you looking for one or two big, overarching sponsors, such as most international events have?

Marie Christie: In the initial planning stages we thought that to go with one or two key sponsors for homecoming might be too exclusive an approach. We have tried to encourage as many organisations as possible to get on board and carry the homecoming brand. An exclusive association with one brand would not send the right message about inclusiveness.

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Members and witnesses might be interested to know that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, of which I am an executive member, is sending a cross-party delegation from Scotland to the maritime provinces in November—sadly I will not be going. Part of the purpose of the visit is to attract interest in the year of homecoming and the group will help with promotional activities in that regard.

I was interested in Nick Larkin's comments about golf in South Ayrshire. Golf will be a key ingredient of the year of homecoming.

10:30

Wearing my hat as a proud native St Andrean, and as a member for the area, perhaps you could tell us more about what is intended for golf over the year? We have heard a lot about what is happening in whisky, for which there is an interesting programme.

Denise Hill: In the broadest sense, we have worked with golf tour operators to encourage them to package up homecoming golfing packages, which will be communicated through the channels that I mentioned. Our PR teams in all the different markets that we are focused on are also getting out the golfing message.

One specific promotion is our drive it home promotion, which will be the biggest ever golf giveaway in Scotland: we will give away in excess of \$1 million-worth of Scottish golf. We are working with golf courses, in partnership with the Scottish Golf Union, Golf Tourism Scotland and various other bodies in Scotland, to create the promotion using unused inventory—four-balls that would probably never get used in any case. Every golf course, with a few exceptions, has some inventory that it can use, so at no cost to themselves those courses can become part of a major campaign.

We will advertise the promotion in Canada, America, Sweden and Germany, but it will also run in other markets on the back of PR, because it is an extremely PR-able hook. Golfers and people who are interested in golf—Scottish golf in particular—will be able to visit a dedicated website, which will highlight all the courses throughout Scotland that are participating in the promotion. If they tap in their details, they have the chance to get a four-ball free of charge in Scotland. We are working with the handling agents and the tour operators to allow them to have the chance to package that up with some other golf so that those people will ultimately convert. We hope that they either convert, which is the best possible option, and take up their free four-ball and pay for an awful lot more besides, or at least come on to the website and are made aware of the fantastic

golf opportunities in Scotland, which plants a seed for a future trip. It is a massive promotion for us, which launches in January and will have enormous PR legs.

Ted Brocklebank: You will be aware that this year, for the first time in my memory, there have been spare tee times on the Old course at St Andrews—things have not been going quite as well as in previous years. I know that it is early days, but does that situation look like being reversed? Is there tremendous interest in golf in Scotland next year?

Denise Hill: There is still interest, but the danger is that people prevaricate and postpone. Despite solidly intending to come and play at the home of golf at some point, they may put off their visit. We hope that the promotion will spur people's interest and that the promise of a four-ball free of charge might make them think seriously when otherwise they would have postponed.

Marie Christie: It is important that, in respect of the programme on the ground, we work with our international stellar events. We are working closely with the open championship to enable it to develop a homecoming programme and product for 2009, so that it assists us in getting out the message about coming home for golf. The open has a great reach that we can tap into. Additional activities range from Scottish classics—a golf programme that will involve thousands of golfers taking part in events across the country—to the hole in one exhibition that we are supporting at South Ayrshire Council, which will run before and after the open, so there will be on-going visitor attractions before and after the event.

Nick Larkin: My colleague has filled in many of the details. Specifically, in South Ayrshire, we have the open championship in 2009. That is one reason why South Ayrshire has got behind homecoming so strongly, in addition to doing so because homecoming is a wonderful opportunity in general. Denise Hill is correct that we are always looking for a unique selling point, and homecoming gives us that. A USP is all the more important in the difficult years as opposed to the years of plenty.

It is important that we not only make the most of having the open championship in our own area of South Ayrshire next year but get behind it as a nation, because it is a fantastic opportunity. Golfers traditionally are high spenders, particularly those from North America. I have mentioned the opportunities that Scandinavia and northern Europe more generally present—the market is growing for my area—and we need to maximise them.

As Marie Christie said, we have tried to use the open as a catalyst and to build in two of the other pillars. One is the exhibition that will take place—I pay tribute to the R&A and to the open championship clubs in my area, which have been marvellous in agreeing to provide the memorabilia for the exhibition next year. I am confident that it will be a huge attraction for South Ayrshire over an eight or 10-week period across the open championship. We also hope to have a genealogy tent at the open championship. Clearly, a huge international collection of people come to the open championship, and we hope to give them a taster—say half an hour of our staff time—to help them to work up their genealogy. The idea is that they will come back the following year for a week or a fortnight to find the rest of their family. It is a fairly simple task.

We hope to use homecoming, the open championship and, of course, Burns. We are fortunate in being unique in having two of the five pillars within South Ayrshire. This is a huge opportunity for us, and we need to get behind it as a nation. The First Minister's enthusiasm has been very helpful to us—certainly to those at the coalface—because his enthusiasm is infectious and it helps us when we are speaking with colleagues in other areas.

Ted Brocklebank: On the Burns pillar, with direct reference to South Ayrshire, perhaps you can update us on what is happening with the Burns centre. We are disappointed that it will not be ready in time for 25 January. Perhaps you can explain the situation and describe the focus on the Burns tradition.

Nick Larkin: I will take the lead on that, but Shirley Bell might also want to comment. It is perhaps fortuitous that I am the officer in South Ayrshire Council who has been acting on the matter, because most of the land on which the new centre will be delivered is South Ayrshire's land. The council took a decision last Tuesday to transfer the assets to the National Trust for Scotland, which is a huge step forward. I believe that the NTS will meet today, or certainly in the next couple of days, to consider its position. I hope that things will move forward significantly as a result of both those decisions. There has been great enthusiasm for the project, because we see it as a wonderful opportunity for our tourism product.

My understanding of the current situation is that renovation works have taken place on the Burns cottage over the past six weeks or so—rethatching, if not a total rethatching, and painting to bring it up to standard. There was nervousness that the planned renovations would not be complete. You will appreciate that that is an NTS element rather than the council's, but I am happy

to report my understanding of the situation. Activity will not take place and there will not be a full renovation prior to 24 and 25 January next year, but matters will move forward at a great pace thereafter. The fear was that the NTS would be halfway through the project by the weekend of 24 and 25 January, so a decision had to be taken to err on the side of caution. Following the rethatching and painting, the cottage is looking a lot better than it has done for a number of years.

There is a marvellous drive forward. Through working with colleagues in EventScotland in particular, we are fortunate to have the launch of the year of homecoming, which has an extremely exciting agenda, over the weekend of 24 and 25 January. We hope that the First Minister's Burns supper will take place on the Saturday night in Alloway.

I hope that that brings the committee up to date. We are looking to work well with the NTS—we have had a close relationship with it over the years, particularly through Culzean, as the council is a major funder of its activities there, which draw a huge number of people. With the NTS taking over responsibility for the new Burns centre and the new Burns museum, which is extremely exciting, and working on that aspect of economic development with the council, which has a drive towards tourism and economic development, there are great times ahead. We are looking forward to it very much.

Shirley Bell: I am not terribly concerned that the cottage will not be ready by 25 January. Life does not start and end in 2009. As long as renovations are done properly and the cottage is open to the public, I will be more than happy. We have lots of Burns-related sites to offer throughout Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Edinburgh and the rest of Scotland.

To promote the year of homecoming, next week the First Minister will record greetings, which will include the participation of five youngsters who were winners of our schools competitions last year. Some 160,000 children take part in the annual competitions. Those competitions have now been spread out to North America, so next year we will hold competitions in our North American clubs. The First Minister's greetings will be recorded and sent to all our clubs and members and will, I hope, be broadcast on Burns night. All our members will hear from the First Minister and experience a touch of Scotland through the children. It is not just our overseas clubs that will receive the DVD; all those in Scotland, England and Ireland will, too. It is an important marketing tool for 2009.

We have produced a commemorative medal and the homecoming logo is on its box. Everything that we send out will carry that logo. I urge all councils

and businesses to have the homecoming logo on their franking machines, because it is a cheap and easy way to promote the year.

Many things will happen in 2009 throughout the Burns world, but I draw the committee's attention to something that is happening in Glasgow and has been encouraged by Bridgeton Burns club. Strathclyde partnership for transport plans to install 10 flagstones in bus stations in the west of Scotland and wooden panels in each of the subway foyers inscribed with lines from Burns; to vinyl wrap an entire subway carriage to commemorate the life of Robert Burns; to publish bus routes leading to Burns cottage and other associated destinations; and to establish a poetry competition for local schoolchildren to comment on the subway in the style of Burns. It is fantastic that everyone is taking part. Whatever means they use to promote Robert Burns I applaud.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I have two questions, the first of which develops Ted Brocklebank's point about the product. I live in Ayr, and I saw the much-improved cottage at the weekend. If I live in America or Canada and I buy a ticket to the homecoming, will I be able to buy a ticket that gets me into the Burns cottage, a look at the Batchelors club in Tarbolton, a tour of Ellisland in Dumfries and so on, or will I have to buy individual tickets for each attraction? Is there linkage in the homecoming marketing?

Shirley Bell: I am not sure about that. Perhaps VisitScotland can comment.

Denise Hill: There is a homecoming pass on which Historic Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland have worked together. I am not sure how many other groups and organisations they have collaborated with, but I will check. The idea is that, for the first time, instead of having to buy individual passes to get into Historic Scotland or NTS properties, there will be one homecoming pass. I hope that the pass will include the properties that Alex Neil mentioned. The pass is being lapped up by overseas tour operators, who love the idea of it, and they are packaging it as part of their product.

Alex Neil: Ayr has good visitor attractions in and around the cottage. However, in and around Mauchline, for example, or the Batchelors club at Tarbolton, facilities are closed at many times of the day and year. There is no point putting all that effort into getting large numbers of people to come from North America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and other places for a wee tour of the Burns facilities and the cottage if they cannot see the Batchelors club because it is closed until a week on Tuesday. Perhaps Nick Larkin and Shirley Bell are best placed to answer this question: will there be a focus on ensuring that those facilities are open and available to people when they come?

10:45

Shirley Bell: A number of those places are owned by the NTS, which is responsible for staffing them. The Burns federation provides lots of volunteers to take people around various sites. If someone said, "We want to visit the Batchelors club," one of our members would arrange for the club to be open and take them there. However, that happens only if people know to come to the federation. I agree that too many places are closed, and I understand the reasons why, which can relate to budgets. In 2009, a special case has to be made for all those places to be open seven days a week, because we have to ensure that we are available to the people who come to see what we want to offer and promote.

Alex Neil: I say to Nick Larkin that we could take Ted Brocklebank down to the Red Lion in Prestwick to show him where golf tournaments started. I am sure that he would welcome that.

Ted Brocklebank: I am certainly interested in fables.

The Convener: They started at Leith Links, did they not?

Alex Neil: No, the first tournament was in Prestwick. Sorry, Nick, you were going to say something.

Nick Larkin: Just a couple of things. First, a passport to Burns is a really clever idea. South Ayrshire is leading on homecoming for Ayrshire and we are trying to develop, as much as anything, a modern government agenda on sharing resources and agendas with colleagues. I will develop that with colleagues in East Ayrshire and North Ayrshire, and indeed in Dumfries and Galloway, with whom we are trying to work much more closely. We have done introductory work on what is almost a Burns trail. A passport to Burns is a cracking idea for 2009, and we will happily take the idea back to Ayrshire.

Alex Neil: You heard it here first.

Nick Larkin: Yes—there is a wee copyright symbol on that.

On your second point, we are working closely with the NTS and our colleagues in other councils and, where we can, we will raise the issue of access, because it is important. You are absolutely right about that. If I go to North America or somewhere else to see two or three places of interest, and my interest is whetted by one of them, I am not left with a good memory if I go to another one and find that it is shut. We want people to come to Scotland next year and to leave with wonderful memories for all the right reasons. I assure you that I will press the matter: how much success I have remains to be seen.

Shirley Bell: A small passport was produced in 1996—it was mostly for children who went to the various Burns sites and had their passport stamped. At the end of the tour, they received a Burns badge. It was another way of encouraging people to visit all the Burns sites.

Alex Neil: My final question is about marketing and the database. The obvious contacts, such as global Scot, are all in there. I worked for the Digital Equipment Corporation, and I am a member of its alumni club. Many companies that have operated in Scotland, such as IBM, have alumni clubs for people who no longer work for them. In Digital's case, they share a magazine that is distributed regularly worldwide and goes to something like 100,000 people. Similarly, the universities have alumni clubs. Are the likes of the Digital, IBM and university alumni being built into the database?

Stewart Laing: I am not aware of such contacts, although some of my SDI colleagues engage directly with IBM. However, I will check it out, because examining how we can reach that wider audience through other channels is a great idea.

Marie Christie: We work closely with Universities Scotland to develop what universities are already doing for homecoming. As I mentioned before, Strathclyde University and Aberdeen University have specific events for homecoming. We need to work with them to get the message out through their alumni networks. We also need to get students who will graduate in 2009 to be smart and put the offer out to their friends and families to come to Scotland to see them graduate.

Jim Hume: You touched on university alumni. The enlightenment happened in this very city, and Hutton, the father of modern geology, came from Edinburgh. Is any work being done to encourage people who are interested in such subjects to come back to Scotland to see where the initial thoughts occurred?

It is right to focus on Burns, whisky and golf, but other sports are synonymous with Scotland. One that springs to mind is curling. The Royal Caledonian Curling Club, particularly in Canada, used to be like how the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews is now. Has any work been done with curling associations or with clubs associated with other sports? We seem to be doing well in mountain biking.

Denise Hill: I am happy to say that there are curling societies on our great big database. We went through it and were amazed at how many different affinity and interest groups there were. Curling societies are included, and will therefore receive the updates.

Marie Christie: There is a curling event in the homecoming programme, which looks forward and

backwards to other major activity that is organised by the group to which Mr Hume referred.

Alex Neil: You mentioned repeat business. We do not want the homecoming to be a one-off event; we want it to be a platform for reaching our target to increase tourism numbers by 50 per cent by 2015. If someone comes to the homecoming and agrees to come back in 2011, 2013 and 2015, do they get a special deal?

Irene Oldfather: A very special deal.

Alex Neil: Exactly. Is there some kind of built-in incentive for repeat business?

Denise Hill: Not exactly as you have described, but our colleagues in customer relationship management have developed a sophisticated CRM programme, particularly for near-markets such as the UK, which have much greater potential for repeat visits. In the case of the UK, there is potential for annual repeat visits. The CRM programme takes into account the interests of the people on the database, their level of loyalty and the likely frequency of their return visits, and tailors specific deals to them. If you are on that database, it is guaranteed that special, tailored, money-off deals will be sent to you monthly. As I said earlier, getting people into the database is critical, because we can then manipulate the messages and, we hope, give them special deals that will keep them coming back.

Alex Neil: We can invite them to the independence day celebrations.

The Convener: At which point we will move on to Irene Oldfather.

Irene Oldfather: I want to ask about the budget. We understand from an answer to a parliamentary question that £1.5 million was allocated to signature events, £1 million to themed events and £500,000 to support a rolling programme. What is the difference between the signature events and the themed events? Who is in charge of those budgets and how are they being allocated?

Marie Christie: EventScotland is in charge of those budgets. What you describe is a mechanism for delivering the programme. Those are not customer-facing programme strands. The signature events programme supports a range of what we see as flagship activity, such as the Burns anniversary on 24 and 25 January, when there will be activity in Ayrshire, Edinburgh, Dumfries and Galloway, and Glasgow.

In May, we have whisky month, in which we are investing a large amount of our signature programme budget. In the summer, we have the gathering, and we are working with key international events such as the Edinburgh International Festival, the military tattoo and the open, so that we can showcase what Scotland has

to offer. All of those events are producing brand new homecoming-related activity, all in celebration of the homecoming year. The spend is not about filling holes in any budget; it is all brand new activity for the year.

Moving into the autumn, we have Highland homecoming, which is part of our signature programme, and at the end of the year we have our major celebration of Scottish music, with a finale event around St Andrew's day. The locus of the core event is in Glasgow, but there will be activities throughout the country.

Irene Oldfather: So it is all new money and it is all ring fenced.

Marie Christie: It is all new money, going into specific new activity to celebrate homecoming. Our programming strategy has largely been to work with existing asset events so that they gain a legacy and we have a stronger events portfolio at the end of homecoming.

We are also working to create new product, but it is not as if we are creating hundreds of new events that will be looking for on-going support once homecoming is over. For example, the gathering is a one-off event for 2009. I am sure that the committee would agree that if we did not have that kind of event in the programme, we would be asked why.

Underneath the signature programme, we have the themed events programme. There was a competitive application process, which invited applications to support new activity or to enhance existing activity in line with the objectives of homecoming. Throughout the year, there will be 57 events all over the country. Bodies ranging from community groups to professional events organisations will deliver key activity through the themed events programme.

Irene Oldfather: Has that money already been allocated?

Marie Christie: Yes. All the programming money—£3 million in total—has been allocated. Most of the programme is in the public domain, but final negotiations are still to take place. Over the coming weeks, we will launch an exciting events programme.

Irene Oldfather: It might be helpful if the committee had a list of those projects and how the money is being disbursed.

Marie Christie: You already have the events programme. Are you looking for a breakdown of the amount for each event?

Irene Oldfather: Yes.

Marie Christie: That is no problem.

Irene Oldfather: I understand that in addition to those funding streams, partner events that fit in with the general homecoming theme but which are not directly funded by homecoming will be considered and will receive, for example,

“in-kind promotional support from the project team.”—
[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 24 April 2008; S3W-11852.]

Is it VisitScotland that will consider those events and decide? What criteria will apply? What sort of promotional help will you give the events?

Marie Christie: The criteria for partner events have been issued through our local authority partners and some key organisations and non-departmental public bodies, which we asked to assist us in identifying key events that should be featured in the next iterations of the homecoming programme, featured on the website and promoted through advertising, PR and so on.

The key for homecoming in being as inclusive as possible is to work with our local authority partners to provide local web pages that showcase not just featured events—which help us to meet the core objectives of homecoming—but a wider programme of activity, so that, for example, people who visit South Ayrshire can find out about not only the key events but what else they can do and see in South Ayrshire or in any other area of Scotland throughout the year.

Irene Oldfather: Have sufficient funds been allocated or could you do with more? I ask that question of the other organisations as well.

Nick Larkin: In local authorities in particular, we have to live within our means. Because of the significant economic benefit that homecoming can bring, my council has been extremely pleased—difficult though it was—to make significant funding available. I appreciate that this is a wish rather than a reality, but it would have been wonderful if Parliament had matched us pound for pound. It would have given us even greater encouragement. However, I recognise the difficulties in that. My council put forward £150,000: matching that would have been a huge plus. However, we will live within our means and make the best of what we have got. Homecoming represents a huge opportunity. It could have been a wee bit better with matched funding, but it is still a great opportunity.

11:00

The Convener: I will bring in the Scotch Whisky Association on that. You made a very good written submission, which is perhaps why we have not asked you many questions. Would you like to comment on that one?

David Williamson: I was going to say that I think that the point is covered in our written submission.

We agreed with the homecoming organisers and other partners that whisky month in May next year is the most appropriate vehicle for bringing together all the whisky-related activities, principally because there is already significant activity by the industry at that time. Enhancing the offering, for example by including the spirit of Speyside whisky festival, is seen as the best way of using the industry's iconic status overseas.

We have also seen the industry step up to the mark in examining how we can badge our existing tourism offering and marketing activities with the homecoming logo and banner that was mentioned earlier. Companies such as Diageo, which runs the Johnnie Walker experience and the classic malts cruise, are looking to the whisky industry to add value by using the homecoming banner to attract visitors into the country.

The industry already supports a significant amount of activity at community and national level. Building on that with the homecoming year, through whisky month, seems to us the most appropriate way of working. The industry is delighted to do so.

The Convener: This is a question to everybody, but we could start with the Scotch Whisky Association. What are your expectations? What do you hope to get out of homecoming, and how will you monitor and calculate the impact after the event?

David Williamson: There are a number of reasons why individual companies have decided to support homecoming. First, it is a commercial opportunity: businesses want to promote their brands, and they see the opportunity to do so. They are already doing various things that draw on Scotland's image overseas, which is very important to the industry. We have to make Scotch whisky here, so ensuring that the image is as good as possible benefits the industry as a whole.

Whisky-related tourism is becoming increasingly important to the industry. As we say in our submission, £22 million of business is done through distillery visitor centres, which is an important contribution to the rural economy. The industry will support anything that we can do to build on that and the high-quality offering, which is why both as an association and as individual companies we have supported the concept since its inception. It can bring positive cultural, economic and reputational benefits for Scotland as a whole, and for the industry in particular.

Stewart Laing: SDI's main focus in its overseas activities is driving inward investment, and homecoming gives us a key opportunity to add to

our messaging. We are using it to complement our messaging wherever possible, and the more visitors we can generate for Scotland, the more awareness there will be of Scotland, and the more likely it is that our inward investment will grow. Homecoming will assist inward investment over the medium to long term.

Shirley Bell: I would like everyone to recognise the amount of work that is being put in by volunteers for 2009. No figure has been put against that, but given what all the clubs are doing without any public funding, we must recognise that a lot of unseen time and money is being spent by volunteers.

I hope that, at the end of 2009, there will be more members of the Burns federation, including members of the Scottish Parliament.

The Convener: I am sure that we will take that on board.

For Denise and Marie, I suppose that monitoring and calculating the impact is not your main thought at the moment, but no doubt it will arise in due course.

Denise Hill: In fact, it has to be built in right from the beginning. We will monitor the effectiveness of the marketing, which is the VisitScotland element, and we will conduct various studies as we proceed. For instance, we are doing some work at highland games. We will monitor and profile the responses and the data that we receive from the people who find their way on to our databases.

At the end of the year—October to November—we will conduct a major conversion study to identify the return on investment. That will mean going back to people in 2009 to ask how many of them converted and how much money they spent and, we hope, to identify that we have reached the £40 million mark.

Marie Christie: We have a wider research programme, which will supplement the conversion studies with research at the events to see where people come from, whether they were drawn primarily by homecoming, what their experiences were and whether their expectations were met.

In addition, we are undertaking a series of omnibus studies throughout the year to check awareness levels in the Scottish population. The key point is that, for homecoming to be a success, it requires everyone in Scotland to get on board, to be part of the message and to extend the message to friends and family. We want to ensure that we measure that throughout the year.

There are many measures in our monitoring and evaluation, but we have to keep our eye on one key one: we have been given £5 million in core budget to spend, and we have to return £40 million in investment. We think that we will do better than

that, even given the challenges that lie ahead, but we will keep a keen focus on that through our research.

Ted Brocklebank: I have a quick supplementary for Shirley Bell, picking up on Alex Neil's attempts to hijack the home of golf for Prestwick from St Andrews. Is there anything in the Burns trail that is not in Ayrshire but is in the Mearns of Kincardineshire—Gilbert's farm, Clochnatill, the Burns and Burnesses in Arbuthnott kirkyard and so on?

Shirley Bell: Absolutely. The Burns clubs in the Grampian region are pulling out all the stops. There will be trails and all of those places will be mentioned in 2009.

Let me finish with one point. I was involved in the events in 1996, when we received a lot of bad press. I remember that someone from CBS news spoke about Scotland eating its young. I hope that we will not be accused of that after 2009.

The Convener: There are no further questions. We have had more than an hour. I thank all the witnesses for coming along. It has been extremely useful for us all.

11:07

Meeting suspended.

11:14

On resuming—

Services Directorate Inquiry

The Convener: The next four agenda items are all on European Union issues. We start with the services directorate inquiry. The covering note with the correspondence from the Scottish Government asks us to note the Government's response and

"to agree to continue to monitor the Scottish Government's approach to the transposition of the Services Directive".

Do members agree to the recommendations?

Members *indicated agreement.*

France's European Union Presidency

11:14

The Convener: We have an interesting longer paper on France's presidency of the EU, which does not contain recommendations but is just for information. Do members have any comments on it?

Alex Neil: I do not know what a "European private company" is.

Gil Paterson: It is one that speaks French.

The Convener: Where is that mentioned?

Alex Neil: In paragraph 3 on page 2 of annex A, under the heading "Small Business Act". Can anyone enlighten us? I do not have a clue what a "European private company" is.

The Convener: That is quite interesting.

Alex Neil: Is it a new type of company?

The Convener: The clerks will enlighten us.

Alex Neil: In writing? Okay. Good.

Do you not know the answer, Irene? You know everything about Europe.

Irene Oldfather: I do not know what a "European private company" is.

Jamie Hepburn: I have a comment about the social policy section, which includes health. It says:

"A conference on workers' rights will take place 11-12 September 2008 focusing on issues of trans-national mobility and 'flexicurity'."

I do not know what "flexicurity" means. Given that the conference has already taken place, do we know what its outcome was?

Irene Oldfather: I had also marked that part of the paper. It is a helpful and comprehensive document, but unfortunately—this is an issue that we have discussed before—many of the events have already taken place. Some of the events that are coming up are of significant relevance to work that is being done in the Scottish Parliament. I marked my papers when I read them, which was a few days ago, so I am frantically trying to find the right parts of the document.

Alex Neil: The Alzheimer's conference is relevant.

Irene Oldfather: Yes. The paper also mentions the animal health action plan and the idea of patient mobility across borders. Even if the European and External Relations Committee does not tackle such issues, how can we as a

Parliament ensure that we have influence over such matters? The directive on cross-border health will

"clarify the right of patients to seek health care in other member states with the costs reimbursed by the patient's national health care provider."

Health is a devolved issue, but are we fully aware of the directive's implications? Have we thought them through? Do we want to have an input to the directive's development?

As Alex Neil mentioned, a major conference is to be held on Alzheimer's disease. I chair the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on Alzheimer's, which is doing groundbreaking work. The Government comes along to our meetings and has an input to them.

The paper deals with a wide range of issues, including animal health, workers' rights, the cross-border health directive and Alzheimer's. How can we get in on some of the work that is being done in those areas? Perhaps we need to discuss how the committee contributes and how we work with the other committees. For example, if the Health and Sport Committee did not want to contribute on the cross-border health directive, could we hold a short, but focused inquiry to take evidence from key people about the directive's implications for the Scottish Parliament?

The Convener: Those are important points. We have the policy of mainstreaming, and it is right that we try to get the other committees involved in consideration of European issues. The Health and Sport Committee is certainly keeping a watch on the cross-border health directive, although I do not know how much work it has done on it. Irene Oldfather has made an interesting point. Does mainstreaming just mean that we do not get involved in consideration of issues that relate to the work of other committees?

It is a good paper that covers many issues, even if there is an issue about exactly when it was written. Does anyone else have comments on what Irene Oldfather has said?

Ted Brocklebank: I agree with Irene Oldfather.

I come back to fisheries—one of my favourite subjects—and an issue that the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee might deal with. I note that the paper says that

"The French are hopeful that the Cod Recovery Plan will be signed off during the 24-25 November 2008 Fisheries Council Meeting".

That is a particularly important topic for Scottish fishermen at the moment. Members will probably have seen stories over the past week about a whole pile of cod being discarded. The fact that cod are returning in big numbers means that fishermen are exceeding their quotas and so are

having to dump as much cod as they are allowed to keep in their boats. The Government will have to renegotiate the days-at-sea agreement or something similar so that that valuable stock is not thrown back just because the quotas allow the fishermen to catch only so much cod. One hopes that the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee is considering the situation, which is extremely serious. If the cod recovery plan is to be signed off at the council on 24 and 25 November, there should be some input from Scotland on it.

The Convener: That raises the question to what extent we need to be more proactive on the issues with which we expect other committees to engage. Perhaps we simply need to be in more regular contact with them. Lucy Scharbert might like to comment; she has probably been involved with the other committees on those issues.

Lucy Scharbert (Clerk): Some of the issues that the committee is raising will be monitored in the "Brussels Bulletin", which is disseminated to subject committees and stakeholders more broadly. Through that, we can certainly follow up the specific issues that committee members have raised and highlight them to the subject committees.

Alex Neil: I was for a while the convener of the subject committee that dealt with the economy. A lot of European stuff was relevant to that committee, but the European angle was almost inevitably marginalised by the main committee work and was merely noted at the end of the meeting, if at all.

I agree with Ted Brocklebank and Irene Oldfather. Why not write to the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee and ask whether it is doing any work on the cod recovery plan? If it is not, perhaps we should take up the cudgels and do something about it. Ted will no doubt need to educate the rest of us on exactly what is involved—I do not know much about the plan.

Fishing is a critical industry for Scotland and the decisions that are made in Brussels will be critical for fishing communities, particularly but not exclusively those in the north-east. As Scotland's Parliament, we should take a proactive approach to the plan. If the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee does not have the time or inclination and does not want to take up the cudgels, we should do it.

Jamie Hepburn: I used to be a member of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee and I believe that it will consider the issue—I think consideration of the common fisheries policy is factored into its work programme every year. As important as the matter is, one of the reasons why I am happy to be on this committee is that I will not

have to assess the common fisheries policy in so much detail.

On the wider issue, I agree with what Alex Neil said. Although the European Union's work is clearly important to rural affairs and a number of directives came up at every meeting, the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee did not consider the "Brussels Bulletin" in particular detail. Is there a role for us to play in directing subject committees? We obviously cannot instruct them, but perhaps we could tell them that an issue was coming up, ask whether they had considered it and take the matter forward from there.

Jim Hume: The terms "cudgels" and "cod recovery" do not go well together.

I highlight the section in the paper on animal health, food safety and plant protection. In the pesticides directive, there is a long list of pesticides, many of which are used in areas that have a maritime climate—as we do—that has a damper atmosphere. The directive is of great concern in the farming community—I have already declared an interest, although I am just a hill farmer—and, if we are going to alert the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee to developments in the cod recovery plan, we should also alert it to the pesticides directive, which may have serious implications for Scottish agriculture, although that committee may be on the job already.

Irene Oldfather: I forgot to mention the Erasmus Mundus programme, on which the French have responsibility for making final decisions. Scottish students have accessed the Erasmus programme widely over a number of years. Decisions could be being taken on that and other matters, such as the cohesion programme and the cross-border health directive.

Perhaps the committee could have a brief private discussion about how it could be more proactive on such matters. It might be possible to have rapporteurships such as we used to have, whereby a member who has an interest in a particular matter would take responsibility for liaising with appropriate people and reporting back to the committee. The European Parliament has appointed a UK rapporteur on the cross-border health directive—I think it is John Bowis—who can keep us right on such things. That would put us in a unique place to be able to find out what is going on, be ahead of the game and make submissions or meet the rapporteur. Perhaps we could invite him to the committee.

There are things that we could do to be a little bit more proactive. Perhaps we should have a short private discussion to consider how we could do that.

Alex Neil: I agree. It would be useful if the clerks would prepare a paper for us. The idea of permanent rapporteurs taking responsibility for particular subject areas is good, but the key thing is how we decide what to get involved in, so we need a set of criteria for deciding our priorities for that. Although it would be tempting to get involved in the pesticides directive, it might not be the best use of our time, important though it is.

The first criterion would be to check whether the relevant subject committee was taking up the cudgels on a given issue. If it was, we would not need to do it but, if it was not, we would need to consider whether the issue was important enough for us to take it up and whether we had the time to do so seriously. Then we would need to consider how to take it up.

There are various ways in which we could do it. We would not need an inquiry every time; the rapporteur might simply go to Brussels to investigate, then come back and tell the committee what was happening. They might inform the minister and say that there was not much more that the Parliament needed to do or they might say that the issue was extremely important.

If we had taken that approach in the early stages of the services directive, a rapporteur would probably have said that we needed to consider it because it had huge implications for Scotland. Some of the VAT changes that are mooted—such as the proposal to reduce VAT on catering services and restaurants—are potentially beneficial to Scotland.

There are loads of issues and, although we cannot get involved in them all, there are clearly some on which we need to be more proactive than we are. I am happy to discuss that in public, however: I do not see why we need to do it in private.

The Convener: I was going to suggest much the same thing. We do not need a long paper, but we need more thought on how we relate to the subject committees on such issues. Mainstreaming is right in principle, but we must make it work as effectively as possible and not use it as an excuse not to get involved with issues.

The clerks will prepare a paper for the next meeting. We can decide at the beginning of that meeting whether we want the discussion to be in private or public. However, that does not mean that we need to delay action on the cod recovery plan. Jamie Hepburn indicated that the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee is taking that on board, but the clerks will check that officially.

Are committee members happy with that?

Members indicated agreement.

“Brussels Bulletin”

Irene Oldfather: It will be related, but territorial cohesion is a huge subject in its own right.

11:28

The Convener: The “Brussels Bulletin” covers some of the same territory as the previous paper from a different point of view. The bulletin contains a lot of useful information that could be connected to some of the points that we have already made about how we handle such information. However, we are certainly getting plenty of information.

I found the information on the Lisbon treaty interesting. Does anybody want to comment on that? I am not up to speed on it.

Irene Oldfather: It is important to place on record that, as I understand it, 23 out of 27 countries have ratified the treaty. We are waiting for the Czech Republic, Poland, Sweden and Ireland to ratify it.

Ted Brocklebank: Irene, can you confirm whether, if Ireland does not vote again or votes the wrong way the next time, the treaty will simply be enacted?

Irene Oldfather: What I can confirm is that positive attitudes to the EU stood at 70 per cent in Ireland—even among “no” voters—and that 63 per cent of “no” voters in Ireland believe that the EU is a good thing. I am very encouraged by that.

The Convener: Okay, we now have the gist of the different points of view—and I am sorry I mentioned the issue.

Do members wish to raise any other points? I found the comments on the emissions trading scheme very interesting.

Jamie Hepburn: This point relates to a point that I raised earlier about the works councils directive. A conference took place recently; will we receive more information on the outcome of the conference?

The Convener: Yes.

Jamie Hepburn: That is fine.

Irene Oldfather: We should also note that there will be a green paper on territorial cohesion; it will be about reducing the inequalities between the rich and poor regions of Europe. The Brussels officer has noted that a rapporteur has been appointed and that the first reading in the European Parliament will take place during January 2009. This is another issue that it would be good to keep a close eye on.

The Convener: We will be doing an inquiry on the budget, so I presume that the issue will be related to that, at least in part.

European Union Budget Review Inquiry (Witness Expenses)

11:31

The Convener: We have a paper on the EU budget review, but it is limited—it is not about the whole EU budget review but about giving me extra powers. Do members agree with the suggestion in the paper?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Alex Neil: Absolutely, Malcolm. If Iain Gray will not do it, we will do it.

The Convener: For the benefit of the official reporters, I should explain that the paper is about giving me extra powers to approve expenses to people who come to the committee to give evidence.

Alex Neil: We trust you implicitly, convener.

Meeting closed at 11:32.

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