



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01569

Name of petitioner

George McKenzie

Petition title

Re-introduction of the Scottish Red Ensign

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to seek a warrant from the UK Government in terms of Part 1, Section 2(3)(a) of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, for the re-introduction of the Scottish Red Ensign as an 'informal or voluntary' ensign for Scottish vessels.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

In 2010 the States of Jersey were granted their own 'informal or voluntary' Red Ensign for their vessels. As Scotland has a long and celebrated maritime history and played an important part in the development of shipping throughout the world, I wrote to my MSP, Michael Russell with the suggestion that the Scottish Government should seek similar recognition of the Scottish Red Ensign for Scottish vessels.

Following a subsequent meeting and discussions with him he suggested that since the matter had a 'national context and implications', rather than pursuing it on an individual basis, perhaps it would be better and more effective if an approach was made to the Scottish Parliament to seek their support in securing a warrant for the ensign in terms of Section 2 Para 3(a) of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995. He passed a copy of my letter to Fergus Ewing MSP who advised me that the matter was a 'reserved issue', and suggested I contact the Red Ensign Secretariat of the Marine and Coastguard Agency.

Simultaneously I wrote to the Registrar of Shipping and Maritime Compliance of the States of Jersey to establish the procedures they adopted and also wrote to the MCA. I was advised by the MCA that the subject of granting warrants for ensigns was the responsibility of the Department of Transport and accordingly my letter had been forwarded to that Department. An official from the Department of Transport wrote, 'the Scottish Government could seek to make known their political wish for a Scottish Ensign to be granted a warrant.'

I referred this response back to my MSP and Fergus Ewing and was advised to raise the matter with Stuart McMillan MSP in his role as Chair of the Cross Party Group on Recreational Boating and Marine Tourism. He invited me to attend a meeting of this group on 22nd February 2012 to table my proposal which was received with the general support and approval of those attending. Despite stressing that the matter was being pursued on a maritime and historical rather than a nationalistic basis, the Vice Chairman's recommendation was that it should be deferred in the light of the forthcoming

Independence Referendum in 2014.

In the interim two years I contacted the Editor of the Scottish Yachting Magazine 'Yachting Life' to try to get a wider airing the matter but he did not want to have his magazine drawn into the Independence debate however he did accept a 'letter to the editor' on the matter.

I have conducted 'ad hoc' surveys of yachtsmen, fishermen, etc when visiting marinas in my own yacht and have found general support for the proposal.

Following the result of the Referendum I again wrote to Stuart McMillan MSP to ask if the matter could come before his Cross Party Working Group once again for their support and endorsement but received the reply that his recommendation was to take the matter to the Petitions Committee.

I have since consulted my local MSP, Michael Russell, who endorsed the suggestion of an approach by way of a petition to pursue the matter.

Petition background information

The Scottish Red ensign was in use by Scotland's merchant vessels until the Red Ensign with the Union Flag was approved by Queen Ann a few years after the union of 1707, however it was not immediately superseded at this time and continued to be flown by Scottish vessels for many years after this date. Red Ensign itself did not become the flag of the British merchant fleet until 1864, when all the ships of the Royal Navy moved to the White Ensign, until then they flew the Red, White and Blue ensigns depending upon their station in the world.

My proposal does not intend that the Red Ensign will be superseded or replaced as the maritime ensign for merchant vessels in this country by the Scottish Ensign however, if approved, Scottish vessels will have the option of flying either the Scottish Red Ensign or the Red Ensign.

In recent years flag etiquette amongst leisure and small vessels around our coasts has deteriorated to the extent that on any day at sea you will see yachts and fishing vessels flying the Red Ensign, the Scottish Red Ensign, the Saltire, the Royal Standard or the Skull and Crossbones. Approval of an 'informal or voluntary' Scottish Red ensign may restore that etiquette and a sense of pride in a flag which served our Scottish Merchant vessels for hundreds of years.

The Scottish Red Ensign is currently being flown abroad by yacht owners without any reports of objection, requests for removal, or questioning by foreign authorities.

The letter I received from the Department of Transport seems to indicate that UK Parliamentary time would be necessary to take the matter forward at Westminster level. However the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 specifies that the matter is a decision of the 'Queen in Council or of the Secretary of State.' If this petition is endorsed, as a member of the Privy Council would our First Minister not be in a position to have the matter taken forward as a matter for discussion by the Privy Council with a subsequent recommendation to Her Majesty? Additionally if the Secretary of State for Defence has authority to approve a warrant, he or she surely must have delegated authority from the government to undertake this task thereby negating the need for Parliamentary time to deal with the matter.

Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01569>

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