

JUSTICE 1 COMMITTEE

Wednesday 30 November 2005

Session 2

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JUSTICE 1 COMMITTEE

39th Meeting 2005, Session 2

CONVENER

*Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)
*Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP)
*Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)
*Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)
*Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con)
Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Hugh Henry (Deputy Minister for Justice)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Callum Thomson

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Douglas Wands

ASSISTANT CLERK

Lewis McNaughton

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Justice 1 Committee

Wednesday 30 November 2005

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 09:53*]

Family Law (Scotland) Bill: Stage 2

The Convener (Pauline McNeill): Welcome to the 39th meeting of the Justice 1 Committee in 2005.

Our first item of business is the continuation of stage 2 of the Family Law (Scotland) Bill. I welcome Hugh Henry, the Deputy Minister for Justice, and his legal team: Carol Duncan, Moira Wilson, Kirsty Finlay and David McLeish.

Section 8—Matrimonial interdicts

The Convener: Amendment 84, in the name of the minister, is grouped with amendments 85, 90 to 92, 40, 97 and 98.

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): These amendments are of a technical nature and seek to clarify the provisions on matrimonial and domestic interdicts. I believe that the amendments will make the law more straightforward, cohesive and user-friendly. More important, they will extend protection to the vulnerable. They will not in any manner dilute the existing powers that are available to the courts.

By introducing the concept of domestic interdicts in section 24, we are removing the need for cohabiting partners to depend on matrimonial interdicts when seeking the protection of the courts from domestic abuse. At the same time, we are extending legal provisions that already exist for opposite-sex cohabiting couples through the Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection) (Scotland) Act 1981 to include same-sex cohabiting couples. By doing that, we are ensuring fair and equitable treatment for all, regardless of their sex or sexual orientation.

Through the amendments, Parliament will be meeting its obligations under the European convention on human rights to ensure that same-sex couples are afforded the same protection as opposite-sex couples and are not discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation.

I move amendment 84.

The Convener: Brian Adam has already intimated that he does not intend to move amendment 40 and no other member appears to wish to move it instead of him.

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the amendments that the minister outlined. It is important that we have equitable treatment for all with no discrimination in legislation.

Amendment 84 agreed to.

Amendment 85 moved—[Hugh Henry]—and agreed to.

Section 8, as amended, agreed to.

Section 9—Powers of arrest

The Convener: Amendment 86, in the name of the minister, is grouped with amendments 87, 89, 93, 94, 99, 114, 116 and 117.

Hugh Henry: The committee had expressed concern that, in practice, the law on interdicts was becoming increasingly complex and that the provisions of the bill, particularly those in section 24, would add to that complexity.

Domestic abuse is a scourge on society and the situation calls for readily accessible remedies. The law on interdicts has developed over the past 20 years or so. The 1981 act was a radical piece of legislation in its day and tackled the problems of domestic abuse head on. Since then, subsequent legislation has enhanced the provisions in the 1981 act.

I recognise that the present regimes overlap and that the committee has made some valid points in that regard. Having said that, I should say that each regime separately addresses different aspects of affording protection to victims. We have listened closely to what has been said on this matter, including representations that have been made by the Law Society of Scotland, Scottish Women's Aid and Professor Eric Clive. In particular, we have considered both the Law Society's submission that the bill presents an opportunity to rationalise and simplify the law on the attachment of powers to interdicts and its suggested amendment to the bill.

We have concluded that the Law Society's proposals have much to commend them and merit serious consideration. Accordingly, I have lodged these amendments, many of which are of a technical nature and will have the effect that only one act—namely, the Protection from Abuse (Scotland) Act 2001—will allow courts to attach powers of arrest to all interdicts, regardless of their nature. The 2001 act has operated well since it came into force, in that it deals directly and appropriately with all the matters that are dealt with by other legislative provisions.

The amendments will consolidate, in part, the present legislation. That will help to tackle many of the key concerns that have been raised by

stakeholders. They will clarify the law and, most important, extend protection to the vulnerable.

I move amendment 86.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I welcome this set of amendments, which clarifies and simplifies for lawyers and victims the way in which interdicts work and their effect. I know that, in my constituency surgeries, I have, on a significant number of occasions, pointed people to the 2001 act as it seemed to me—as a layman—the one that would most easily apply to some of the issues that are brought to me. I suspect that I am not alone in that. I will, of course, support the amendments.

The Convener: We are amending the 2001 act to amalgamate the previous list of interdicts. However, the 1981 act will still exist and will contain a power of interdict.

Hugh Henry: That is correct.

The Convener: I raise that because when the Scottish Women's Aid witnesses gave evidence to the committee they seemed to be under the impression that a slightly lower test was used in applying for an interdict under the 1981 act. They might have been wrong. I just wanted to seek clarification.

10:00

Hugh Henry: We have attended to that point. We have discussed the issue with Scottish Women's Aid. No rights or opportunities are diluted as a result of these amendments. As Stewart Stevenson said, they provide clarification and are a simplification.

The Convener: So both acts will continue to apply and if it was more appropriate to use the 1981 act, rather than the 2001 act, that is what would happen.

Hugh Henry: That is correct.

Amendment 86 agreed to.

Section 24—Domestic interdicts

Amendment 87 moved—[Hugh Henry]—and agreed to.

The Convener: Amendment 88, in the name of the minister, is grouped with amendments 95, 126, 124, 101, 113, 125 and 118 to 120.

Hugh Henry: These amendments will make consequential or technical amendments to the provisions in the bill relating to civil partners, to the Civil Partnership Act 2004 and to other legislation to take account of the 2004 act.

Amendments 88 and 119 reflect for civil partners amendments debated earlier in connection with

interdicts and powers of arrest. Amendments 95 and 118 correct an error in schedule 3 to the bill, which would have had an unintended effect on step-parent forbidden degrees where one party to a civil partnership had undergone gender recognition.

Amendment 120 makes two minor, technical corrections to the Civil Partnership Act 2004. One corrects an omission in the provisions repealing desertion as a ground for dissolution and the other corrects an error in the description of “family home”.

Amendment 113 is a minor, consequential amendment that has the purpose of including same-sex cohabitants in the Civil Evidence (Family Mediation) (Scotland) Act 1995.

Amendment 124 amends the 2004 act to bring the circumstances under which civil partnerships are void into line with the circumstances under which marriages are void by virtue of section 2 of the bill.

Amendment 125 amends section 12 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 to make reference to the children of civil partners.

Amendment 101 amends the definition of same-sex cohabitants in section 26 of the bill to make reference to civil partners.

I turn to amendment 126, in the name of Marlyn Glen, which seeks to change the definition of the term “child of the family” in the provision in the Civil Partnership Act 2004 on occupancy rights. Although we do not believe that the amendment to the form of words makes any material change to the definition, it will ensure more consistency with the equivalent definition of “child of the family” that appears in the Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection) (Scotland) Act 1981. Given that the Executive's policy has always been that the law relating to civil partners should mirror that for spouses, we are content to support the amendment.

I pay tribute to Marlyn Glen. We did not always agree that the change was required, but she has pursued the matter persistently and doggedly and has persuaded us that she is correct.

I move amendment 88.

Marlyn Glen: The aim of amendment 126 is the same as that of the rest of the amendments in the group: to remove the differential wording of legislation and protect the children of civil partnerships. As the minister explained, that fits with the Scottish Executive's intentions, which I welcome. I add my thanks for all the detailed work done on the comparisons, which the convener mentioned last week. I am confident that the minister will check between now and stage 3 that no other amendments are needed in this respect. I

assure him that my persistence will persist. I get good legal advice too, which is absolutely necessary with such detailed legislation.

Stewart Stevenson: I wish to raise an issue that I think might be too complex to deal with today. I will describe a constituency case. This is an actual case, by the way—it is in the public domain. A husband murdered his wife, with whom he had two children, and was sent to jail for life. The children did not have residency in the house and, under the 1981 act, the husband inherited the sole rights. Very fortunately, he signed the house across to the grandparents; they were allowed to have the house and look after the children.

Despite that outcome, a difficult hole remains in the law. In a sense, the husband benefited from a criminal act in a way that could have been to the detriment of the children. Will the minister consider such issues at some future stage? Such circumstances occur extremely rarely, but any cases of that sort are very hard to deal with. In this case, there was a shred of decency left in the person who was in prison, who did the right thing, but he was not legally required to do so.

The Convener: I am not sure that that is entirely a question for this group of amendments. Nevertheless, I invite the minister to comment if he wishes to.

Hugh Henry: Thank you, convener. You are so kind. The situation that Stewart Stevenson raises is fairly unusual. It is a complex matter. I suggest that the best way to proceed would be for Stewart Stevenson to raise the issue with me in a letter—without necessarily giving all the details—and we will look at that. If the bill can do anything about such cases—I doubt that it can—we will look into that before stage 3. If provisions elsewhere need to be attended to, we will of course seek an opportunity to consider them in future. Without being able to examine the detail, however, I hesitate to pronounce on the case.

Amendment 88 agreed to.

Amendments 89 to 93 moved—[Hugh Henry]—and agreed to.

Amendment 40 not moved.

Section 24, as amended, agreed to.

After section 24

Amendment 94 moved—[Hugh Henry]—and agreed to.

Section 25 agreed to.

Schedule 1

AMENDMENTS OF THE CIVIL PARTNERSHIP ACT 2004

Amendment 95 moved—[Hugh Henry]—and agreed to.

The Convener: Amendment 96 has been withdrawn from the marshalled list.

Amendment 126 moved—[Marlyn Glen]—and agreed to.

Amendments 13, 97 to 99, 124 and 8 moved—[Hugh Henry]—and agreed to.

Schedule 1, as amended, agreed to.

Section 26—Application of 1981 Act to cohabiting couples of same sex

Amendment 101 moved—[Hugh Henry]—and agreed to.

Section 26, as amended, agreed to.

After section 26

The Convener: Amendment 102, in the name of the minister, is grouped with amendments 112, 115, 121 and 123.

Hugh Henry: This series of amendments amends the Damages (Scotland) Act 1976.

Amendment 102 addresses current anomalies, such as brothers and sisters being unable to sue for non-patrimonial loss while relatives such as parents-in-law can, and a stepchild or step-parent being entitled to sue for non-patrimonial loss even when the marriage has taken place after the child has become an adult.

From both the Scottish Law Commission report and the response to letters that we issued to relevant organisations to inform them of the proposals, in which we invited comment if they had concerns, it is clear that the list of persons who currently make up the deceased's immediate family needs to be updated to reflect the family structures found in modern-day Scotland.

We believe that the proposals for change both develop and extend existing policy by ensuring that relatives closest to the deceased have title to sue for non-patrimonial loss. That is why we decided to lodge amendment 102.

Amendment 112 corrects an error made in taking forward, through the Civil Partnership Act 2004, an amendment that the same-sex cohabitant of the deceased should be entitled to sue for both patrimonial and non-patrimonial loss.

Amendment 115 is consequential to amendment 102.

Amendment 121 repeals paragraph 4 of schedule 28 to the Civil Partnership Act 2004, which was incorrect.

Amendment 123 amends the long title of the bill to include reference to the amendments made to the Damages (Scotland) Act 1976.

I move amendment 102.

The Convener: I seek clarification. There was not much discussion at stage 1 of amendments to the 1976 act. Can you tell the committee more about where the consensus has come from on amending the 1976 act?

Hugh Henry: There were comments from the Scottish Law Commission, which consulted widely on the proposals for reform. Its report took into account the views of the respondents to that consultation. The vast majority of respondents agreed with the policy aim to retain the concept of the deceased's immediate family.

We recently issued letters to 33 organisations, including ones that represent victims. We informed them of our proposal to accept the recommendations in the Scottish Law Commission report and invited them to comment where they had concerns. Only one respondent voiced any concerns. We thought that the 1976 act should be amended and we attempted to consult as widely as we could.

The Convener: Does the amendment of the 1976 act mean that it will include an additional list of persons: stepchildren, step-parents, stepbrothers or stepsisters?

Hugh Henry: The amendment of the 1976 act changes the list; it tries to reflect the relationships that I outlined.

The Convener: This is the first time that I have heard about the matter and I am trying to understand it. Who comes out of the list?

Hugh Henry: Nobody comes out of the list. We are amending the list to reflect the fact that some close relationships have previously been overlooked or disadvantaged. We think that it is relevant to amend the list. It seems to be an anomaly that siblings can currently sue for patrimonial loss but, under the 1976 act, are unable to sue for non-patrimonial loss although, as I explained earlier, relatives by affinity—for example, a father-in-law or a son-in-law—can do so. That does not seem right. We think that amending the 1976 act is the right thing to do.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): The provision seems sensible. My only comment is that bringing in the amendments at this stage has not given the committee a chance to look underneath to see whether there are any problems

and fully satisfy itself that there is none. That is not a desirable precedent to set.

10:15

Hugh Henry: I stand to be corrected, but I think that I raised the matter in a letter to the committee. I will double-check.

The Convener: I can clarify that you did so; you said that you wanted to amend the 1976 act. However, prior to the amendments being lodged, we were not clear about why you wanted to amend the 1976 act, which is why we wanted to draw that out today. There is no opposition to what you seek to do, but today has been our only opportunity to understand what the substantial amendment to the 1976 act would do.

Hugh Henry: I accept the point.

Amendment 102 agreed to.

Section 27—Jurisdiction: actions for declarator of recognition of certain foreign decrees

The Convener: Amendment 103, in the name of the minister, is grouped with amendments 104 to 108.

Hugh Henry: These amendments seek to make technical changes to section 27. At present, there are no clear jurisdictional rules to determine when Scottish courts are competent to deal with proceedings that relate to the recognition here of a foreign matrimonial judgment from outside the European Union. Within the EU, the matter is governed by the regulation that is commonly known as Brussels 2A, which came into effect in March this year.

Section 27 aims to rectify the situation by creating jurisdictional rules for that type of case. However, as drafted, it would apply only where the proceedings were for a declarator that the foreign judgment should be recognised here. There might also be circumstances in which it would be in the interests of a party to seek a declarator that the foreign judgment should not be recognised.

Amendments 103 to 108 expand the wording of section 27 to cover the situation.

I move amendment 103.

Amendment 103 agreed to.

Amendments 104 to 108 moved—[Hugh Henry]—and agreed to.

Section 27, as amended, agreed to.

Section 28—Validity of marriages

The Convener: Amendment 109, in the name of the minister, is grouped with amendment 110.

Hugh Henry: Amendments 109 and 110 introduce a public policy provision to section 28. Section 28 provides that a person's capacity to marry is governed by the law of his or her domicile immediately before the marriage. It is right that the law of an individual's long-term home should regulate the matter. It is legitimate that different countries take slightly different views about aspects of capacity, such as prohibited degrees of relationship. It would be wrong for the validity of a marriage that was entered into by a foreign couple abroad to be subjected to the internal rules of Scots law rather than to the legal systems that were relevant at the time of the marriage.

However, there might be situations in which a Scottish court might feel that the content of a foreign law on capacity was unacceptable—an example of that might be a law that regarded young children as having the capacity to marry. Although the provision is likely to be invoked rarely, the courts here need to be able to disapply foreign law on the ground of public policy. The general rules about the validity of international marriages are included in section 28, so it is appropriate also to include there an express provision in relation to this matter.

The Parliament has spoken out strongly in other legislation about the need to protect children from the dangers of sexual exploitation and abuse. Although we recognise that there might be cultural differences in some countries, there is nevertheless potential for some relationships to be unacceptable here. It is right that we take steps to ensure that protection can be afforded.

I move amendment 109.

Stewart Stevenson: I support what the minister is trying to do. I just have a technical point about the drafting. Amendment 110 uses the phrase

"where, immediately before the marriage, the person was domiciled",

whereas section 28(4) uses the phrase

"in which a person is domiciled".

What is the distinction between someone being domiciled somewhere else and getting married in Scotland, and proposed subsection 3A, which refers to their domicile immediately before the marriage? What is the technical effect of that difference? I am not 100 per cent sure that I know what "immediately before the marriage" means. Does it mean up to the day before the marriage or a month before? Is it simply an accepted form of words that will be fully understood by the courts?

Hugh Henry: We are not aware of any significant difference. It means just prior to the marriage. We will reflect on whether any different inferences would be made, although we do not think that they would be.

Stewart Stevenson: I am concerned that there are different constructs in what will become adjacent subsections. I am quite content to support amendment 110 at this stage, as long as the minister re-examines it.

Hugh Henry: We will look at that. If, for whatever reason, we think that there is a need for consistency, we will lodge an amendment. If we think that there is no problem, we will leave it as it stands.

The Convener: I presumed that, with amendment 110, you were trying to establish domicile as where the marriage took place, whereas the section to which Stewart Stevenson referred is the general rule on domicile. Are you trying to establish where the marriage took place?

Hugh Henry: We are looking at where someone was resident and where they were married. A person could seek to claim domicile or residence in a country that affords them the opportunity to marry someone whom we would regard as a young child but whom that country does not. We are seeking to ensure that we can address that problem.

The Convener: How far will public policy extend? You gave one example, but it would not be the only one. Recently, a United Nations report was published on a country that encouraged rapists to marry the women whom they had raped. Would that be a public policy ground on which a marriage would not be recognised?

Hugh Henry: It could be.

The Convener: So the provision is broad.

Hugh Henry: Yes. The situation that you describe could be included. The provision could include parties to the marriage being within prohibited degrees of relationship that are unacceptable here. It could include either party already being married, which might be acceptable elsewhere but not here. It could deal with either party being under 16 years of age, which would be unacceptable to us. In addition, a marriage could be considered void if either party could not give effective consent. A range of issues could be covered.

The Convener: Will the courts be given guidance? How will they determine what is public policy?

Hugh Henry: Normally, such things are within judicial knowledge. Although we use the term "public policy", we are talking about matters that start from a legal basis and which are not legally acceptable here but are acceptable elsewhere. If something that is legally acceptable elsewhere is not legally acceptable here, the public policy conclusion is that it would not be applied here. That conclusion is founded not just on personal or

political opinion—it has to be founded on the legal basis of what we find acceptable in this country.

Amendment 109 agreed to.

Amendment 110 moved—[Hugh Henry]—and agreed to.

Section 28, as amended, agreed to.

Sections 29 and 30 agreed to.

After section 30

Amendment 22 moved—[Hugh Henry]—and agreed to.

Sections 31 and 32 agreed to.

After section 32

The Convener: Amendment 111, in the name of the minister, is grouped with amendment 122.

Hugh Henry: Section 34 details the short title and the commencement provisions. The Subordinate Legislation Committee noted that section 34 allows the commencement order to be combined with transitional and saving provisions. While that approach is not unprecedented, the Subordinate Legislation Committee considers it to be bad practice, a view that the Justice 1 Committee supported in its stage 1 report. Accordingly, the Executive has lodged amendments to separate the power to commence the act from the power to make transitional or saving provisions. As is usual practice, the commencement order will not be subject to parliamentary procedure and the transitional and saving provisions will be subject to the negative resolution procedure.

I move amendment 111.

The Convener: I understand what a commencement order is, but what is a transitional and saving provision?

Hugh Henry: Anything that needs to be kept alive until the act comes into effect would be regarded as a transitional provision.

The Convener: Would anything else be included? When I first read amendment 111, I thought that the powers were wide, but that is not what you suggest.

Hugh Henry: The amendments in the group respond to the concerns of the Subordinate Legislation Committee and the Justice 1 Committee.

Margaret Mitchell: To be clear, would any transitional orders be made prior to the act coming into effect and not subsequent to that?

Hugh Henry: That is my understanding.

Margaret Mitchell: I am satisfied with the assurance that nothing too fundamental will be done. If anything fundamental were required, the affirmative procedure would be better, but I am happy to accept the assurance that that is not required.

Hugh Henry: I give that assurance.

Amendment 111 agreed to.

Section 33 agreed to.

Schedule 2

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments 112, 23 to 25, 113, 125 and 114 moved—[Hugh Henry]—and agreed to.

Schedule 2, as amended, agreed to.

Schedule 3

REPEALS

Amendments 26, 27, 41, 115, 29, 116, 30, 31 and 117 to 121 moved—[Hugh Henry]—and agreed to.

Schedule 3, as amended, agreed to.

Section 34—Short title and commencement

Amendment 122 moved—[Hugh Henry]—and agreed to.

Section 34, as amended, agreed to.

Long title

Amendments 71 and 123 moved—[Hugh Henry]—and agreed to.

Long title, as amended, agreed to.

The Convener: Members will be pleased to note that that ends our stage 2 consideration of the Family Law (Scotland) Bill, which did not take too long. I thank the minister and his officials for clarifying a substantial number of issues that the committee had raised. We appreciate all the work that went into doing that.

We still have some questions outstanding, so we will meet the minister next Tuesday to run through them.

Hugh Henry: I look forward to that.

The Convener: We know that you mean it.

Scottish Commissioner for Human Rights Bill

10:30

The Convener: Under agenda item 2, I invite members to agree to receive a briefing in private from our adviser Professor Jim Murdoch at our next meeting and to consider in private the main themes that arise from future evidence sessions on the Scottish Commissioner for Human Rights Bill.

Members *indicated agreement.*

Committee Debate in the Chamber

10:31

The Convener: Under agenda item 3, I invite members to consider whether we should seek time in the chamber for a committee debate on our recent scrutiny of the European Commission green papers on applicable law on divorce and succession and wills. Members are looking at me aghast.

My feeling is that it might be of benefit to have 45 or 60 minutes to highlight the issue in the chamber. We spent some time working on the green papers and the issues that we raised in our sessions on them are of interest to the public; a committee debate would allow us to bring them to people's attention. The Commission is making decisions that may affect the people whom we represent.

I ask members for their views.

Stewart Stevenson: I support the proposal. People are often struck when measures that might have originated eight or 10 years previously mysteriously appear out of Europe. We are in on this issue at a relatively early stage, and it would be good to draw the attention of a wider audience to some of the—I hesitate to use the word, but I shall—loopy ideas that officials are discussing. We should send a high-calibre shell across their bows in the hope that they will not spend an unreasonable amount of time on something that, frankly, is going nowhere and will get no support.

Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): Like Stewart Stevenson, I am happy to have the matter debated by the whole Parliament. The queries that I get from constituents show me that it is a matter in which they have an interest. It is also an example of work that overlaps from Europe

How might the timing of the debate fit in with any further deliberations on the green papers in Europe? Do we have any indication of that?

Douglas Wands (Clerk): Our understanding is that consideration of the succession and wills green paper has been delayed somewhat. However, the Commission's plan on the applicable law on divorce green paper is to proceed to regulations over the next 12 months. That is contained in the Commission's work programme. It might be helpful for the attention of the Parliament to be drawn to that. Next week, there is a public hearing in Brussels that will be the next step towards that. The Parliament's European officer, Ian Duncan, and I will attend that session and will return to the committee with an update on developments. Certainly, ahead of any debate in

the chamber, members will have an update on developments at European level.

Mrs Mulligan: That is helpful. I was concerned that the situation might have moved on by the time that we debate the issue. However, I am reassured by the clerk's words.

Margaret Mitchell: It would be worth while to have a debate to raise awareness about what is coming out of Brussels. More than most committees, this committee has been aware of the importance of being in at the beginning of agendas in order to pick up on certain issues. When we have had an opportunity to consider certain measures in depth, we have been able to see that they have had quite far-reaching consequences that we have objected to and rejected. To give such issues a wider airing in the debating chamber would be helpful to prevent the creeping mutual recognition agenda in Europe from turning into harmonisation before we realise what has hit us.

The Convener: It would appear that the committee is agreed that we should put in a bid for a suitable slot.

I wrote an article for the Scottish Legal Action Group, based on its report. So far, I have had some positive responses, in that those who have written agree with the committee's position.

At our next meeting, on 7 December, we will begin our stage 1 consideration of the Scottish Commissioner for Human Rights Bill by taking evidence from the bill team and MORI Scotland.

I remind members that the deadline for lodging amendments for stage 3 of the Family Law (Scotland) Bill is 9 December.

Meeting closed at 10:37.

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