

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM STORNOWAY & HARRIS CONGREGATION OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES

1. There is NO NEED for this Bill in our view. Threatening and Abusive behaviour is ALREADY COVERED by the Criminal Law.

2-5. Our view is that there is no need for any extension as the UK Police are already applying the Law inaccurately and paying £1,000s in compensation.

6. There is so much to mention here that I will confine myself to only a few:

The Bill pays scant attention to Lord Bracadale's Independent Review Report on Hate Crime with regard to a clear distinction to be made between legitimate debate and rabble rousing.

Police Scotland have said that politically motivated complainants are likely to wrongly identify disagreement as hatred and therefore free speech clauses are important. The Police are already overloaded with work and this unnecessarily adds to their workload as it will to many courts of our land.

While threatening behaviour is, of course patently wrong to all, abuse is much more subjective. 'Opening a can of worms' comes to mind.

A person's religious views and beliefs can and do change over time. A free society must allow for this. NO SUCH PROTECTION is provided.

Christians, the largest religious group in Scotland cannot practice their faith publicly as in the past, because church services are NOT excluded. A preacher could be prevented from stating fundamental doctrines of the faith such as the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Saviour, and other faiths the pointing out of error and the exposure of sexual sins. This is a freedom Scots have had for centuries.

7. Again, 'threatening' should be retained, but who is going to 'define' either 'abusive' or 'insulting'??

10. In the 'preamble' it is clearly stated that 'The Bill will abolish the common law offence of blasphemy'. This shows the Scottish Government's disrespect for the religious and spiritual history of our Scottish heritage.

IN SHORT, our views are:

1. NO NEED for this Bill as crimes are already covered by existing Laws
2. CONFUSION between Disagreement and Hatred
3. ENGLAND and WALES have far better protection for Freedom of Speech

Stornoway & Harris Congregation of the Associated Presbyterian Churches
23 July 2020