

ENTERPRISE AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 6 June 2006

Session 2

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ENTERPRISE AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

16th Meeting 2006, Session 2

CONVENER

*Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green)

*Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)

*Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

*Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

*Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green)

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Douglas Thornton

ASSISTANT CLERK

Seán Wixted

LOCATION

Committee Room 5

Scottish Parliament

Enterprise and Culture Committee

Tuesday 6 June 2006

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 14:00]

St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill

The Convener (Alex Neil): Welcome to the 16th meeting of the Enterprise and Culture Committee. We have apologies from Susan Deacon and from Shiona Baird. Mark Ballard will substitute for Shiona Baird today. For the first two items, we have with us Dennis Canavan.

Agenda item 1 concerns the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill and our consideration of the draft report that is based on the external research that we commissioned into the costs and benefits to the Scottish economy of the various options for celebrating St Andrew's day. It is a fairly extensive report.

Members might recall that, after the stage 1 debate on the bill, the Parliament referred the matter back to the committee for additional work, whereupon we commissioned this piece of research. We did not want the research to come down on one side or the other. Rather, we wanted it to provide the data that we required in order to have an informed debate in the committee and in the next stage 1 debate, which is scheduled for the end of September.

Today, I would like members to air their initial views on this draft but not to make any final decisions, as they have not had a chance to study it in detail. It might be that we would like some additional quantitative analysis to be undertaken before the final report is produced—certainly, the Scottish Executive officials on the steering group have requested that that be done.

I will go around the table and ask people for their general comments. We will start with the sponsor of the bill, Dennis Canavan.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): Much of the report simply reiterates or corroborates information that we already had through the consultation process and the evidence that was given to the committee. For example, the document makes the point that Scotland has eight bank holidays, which is one of the lowest numbers in Europe. The report also makes specific reference to the situation in other countries. For example, it says that the St Patrick's day

celebrations contribute up to £54 million to the Irish economy and that the French national holiday on 14 July was established by an act of the French Parliament in 1880. Further, it says that the French research suggests that granting an additional holiday will not necessarily lead to a proportionate loss in output. The comparison that the paper makes with thanksgiving day in the United States of America is important because it falls around the same time of year as St Andrew's day, which is in the lead-up to the Christmas shopping season. The paper says that, in 2003, that period accounted for 23 per cent of annual retail sales in the USA.

The report has many positive aspects, but I would question some of the findings, particularly those regarding quantitative analysis. For example, paragraph 6.4.1 refers to an alleged cost of £11.67 million for retail sales. That figure is based on a comparison with the holiday for the Queen's golden jubilee in 2002. I do not think that that is a fair comparison because the 2002 holiday was a one-off that was held in midsummer—in June—and which coincided with the world cup, when many people would have been sitting at home watching the television instead of going out shopping or whatever else retailers want us to do on a bank holiday.

Under the terms of my bill, St Andrew's day would of course be an annual event on or around 30 November, rather than midsummer, and it would not clash, as far as we know, with any other big international event. Therefore, I find it difficult to understand why the researchers who wrote the report are so much at odds with the Scottish Retail Consortium, according to whose calculations there would be a massive benefit to retail sales in Scotland from a St Andrew's day bank holiday because it would be in the lead-up to the Christmas period. The SRC firmly supports my bill.

I have read criticisms in the press and elsewhere that the report draws no firm conclusions. I do not voice such a criticism because, as I understand it, the researchers' remit was not to draw firm conclusions but to come out with facts, figures and evidence. It is up to the committee to draw its own conclusions.

I will finish by quoting from the editorial in today's edition of *The Scotsman*, which describes the report as

"an independent study which claims that making St Andrew's Day a holiday for all workers would benefit the economy (marginally) through boosting retail sales and tourist income. However, the case for or against making St Andrew's Day a national holiday cannot be settled by a appeals to cost-benefit analysis, if only because the numbers are subject to too much guesswork. In the end, the case for St Andrew's Day is not about economics but about building national pride and civic identity."

In my opinion, it is also about promoting Scotland on the international stage.

Taking into account all the evidence that the committee has received from various sources, including all the witnesses who gave written or oral evidence to us and all the evidence from the consultation process, and the evidence in the report, I stand by the view that the advantages of my bill would greatly outweigh any alleged disadvantages. I hope that the committee will take the bill forward. Thank you, convener.

The Convener: I emphasise Dennis Canavan's point that it was not part of the consultants' remit, which we agreed, to make a recommendation for or against the bill. Their remit was to provide us with data and information on which our judgment could be based. I also emphasise that the steering group that oversaw the study from the beginning, which included approving initial proposals on the remit, had an Executive representative. The Parliament paid for the report, but it was produced in close co-operation with the Executive.

I will go round the table and give every member an opportunity to have their say.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I would like to say two things, the first of which is directly related to the report, while the other is slightly away from it. I found that the report tested my mental capacity almost to destruction because it is pretty complicated and detailed, to say the least. To be honest, I have not formed an overall conclusion based on the report. The algebra in the appendix is truly something to marvel at, as are the economic statistics.

First, we need to be careful to reach a considered conclusion. I agree with Dennis Canavan that the research was not commissioned to point us in any particular direction, but we must make a judgment based on it. I am not saying that we should keep the matter in the long grass for weeks and weeks, but I would rather take a day or two to read it again two or three times before I draw a final conclusion on it.

Secondly, as we have talked about the matter more generally recently, I have been watching the reaction to public holidays both in my constituency and here in the Scottish Parliament to see how they apply to people going about their working lives. I point out to the committee that the second May bank holiday that the Parliament took at the end of that month was not observed to any great extent in my home town of Tain. There is a curious paradox in that observing the impact of bank holidays on people is somewhat different from doing a straightforward paper exercise that states that there should be eight, nine or 11 holidays. That reinforces my opinion, which I have discussed with Dennis Canavan in the past, that if

we were to go down the St Andrew's day route—I am certainly not ruling it out—we should tidy up the May bank holidays, which do make a great deal of sense to me or a lot of other ordinary people.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): I agree with everything that Jamie Stone said and I would certainly value more time to digest what is an in-depth report. When we consider our approach to the bill today, I hope that the report will play a valuable part in informing our decision on whom we will seek oral and written evidence from. In that sense, the report is very welcome.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): You spoke about our having an informed debate. I regret that my ability to participate in such a debate will be limited by the fact that I printed off the report only this morning because of various things that happened over the weekend, not least of which was that the recent May bank holiday that we had at the end of May was observed yesterday in Fife. My office was therefore closed, remote access was down—

Mr Stone: I rest my case.

Christine May: Exactly.

The Convener: The question is when they celebrate St Andrew's day in Fife.

Christine May: One argument for having a fixed date is that staggered holidays tend not to be observed. We in Fife find that we get neither May holiday because we work when everybody else is off and as everybody else is working when we have our holiday, we have to work then too. I make a plea for sympathy for Fifers, although I am not seeing much from around the table.

I would like to explore further some significant issues in the report, such as the idea of extending the Christmas season from St Andrew's day to Burns night. That has a certain attraction if one wants to increase the number of visitors to Scotland over that period, which takes in winter festivals such as the well-established Celtic connections and the hogmanay celebrations in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Further exploratory work might need to be done on that.

We have to set retail opportunities against the cost to the public sector, which is another point identified in the report. There was a suggestion that if 50 per cent of the population were working on the day and the remainder were off, there would be knock-on costs.

There is an issue about the time of year. We cannot get away from the fact that the end of November is not a particularly attractive time of year to have a day's holiday when we set it against, for example, a sunny day such as today, which has undoubted attractions. Nevertheless,

hordes turn out for Edinburgh's hogmanay and for Celtic connections, so the time of year is not necessarily a deterrent.

I agree that we need to do further work on the cost-benefit analysis. What is in the report is helpful, but I would like some more detail.

I would like to explore further the matter of national pride and identity, although that might be covered in the report, which I have yet to read in detail. Do we need a bank holiday to express that or do we need something a good deal more subtle than just saying, "There shall be a day off"?

I would like the committee to hear from the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform; have some time to read and digest the report; ask the clerks to get further information from the consultants; ask questions; consider the key issues; and have the opportunity for a debate later in the session.

14:15

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I had an opportunity to go through most of the report yesterday. I agree with much of what Dennis Canavan said about the cost-benefit analysis in the report. The thing that struck me most about the report is the way in which it set out the cultural and social benefits of having a national holiday such as St Andrew's day by drawing international comparisons. The other countries that have established national holidays and a national day derive considerable social and cultural benefits as well as economic benefits, for a variety of reasons. I was struck by the level of detail with which the consultants provided us and found the report helpful overall, although it was rather difficult to get my head round some of the economic impact stuff.

I am conscious of having to decide where we are going with the bill. We have considered the matter previously and had two evidence-taking sessions in the original stage 1. We published a stage 1 report and had a stage 1 debate in Parliament. The bill was sent back to the committee and we have carried out research into it, which is helpful in putting more flesh on the bones of the arguments in favour of a St Andrew's day holiday.

I am cautious about being drawn into taking more evidence from a variety of organisations to consider the matter in greater detail yet again, given that the report supports the committee's original position at stage 1. It would be helpful if we could get guidance on where we should be taking this. I am rather reluctant to go through the stage 1 process yet again.

The Convener: We will discuss under item 2 how we are going to proceed.

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): I found the report difficult to deal with, partly because I have not had to deal with the bill before. The economic impact section attempts to apply the impacts of the one-off jubilee holiday to an annual St Andrew's day holiday, at an entirely different time of the year. It states that in the absence of detail about the likely form of celebrations, it is difficult to assess what the economic benefit of having a St Andrew's day holiday would be. If we could celebrate St Andrew's day in the way that St Patrick's day is celebrated in the Republic of Ireland, it would have major economic effects. Whether we have the tradition in Scotland that would lead us to have that level of celebration is open to question. There are so many intangibles in the economic analysis.

The analysis of the social and cultural impact becomes completely intangible. I thought that the attempt to base an analysis of the benefits of St Andrew's day on the benefits of the Olympics was an interesting tack to take. I understand why in casting around for something to base figures on, the authors of the report chose the Olympics. I note that the research on the Olympics found:

"70% to 80% of people thought that intangible benefits ... were more important than more tangible economic impacts such as jobs or new infrastructure."

Ultimately, the question is whether we think that having a St Andrew's day holiday is the right thing to do. We can chase our tails to some extent in trying to quantify whether it would be more like the jubilee holiday, Easter, the Olympic games or St Patrick's day. I still get the feeling that the committee was correct at stage 1 to say that having the holiday was the right thing to do. I am not sure how much further the research can take us. We have no St Andrew's day holiday on which to base any scientific experiment.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I concur with colleagues on the report's timing. I was unable to look at it at the weekend—indeed, I looked at it in detail for the first time only this morning and I certainly have not had any time to digest it. In fact, I have not really got past its conclusions. As a result, I find it difficult to talk in detail about the report. We need some more time to give it more serious consideration.

Nevertheless, I will set out some initial thoughts. Drawing on the comparison with Ireland, Dennis Canavan said that the proposal could benefit the economy by up to £54 million, which is presumably based on a boost in retail spending. I have to say that it will not be much of a holiday for the people in the retail sector who will have to work on that day to generate the increase in

spend. Moreover, giving people the additional time off could cost up to £180 million.

If, as I suggested previously, the St Andrew's day holiday were a substitute instead of an additional holiday, we could get the best of both worlds by securing a proportion of the additional retail spend without incurring any additional costs. To that extent, the report rather helps my argument.

As I have said, we need a bit more time to consider the report. Indeed, I would be interested in hearing the Executive's response to it. I appreciate that this spills over into the next agenda item, but we need to know what the Executive thinks before we can take this matter forward. I tend to agree with Michael Matheson that there is not much point in repeating all the work that we carried out at stage 1.

Other members have pointed out that the report provides helpful background material. However, it tells us what I think we already knew, and I wonder how useful it is in moving the agenda forward. How much did it cost to produce?

Dennis Canavan: It cost £26,000.

Murdo Fraser: Given that the report does not take us much further forward, I wonder whether that was a good use of resources.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): It would be wrong of me to comment on the report, because I have not been able to read it. I did not receive it by e-mail; indeed, I received it only this morning and I have been in committee most of the day.

The Convener: It has been useful to get members' views, if only to highlight the consensus on the view that we need more time to digest this draft report. Moreover, some members share the Executive's view that additional information should be sought—without, I should add, making it an expensive exercise.

I realise that this ties into the next agenda item, but I ask that members submit through Stephen Imrie their observations, including requests for additional information, to the steering group. The same applies to the Executive. The group will then tell us within the next two or three weeks when it hopes to complete the exercise and submit its final report, which I imagine we will discuss after the recess. If it is possible—and if it is not too expensive—the consultants could give us a presentation on their final report, which will in turn give us an opportunity to ask them questions. Do members feel that that is a reasonable way of dealing with the report?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: In light of that discussion and in addition to what we have agreed, I suggest that,

once we have received the final report and the presentation on it, we invite Tom McCabe, the minister with responsibility for this matter, to give us the Executive's view not only on the report but, more important, on the bill. Again, I think that that will need to take place on our first—or, at the latest, second—meeting after the recess. We will then be in a position to draft our stage 1 report, which has to be submitted in time for the stage 1 debate on 29 September. Are members agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Dennis, are you happy with that?

Dennis Canavan: Yes.

The Convener: I also suggest that it would be proper procedure formally to refer the final report to the Finance Committee because it will have to update its report to the Parliament on the bill. I presume that it will do that in the light of what the final report says. In that way, we will keep ourselves right. I do not want the Executive to suggest that, because it does not have the Finance Committee's update, the bill should be referred back to us again.

Do members agree to that way forward? We will finalise the report, invite the minister to tell us the Executive's position and publish our stage 1 report. The stage 1 debate will be held on 29 September.

Members indicated agreement.

Business in the Parliament Conference 2006

14:25

The Convener: We move on to item 3, which is the business in the Parliament conference 2006. As in previous years, we are organising the conference in co-operation with the Executive. The paper that has been circulated gives an update on our thinking about the conference.

I invite comments from members. Is there anything that people want to add, subtract or amend?

Christine May: In paragraph 5, I notice that we have broken the conference down into five key themes. Although I do not argue with those, I wonder whether the employability framework, Government services and support to business sit well together as a single entity. I say that because, later in the paper, there is a suggestion that we should have four business speakers. If we had four key themes, we could get the speakers to take one theme each for their keynote speeches. In that way, we would hear from somebody with expertise in each area. They could touch on the other themes, but they would focus on their broad area of expertise.

The Convener: Yes—that would tie in.

Murdo Fraser: Paragraph 5 gives suggested themes on which to focus the event. To what extent were people outside the Parliament consulted on those themes? In feedback on last year's conference, people said that procurement is an important subject—that also came out in the discussions on the day. We would miss a trick if we did not seek to identify from people outside the Parliament—in the business community, for example—what they regard as the key issues to be discussed. Paragraph 5 may well cover those issues, but I do not know whether that work has been done.

It is important to people who come to the conference that there is good attendance by MSPs. Last year, there was reasonable attendance by MSPs until lunch time, when lots of people disappeared. We should strive to do anything that can be done to encourage MSPs to attend for at least part of the day.

The Convener: I will take other members' points, then I will ask Stephen Imrie to comment.

Mark Ballard: At the breakout session that I attended last year, there were two MSPs and 20 or 25 businesspeople. That was not a particularly happy balance. For me, the session seemed to be more about a variety of businesspeople

expressing their frustrations with the Parliament, particularly about the proposals for plastic bag taxes and the smoking ban. The session did not take us anywhere in particular. More work might need to be done on the breakout sessions to make sure, first, that they are of sufficient value to encourage the MSPs to stay for them, and, secondly, that the businesspeople who attend feel that they get something out of them. If the sessions were a bit more programmed, that might help to make them more than just a reiteration of problems, issues and concerns and people might feel that they were taking the debate forward.

Mr Stone: In the breakout session that I attended, we heard a hilarious contribution from a gentleman who felt that global warming did not exist and that we should therefore drive as a big a gas-guzzling car as we liked.

The Convener: His name was not Bush, was it?

Mr Stone: There is a lot of sense in what Murdo Fraser says—which goes to prove that there is a little bit of Tory in everyone, me included. If business people are to interact and take part, they will want their agenda to be addressed and they will want to ask awkward questions of us and of ministers. The danger—[*Interruption.*]

The Convener: I am sorry, Jamie, but someone has a mobile or a BlackBerry on.

14:30

Mr Stone: With public bodies such as this Parliament, Westminster or the civil service, there can be a tendency to let the politicians, the civil servants or parliamentary staff control the agenda. That is an instant turn-off for the business sector. Obviously, some people will come up with crazy ideas along the lines of there being no such thing as global warming, and we will have to filter such ideas out, but we have to engage the business community and make people feel that they own some of the agenda. That would be invaluable.

It is true that we must keep the MSPs here; it is no good if people disappear at lunch time or do not turn up at all. The businesspeople expect to see members so that they can buttonhole them. I do not know the answer—perhaps the clerks can help—but we should get really good, crowd-pulling speakers. You yourself, convener, have been involved in the Parliament's cross-party group on the Scottish economy and you understood right from the beginning the importance of keynote speakers. Such speakers pull the troops in. If that happens, we can have further success.

The Convener: One of the successes last year was the Thursday evening with Adam Crozier and Willie Haughey. The format worked well. However, the second part of the evening was also rated

highly by the business community because of the opportunities for networking. People had the chance to meet MSPs and ministers informally. The feedback from the business community on previous occasions—this will be the third conference—was that the networking opportunities were very important.

I agree with Murdo Fraser. There are two other things that we will have to try to do. First, we need an overarching theme, which we should agree once the consultations have taken place. Secondly, we will have to make the Friday afternoon a bit more exciting so that we retain people. Last time, the event withered away after lunch on Friday, and most people withered away with it. Perhaps we could cut things short at 3.30 or 4 o'clock on Friday, and try to ensure that it is not heavy meat.

Mr Stone: Keeping the best till last is a good idea.

The Convener: The wind-up speaker could be important. If it is somebody who really holds a crowd, people might stay for the Friday afternoon.

Karen Gillon: Is there any pressing need to continue after, say, half past one on Friday?

The Convener: Not really, no.

Karen Gillon: Could we not break and have an informal lunch or whatever? Then we would not be asking people to come back in the afternoon.

The Convener: I see a lot of members agreeing with that.

Christine May: Karen Gillon makes a good point. For constituency members in particular, it is traditional to have surgeries on Fridays. It can sometimes be very difficult to break that pattern, because other people are involved too. Karen's suggestion would allow those who are able to travel to get back to their constituencies after lunch on Friday, and that would give us a far better chance of getting more MSPs to attend and to stay—even if only for the beginning of the lunch break.

The networking session after lunch on the Friday, after the breakout sessions and the discussion groups, is very important. There will be conversations that we will want to continue with people who have made interesting points in the meeting rooms. However, last year the number of people who wanted to speak far exceeded the number who could have spoken in the time available. Many of us therefore swapped cards with folk and asked whether we could carry on the discussion. Such networking is useful. I therefore agree that finishing officially at 1.30 will be good.

Michael Matheson: I agree. If people are committed to the Thursday night, and then the

Friday as well, they are committing a large share of their diary time to one particular event. For most MSPs, it is difficult to manage that—which is why last year so many people ended up disappearing at lunch time.

If we can find a way to reconfigure some of what happens on the Thursday, to link that with the Friday and to finish after lunch on Friday, I suspect that we will retain a higher proportion of MSPs. Otherwise, we are talking about three parts of our diaries—Thursday evening, Friday morning and Friday afternoon—which form a substantial chunk of the week, given that we are tied to Parliament on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. In effect, we would be left with only Monday in that week to do other stuff.

Stephen Imrie (Clerk): I am grateful to members for their feedback on the two substantive points. It was important to have the discussion before the summer recess, because it is necessary to do as much of the planning as possible this side of the summer recess. As the conference will be in November, September would be a little late to revisit the format.

Members asked about consulting external groups, which we absolutely did. Primarily, matters have been taken forward with the Executive, but I have also had discussions with the Scottish Trades Union Congress and business organisations. The conference is a joint event between the Executive and Parliament, but it is officials' intention to have discussions with all the main business associations and the trade unions all the way along—that will include discussion of the themes and the format. My impression from discussions with those organisations is that they fully support the event and see it as their event, too. There is no question of not consulting business organisations and individual businesspeople on the conference's themes and format.

I am happy to take away the idea of a reduced Friday afternoon, to work with the Executive on what can be done and to keep the programme as creative and exciting as possible. I take on board Mr Stone's suggestion of keeping a good keynote speaker to the end.

We can play about with other elements, but a balance must be struck between giving MSPs and ministers a named role and giving the appearance of a top-heavy programme with lots of political speeches and intervention. However, that is not to say that nothing can be done to give MSPs a role during the event, which also helps to encourage people to stay.

I am happy to take on board all the points. I suggest that I should liaise with the convener and the deputy convener during the summer and that I

will report on progress in September. The bulk of the work on keynote speakers, the format and the themes will need to be sorted out this side of the summer recess. I hope that we will hear feedback from the Executive and ministers on those points.

Christine May: I have one point as a result of what Stephen Imrie said. We were right to decide last year that the conference provides an opportunity for members and ministers to listen to business, so our role is to participate by being there and listening. Speeches from ministers should be keynote and relatively short. We might try to have a member of this committee or a senior member of another committee in each discussion group, but nothing else.

The Convener: Absolutely. Last year, the First Minister was keen to speak first—we had originally arranged for him to speak after the four business speakers. I do not know whether he regretted his decision; that is a matter for him. Subject to discussions with him, it might be better if he wound up the conference, because people would wait behind to hear what he had to say. We will discuss that with the Executive.

Are members happy for Christine May and me, along with Stephen Imrie, to develop plans with the Executive?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We will take on board all the comments that have been made and in particular those on consultation. That is great. I thank members for that.

Agenda item 4 will be taken in private, so we need to clear the multitudes in the public gallery.

14:39

Meeting continued in private until 15:22.

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