

Work of the Scottish Affairs Committee

Scottish Land & Estates is a membership organisation representing landowners, land managers and rural businesses across Scotland. We welcome this opportunity to provide written evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee (SAC), having engaged with the SAC on many occasions previously by way of informal discussions, providing written and oral evidence and meeting members of the SAC.

Ways of working

Scottish Land & Estates considers that a combination of formal evidence sessions and informal panels is beneficial depending upon the area under discussion. Meetings in different parts of Scotland as well as at Westminster allow the SAC to increase opportunities for people to engage with the Committee, and for Committee members to visit areas to see issues and solutions in practice. Generally, we are happy to assist where we are able in terms of Estate and rural business visits or in other ways and to provide feedback

While we appreciate that members will have many duties to undertake in their constituency as well as their wider Parliamentary role, we do feel it is important that meetings are scheduled in such a way that maximises attendance by MPs.

It is also useful to have a consistent point of contact within the clerk team for the relevant business area. Where, for instance, SAC staff are employed on a part or flexi time basis it is helpful for external organisations like ours if there is an alternate contact who is also briefed or aware of issues.

Social media can obviously be used to promote the work of the SAC and reference deadlines, but it is vital where dealing with substantive policy matters which may in turn amend or introduce legislation that there remain formal minutes and transcripts of evidence sessions.

In terms of engagement with the Scottish Parliament and Committees we feel that is a matter best discussed internally between the SAC and Scottish Parliament. However, from a stakeholder point of view it is useful if any similar work complements rather than duplicates the work of the other and that where required there is liaison between the two bodies. We would hope that there are clear channels whereby matters arising which would impinge on or relate to a devolved issue are passed to the Scottish Parliament/Committee and conversely that reserved matters arising during the course of their inquiries can be passed to the SAC.

Appointing expert advisers may be of use to the SAC for complex or technical subjects, but the process needs to be wholly transparent and any conflict of interest should be made clear at the outset. While discussion papers may provide a useful basis in order to stimulate stakeholder discussion, they too need to be properly termed as such and not presented as if formal reports.

Issues

Scottish Land & Estates provided written evidence to the former SAC in relation to its "*Our Borderlands – Our Future*" Inquiry. We subsequently followed this up through one of our members, supported by our regional manager, providing oral evidence to the SAC. A number of issues were raised by stakeholders at the meetings in Galashiels, Peebles and Dumfries relating to rural business, communities and individuals. We strongly believe that it would be worthwhile for the SAC to revisit this inquiry.

The final report produced would provide a useful basis to take forward further inquiry and identify progress made. The inquiry covered a wide range of matters including broadband, community planning, cross-border links, education and skills, employment and wages, enterprise and economic development, EU funding, housing, rural businesses and support and social engagement. We consider this collaborative piece of work would allow the SAC to work with a large number of stakeholders and engage with business, local authorities and private and social enterprise sectors. SAC could have a pivotal role in taking forward or allowing others to take forward this work on the significant challenges of sustainability for the "*Borderlands*" through the UK and Scottish Governments.

We would of course be happy to participate in any work on this or other relevant inquiries as the SAC proceeds to develop its workplan for this Parliament through to 2020.

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