

Proposed Removal from Office and Recall (Members of the Scottish Parliament) Bill

Introduction

A proposal for a Bill to introduce new measures on removing an MSP from office, including additional grounds for removal and new processes for removal, such as recall. Proposed new grounds for removal include where an MSP does not participate in parliamentary proceedings for a given period without valid reason or receives a prison sentence lower than the current threshold for automatic removal.

The consultation runs from 20 January 2022 to 13 April 2022.

All those wishing to respond to the consultation are strongly encouraged to enter their responses electronically through this survey. This makes collation of responses much simpler and quicker. However, the option also exists of sending in a separate response (in hard copy or by other electronic means such as e-mail), and details of how to do so are included in the member's consultation document.

Questions marked with an asterisk (*) require an answer.

All responses must include a name and contact details. Names will only be published if you give us permission, and contact details are never published – but we may use them to contact you if there is a query about your response. If you do not include a name and/or contact details, we may have to disregard your response.

Please note that you must complete the survey in order for your response to be accepted. If you don't wish to complete the survey in a single session, you can choose "Save and Continue later" at any point. Whilst you have the option to skip particular questions, you must continue to the end of the survey and press "Submit" to have your response fully recorded.

Please ensure you have read the consultation document before responding to any of the questions that follow. In particular, you should read the information contained in the document about how your response will be handled. The consultation document is available here:

[Consultation Document](#)

[Privacy Notice](#)

I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice which explains how my personal data will be used.

On the previous page we asked you if you are UNDER 12 YEARS old, and you responded Yes to this question.

If this is the case, we will have to contact your parent or guardian for consent.

If you are under 12 years of age, please put your contact details into the textbox. This can be your email address or phone number. We will then contact you and your parents to receive consent.

Otherwise please confirm that you are or are not under 12 years old.

No Response

About you

Please choose whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.
Note: If you choose "individual" and consent to have the response published, it will appear under your own name. If you choose "on behalf of an organisation" and consent to have the response published, it will be published under the organisation's name.

an individual

Which of the following best describes you? (If you are a professional or academic, but not in a subject relevant to the consultation, please choose "Member of the public".)

Professional with experience in a relevant subject

Optional: You may wish to explain briefly what expertise or experience you have that is relevant to the subject-matter of the consultation:

Work in political field for elected politician - degree in politics

Please select the category which best describes your organisation

No Response

Please choose one of the following:

I am content for this response to be published and attributed to me or my organisation

Please provide your Full Name or the name of your organisation. (Note: the name will not be published if you have asked for the response to be anonymous or "not for publication". Otherwise this is the name that will be published with your response).

Ruairidh Duncan

Please provide details of a way in which we can contact you if there are queries regarding your response. Email is preferred but you can also provide a postal address or phone number.

We will not publish these details.

Aim and approach - Note: All answers to the questions in this section may be published (unless your response is "not for publication").

Q1. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill?

Partially opposed

Please explain the reasons for your response.

I believe that this bill, while well-meaning, will erode the fundamental democratic position of elected members.

Q2. Do you think legislation is required, or are there other ways in which the proposed Bill's aims could be achieved more effectively? Please explain the reasons for your response.

No - the electoral process already provides the ultimate process for removal of unsuitable MSPs - elections. Further, it is up to local parties to choose to reselect or choose a different candidate at the next election

Q3. What is your view on the proposal to remove MSPs from office if they do not participate sufficiently in parliamentary proceedings?

Fully opposed

Please explain the reasons for your response. Please include your views on: what constitutes sufficient participation, how the process for removing an MSP from office should work in practice where they are not sufficiently active for a period of, for example, six months (see detail of consultation document under element one of the proposal for background on this question).

MSPs do not have a contract per se - they are in their position at the grace of their electors and it is they who should retain the final say over their position at each election. It is not for me to decide who represents someone in another constituency or if they should be removed.

Q4. What is your view on the proposal that receiving a prison sentence of a year or less is an appropriate trigger for an MSP to be automatically removed from office?

Partially opposed

Please explain the reasons for your response, including detailing how long you consider a minimum prison sentence should be to trigger the automatic removal.

Active prison sentences should make someone ineligible for Parliament but again it should be up to electors in that constituency to recall an MSP in such a situation. Longer term prison sentences should however result in automatic recalls.

Q5. What is your view on the proposal that an individual who is removed as an MSP under these proposals, either through insufficient participation or being sentenced to a particular period in prison, should be unable to stand as an MSP again for the rest of the relevant parliamentary session?

Fully opposed

Please explain the reasons for your response.

Unless already legally disqualified from standing, the existing electoral process should be 'protection' enough. It is up to local parties to stand candidates and to the electors in that constituency to elect or reject at the ballot box.

Q6. What is your view on the proposal to introduce a system of recall for MSPs? Recall is where the electorate in an area can trigger a special election to remove an elected representative before the end of their term if certain conditions are met

Partially supportive

Please explain the reasons for your response, including how you would envisage such a system working in practice, for members elected under the regional list system and for constituency members elected under the first past the post system.

A system similar to the Westminster recall system would perhaps be appropriate but with significant safeguards from party political abuse.

Because of AMS system, there should be a replication of Westminster operation for constituency MSPs.

For list MSPs, the next on the list should assume the seat similar to resignations and death

Q7. What is your view on the proposal that, where an MSP has been given a prison sentence, they should only be removed from office once any appeal process they pursue has concluded?

Partially supportive

Please explain the reasons for your response, including commenting on the alternative option where an MSP given a prison sentence would be removed from office as soon as they are sentenced, as opposed to awaiting the completion of an appeals process.

Anyone convicted of a crime who is given the right of appeal has certain legal protection while pursuing that process. It should be no different for serving politicians.

Financial Implications

Q8. Taking into account all those likely to be affected (including public sector bodies, businesses and individuals etc), is the proposed Bill likely to lead to:

some increase in costs

Please indicate where you would expect the impact identified to fall (including public sector bodies, businesses and individuals etc). You may also wish to suggest ways in which the aims of the Bill could be delivered more cost-effectively.

I would expect increases in costs for whoever is decided to be this extra arbiter of MSP performance, for the costs in organising a recall system, for the costs in actioning removal of MSPs, and for by-elections.

It seems unavoidable that there would have to be an independent (paid) position who would have the role of arbitration on MSP performance in the circumstance that their removal may be warranted under these proposals. It cannot be Parliament where it would be open to abuse. I see no way to avoid huge salary and admin costs for that position.

Equalities

Q9. What overall impact is the proposed Bill likely to have on equality, taking account of the following protected characteristics (under the Equality Act 2010): age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation?

Neutral (neither positive nor negative)

Please explain the reasons for your response. Where any negative impacts are identified, you may also wish to suggest ways in which these could be minimised or avoided.

With appropriate protections/exemptions in place, there is no reason this bill should be discriminatory. However, I would fear that it could potentially marginalise electors, especially from minority groups, who could face their choices being minimised further.

Sustainability

Q10. In terms of assessing the proposed Bill's potential impact on sustainable development, you may wish to consider how it relates to the following principles:

- living within environmental limits
- ensuring a strong, healthy and just society
- achieving a sustainable economy
- promoting effective, participative systems of governance
- ensuring policy is developed on the basis of strong scientific evidence.

With these principles in mind, do you consider that the Bill can be delivered sustainably?

Yes

Please explain the reasons for your response.

I see no reason this bill should impact any sustainability factors. I am not sure I even know what this question means - it is a tick-box

General

Q11. Do you have any other additional comments or suggestions on the proposed Bill (which have not already been covered in any of your responses to earlier questions)?

I feel that the legislation is well-meaning and certainly on the surface would have public support. However, I think that the current processes are enough. Yes, it can lead to situations like Derek McKay etc but it is for the electors in their individual constituencies to cast judgement at the following election, not an Act of Parliament.

While it means situations like Derek McKay cost the taxpayer money, the potential costs of the bill could outweigh any losses from MSP drawing salary while not doing any work. Again it is for local parties and electors to decide, not fellow MSPs or electors elsewhere in the country.

This Bill could backfire and actually reduce the democratic backstop.