



Stop Climate Chaos Scotland

Response to Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Inquiry on Lobbying

January 2014

About Stop Climate Chaos Scotland

Stop Climate Chaos Scotland (SCCS) is a diverse coalition of 60 organisations in Scotland campaigning together on climate change. Our members include environment, faith and international development organisations, trade and students unions and community groups. There is one paid post at SCCS to co-ordinate the activities of the coalition.

Summary

SCCS welcomes the opportunity to respond to the SPPA Committee's inquiry into lobbying.

While SCCS supports efforts to increase transparency in the area of public affairs, we believe any new legislative measures must be financially and administratively proportionate to the perceived problem.

Lobbying is an essential aspect of any democracy and any new measures must not inhibit small organisations from taking part in the political process or impact on charities' ability to campaign.

Answers to specific questions:

Have there been significant changes over the last decade in the way that lobbying is carried out?

SCCS is not aware of any significant changes to the way in which lobbying is carried out in Scotland. Our experience suggests that the Scottish Parliament is open and accessible to a wide range of organisations.

Is there a problem or perceived problem with lobbying in Scotland? If so, how can this best be addressed? If not, do steps still need to be taken to address any problem arising in future?

SCCS acknowledges the desire to increase transparency of lobbying in Scotland, whether to tackle a current problem, perceived problem or future problem. We are sympathetic to the argument that the introduction of a register of lobbyists may go some way towards addressing these concerns.

To what extent will the introduction of a register of lobbyists address any problem or perceived problem with lobbying?

SCCS is sympathetic to the view that a register of lobbyists could support greater openness and transparency. However, we would urge that any such register is given due consideration to avoid unintended consequences, such as restricting access, particularly for small organisations and charities, to elected members and/or the Scottish Government.

It is worth highlighting that, as with other registered charities, SCCS' activity is already regulated. In addition, SCCS' campaigning positions, policy briefings and activities are publicly available online.

SCCS believes that the onus in promoting greater transparency must lie equally with Ministers and MSPs as well as external organisations. A requirement that Ministers, MSPs and senior civil servants publish their diaries would be a simple step to address any perceived problem with lobbying.

To whom should such a register apply? Should it be voluntary or compulsory?

SCCS believes that any register should cover all professional lobbyists working as consultants, and those in-house staff whose main role is public affairs. Careful consideration would need to be given to the definition of a lobbyist to ensure that it does not extend to staff in small charities who

undertake a wide range of activities, of which only a small proportion could be described as lobbying.

How should it be maintained and who should maintain it? What level of information should be on it? Should thresholds be set for registration? If so what should they be? What are the likely cost implications of registration for groups that lobby?

SCCS believes any information and activities required to be placed on a register should not place a disproportionate burden on third sector and small organisations, with the effect that it takes resources away from other functions or restricts organisations from engaging with the legislative process.

SCCS does not think there should be a cost for registering.

What sanctions should there be for failure to register lobbying activity? How will the register sit alongside the UK register? How will compliance be monitored?

SCCS has no view on this.

What are the implications of a register for (a) the Parliament, (b) MSPs, (c) organisations that lobby and (d) Ministers and civil servants?

SCCS has no view on this.

Whether other changes could be made to improve transparency in lobbying in Scotland?

As stated above, we believe that if there is a perceived need for greater transparency, this could be addressed by obliging Ministers, MSPs and senior civil servants to publish their diaries.

What, if any, changes should be made to Section 5 of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament?

SCCS has no view on this.

Should there be a Code of Conduct for lobbyists? Should it be statutory or voluntary?

SCCS has no view on this.

For more information please contact:

Gail Wilson, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland Co-ordinator
2nd Floor, Thorn House, 5 Rose Street, Edinburgh, EH2 2PR
Tel: 0131 243 2701 Email: gail@stopclimatechaosscotland.org
Stop Climate Chaos Scotland (SCCS) is a coalition of organisations campaigning on climate change, including environment, faith and development organisations, trade and student unions and community groups.
Stop Climate Chaos Scotland is a charity, registered in Scotland