

# **TRANSPORT AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 26 June 2002  
*(Morning)*

Session 1

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## TRANSPORT AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

22<sup>nd</sup> Meeting 2002, Session 1

### CONVENER

\*Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab)

### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green)  
Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
\*Angus MacKay (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
\*Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
\*Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
\*John Scott (Ayr) (Con)

### COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con)  
Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD)

\*attended

### THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED :

Mr George Reid (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Callum Thomson

### ACTING SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Alastair Macfie

### ACTING ASSISTANT CLERK

Rosalind Wheeler

### LOCATION

Committee Room 1



## Scottish Parliament

### Transport and the Environment Committee

Wednesday 26 June 2002

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 10:28]

**The Convener (Bristow Muldoon):** I welcome members, and those members of the press and public who are in attendance, to today's meeting of the Transport and the Environment Committee. In addition, I welcome George Reid MSP who is here to speak to the petition at agenda item 3.

Apologies have been intimated from Adam Ingram and Des McNulty. Des McNulty is attending a meeting of the Finance Committee. Members are aware that, unfortunately, Adam Ingram was taken ill last week. I take this opportunity to pass on my best wishes and to wish Adam a speedy recovery on behalf of the committee.

### Items in Private

**The Convener:** Item 1 is to ask members to consider taking in private agenda item 6, which is consideration of the arrangements for our examination of the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Bill. Is that agreed?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** In addition, it is suggested that when we are preparing lines of questioning for witnesses as part of our consideration of the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Bill, we should take such sessions in private. Is that agreed?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Agenda item 7 is consideration of the evidence that we have taken thus far in our rail inquiry in order to give some guidance to our adviser on how the report should be shaping up. Do members agree to take that item in private?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Subordinate Legislation

**The Convener:** We have five items of subordinate legislation before us under agenda item 2. The Subordinate Legislation Committee considered one of the items for the second time only yesterday. Before we consider SSI 2002/289, it might be useful for me to update members on its progress.

The Subordinate Legislation Committee noted in its letter of 18 June to the Scottish Executive development department that the term "local service" is defined in section 48(1) of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001, which is the enabling act, and the committee asked the Executive to explain the purpose of the definition in regulation 2. The Executive responded by stating that the term "local service" is defined in section 48(1) of the enabling act. The Executive therefore accepts that inclusion of that definition in the regulations is unnecessary. However, it does not believe that the inclusion of a definition gives any doubt to the legal effect of the regulations.

We will go through the five items of subordinate legislation one by one. To date, no member has moved a motion to annul any of the instruments.

### Designation of Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (Scotland) Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/276)

**The Convener:** Is the committee minded to confirm that it has nothing to report on the regulations?

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** It would have been useful to have a map with the regulations for information, because a map is part of the process of designating the area.

**The Convener:** I am sure that the clerks can tell the Executive that members would have found it useful to have a map with the instrument.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** I am still unhappy at the level of designation in the regulations. From the small amount of information that we were given earlier about the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Bill, I think that it might become necessary to change those designations in future. I hope that the Executive will review the designations if the opportunity arises, and keep them under review. I am far from assured that the designations are as they need to be. I think that they are excessive.

**The Convener:** We will note your comments. However, is the committee agreed that it has nothing to report on the instrument?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**New Water and Sewerage Authorities  
Dissolution (Scotland) Order 2002  
(SSI 2002/277)**

**The Convener:** Again, no motion to annul the order has been lodged. Is it agreed that the committee has nothing to report?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**Bus Service Operators Grant (Scotland)  
Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/289)**

**The Convener:** Will the committee confirm that it has nothing to report on the instrument?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**Travel Concessions (Eligible Services)  
(Scotland) Order 2002 (SSI 2002/290)**

**The Convener:** Do members agree that there is nothing to report?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**Home Zones (Scotland) (No 2) Regulations  
2002 (SSI 2002/292)**

**The Convener:** Are we agreed that there is nothing to report on the instrument?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** Thank you for that speedy resolution of the subordinate legislation item.

**Petitions**

**Organic Waste Disposal (PE327)**

**The Convener:** Agenda item 3 is about the spreading of organic waste on land. Members are aware that the committee has dealt with the issue on a number of previous occasions in response to a petition by the Blairingone and Saline Action Group on organic waste being spread on land. The committee appointed Andy Kerr as reporter to investigate the issues that were raised in the petition. A report was produced and sent to the Scottish Executive and we have now received the Executive's response. This morning, we want to consider that response and discuss any further action that we might be minded to take.

As I have said, we are joined by George Reid, who will speak to the petition. Members are well aware that George has taken an active involvement in the petition and the issues that it raises, and in a moment I will give him the opportunity to comment on the Executive's response. I have also consented to his request to give a presentation that will highlight his remaining concerns and suggest ways in which the committee could progress the issue. George will give his presentation first, after which members can ask questions.

Sylvia Jackson has contacted me to indicate her interest in the issue. She would have attended today's meeting, but has a constituency engagement instead.

With that, I invite George Reid to make his presentation.

**Mr George Reid (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** Thank you. I am grateful to the committee for the further opportunity to contribute to the discussion of this important issue.

First, I have a general comment on the Executive's response to the committee's report. Although it is moving in the right direction, the approach is slow and hesitant and does not amount to the joined-up, safe, sustainable, enforceable regulation that Blairingone wants. I simply note that, in Scotland, we are years behind what has been achieved in Germany, Scandinavia, Canada, Switzerland and the United States. What is happening in our country would be banned in those countries.

It is with a very real sense of outrage that I draw two particular cases to the committee's attention. They are urgent and important and pose a direct challenge to the committee and the Minister for Environment and Rural Development. I want to show the committee some dirty pictures. The first shows what was being applied to the land of Scotland—our Scotland—in this week's heavy

rain. Over the past fortnight, a convoy of lorries has transported blood, chicken sludge, food waste, fish oil and barley waste to a site at Netherton outside Doune. Although that activity is permissible, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency does not know what kind of blood has been transported or what chicken sludge or barley waste is. It says that it is taking urgent steps to find out.

Members will remember the background. The next slide shows the same site in February last year. A hundred thousand gallons of bovine blood were moved to the site then sent on their travels to Forestmill in Clackmannanshire. When the local authority objected, the blood was moved back again and there was an attempt to spread it onto the land. As members can see, the result was a smirr of blood across the face of Scotland.

The blood turned into a gelatinous glue that the birds pecked at. In the Parliament, during the foot-and-mouth outbreak, I asked the Minister for Environment and Rural Development to take action. An injunction was served, but that has now been lifted.

The focus now falls on the headquarters of Beneagles Ltd at Netherton, which Stirling Council regards as an industrial waste operation. Although there have been attempts to secure an injunction, the hearing has been postponed three times to date. The next slide shows the fields on which spreading has taken place in the past week. As a farmer, John Scott will know that, in wet weather, no one goes into 3ft-high silage. However, that is what has happened. In reality, the operator—Mr Hogg of Beneagles Ltd—is destroying what theoretically he is fertilising. That is why I am arguing that this is a waste operation, not an agricultural one.

The site is now covered in graffiti that gives two fingers to the committee and the regulatory authorities. For example, the graffiti in the next slide refers to Jim Drysdale, who is the lawyer acting for the landowner. It goes on to say:

“You will never get a better milking cow than Bully Boy Bowser”—

who is the landowner—

“and his mad cow Lynn”—

who is his wife. There is more graffiti on the subject of Humpty Dumpty that relates to the committee, but I will not go into it at this time.

The last slide again shows what has happened to the land of Scotland—our land—this week. Such activity would be illegal in most developed countries. I ask Fiona McLeod whether she would live beside such land, which stinks so much that people cannot open their windows. Would Nora Radcliffe allow her cat to go out the back door and

roam through such stuff? Would Maureen Macmillan eat anything that had fed on such grazing land? How can it be illegal in this country of ours to feed blood to animals, yet be legal to spread such muck on land that is used for grazing cattle?

In its response, the Executive says that we should have patience, because a new European directive is being introduced that will take care of things. However, the directive is stuck in the European Parliament until 2003. The Executive will then have to introduce its own regulations. In the meantime, it has set up a working group to decide how to render blood safe. So that is all right then.

However, it is not all right. We first raised the issue in Blairingone in 1998 and got the BBC in to make a film called “Fields of Filth”. Lord Sewel then called on SEPA to produce the organic waste to land—or OWL—report, which recommended to the Scottish Office that the application of blood to land should be banned. That is what should happen now. To the best of my knowledge, this is the only place in Scotland where such activity is taking place. I strongly suggest to the committee that if it, like the First Minister, believes in environmental justice and the Parliament’s petitioning process, it should tell Ross Finnie to introduce a ban on such activity, at least until the directive is in place and his experts have determined how to render blood safe.

There is more: I have to mention another case that fills me with a real sense of outrage. Members will recall that there were two legs to the Blairingone petition, the first of which was environmental. The other concerned health. After listening to the villagers in their village, Andy Kerr recommended that the environmental hazard investigation team’s terms of reference should be made public and that the villagers should be consulted. So that is all right then.

No, it is not all right. The team met twice under the chairmanship of Dr Mike Roweth and, even before the terms of reference were issued, concluded that there was no case to answer. Did it tell the committee? No, it did not. However, it did tell the contractors in question, Snowie Ltd. Long before the Parliament was aware of the conclusions, the company promptly issued a press release to all the media entitled “Snowie not to blame”, which quoted Dr Roweth’s comment that there was no health risk. I have to point out that, over the years, Dr Roweth has featured in releases issued along those lines by Snowie Ltd.

When I learned that news, I immediately contacted SEPA, which said that the situation was quite unsatisfactory and informed the media that it would not consider the investigation team’s report until the villagers had been contacted. So that is

all right then. The team's own guidelines say that there must be full consultation with the people involved. However, that did not happen. Indeed, I have the minutes of the team's meeting. At the first meeting in Stirling, the team said that two courses of action were open to it. The first option was a full investigation, which I concede would have been expensive and would have taken time. The other option was to conduct a shorter investigation that would have involved making contact with the villagers and their general practitioners and examining prescription data. In the team's first meeting, it was made clear that the Blairingone and Saline Action Group should be contacted. That did not happen.

We had to get to the truth. Neither the villagers nor I have ever made any causal connection between waste spreading and health. However, the villagers should be listened to in the way that the committee recommended. They have assembled a vast amount of background information that includes details of real cases of viral myocardia. Similar cases have emerged from spreading operations in the US. They have Polaroid pictures of children whose backsides broke out in blisters the size of half-crowns after they had lived in houses where sludge was spread right up to the back door. As the mother of one child who nearly died in Stirling royal infirmary is a qualified doctor, we are not talking about innocents at gathering and examining evidence. Was any of that information considered by the team, even though it was tabled by SEPA? No, it was not.

I am almost finished. I became involved in the matter as a sort of honest broker and made desperate attempts, along with SEPA, to get the team to visit Blairingone. However, it refused to do so. Last week, SEPA and I attempted to get a consultant from a university to take evidence from the villagers in Blairingone. SEPA was prepared to pay for that. Would Dr Roweth accept that? No, he would not. We now, I am afraid, have total stalemate. The issue is important to our society because the Parliament exists to open up previous dark corners of Scottish life.

All I can think of is that the matter must come back to the Transport and the Environment Committee. A senior official of SEPA said to me this week—he allows me to quote him—“Hell mend Dr Roweth; it's got to come back to Parliament.”

Therefore, I request the committee to take evidence on the issue, possibly in conjunction with the Health and Community Care Committee, after the recess. For the good of the petitioning process, it would also be helpful if members, during the summer, took themselves briefly to Blairingone and Argaty.

Those two cases show that Scotland's regulations for the handling of waste are not joined up, safe, sustainable or enforceable. What has happened to those two villages in the past fortnight is an outrage. I ask the committee to seek for its report to be debated in Parliament after the recess.

10:45

**The Convener:** Thank you for that comprehensive contribution. I think that all members recognise your strength of feeling and your long history of involvement with the subject.

Do other members want to contribute before we come to a conclusion about how we want to respond to the current position?

**Nora Radcliffe:** I want to clarify the status of the environmental hazard investigation team. Was the team set up by SEPA?

**Mr Reid:** It was convened by SEPA and it brought together various bodies, but it is an independent body. SEPA cannot instruct it.

**Nora Radcliffe:** SEPA cannot instruct it, but who decided that Dr Roweth should continue to chair that body?

**Mr Reid:** It is an independent body, convened under the chairmanship of Dr Roweth. He was not appointed. The senior health consultant in public health in the area chairs the body automatically.

**Nora Radcliffe:** Right. Thank you.

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** We will consider later today our work programme from now until Christmas and subsequent to Christmas. It strikes me that we might be well advised to consider the most urgent parts of the report first, then to take up all the other issues such as improving legislation. We should press the Executive on its proposals and its use of phrases such as “in the near future.” The question is how we divide our efforts, because this issue is big. We should produce something that will be effective for Blairingone and Saline before Christmas, but we ought to be able also to take up the bigger issues. It is just a question of sorting out what we deal with first.

**Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP):** What George Reid's presentation showed was utterly disgusting and it is absolutely beyond belief that that can happen in Scotland. I am conscious that when such petitions come before us we say that we will not consider the individual issue that has been raised, and that we will not interfere in local issues but will look at the bigger picture. We appointed a reporter and made recommendations. However, at the end of the day, can we merely sit here and watch that presentation, knowing that we



have considered the petition for about eight months or a year but that within the past fortnight that activity has taken place in Blairingone? Can we say that we will consider only the generic issues and not the specifics? We must say, "That's not on, and the minister has to tell that company right now to stop doing it."

**Robin Harper:** We need to do both.

**Nora Radcliffe:** George Reid mentioned an injunction that was delayed. Can he tell us a wee bit more about that?

**Mr Reid:** Yes. Stirling Council brought an injunction against the operation, stating that it is basically waste handling and not agricultural. Mr Hogg has delayed the proceedings on three occasions. Once, he was not available. Once, he was calving. According to the ministry vets in Perth, they are the cows from Mars, because Mr Hogg has no cows. A third occasion was open to negotiation. That has gained him something like eight months. Of course, a person is innocent until proved guilty in that process, so the operation can continue. The reporter is due on site on 19 July.

**The Convener:** One of your key requests is that we urge the minister to take immediate action to halt the application of blood to land in advance of implementation of the EU animal by-products regulation. Do you know whether it is in the minister's power to do that?

**Mr Reid:** Yes. This is the only site in Scotland on which that practice is occurring. Blood is being processed at other locations, but it is being processed safely. Under current regulations, the minister can take that action, if he has the will to do it. I remind members that the official evidence to the Scottish Office, in the OWL report that Lord Sewel commissioned, showed that the practice should be banned.

**Angus MacKay (Edinburgh South) (Lab):** I presume that the person who is responsible for placing the blood on the land is not producing the blood by virtue of other activities and that that person is acting as an intermediary between the blood suppliers and the disposal of blood. In effect, that is a business opportunity for that person.

**Mr Reid:** The key issue is that, under the regulations, all that is agricultural activity. It is clear that this is not agricultural activity; it is waste disposal. The stuff comes from abattoirs and other plants.

**Angus MacKay:** As you said, blood is processed safely in other ways and at other locations, within the regulations.

**Mr Reid:** Nowhere in Scotland has 100,000 litres of blood lain in tankers—some of which do not have tops—since September 2000. That blood

has separated. There is clear fluid at the top of the tanks and a foul, gelatinous goo at the bottom. That is unique to the site.

**John Scott:** As other members said, the process must be stopped. It does agriculture a great disservice, as it is not an agricultural practice, as far as I am aware. It is tarnishing the reputation of Scottish agriculture and should be stopped. I had planned to ask the question that the convener asked about whether the minister has the power to take the proposed action. If the minister has the power, it will be interesting to see whether he takes the steps.

**Mr Reid:** I have talked to the National Farmers Union of Scotland about the matter. Perception is what matters. Scottish agriculture has taken a great battering and is in a fragile state. It must be seen as green and clean. While such practices are undertaken on grazing land, the damage to the perception of agriculture is serious.

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** What is the commercial set-up? Does the farmer pay to have the blood spread on his land or is he being paid for that? When I saw the silage, I could not imagine that any responsible farmer would want the mess that has been created.

**Mr Reid:** I cannot go into that in too much detail, because litigation about the site has been started. All that I can say is that the sole lease for the land is for grazing, so the blood could never be ploughed in.

**The Convener:** George Reid has suggested several actions for the committee to consider. The first is to urge the minister to take speedy action to ban the direct application of untreated blood to land, in advance of implementation of the EU animal by-products regulation. I would be comfortable with the committee's recommending that to the Executive. If members are so minded, we can draft an appropriate letter for the minister. Do members agree to that approach?

**Nora Radcliffe:** We would strengthen the argument by saying that we expect the minister to apply the precautionary principle, in advance of the work that is being conducted on blood and the safe disposal of blood. We are not just waiting for the regulation, but doing work to find out what safe disposal is.

**John Scott:** We must make it quite clear that we do not want to discourage proper and accepted good agricultural practice, but what we have seen is not good or accepted agricultural practice.

**The Convener:** George Reid described the operation as waste disposal as opposed to agricultural, and it is on that basis that we should urge the minister to act. Do members agree that we should write to the minister in those terms?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** On the other two issues that George Reid raises, I suggest that we seek a debate on the report. I do not see a problem with our bidding at the conveners liaison group for an opportunity to debate the report. Are members comfortable that we should do so?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** The health aspects of the issue must also be considered in more detail. Perhaps we should consider how to progress that matter in conjunction with the Health and Community Care Committee. We must decide whether this committee would do further work or whether we would refer some issues to the Health and Community Care Committee. George Reid pointed out that the way in which the body that was set up to examine the health aspects has operated ought to be considered by the Parliament. That team appears not to have operated openly or to have taken on board community representations about health concerns. Obviously we cannot bind the Health and Community Care Committee to act in a certain way on that issue, but perhaps the clerk and I could consult the clerk and convener of the Health and Community Care Committee to discuss the most appropriate way of addressing the problem. If the Health and Community Care Committee is the appropriate vehicle for looking into those issues, we can discuss that with the convener of the Health and Community Care Committee.

**John Scott:** Should we also write to the committee that was meant to be taking evidence on the matter? According to George Reid, it appears that that evidence taking was not completed. We should ask the committee to explain its position. There are always two sides to any argument, but we should certainly give the committee the chance to explain why it appears not to have taken the action that it was asked to take.

**The Convener:** For completeness, perhaps we should also write to SEPA, which has a role to play.

**Mr Reid:** I agree that, in the interests of equity, we should do as you suggest. However, everything that I have said this morning has the full endorsement of the chief executive of SEPA.

**The Convener:** We have discussed those actions and the clerk has noted them. Are members happy that we continue consideration of the petition in that manner?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** I thank George Reid for his contribution, which has been helpful in our consideration of the petition.

## **Polluting Activities (Built-up Areas) (PE377)**

**The Convener:** We move from one area of environmental concern to another. Agenda item 4 is consideration of petition PE377, from Michael Kayes, on polluting activities in built-up areas, and of a reporter's paper on that petition. I thought that Dorothy-Grace Elder might attend for this item, but she is not here at the moment. I know that she has a strong interest in the issue, so I assume that she must be otherwise engaged.

When we first considered the petition on 6 June, we appointed Fiona McLeod as a reporter. We agreed to write to the Minister for Environment and Rural Development and the Minister for Social Justice on matters relating to the petition. The reporter's paper, which has been circulated to members, updates the committee on the action that has been taken so far and recommends that the committee approve the terms of reference for the reporter and the actions that are proposed in connection with the petition. Before seeking members' views, I invite Fiona McLeod to add any comments that she wishes to add to the paper.

**Fiona McLeod:** It is pertinent that this matter has come after our discussion on the previous item. It is important that I attempt to perform a role similar to that which Andy Kerr performed on the Blairingone petition. It is obvious that practices in some areas of Scotland are causing concern. We must investigate how such practices are allowed to happen in individual areas.

I hope that members will agree with the proposed terms of reference that Callum Thomson and I have produced. We need to find out how incinerators are allowed to be situated in places such as Carntyne and investigate the problem that SEPA has identified with the disposal of BSE-infected carcasses. The site does not have to be licensed to do that; the operator can do it as long as it tests the carcasses before incineration. The operator is allowed to incinerate the carcasses, so it could have incinerated them inappropriately before anybody knows. The nub of the problem is the location of the incinerators and the disposal of infected carcasses. Why have the regulations allowed the incinerator at Carntyne to continue to exist as it does and where it does?

**The Convener:** Do any members have comments on the proposed terms of reference?

**John Scott:** I congratulate Fiona McLeod on her work. I suggest, although I am not sure how relevant it is, that an element of risk assessment might be built into the inquiry. I am not sure how you would do that, but it would be helpful to have an assessment of the risks as a result of those practices.

11:00

**Fiona McLeod:** Do you mean a risk assessment on the effect that putting the animals through the incineration process, as is being done at the moment, is having on the local community's health and the environment?

**John Scott:** Yes. I do not know who would provide you with that knowledge or whether you want to pursue such an assessment, but I think that it would be relevant.

**The Convener:** Perhaps SEPA could play a role in conducting such a risk assessment.

**Fiona McLeod:** I think that John Scott is right, but the risk assessment in relation to the disposal of the carcasses should already be being done.

**John Scott:** I trust that it has been done.

**Fiona McLeod:** The problem that SEPA is finding is that the regulations are almost post-operative.

**John Scott:** Indeed. A definite level of risk is attached to the process. I would be interested in seeing a risk assessment. Perhaps the Executive could furnish you with the risk assessment that it has done.

**Fiona McLeod:** This also raises an issue about risk assessment in planning. I do not think that that exists and perhaps it should.

**John Scott:** Yes. Environmental impact assessments now exist in planning. Are they not coupled to risk assessments?

**Fiona McLeod:** It should be the same sort of thing.

**John Scott:** I am not well enough versed in that subject to know.

**The Convener:** As no other members want to comment, are members happy to endorse the terms of reference as drafted in the paper and the proposed actions to take forward consideration of the petition?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Rail Inquiry (Parliamentary Debate)

**The Convener:** Agenda item 5 concerns a parliamentary debate on our rail inquiry. The item is on the agenda to allow the committee to consider whether it wants to make a formal bid for our report on the rail industry to be given time in the chamber. The item is on the agenda now rather than once we have completed the report because, in practical terms, if we are to stand a chance of having a debate we probably need to submit our bid now, given that we are approaching the end of the parliamentary session. Otherwise, all the time between now and next March will be taken up by other committee bids.

Given that we are conducting a major piece of work and that we will produce a significant report on the rail industry later in the year, I am keen that we give the issue an airing in the chamber. It remains to be seen exactly what recommendations we will make but, from the evidence that we have received so far, I envisage our report being a major study of the way in which the Scottish rail industry operates and can and should develop in the future. It is an appropriate subject for us to propose for a debate. Whether we secure a debate is up to the conveners liaison group. We seek to establish whether members are comfortable with our submitting such a bid.

**Robin Harper:** It is necessary that we make such a bid. There is so much public interest in the development of the railway industry in Scotland that it is time that we had a full-scale debate.

**The Convener:** Are members agreed that we should submit a bid?

**Fiona McLeod:** We had a discussion with George Reid about a debate on Blairingone.

**The Convener:** We will make a bid for both debates. Ultimately, the decision on whether either bid is accepted is for the conveners liaison group. The chances are that the Transport and the Environment Committee will be given a fair degree of precedence because it is some time since the committee initiated a debate in the chamber. I hope that the conveners liaison group will take that into account, as well as the importance of the subject matters that we are proposing.

**Nora Radcliffe:** If the debate on Blairingone is knocked back, it might get space as a members' business debate.

**The Convener:** That would be another option for individual members to consider once the conveners liaison group has given its view.

**Maureen Macmillan:** The Health and Community Care Committee is also interested in

Blairingone. Have committees ever requested a debate jointly?

**The Convener:** Before a committee can make a bid for a debate, it must have done a fair amount of work on the subject and, usually, produced a report. It would be best to leave the bid as ours, but obviously members from other committees who are interested in the subject would have every opportunity to take part in the debate.

**Maureen Macmillan:** I thought that the bid might carry more weight if two committees asked for the debate, as we are anxious for the matter to be debated.

**The Convener:** Are we agreed that we will make bids on both subjects?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** That brings us to the end of the public agenda. I thank members of the press and public who have been in attendance. We move to agenda item 6, which is consideration of arrangements for the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Bill.

11:06

*Meeting continued in private until 12:18.*

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