

Edinburgh MP wants agreement on the independence question



Mark Lazarowicz MP calls for clarity and consensus on the referendum

In a wide ranging speech Mark Lazarowicz, MP for Edinburgh North and Leith, has called for the Scottish Government to seek consensus and to legislate so that the referendum takes place in a way that is seen as fair and where the result will be accepted by all sides.

He was speaking in a historic debate at Westminster on the Order to devolve the power to hold the referendum to the Scottish Parliament which was agreed between the UK and Scottish Governments in October last year.

Mark said:

“I welcome the fact that the agreement was speedily concluded but there remain key issues to be decided such as the wording of the question, who can vote and rules for campaign finance. It’s right that the final word will lie with the Scottish Parliament.

“I hope that the Scottish Government will now seek consensus so that the way that the referendum is carried out is seen to be fair by all sides.

“That’s vital to avoid any legal challenges and ensure that on the day after both those who want to see Scotland remain part of the UK and those who advocate independence can work together for the good of Scotland.”

The legal consensus has been that the Scottish parliament does not have the power under the Scotland Act 1998 to hold a

referendum and the Section 30 Order will now devolve that power providing that the referendum is held by the end of 2014.

With leading businesses keen to see an end to the constitutional uncertainty that is certainly necessary from a practical point of view as well.

Under the Edinburgh agreement the independent Electoral Commission will report on the wording of the question itself and the rules for the referendum. If the Scottish Government chooses not to follow that advice it must explain why not.

Mark ranged over a number of issues such as whether Scots living abroad can vote and the need for a proper canvass if 16 and 17 year-olds are to be able to vote so that as many as possible of them are on the register.

The basis of his argument was again that the rules must be seen to be fair so that the referendum will in reality be seen as fair, legal and decisive by campaigners and voters alike.