SUBMISSION FROM THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE ANCIENT AND HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF SCOTLAND (RCAHMS)

1. The RCAHMS welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the committee and take part in the roundtable discussion on 15 September.

2. We fully support the general principles of the Bill and its stated aims to address some of the gaps and weaknesses in the present legislation that have become apparent over time. We also enthusiastically support the Scottish Government’s programme to streamline, simplify and clarify the system for protecting and managing the historic environment. The work of RCAHMS contributes to that agenda by providing an essential evidence base that enables those in the front line of protecting Scotland’s historic environment to be well-informed so that they may do their jobs effectively. The underpinning work of RCAHMS also provides a storehouse of knowledge and original material from which the sector generally can capture additional economic and added value.

3. We have been asked to consider how the general principles of the Bill will impact on RCAHMS and we would like to make the following points preparatory to the discussions in September:

Mission

4. The mission of RCAHMS is to help people to value and enjoy their surroundings, to provide a world-class record of the historic and built environment to local, national and international audiences, as well as advancing understanding of the human influence on Scotland’s places from earliest times to the present day. We achieve this through strategic field investigation, research and our dynamic national collection, which together provide a unique, authoritative and internationally important resource for the study and management of the historic and built environment.

Role – investigation to create the inventory

5. One of our roles, therefore, is to be ahead of, and independent of, the legislative process by undertaking investigatory programmes of work to establish evidence upon which the management of the historic environment is based. The evidence is used for designation and management of sites and also for the management of undesignated sites. RCAHMS provides reliable independent information, which is available to all parties without bias. Gathering information and research, so that monuments and buildings do not disappear unrecorded, is especially important at a time of rapid landscape and urban change, through changing economic pressures for example on the countryside and in industry.

6. RCAHMS works closely with Historic Scotland and with local authorities and others to ensure that investigative priorities are aligned to fill gaps in knowledge. It is essential that this work is carried out independently of scheduling and listing powers. RCAHMS has investigatory powers and
right of access under its Royal Warrant to gather information. Our investigatory work therefore is essential to underpin regulation. We do not see any specific impact on this work by the implementation of this Bill, beyond widening our national survey to include artefact scatters now regarded as monuments and ensuring better definition of the areas defined as heritage assets.

Role - inventory and historic environment records
7. The inventory is a database of information compiled from our investigations over more than 100 years, and fulfils Scotland’s requirements under the Valetta Convention (European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (revised) – Valetta, 16 January 1992) for a national inventory. We work closely with Historic Scotland and local authorities to ensure that data is shared and widely available to those who manage the cultural and natural environment and to the public. We are working towards the establishment of a shared GIS based register for the historic environment of Scotland that will eliminate duplication, improve efficiency and save costs. Three reports have been produced to examine the current position and the feasibility of this (Casey 2009; Middleton 2009a; Middleton 2009b). While this is not part of the Bill as currently framed, we will be working with Historic Scotland and others including CoSLA, Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) Scotland, Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) and Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS) to set out a clear strategy for Historic Environment Records in Scotland to address some of the issues that have been raised during the consultation on the Bill.

Role – safeguarding unique archive
8. We also work closely with Historic Scotland and local authorities to ensure that the unique records created during excavations - records that can never be recreated - are safely looked after in perpetuity in the National Collection. This is vitally important at a time of financial uncertainty for commercial archaeology.

Role – Recording our marine heritage
9. We note reference to the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 in the consultation document. We note the awareness of these parallel Acts and welcome even the small steps taken to align fines for offences. The underpinning inventory that is available for the historic environment on land is also required for the marine environment – something that RCAHMS is working towards in conjunction with Historic Scotland.

Role – threatened buildings survey
10. RCAHMS has a statutory role to record listed buildings and selected non-listed buildings that are under threat of demolition or alteration. The proposed amendments do not alter our powers but we welcome the clarification that the Bill provides in this area. We are developing a more
strategic approach to our own work with the aim of streamlining and clarifying the system for planners, owners and developers.

**Role – education and enjoyment**

11. A key role for RCAHMS is to help people to value and enjoy their surroundings. By assisting and encouraging people to celebrate their national culture and to understand, enjoy and participate in the recording of the historic landscape, towns or cities where they live, we know that people come to recognise how their surroundings contribute to the sense of place. This fundamentally helps in the protection and enhancement of the historic and the natural environment for the future. We therefore welcome that the Bill does not seek to increase regulation but is seen as part of a package of measures that improves the way that national and local authorities work together to carry out their protection and management roles.

**Conclusion**

12. Our cultural, built, historic and natural environment together contribute to what makes Scotland a unique place. We believe that these amendments provide a valuable step forward towards the better protection of our Historic Environment within this wider context as expressed in the National Outcome – *We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations.*

Diana Murray
Chief Executive
20 August 2010
References
Three reports have been produced by RCAHMS in conjunction with the Local Authority Archaeologists and Historic Scotland

*Delivering Efficient Data Management*
Local Authority Archaeological Liaison, (Casey, S 2009)
http://www.rcahms.gov.uk/assets/files/Survey/DATA_MANAGEMENT_COMP LETE.pdf

*Polygonisation, The Shape of things to come*
What are the needs for Scottish polygonised Historic Environment Data? (Middleton, M 2009a)

*Inspired*
The IT capabilities of the Scottish Sites and Monuments Records, (Middleton, M 2009b)