

I would like to make 2 points in relation to the Commission's work as follows:-

MSP numbers and responsibilities. I have noted calls from some witnesses for an increase in the number of MSPs as the responsibilities of the Parliament increase. I remain completely unconvinced that any increase is necessary, and base my argument on what I know of the parliamentary system of New Zealand - a highly respected, fully independent nation state with a unicameral Parliament of approx. 120 members, although that number can vary by 1 or 2 depending on the outcome of any particular election.

Furthermore, the NZ system of election is an 'additional member system' similar to ours, although I believe it benefits greatly from the fact that the List Members cover the whole country rather than various regions. This leads to much greater diversity of membership (one of the principle arguments for the additional member system) and could reduce the degree of 'constituency shadowing' that currently takes place.

I also believe that the duties of Regional MSPs should be clarified by changing the current guidance, which is along the lines of "Regional MSPs should be seen to be working in at least 2 constituencies" to "Regional MSPs should be seen to be working in at least 3 constituencies EQUALLY". The inclusion of the word 'equally' in the guidance would undoubtedly reduce the constituency shadowing to which I referred previously.

Flexibility of Parliamentary hours. I believe that both Chamber and Committee sitting times are currently too rigid for the increasing responsibilities that the Parliament has to deal with. There is no reason why Committees should not meet on Mondays or Fridays, and no reason either why the full Chamber could not extend it's sitting times more often that it currently does - in fact, if extended sittings were held on a regular fixed basis it would be considerably less disruptive to other parliamentary events, such as receptions and Cross Party Groups, than is currently the case. I would also question the current situation whereby Committees cannot meet while the Chamber is in session.

The ambition of the Scottish Parliament to be family friendly is laudable but, as someone once said, it is only family friendly for those who live reasonably close to the capital! More responsibilities will undoubtedly require more Parliamentary time, and that in turn requires greater flexibility of sitting times. (Again, I note that the New Zealand parliament sits for just 30 weeks a year, but meets for 4 days a week which include evening sittings).

I wish the Commission every success with its deliberations.

Alex Fergusson.

MSP from 1999 to 2016.

Presiding Officer from 2007 to 2011.