



PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01483

Name of petitioner

Iain Macleoid

Petition title

Dreach da-chananach de cheist an refreinn air neo-eisimeileachd Bilingual version of the independence referendum question

Petition summary

A' gairm air Pàrlamaid na h-Alba ìmpidh a chuir air Riaghaltas na h-Alba ath-bheachdachadh a dhèanamh air an rùn aca gun dreach dà-chànanach (Beurla/Gàidhlig) de phàipear baileit an refreinn air neo-eisimeileachd a sholarachadh.

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review its intention not to provide a bilingual (English/Gaelic) version of the ballot paper for the independence referendum.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

1. Chaidh litir bhuam gu Leas-phrìomh Mhinistear na h-Alba air 30.03.13 ag iarraidh oirre ath-bheachdachadh a dhèanamh air a' cho-dhùnadh a rinn Riaghaltas na h-Alba air 25.02.13 mar a chaidh a libhrigeadh anns an fhreagairt sgrìobhte don Cheist Phàrlamaideach bho Aonghas Dòmhnallach BPA. Fhathast a' feitheamh ri freagairt.
2. Sgrìobh mi gu mo BhPA Coinneach MacAsgaill a' sireadh taic bhuidh airson a' chuspair a thogail le Riaghaltas na h-Alba agus tha mi fhathast a' feitheamh freagairt. Tha mi cuideachd air a bhith a' conaltradh mun chuspair ri Aonghas Dòmhnallach, BPA a tha na Chathraiche air Buidheann Thar-phàrtaidh na Gàidhlig ann am Pàrlamaid na h-Alba. Tha mi'n dùil gum faighear ùrachadh mun t-suidheachadh aig an ath choinneimh den Bhuidheann air 15 Cèitean 2013.
3. Tha mi cuideachd an dùil mo bheachdan a chuir gu Comataidh Bile an Refreinn (Alba) a tha air gairm fianais a chuir a-mach airson beachdan a' phobail air Bile Refreinn Neo-eisimeileachd na h-Alba ro 6 Òg Mhìos 2013.

1. Letter written by me to the Deputy First Minister on 30.03.13 asking her to review the Scottish Government's decision on 25.02.13 given in the written answer to the Parliamentary Question from Angus MacDonald MSP. Still awaiting a response.

2. I have written to my local MSP Kenny MacAskill to seek his support in taking up this issue with the Scottish Government and am currently awaiting his response. I have also liaised with Angus MacDonald MSP, the convenor of the Scottish Parliament Gaelic Cross-party Group. I expect an update on the issue will be given at the Group's next meeting on 15th May 2013 which I hope to attend.

3. It is also my intention to submit my views to the Referendum (S) Bill Committee who

Petition background information

1. Chaidh aonta a thoirt do dh' Achd na Gàidhlig (Alba) 2005, le làn thaic bho gach pàrtaidh ann am Pàrlamaid na h-Alba “ le sùil ri inbhe thèarainte fhaighinn don Ghàidhlig mar chànan oifigeil an Alba le spèis co-ionann ris a' Bheurla.” Chuir an Achd Bòrd na Gàidhlig (a chaidh an stèidheachadh an-toiseach ann an 2003) air stèidh reachdail, agus a bharrachd air cumhachd a thoirt dhaibh Plana Nàiseanta airson na Gàidhlig a chur an-gnìomh, fhuair iad ùghdarras a dhèanamh na riatanas air cuid de bhuidhnean poblach Plana Gàidhlig a bhith aca.

2. Às deidh don leithid de riatanas, dh'ullaich Riaghaltas na h-Alba Plana Gàidhlig. Tha e ag ràdh “nuair a tha sinn a' libhrigeadh sheirbheisean sa Ghàidhlig, feuchaidh sinn ri dèanamh cinnteach gum bi an ìre agus càileachd den aon ìre 's a bhiodh iad tron Bheurla”. Tha gealladh ann cuideachd inbhe na Gàidhlig adhartachadh le bhith “dèanamh cinnteach gun toirear inbhe nas àirde don Ghàidhlig ann am beatha poblach na h-Alba...”

3. Air 25 Gearran 2013, fhuair Aonghas Dòmhnallach BPA freagairt sgrìobhte bhon Leas-phrìomh Mhinistear, Nicola Sturgeon BPA, fa chomhair Ceist Pàrlamaideach a chuir e a-steach a' faighneachd an robh e an rùn Riaghaltas na h-Alba dreach Gàidhlig de phàipear baileit an refreinn air neo-eisimeileachd a sholarachadh. Thuirt Ms Sturgeon nach robh dùil aig Riaghaltas na h-Alba dreachd Gàidhlig a sholarachadh, agus gun d'fhuair Coimisean an Taghaidh a-mach ann an deuchainn a rinn iad o chionn ghoirid a thaobh a' cheist a chaidh a mholadh (anns a' Bheurla) gun robh cuid den luchd-bhòtaidh aig an robh a' Ghàidhlig mar chiad chànan air a' cheist a thuigse gu furasta agus nach robh duilgheadas sam bith aca am pàipear baileit a lìonadh a-steach.

4. Tha e soilleir nach eil an Leas-phrìomh Mhinistear idir a' tuigse an adhbhar airson a bhith a' brosnachadh Gàidhlig na h-Alba. Chan eil “cùis” na Gàidhlig idir mu dheidhinn “comas a' Bheurla a thuigsinn” ach mu dheidhinn “còraichean cànan” agus “co-ionannachd spèis eadar Gàidhlig is Beurla”. Tha e cinnteach a ràdh nach eil aon neach-labhairt Gàidhlig ann an Alba an-diugh nach tuig agus nach bruidhinn Beurla. Nam b'e an adhbhar airson taic a chumail ris a' Ghàidhlig dìth “tuigse Beurla”, cha bhiodh feum sam bith air Bòrd na Gàidhlig, foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig no craoladh sa Ghàidhlig. Ach, tha cleachdadh na Gàidhlig ann am prìomh phròiseas bunreachd leithid refreann air neo-eisimeileachd – ceist a tha Riaghaltas na h-Alba fhèin air a ràdh a tha na ceist nas cudromaiche na gin eile a chaidh a chuir air luchd-bhòtaidh na h-Alba ann an còrr is 300 bliadhna – riatanach gus iomchaidheachd a' chànan a chumail suas mar “chanan oifigeil ann an Alba”. A thuilleadh air an sin, am measg luchd-bhòtaidh an refreinn thathas an dùil gum bi deugairean 16 is 17 bliadhna a dh'aois, cuid dhiubh a tha air a bhith air an oideachadh tro shiostam soirbheachail foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig anns na 25 bliadhna a dh'fhalbh. Tha iadsan airidh air faicinn gu bheileas a' toirt fìor “aithne” is “spèis” don chànan oideachaidh aca mar a tha an lagh ag ràdh a bu chòir dhith bhith faighinn.

5. Feumar cuimhneachadh cuideachd gun do chuir an Rìoghachd Aonaichte an ainm ri Cùmhnant Eòrpach nan Cànanan Roinneil is Mion-chànanan, agus tha e na riatanas air Pàrlamaid na h-Alba agus Riaghaltas na h-Alba spèis a thoirt do na geallaidhean a th'anns a' chùmhnant sin. Fo Artaigil 7 (1) tha e na riatanas air riaghaltasan na poileasaidhean, reachdas is cleachdaidhean aca a bhith stèidhichte air grunn phrionnsapalan, nam measg am feum air gnìomh seasmhach gus a' Ghàidhlig a bhrosnachadh airson a dìon (c), agus a bhith a' dèanamh comasach agus/no a' brosnachadh cleachdaidh na Gàidhlig, gu labhairteach agus ann an sgrìobhadh, anns a' bheatha phoblaich, a bharrachd air a' bheatha phrìobhaidh (d). Mas e an refreann,

mar a tha Riaghaltas na h-Alba ag ràdh, an co-dhùnadh as cudromaiche a tha gu bhith fa chomair muinntir na h-Alba ann an 300 bliadhna, is cinnteach gur e a bhith a' leigeil le Albannaich a tha airson a' Ghàidhlig a chleachdadh airson am beachdan a thoirt seachad air a' chuspair, sin a dhèanamh, an rud as cudromaich a b'urrainn dha Riaghaltas na h-Alba a dhèanamh gus na tha ann an Artaigil 7 (1) (c) agus (d) den Chùmhnant, a shàsachadh. Tha e cuideachd na riatanas fo Artaigil 7 (4) den chùmhnant, ann a bhith a' co-dhùnadh mu na poileasaidhean aca mun Ghàidhlig, gu feum riaghaltasan aire a thoirt dha feumalachdan is iarrtasan nam buidhnean a tha a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig, agus mar a chaidh a ràdh, tha mòran de na buidhnean mòra as iomchaidh, leithid Bòrd na Gàidhlig agus An Comunn Gàidhealach, a bhuidheann ballrachd as motha buileach de na buidhnean ballrachd Gàidhlig, air a dhèanamh soilleir cho cudromach 's a tha e gun toirear cead dha luchd-cleachdaidh na Gàidhlig am beachdan air bunreachd na h-Alba san àm ri teachd a chuir an cèill tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig.

6. Tha mi tuigse gun deach litrichean cuideachd chun Leas-phrìomh Mhinistear bho Bhòrd na Gàidhlig, Fèisean nan Gàidheal agus Buidheann Pàrlamaideach Thar-phàrtaidh na Gàidhlig. Tha mi a' tuigse gun d'fhuair am Bòrd freagairt ag ràdh gun robh Riaghaltas na h-Alba a' rùnachadh cumail ris a' chleachdadh àbhaisteach agus am pàipear baileat a bhith a-mhàin anns a' Bheurla. Chan eil fhios agam an deach freagairt sam bith eile fhaighinn.

7. Bidh cothrom ga ghabhail cuideachd dith pàipear baileit dà-chànanach san refreinn a tharraing gu aire Comataidh Eòlaichean Comhairle na h-Eòrpa a tha, aig coinneamh air 1 Cèitean 2013, gu bhith a' gabhail fianais bho bhuidhnean Gàidhlig mun ìre gu bheil Riaghaltas na h-Alba a' coileanadh an cuid dleastanasan fon Chùmhnant Eòrpach air Cànanan Roinneil is Mion-chànanan.

8. Seach gu bheil Coimisean an Taghaidh air am beachdan mu bhriathran ceist an refreinn a chur a-steach, agus gu bheil an Riaghaltas na h-Alba air ainmeachadh gu bheil iad a' gabhail ris na molaidhean sin, thathas den bheachd gum b'fheàrr dha Comataidh nan Athchuingean Poblach beachdachadh air a' ghnothach poblach cudromach seo gun dàil.

1. The Gaelic Language (S) Act 2005, which received all-party support in the Scottish Parliament, was passed “with a view to securing the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language” The Act gave Bòrd na Gàidhlig (initially created in 2003) a statutory basis, and as well as giving them power to produce a national Gaelic Language Plan, gave them authority to require certain public bodies in Scotland to have a Gaelic Language Plan.

2. Following such a requirement, the Scottish Government have produced a Gaelic Language Plan. It states that “when delivering services in Gaelic, we shall endeavour to ensure they are of a comparable standard and quality as those they provide in English”. There is also a commitment to enhance the status of Gaelic by“ensuring that Gaelic is given an increased profile within Scottish public life....”

3. On 25th February 2013, Angus MacDonald MSP received a written answer from The Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon MSP, to a Parliamentary Question asking whether the Scottish Government intended to provide a Gaelic language version of the independence referendum ballot paper. Ms Sturgeon confirmed that the Scottish Government does not plan to provide a Gaelic language version, and that the Electoral Commission in a recent test of a proposed question (in English) found that some voters who speak Gaelic as a first language had understood the question easily and experienced no difficulty in completing the ballot paper.

4. Clearly, the justification for promoting Scottish Gaelic has been misunderstood by the Deputy First Minister. The Gaelic “issue” is not about “an ability to understand English” but about “language rights” and “equality of respect between Gaelic and English”. It's an accepted fact that there are no Gaelic speakers in Scotland who cannot also speak and understand English. If the basis for supporting Gaelic was an absence of “understanding English”, there would be no need for Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Gaelic-medium education or Gaelic broadcasting. However, the use of Gaelic in a key

constitutional process such as a referendum on independence – a question the Scottish Government has said is the most important question put to a Scottish electorate in more than 300 years – is necessary in order to maintain the relevance of the language as “an official language of Scotland”. Furthermore, the referendum electorate will include 16 and 17 year olds, some of whom will be products of the successful development of Gaelic-medium Education over the past 25 years. They deserve to have their education language given the due “recognition” and “respect” that the law says it should have.

5. It must also be remembered that the United Kingdom has ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government must respect commitments made under the charter. Article 7 (1) requires governments to base policies, legislation and practice on a number of principles, including the need for resolute action to promote Gaelic in order to safeguard it (c), and the facilitation and/or encouragement of the use of Gaelic, in speech and writing, in public, as well in private life (d). If, as the Scottish Government claims, the referendum is the most important decision to be taken in Scotland in 300 years, allowing those Scots who wish to use Gaelic to express their views on this matter must surely be the most important thing that the Scottish Government could do to satisfy Article 7 (1) (c) and (d) of the Charter. Article 7 (4) of the charter also requires that in determining their policy with regard to Gaelic, governments must take into consideration the needs and wishes expressed by the groups which use Gaelic, and as has been noted, many of the most significant organisations of relevance, including Bòrd na Gàidhlig and An Comunn Gàidhealach, the largest of the mass membership Gaelic organisations, have made clear the importance of allowing users of Gaelic to express their views on Scotland's constitutional future through the medium of Gaelic.

6. I understand that letters have also been sent to the Deputy First Minister from Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Fèisean nan Gàidheal and the Parliamentary Cross-Party Group on Gaelic. I understand that Bòrd na Gàidhlig received a response stating that the Scottish Government intended to follow the normal practice and issue the ballot paper in English only. I am not aware if any other responses have been received.

7. The opportunity will also be taken to bring the absence of a bilingual ballot paper in the referendum to the attention of the Council of Europe Committee of Experts who, at a meeting on 1st May 2013, will be taking evidence from Gaelic organisations as to the Scottish Government's progress on meeting their obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

8. Considering that the Electoral Commission have submitted their views on the terms of the referendum question, and that the Scottish Government have announced their acceptance of these proposed terms, it is felt that the Public Petitions Committee should consider this important public issue without delay.

Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/bilingualreferendumquestion>

Related information for petition

Reference for PQ Written Answer:

http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_ChamberDesk/WA20130225.pdf

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

How many signatures have you collected so far?

0

Closing date for collecting signatures online

05 / 06 / 2013

Comments to stimulate online discussion

1. Chan eil Riaghaltas na h-Alba a' toirt taic do Ghàidhlig na h-Alba air bhonn "dìth tuigse na Beurla" ach airson "còraichean cànan" agus "co-ionannachd spèis ris a' Bheurla"

2. Bu chòir do Riaghaltas na h-Alba a bhith gnìomhach ann a bhith a' cur an sàs briathran reachdail Achd na Gàidhlig (Alba) 2005, Cùmhnant Eòrpach nan Cànanan Roinneil is Mion-chananan, agus am Plana Gàidhlig aca fhèin gus sealltainn gu soilleir gu bheil iad dha-rìribh a' cumail ris an rùn a gheall iad dèanamh cinnteach gum bi a' Ghàidhlig tèarainte san àm ri teachd.

1. Scottish Government support for Scottish Gaelic is not given on the basis of "lack of understanding of English" but for "language rights" and "equal respect with English"

2. The Scottish Government should be active in applying the statutory provisions of the Gaelic Language (S) Act 2005, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and their own Gaelic Language Plan to demonstrate their stated intent of ensuring a secure future for Gaelic.