

The Scotland Bill to be examined by Holyrood

The Scottish Government has moved quickly to enable scrutiny of the Scotland Bill by the Scottish Parliament.

In a Ministerial Statement to the Scottish Parliament, External Affairs Minister Fiona Hyslop announced that a legislative consent memorandum has been lodged today, giving Parliament the maximum amount of time to consider the Bill.

Detailed work will be undertaken by a Parliamentary Committee, but the whole Parliament will have the opportunity to debate the changes proposed.

The memorandum sets out the Scottish Government's analysis and position on the Bill and its recommendations for making improvements.

Ms Hyslop said:-“The Bill requires consent of the Scottish Parliament, so we have moved quickly to enable full scrutiny to commence without delay.

“As we have made clear, we welcome many aspects of the Scotland Bill and the further devolution of powers it provides. However, overall, this is a missed opportunity that does not meet the ambitions this Government – nor indeed the majority of the people of Scotland – have for this country.

“The key test for this Bill should be whether it delivers the priorities of the people of Scotland – to grow the economy, to protect jobs and to ensure proper investment in public services. We do not believe the Bill as it stands will deliver on those priorities, and indeed may hinder them. Careful scrutiny is vital to achieve the improvements that we believe should be made.

“We are particularly concerned about the unanswered questions on the financial proposals which would reduce the resources available for public services in Scotland. Unfortunately, the UK Government has so far failed to give the information that will allow proper consideration of this vital element of the Bill.

“The UK Government expects the Scottish Parliament to foot the bill for implementation of the measures in the Bill. The UK Government’s partial Regulatory Impact Assessment, published today, confirmed that Holyrood will be expected to pay these costs, but provides only indicative costs of £45 million to set up HMRC systems and another £4.2 million per year to operate the flawed income tax proposals. The people of Scotland already pay for the costs of running HMRC through their taxes levied by the Treasury, now the UK Government wants them to pay a second time through the money provided in the Scottish Budget for vital public services.

“We urge the Scottish Parliament to consider the proposals very carefully and to ensure the final Bill is one which everyone can say with confidence will be better for Scotland. We will support the Parliament’s process fully and work to ensure the Scotland Bill evolves into a package of measures that delivers for Scotland.”

In the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (January 2010), 69 per cent of respondents favoured significantly more powers for the Scottish Parliament. On tax (59 per cent) and welfare benefits (60 per cent), a majority want the Scottish Parliament to make the decisions for Scotland.