PART 1

Is the simplification of public bodies identified in part 1 of the Bill consistent with the policy objectives of the Bill?

Section 1 – Transfer to Scottish Natural Heritage (“SNH”) of functions of the Deer Commission for Scotland (“DCS”)

1. At the request of Ministers, DCS and SNH have been working with their sponsor division in the Scottish Government to develop a transitional plan for merger, subject to the will of parliament that it should proceed. This work is guided by a Programme Board comprising the two Chairmen and senior management in the three bodies as well as two external members. The transitional plan is aimed at delivering the Programme Board’s vision:

“....that the merged organisation has the potential to contribute more to the sustainable economic growth of Scotland and the Government’s National Performance Framework than the two separate bodies on their own. This will be achieved through a more integrated approach to working with those who manage Scotland’s land and its wildlife through:

- Better deer management through better resourcing of advice and support to deer managers, greater integration with other land management advice, and better integration of research;
- Better policy making and delivery on a wider range of wildlife and land management issues through stronger integration of theoretical and practical knowledge;
- Enhanced stakeholder engagement across the whole remit of the merged organisation;
- Increased recognition and achievement of the economic benefits of Scotland’s natural heritage through an enhanced focus on land and wildlife management issues; and
- Increased role as a trusted adviser on practical land management issues, and a facilitator of problem solving and consensus building on wildlife issues affecting communities across Scotland.”

We see the merged organisation building on the foundations of what both organisations have been doing in recent years to become a stronger player in supporting the Scottish economy through more facilitation and consensus-building on major wildlife management issues affecting not just the land management sector but with wider implications for tourism, rural and urban development.
2. The aim of the transitional plan is to ensure that, subject to Parliamentary approval and timescales, the merger of the two organisations is effected progressively to planned timescales during 2010. SNH is committed to implementing this plan successfully in order to secure, to the fullest possible extent, the benefits of improved effectiveness outlined in the vision. In addition it is anticipated that administrative efficiencies will be identified which may be redirected to help secure these benefits. While this plan is not yet sufficiently advanced to confirm the scale of these efficiencies, the estimates provided in the Explanatory Notes and Financial Memorandum to the Bill appear to be realistic.

Section 2 – Transfer to Scottish Natural Heritage (“SNH”) of functions of Advisory Committee on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (“ACSSSI”)

3. The main benefit of abolishing ACSSSI and transferring its functions to SNH is to reduce the fixed administrative costs involved with maintaining a standing committee. These costs are incurred by both the Scottish Government, as identified in the Policy memorandum, and by SNH, which manages ACSSSI’s secretariat contract.

4. Currently SNH’s Protected Areas Committee (a committee of the SNH Board) is advised on the scientific nature of any representation by two advisory committees, SNH’s Scientific Advisory Committee and ACSSSI. Neither of these advisory committees is involved in the identification and selection of SSSIs, and so can provide objective advice on the merits of the land that has been notified and the data supporting this. Therefore the proposal to abolish ACSSSI could help to streamline the notification of SSSIs, and this could be achieved without losing the checks that are in place.

5. Recently, new SSSI notifications have been made in order to underpin sites proposed for designation under European Directives (Natura 2000 sites). This work has now largely been completed and SNH does not currently have plans to notify any new SSSIs in the immediate future, so ACSSSI’s workload is likely to be low. Currently there is only one active unresolved case that would be referred to ACSSSI.

Scottish Natural Heritage
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