

TRANSPORT AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 19 September 2001
(Morning)

Session 1

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TRANSPORT AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE 22nd Meeting 2001, Session 1

CONVENER

*Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green)

*Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP)

*Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

*Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP)

*Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)

*Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab)

*John Scott (Ayr) (Con)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Callum Thomson

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Tracey Hawe

ASSISTANT CLERK

Alastair Macfie

LOCATION

The Hub

Scottish Parliament

Transport and the Environment Committee

Wednesday 19 September 2001

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 09:59*]

The Convener (Mr Andy Kerr): I welcome press and public alike to this meeting of the Transport and the Environment Committee. We have received no apologies, although a couple of members have indicated that they might be late.

I also welcome to the committee our new clerk, Callum Thomson. Today is his first time in the hot seat. His is a face that we will get to know well over the next wee while. He joins us from the Audit Committee and the Finance Committee so we will have much greater insight into matters budgetary and financial when we deal with the budget process later in the meeting.

Item in Private

The Convener: Item 1 invites members to consider whether to discuss item 4 in private to allow us to debate the practical arrangements for our continued consideration of the Scottish Executive budget for 2002-03. Are members agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Subordinate Legislation

The Convener: Under agenda item 2, the committee will consider two negative instruments on telecommunications developments: the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2001 (SSI 2001/245) and the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Amendment (No 2) Order 2001 (SSI 2001/266). Covering notes on both orders have previously been circulated, although we can issue more copies should members require them.

SSI 2001/245 was laid on 25 June 2001 and is subject to negative procedure. The committee is required to report on the order by 24 September, so today is our last opportunity to consider it.

SSI 2001/266 was laid on 20 July 2001 and is also subject to negative procedure. It will, in effect, replace SSI 2001/244, which has been revoked. We are required to report on the order by 1 October. That means that if we decide not to report on that order today, we have another opportunity at next week's meeting. The Subordinate Legislation Committee considered the orders on 4 September and agreed to seek further information on them from the Executive. Members have the relevant extracts from the Subordinate Legislation Committee's subsequent report to the Parliament.

In the covering note, members will read that we had a lengthy and—I hope—useful meeting with the Deputy Minister for Transport and Planning last week, at which we discussed fully the Executive's proposals. The committee expressed some concerns about aspects of the proposals, but I advise members that I have received no motions to annul.

Do members have comments on the two orders?

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): I am sorry for being late, convener.

I have comments on SSI 2001/266, which I know we do not have to consider until next week. I would appreciate it if we could delay consideration of that order until next week because I would like to seek clarification from the Executive on a certain part of the order that has come to my notice. I would like a definition of a completed installation in relation to the 14-day grace period that is mentioned. Only last night it was brought to my attention that one company in particular is disputing the meaning of a completed installation. In the eyes of the community and the local council, the company has not completed the installation and it is about to try to complete it well outwith the 14-day period, which ended on 6 August.

I have done some research and I understand that at least four local authorities in Scotland face similar situations, in which companies are disputing whether their installations were completed by 6 August and are attempting to work on installations. Therefore, I request that we delay making a decision on SSI 2001/266 to seek clarification from the Executive on the definition of a completed installation.

The Convener: We have a good track record of reflecting communities' concerns about such matters. We do not have to consider SSI 2001/266 today, so I will err on the side of caution and accede happily to Fiona McLeod's request for the definition of a completed installation. I am not sure what that will add to the areas that are involved, but I am sure that the local authorities will be interested in the response from the Executive. I will liaise with Fiona McLeod on the detail of those matters so that the points that we make to the Executive are clear in order to ensure that we receive a clear response.

In that case, I suggest that we have nothing to report on SSI 2001/245 and that we delay consideration of SSI 2001/266 until our next meeting.

Members *indicated agreement.*

Sea Cage Fish Farming

The Convener: Item 3 is petition PE96, which was a matter of some discussion at last week's meeting. We agreed to delay consideration of it until today.

We agreed that there was merit in the principle of a rolling or staged inquiry. The paper that has been circulated to members reflects that. We agreed to consider the proposed inquiry in much greater detail. What the paper suggests is clear and we must reach a conclusion on a number of points that I will summarise at the end of our discussion. I seek members' initial views on the paper so that we can make progress.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): The clerking team has done an excellent job of trying to collate a variety of different approaches into a strategy or route forward. There is a good balance between maintaining a rolling inquiry and putting the onus on the Executive to ensure that the information is provided and presented properly. We should welcome the proposal and I have no difficulty in going along with the broad thrust of the recommendations.

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): I think that the role of the co-ordinator should be more specific and more scientific. I understand from the paper that an individual will be appointed to draw together all the evidence that we gather and to deal with procedures to advance the inquiry. The paper does not seem to recommend an individual who has knowledge of the industry.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I think that that was assumed.

The Convener: The point could be made more specifically, but at our previous meeting we said that the person appointed should be somebody who understands the industry and the science that surrounds it. We will write that into the report.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Has the Executive undertaken to fund such a post?

The Convener: Not yet. We have not approached the Executive formally because the committee must first agree on the report. If members agree on the content of the report, we can contact the Executive. Unless the clerks can advise me otherwise, the Executive has not taken a view. We will write to the Executive formally to request funding for the appointment after the committee agrees to the report.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): We should be even clearer that the main thrust of the paper is to follow the development of the strategy. Bullet point 6 mentions

"The extent to which the proposed strategy for aquaculture addresses the concerns of both industry and environmental groups".

We should strengthen the references to the development of an overall strategy before we conclude our consideration. It is merely a matter of emphasis.

John Scott: Are we going through the detail?

The Convener: I was looking for general comments at first, but I want now to go through the paper point by point.

Fiona McLeod: I thought that we had gone into the technical detail. We are calling it a rolling inquiry. Given the interest from the relevant parties last week when we called it an investigation, I am glad that we are now calling it an inquiry. It is an inquiry. There is no specific format for the way in which an inquiry must take place. Rather than preceding the word inquiry with the word rolling, we should just say, "We are conducting an inquiry".

Des McNulty: Good try, Fiona.

The Convener: We are returning to issues that we discussed at our previous meeting. The inquiry under discussion is different from our usual format for inquiry in which we have terms of reference, time scales, interested parties and witnesses called to give evidence. We are maintaining the view that we should seek specialist advice and, in a sense, it is not a normal inquiry.

I am not hung up about the matter; after our extensive discussions last week, members should understand what they are doing. Terminology is unimportant. As people will find out if they read the *Official Report* of last week's meeting—and, indeed, of this week's meeting—we intend to appoint a reporter, seek specialist advice, keep an eye on the Executive, consider gaps in the programme, stimulate further interest in the matter and listen to interested parties on the issue. The format is different from the committee's previous inquiries, which is why we have used the phrase "rolling inquiry". The essential point is that it is still an inquiry; how we determine its form is another matter.

If we simply call what we are doing an inquiry, we would have to organise matters a little differently, which would limit us. The rolling inquiry idea expands our horizons and broadens our approach to include different aspects such as the legislative programme, the work of the Executive, the specialist advice that we receive and the needs of the industry and the environment. I am cautious about dropping the term "rolling inquiry", because, if we do so, we will need to revisit the issue and find a different approach. Instead of disabling us, the approach that we have chosen enables us to address the request in the petition,

which is our aim. Although I seek the views of members on that, I am happy with the term "rolling inquiry" as it highlights that what we are doing is different and not our usual practice.

Members appear to be nodding in support of that general principle, Fiona. Do you wish to press the point?

Fiona McLeod: No, I am quite happy. You have said that it is an inquiry, which is fine by me.

The Convener: Indeed it is an inquiry. I think that we always said that.

I assume that colleagues are happy with the contents of the first section of the report, which details the background of the inquiry. The next section focuses on the continued appointment of reporters. Robin Harper and Bristow Muldoon did a sterling job over the summer to put the issues before the committee. However, I have received an indication from Bristow that he would prefer not to continue as a reporter.

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): It is not so much that I would prefer to stand aside—I found the work very interesting—but I had informal discussions with my colleague Maureen Macmillan, who expressed her interest in taking part in the inquiry. I would be prepared to stand aside to give her or any other member of the committee the opportunity to be a reporter.

The Convener: Robin, I did not get a chance to talk to you about this issue. Are you happy to continue as reporter?

Robin Harper: I am very happy to do so. I realise that other members might want to take on the role, but no one has said to me, "Robin, can I have a go?" I would certainly like to continue for a couple of months longer so that I can pursue some matters in which I am interested.

The Convener: I think that the committee would certainly prefer to appoint members who were willing to take on the role instead of having to ask a member to take it. I am happy that Robin Harper is willing to continue and that we have received an expression of interest from Maureen Macmillan. Are members happy for Robin and Maureen to proceed as reporters?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Robin Harper and Maureen Macmillan are now tasked with being our reporters on the matter on a continuing basis.

We now move on to discuss the rolling inquiry. A number of points have been made under that general heading. First, are members content with the draft remit in the report? It covers the comments that we made last week and refers to matters that were raised by our reporters.

Des McNulty: Can we please take on board the point that Robin Harper made about the priority of the last bullet point on a “proposed strategy for aquaculture”, which should perhaps come first.

Robin Harper: Perhaps the first paragraph under the “Remit” heading should read: “The aim of a ‘rolling’ inquiry would be to ensure that there is work by the Executive and other relevant bodies in developing a strategy for a sustainable aquaculture industry”. That would get the word “strategy” in at the beginning.

The Convener: That would be a useful change. Mr McNulty, would that change remove the need for your suggested amendment to the bullet points in that section of the paper?

Des McNulty: The paper sets out the list wrongly. The point about locational guidelines does not belong at the top of the list. The point about the proposed strategy should be at the top of the list.

The Convener: Do members agree to put the last bullet point first?

Members indicated agreement.

John Scott: The second bullet point mentions voluntary codes of practice. We want the fish farming industry to succeed, but we want other interests in those areas to have a future, for example environmental and wild salmon interests. If we are serious about cleaning up the fish farming industry, should we be looking to develop codes of practice that are not voluntary?

10:15

The Convener: We want to examine the status quo—which includes voluntary codes of practice—to discover whether it is good enough. Our recommendations will flow from that examination. The second point on the list is about regulatory systems and whether the voluntary codes of practice are good enough. The inquiry’s remit would be to review the existing voluntary codes of practice and area management agreements to discover whether they are strong enough.

John Scott said that to achieve what we want there might need to be a move away from the voluntary codes—that is a good point.

John Scott: We need a move to something that is not voluntary.

The Convener: The remit for the inquiry is to examine the codes to find out whether they should be voluntary or not. We should not judge that issue until we have done the work.

John Scott: There is an enormous amount of dissatisfaction in the wild salmon fisheries with the fish farming industry, so could we include them in

the list? The remit would then read: “the needs of industry and environment groups and wild salmon fisheries.” That is important.

The Convener: Are colleagues content with that?

Robin Harper: Where do you want to insert that phrase?

John Scott: In the fifth and sixth bullet points on the list.

Maureen Macmillan: We cannot mention only wild salmon fisheries. If we mention a specific group, we will also have to think about, for example, the shellfish industry.

John Scott: Yes, I am happy to accept that. We need better wording than simply “environment groups”. We should include other people who are trying to make a living from investments in those areas.

The Convener: So we need to mention the different aspects of the industry. The term “industry” could lead people to think about only fish farming, but there are other aspects of the industry, including wild fish and shellfish.

Maureen Macmillan: The fish farming industry impacts on other industries.

John Farquhar Munro: The second bullet point mentions area management agreements, which incorporate fishery boards and local fishery organisations.

Maureen Macmillan: They incorporate fishery boards and sea cage farming, but I do not think that they incorporate the shellfish industry.

John Scott: The point that I am making is that our approach must be holistic.

The Convener: Yes. We need a form of words that broadens the scope to include the shellfish industry and wild salmon fisheries. We will amend the remit as appropriate.

John Scott: I am sure that we will miss somebody out, so we need a broad form of words that catches everybody.

Maureen Macmillan: We should try to keep the remit general.

The Convener: We will put a catch-all in the remit, if that is the right phrase to use during a discussion about fish.

We will move on to consider the “Phased approach” section. Are there any comments on the section?

John Scott: The time scale for appointing an adviser, which must be done by early October, seems to be short—perhaps a bit wishful.

Des McNulty: There is another issue. If we have a research co-ordinator, that might obviate the need for a separate adviser to the committee. The appointment of an adviser is conditional on the Executive's response to the proposed research co-ordinator.

John Scott: I agree.

The Convener: If I remember correctly from my discussions at the conveners liaison group, the deadline for bids is 5 October so we must move fast in shortlisting potential candidates for such a role. What Des McNulty said is absolutely correct. The response from the Executive is central to the matter and we must await its outcome. Callum Thomson has taken note of that point. We shall certainly pursue the time scale required so that the proposal can be implemented satisfactorily.

Des McNulty: Can we inform the Executive that we want its response in time to meet the deadline?

The Convener: Yes.

Des McNulty: There will be a further meeting, but perhaps we can give you authority on our behalf to put in a bid if the Executive is negative, although obviously I hope that it will not be negative.

The Convener: We will prepare a case for a submission for funds on the basis that we do not know what the Executive will do. In that way, we will not be starting from square one when we receive its response. I hope that it will be positive.

Fiona McLeod: We are talking about whether we want a research co-ordinator and an adviser. However, the paper says such options are not mutually exclusive. The way in which you were talking, convener, seemed to imply that they are. I argue that they are not.

The Convener: I would not argue that such options are not mutually exclusive. Given the short-term needs of the committee, it is crucial that we have someone in place if the Executive does not accede to our request. That does not mean that that will not happen anyway, given the broader issues in the report. There is no suggestion that, if we have one post, we will not have the other. The roles will be significantly different as would be the number of days that they would be required to work. The resources also differ substantially. Fiona McLeod is absolutely correct that the options are not mutually exclusive.

John Scott: We must debate such matters seriously. From my understanding of the paper, it would probably be better if one person undertook both jobs, reporting to the committee and acting as a research co-ordinator. There would then be no doubt about the message that we would receive. To whom would the person be responsible, given that the Executive would be paying their salary? I

feel strongly that the research co-ordinator, or whatever title he or she is given, should report and be responsible to us, not to the Executive. That is how the person would gain their independence. Do colleagues have any views on that?

Des McNulty: A phased process is attached to such matters. We want the Executive to agree to the appointment of a research co-ordinator because that is the most effective way in which to receive the information that we need. I hope that, given that we have requested the Executive to make such an appointment, it would go through the proper process and appoint someone with a clear, professional remit. We want an expert, who would make information available to us and the Executive at the same time. That would be the ideal situation. We could influence the remit of the research co-ordinator and feed in the specific questions that we want answered.

If the Executive agrees to our request, we can see how that takes shape and whether we are satisfied with the way in which the appointment was made. If we consider that all the information we require will be provided by the research co-ordinator, there may be no need to appoint an adviser. However, if we are not satisfied with that process, we still have the opportunity to appoint our own adviser if we require something specific.

First, we need a response from the Executive on the essential principle. At this point, we must not jump through too many hoops. We must maintain a holding position with regard to an adviser. We can decide on what action to take when we know the Executive's response. At this point, the best solution would be for the Executive to appoint a research co-ordinator, who would work for us as well as for the Executive. That information should come back to us at the appropriate stage. We should leave open the possibility for that optimum situation to emerge from the process.

The Convener: I still think that we will need some support, whether that support is within the framework that we are currently discussing or whether it is support to enable us to interrogate witnesses, supply us with specific advice in the short term or consider different aspects of the matter. We do not want to close any doors today. We are trying to keep all the doors open, write to the Executive and obtain its view quickly on the principle of a research co-ordinator. That will allow us to focus our discussions on what level of support we need.

A paper will be produced to outline our options in the light of the Executive's decision. If the Executive says, "Yes, the research co-ordinator will be fully funded and there will be a direct reporting line to the Transport and the Environment Committee", that will be our pinnacle of achievement. We then work our way down from

there, depending on what the Executive says, and decide what we require to do in the absence of the Executive making that full decision.

We will not have closed any doors. We recognise that, whatever happens, the bottom line is that we will need some form of advice. The issue is the level of the advice. As John Scott says, there is no point in having two people doing the same work. That would create confusion. I think that our suggestion would be the ideal way to proceed, but we must wait for the Executive's response.

Fiona McLeod: I have concerns about the way that Des McNulty presented the situation. He suggested that if the Executive were to produce a research co-ordinator, that would be fine and they would do the job that we wanted. We know about the enormous amount of research work that is being done in the Executive. I would be surprised if the Executive did not have already somebody who co-ordinates their research. I assume that someone is ensuring that the department is working efficiently. That would be effective use of research money in the Executive.

We should say that we need a separate, independent adviser who might take evidence from the Executive about how it is co-ordinating its work, investigate whether there are holes in its work and bring that evidence to the committee. I do not understand how we could be part of the line management of a civil servant from the Executive.

The Convener: You have assumed that the research co-ordinator would be a civil servant from the Executive. I do not share that assumption about how the Executive is going to do this.

We have not closed any doors this morning. We have said that that is what we want to do and that we are going to correspond with the Executive on the matter. I have said clearly that we will have to get separate advice at some point to support us as a committee. I am trying to establish the principle that we do not know what depth of support will be necessary. We should get a view from the Executive before we determine what our support level should be. We may need maximum support or we may need a lower level of support. We should get a response on the research co-ordinator from the Executive first, but the door is not closed on us doing anything else that we want to do.

John Scott: As we move towards the water bills, we will need somebody to support the committee. The comments that Fiona McLeod and Des McNulty have made suggest that we perhaps need to draw up a job specification of the type of person that we are looking for to be the research co-ordinator. It must be someone of significant standing, who will command our respect and that

of the industry. We will have to pay accordingly to get that quality of person, but unless we do so, we may be accused of selling the industry short.

The Convener: I share your views about the quality of person required to do this job.

Bristow Muldoon: Perhaps Fiona McLeod misunderstood what we were aiming at a fortnight ago when we discussed a research co-ordinator. We were clear that we were not talking about an existing civil servant. We suggested that the Executive should source someone who is an expert in the field and has a degree of impartiality. That might not be easy to achieve, as an expert may have their own well-formed views. However, we were clear that we wished the person to be from outwith the existing pool of expertise in the Executive. In addition, we expected—or we wish—the Executive to give the committee full access to the person and full access to the assessment of any gaps that are identified by the person.

On John Scott's point, the suggestion that the Executive should make the appointment rather than the committee related to resources. The Executive has considerably more access to resources to recruit someone at the appropriate pay level than the committee does. A restricted research budget is available to committees and we do not have any guarantee that we will be able to obtain funding. We would have to make a competitive bid. If we appoint a research co-ordinator, the paper says that the decision-making process would be such that we might not have someone in place early enough to make a substantive input into our analysis of the bills.

10:30

Robin Harper: Bristow Muldoon summed things up well, but I would like to add to what he said. Whoever we appoint, or whoever is appointed from wherever, should report to the committee—that was made clear from the beginning. We could indicate that we would prefer the Executive to appoint from outside. The committee could fairly speedily construct a remit that includes the person's responsibilities and how they should be fulfilled for the Executive's consideration. Whoever is appointed should work to that remit.

The Convener: We can take all those comments on board when we correspond with the Executive.

Maureen Macmillan: I hope that the Executive will discuss who it might appoint with the committee rather than simply present it with one person. We want discussion about the person and their background.

The Convener: We can refer to that in correspondence. An appointment is difficult to

organise. It may be that we need to short-circuit the process in some manner, but we can come back to the committee on that.

Robin Harper: As Maureen Macmillan said, we should take part in the process of choosing the person. We should be involved in some way or another, perhaps through conversing with the Executive, through the Executive giving the committee a list of names or the committee giving the Executive a list of names.

The Convener: We are going deep into the mechanics of the process.

Robin Harper: There should be negotiation in which we are involved.

The Convener: All those matters will be considered and there will be a report back to the committee. All those parameters should be applied to the research co-ordinator.

John Scott: We are going deep into the mechanics of the matter, but it is important that we do. We must establish the key principles—that is the key to the venture's success. It is essential that the industry perceives that the appointee has a degree of independence, almost as if he were a reporter to an inquiry. The appointee must be someone of that stature—that is absolutely essential to provide the security, if you like, of a further level of independence. That they report to the committee rather than the Executive is also important. That might be a wish list, but it is reasonable to aspire to those conditions.

The Convener: I agree. The approach would be novel and would benefit the Executive, the committee and the industry. I strongly hope that the Executive will concur with our views on the matter.

That was our discussion on the phased approach, colleagues. I want to get back to the paper. Do members have any specific comments on the phased approach up to the appointment of the research co-ordinator, which we have discussed? If not, is there anything to add about the appointment of a research co-ordinator?

Robin Harper: In keeping with the phased approach that we have already mentioned and the question whether we subsequently appoint an adviser, the appointment of a research co-ordinator would be contingent on how we feel it would work towards our aims. After a couple of months, we should be in a position to decide whether we need a committee adviser or whether that appointment would be surplus to our requirements.

Fiona McLeod: If the dates for deciding on an adviser are either 5 October or 28 January, we must do so by the first date.

The Convener: I share that view. However, I am trying to assess the parameters of any request that we make at that time. As a result, with regard to our previous discussions, the Executive's response will be critical.

Bristow Muldoon: I seek some clarification, convener. I thought that the 5 October deadline relates to our decision about a senior research assessor of our own, not necessarily an adviser. Is that correct?

The Convener: The deadlines relate to bids for the external research project, in which we undertake a specific piece of research. The appointment of a committee adviser happens on a continuing basis. I repeat that, after we receive the Executive's response, what the adviser and research co-ordinator will do for us will be critical. However, that returns me to my initial point that our views about external research and the role of the adviser will be determined by the Executive's response to our suggestions about how the work should be structured.

Des McNulty: Looking at the summary recommendations at the end of the report, I think that our first principle should be recommendation f), which mentions pursuing the

"creation of post of research co-ordinator ... by the Executive".

If the Executive gives us a blank refusal, we should consider whether we want to place a bid using the external research budget. Although I am disposed towards the idea of appointing a committee adviser, the question is when we should do so. However, we should wait and see how the Executive responds. The adviser might be appointed at Christmas to take us through to March. Who knows?

Robin Harper: The cut-off point for research proposals is 5 October. How would we be able to identify the research need before that date? It might be sensible to call in evidence from interested parties and to ask organisations such as the aquaculture forum whether they could recommend a piece of research that we could commission out of our budget.

The Convener: That is probably not what we are trying to achieve here. Given Callum Thomson's experience of the external budget research process, perhaps he could enlighten us about the issue of time scales.

Callum Thomson (Clerk): First, the committee should write to the Executive, asking for a quick response to the question whether it is minded to appoint the type of research co-ordinator that the committee clearly wants. It is an either/or situation. The Parliament will conduct external research only if the Executive gives a negative response to the

committee's request.

Although we would press for a quick response from the Executive, it is highly unlikely that the committee could then turn around a bid for external research by 5 October if the Executive's response is negative. Realistically, the committee would be looking at the 28 January deadline—a far longer-term process—for conducting external research. However, that issue stands separately from the committee's appointment of an adviser, even though an adviser might have a greater role if the Executive is not willing to appoint a research co-ordinator.

The Convener: That was a fairly clear explanation of the process. Do members have any other comments?

Robin Harper: My concern is that some research takes a long time. For example, the marine laboratory at Torry has been conducting research into marine water quality for three years, with another two years to go. If we are going to identify research areas, we should do so as soon as possible.

The Convener: My understanding is that the committee wants to appoint someone to undertake the tasks set out in the report, not specific and focused pieces of work on sea-lice or whatever. As far as the external research resource is concerned, part of our work is to identify research areas, not necessarily to undertake research on those areas. We must be clear about what we can or cannot achieve. As a result, I want to seek the committee's agreement on each of the recommendations in the summary to ensure that that committee members are all signed up to the work.

Do members have any other comments about the report's contents? I think that Callum Thomson has a fair insight into the committee's feelings on the matter, particularly on how we need to correspond with the Executive.

John Scott: Using the external research budget would not be one of my preferred options. We should appoint an individual and rely on his ability to form views that we and the industry can develop.

The Convener: I think that many of us share that view.

I want to move on to the summary of the report, because I want to ensure that we all understand the process. We have agreed to continue the appointment of reporters, in the shape of Maureen Macmillan and Robin Harper. Are members happy to approve the programme of visits contained in the report?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Are members content with the principle of the rolling inquiry?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Are members happy with recommendation c), which asks the committee

"to undertake the inquiry using the phased approach to evidence taking and committee reporting as outlined"

in the report?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Do members agree the remit of the inquiry, which we have since amended?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Do members agree recommendation e), which is

"to issue a call for written evidence based upon this remit"?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: In the light of our previous discussions and subject to our request to the Executive, do members agree recommendation f), which is

"to pursue creation of post of research co-ordinator"?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Are members agreed on the adviser's different role, which we will determine when we find out the Executive's decision about the appointment of a research co-ordinator?

Members indicated agreement.

John Scott: Perhaps we should insert the phrase "as well" at the end of that recommendation, so that it asks us whether we wish to "appoint a committee adviser as well".

Des McNulty: Are we not deferring the decision on appointing an adviser?

The Convener: Yes, we are.

I thank committee members for their co-operation. It has been a very useful discussion, and it has given Callum Thomson and me a greater insight into members' desires on the matter.

We now move into private session for our discussion of the practical arrangements for our continued consideration of the Scottish Executive budget for 2002-03.

10:43

Meeting continued in private until 11:10.

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