

To: Sarah Newton MP, George Eustice MP
From: Bert Biscoe - Chair Cornish Constitutional Convention
Date: Mon, 27 Aug 2012 18:57:31 +0100 (BST)
Subject: Cornish Assembly – The Serious Case

Truro
27th August 2012

Dear Sarah

I've been particularly interested to read your joint remarks (with George Eustice) about the long-standing campaign to establish a devolved governance model for Cornwall which offers the opportunity to secure equality of opportunity, investment and representation for this peripheral and distinctive British region.

I thought you might care to have a look at the website of the Cornish Constitutional Convention (www.cornishassembly.org). We find it helpful to embrace the quite complex thinking around these ideas under the banner 'Cornish Assembly' – a democratically accountable model of devolved governance for Cornwall that enables Cornwall to fulfil her greatest potential to contribute and be an incisive part of the UK, EU and wider governance.

Whilst the eventual model may, or may not, increase or decrease the numbers of democratically elected representatives, the principle is very widely owned, understood and supported.

I'm fairly sure that I gave you a selection of our literature when you and Mark Prisk visited me to discuss these issues before the last election. Forgive me if I did not. Copies are in short supply and the digital versions of our earlier publications were attacked some years ago by somebody from Turkey! However, the document entitled *The Next Push* is on this site and I think may belie some of the assumptions which you have cited as influencing your view.

As I pointed out to Mr Hammond MP (PPS to Eric Pickles, MP) when we met him at Portcullis House earlier this year, it is important for central governments to ensure intelligent management of peripheral regions by fostering devolved arrangements which offer an enhanced autonomy in order to balance the inequalities inevitably created by that peripherality for those living in that region. This is no different for any Government, and applies equally to Highlands & Islands of Scotland, as it does to the Gaeltacht or to Gwynedd, or to the Channel Islands, Isle of Man or, indeed, Cornwall, and equally, to all other centralised governments.

Our campaign has been expressed and sustained in reasoned terms, and is consistently directed towards creating conditions in Cornwall which enable place and community to offer their best possible contribution to UKplc. At no time has the campaign expressed any view which advocates separation, independence, or removal from any Union.

We are, of course, in a society which celebrates and protects freedom of speech. However, we are unable to ensure that one and all express objectives, principles or strategies in not overly-enthusiastic ways – the growth of digital platforms has made it impossible to keep up – but I would counsel that the views of one or two rarely describe the considered, published expressions of public bodies, such as the Convention.

I'm suprised that, in preparing your article, you did not contact me or colleagues to clarify the Convention's position. We welcome constructive discourse, as I am sure you will recall from your attendance at our pre-election Annual General Meeting and your participation in the debate that day. I don't think you heard anything then to substantiate the negative associations which you have later chosen to publish in your article. I recall you being supportive of active and lively discourse.

It is also the case that, whilst many people engaged in this discussion, and elsewhere in every walk of life in Cornwall, recognise the influence of the European Union, the emphasis of the campaign for a devolved governance for Cornwall is not part of any wider agenda. It stems from long-held and well-documented experiences, conferences, thinking and aspiration that some might claim began during the British Civil War (see Professor Mark Stoye – *West Britons*, University of Exeter Press). To claim thus is to mis-represent the campaign.

We recognise that, in many ways, not least in economic regeneration, Cornwall has benefitted from EU investment, not least in Broadband and the Universities, and in raising the Cornish skill-base. But this does not form part of our campaign.

As an initiative which aims to garner as much Cornish influence over Cornish affairs as possible, I'm sure that you, like the Convention, welcome the campaign to gain management control of the next Convergence Programme – if only to counter the imbalances created by the RDA in the closing round.

I hope that we can engage in that discussion, but it will be difficult to do so if you stick to the assertion that the campaign for Cornish devolution is about separatism, independence etc. I'm sure that discourse and consensus offer the best way forward for Cornwall long-term.

With best wishes, as ever,
Bert