

SPOKESPERSONS REPORT

Councillor Len Scoullar – Spokesperson for Islands

April 2009

CPMR

The debate on Territorial Cohesion was one of the principal agenda items at the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions of Europe's 2008 General Assembly.

As the Council delegate to this event, I raised the highly important issue of electricity interconnector cables to remote and island areas which are necessary to allow the export of renewable energy. This issue has now been incorporated in the CPMR response to the European Commission.

This is particularly important for Argyll given the current representations by the Council on the inclusion of an Argyll interconnector in the national planning framework and the recent announcement by the Crown Estate Commissioners on the suitability of the sea beds west of Argyll for offshore wind development.

Atlantique Arc of the CPMR have declared a position on Territorial Cohesion including support for underwater grid connectors. As this is a very complicated document I have passed it to Prof. Laurence Mee of SAMS for his views.

Scottish Ferries Review

Scotland's National Transport Strategy published in 2006 made a commitment to undertake a comprehensive review of the nation's lifeline ferry services. The Scottish Government announced on 28 August 2008 that this review would commence with an anticipated conclusion date of October 2009. The review is led by the Scottish Government and will include input from CMAL, COSLA, the Regional Transport Partnerships, Freight Transport Association, Caledonian MacBrayne, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the various Local Authorities affected by ferry services in Scotland.

As part of the consultation process in this Review, I attended an inter-agency meeting on 23 February with the Head of Roads & Amenity Services, which was held in Greenock Town Hall in Inverclyde. There were presentations by CMAL, Caledonian MacBrayne and the various consultants involved in the review process, prior to group workshops being undertaken in the afternoon. This meeting allowed Argyll and Bute Council appropriate input to this process and, taking into account the meetings at Oban and Inveraray, this will give us adequate opportunity for our voice to be heard from an islands perspective.

Public consultation on the ferries review will be undertaken between June and August this year to allow the results to be analysed and a further report to be prepared with their initial strategy being prepared for the approval of the Scottish Ministers in September 2009.

West of Scotland European Forum Meeting 24/02/09 – North Ayrshire Council Introduction

There was a West of Scotland European Forum (WOFSEF) meeting held in North Ayrshire Council on Tuesday 24 February. WOFSEF is a partnership organisation which brings together the 12 local authorities in the West of Scotland and a number of other important organisations including the Police and Fire services, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, the college's network and a range of third sector and local regeneration initiatives to represent the interest of the partners in European affairs. In an Argyll and Bute context WOFSEF represents the interest of the Helensburgh and Lomond Area.

My apologies were tendered for the meeting because of the Process for Change meeting held in Kilmory on the same day. Argyll and Bute Council was represented at the meeting by Shona Strachan, the Council's European and Policy Assistant.

The key issues that arose at the meeting for Argyll and Bute are summarised below:

European Parliamentary Elections

In light of the European elections to be held on 4 June in the UK, Bill Millar drafted a short paper for WOFSEF members to highlight the forthcoming elections which will see 6 Scottish MEPs elected (reduction in 1 seat) and to recommend that the Forum considers how to develop an effective working relationship with the Scottish MEPs elected for the 2009-2014 period.

In order to highlight the aims, objectives and any pertinent issues for WOFSEF, the Forum has agreed to draft a report to be sent to all newly elected MEPs to act as an initial briefing. It was also agreed to invite the MEPs to a Forum meeting early on in their tenure to build on the initial report and also to start to develop the effective working relationship between the Forum and the MEPs.

European Economic Recovery Plan

The Economic Recovery Plan was launched in 2008 and is focused on Member States. However, Bill Millar raised the following points which may be of interest to local authorities:-

- The European Commission is proposing to simplify criteria for European Social Fund support.
- Infrastructure and Energy projects are specifically highlighted as important during this time.
- Improvement in energy efficient buildings is a priority and Member States are being asked to re-programme their Structural Funds to devote a greater share to energy-efficiency investments, including opportunities for social housing.

In highlighting the above points Bill Millar noted that in order to take advantage of any relaxations it is important to work with the Scottish Government to ensure they enact any recommended simplifications or relaxations.

Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion

Following the agreement at the last WOSEF meeting (held in October 2008) to draft a WOSEF Response to the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, the draft WOSEF Response was duly approved by the Forum. Its approval follows ongoing officer level consultation and included the addition requested by Argyll and Bute Council to note the

‘ . . . strong case for rigorous territorial impact assessments — both ex ante and ex post — to be made of sectoral policies and programmes.’

Given the importance of the debate on Territorial Cohesion to an area like Argyll and Bute; the Council submitted our own response to the Green Paper (agreed at the Executive Committee on 19 February) as well as feeding into the WOSEF and Highlands and Islands European Partnership responses.

Further, in concluding the discussion Malcolm Leitch noted that the Territorial Cohesion debate will be a long standing one which will require WOSEF to engage in dialogue at various levels i.e. with the Scottish Government as the Managing Authority for Programmes, with Department for Business and Enterprise and Westminster due to the reserved nature of Structural Funds Policy as well as engaging in the debate at a European level.

Structural Funds Programmes - Progress Report

The discussion was centred on concerns about the management and administration of the Lowlands and Uplands Scotland Programme (LUPS) which is administered by ESEP Ltd on behalf of the Scottish Government. In essence WOSEF is concerned about the following points:

- Lack of an ‘operational bridge’ between the ESEP, the Scottish Government and WOSEF (and ESEC East of Scotland European Consortium). This is because unlike the Highlands and Islands Programme there is no Programme Review Group which fulfils the function of operational bridge.
- Concerns over lack of consistency in advice and need for clear guidance for applicants.
- It is perceived that the Scottish Government and ESEP are struggling with the compliance regime.
- Pressures on European Social Fund Priority I and concerns about the ‘front loading’ of this priority, especially in the current recession.

These operational concerns will be discussed further at the next WOSEF Officer Group Meeting on 10 March 2009.

Note on COSLA Climate Change Bill Task Group

On 6th February I attended the COSLA Climate Change Bill Task Group. Among the issues discussed were

- A Climate Change issues update
- The Climate Change Bill (with a Scottish Government presentation) during which I raised the issue of grid connections for our remote islands wishing to use renewable sources of energy. I was invited to write to Fiona Page with these comments for her to take them to Scottish Government.
- A Strategic Overview Project presentation again from the Scottish Government looking at how the 2050, 80% emissions reduction target can be achieved.

- Members went through the draft COSLA response to the Bill, during which some comments were made including a need to talk up the work that local authorities are already doing.
- Climate Change Approaches/indicators for SOAs. A draft working paper on a shared approach to Climate Change in this regard was discussed.

**KIMO PRESS RELEASE FOR NOTING
(KOMMUNENES INTERNASJONALEMILJØORGANISASJON) LOCAL
AUTHORITIES INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANISATION**

Biggest Plutonium Transport in History Threatens Marine Environment

Two British based ships are currently being loaded with deadly cargoes of MOX nuclear fuel in France for transportation to Japan, the Pacific Pintail and Pacific Heron are expected to leave Cherbourg on Friday. The ships, which will carry a combined cargo of 1.8 tonnes of MOX, will most probably travel to Japan via the Cape of Good Hope and the Tasman Sea.

While the ships are more robust than the single hull, single engined Atlantic Osprey used to transport nuclear waste around Europe KIMO is very concerned about the threats to security, safety and the environment of all countries en route to Japan. The vessels will be unescorted for most of the voyage and should the relatively unprotected shipments fall into terrorist hands the consequences are unimaginable.

A KIMO spokesperson stated: “As an organisation KIMO is against all shipments of highly radioactive material by sea as they pose an unnecessary threat to the marine environment and to the coastal communities they pass. They are also vulnerable to terrorism as highlighted by the boarding of the Atlantic Osprey by Greenpeace activists last year. We can’t stress enough that if an attack by terrorists succeeded in causing an incident involving a severe long-term fire, breaching shipping casks and/or sinking a nuclear transport vessel, the consequences would be severe.”

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