

CIB/2/1/12

Parliamentary Clerk

Copy to: PS/AEFD
Mr Grice

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS: POINTS ON REFERENDUMS BILL

I attach notes on **Thresholds** and **Broadcasting** as requested and, at PS/Mr McLeish's suggestion a note on **Incorporation of Orders in the Bill**. You will obtain Ministerial clearances.

Ms M. Gordon

Robert Gordon
1 July 1997

Constitution Group
Room 1-F99
Victoria Quay
Ext 7937

ELF00301.077

SCOTTISH REFERENDUM: THRESHOLDS

- Manifesto on which Government elected was clear that the only threshold in the Referendums would be a simple majority voting in favour of our proposals.
- No place for rigged ballots and fancy franchises; any threshold other than a simple majority would be arbitrary and unfair and would frustrate the democratic will of the people.
- Imposition of thresholds allows those who are too apathetic to vote or who abstain for whatever reason to affect the decision taken. If people oppose our proposals they will need to vote against them but I believe that a resounding majority of the people in Scotland will vote in favour.

Background Note

The opposition in the House of Lords have introduced a series of amendments to the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill (first Committee day today) setting various thresholds for a positive result depending on the level of turnout. The Government have made it clear that they will resist attempts to “rig” the Referendum Ballot and that a simple majority of those voting in the referendums will constitute approval of the Government’s proposals.

BROADCASTING DURING REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN

- Adequate rules already exist to ensure fairness, balance and impartiality in broadcasting.
- Responsibility rests with the broadcasters and the regulatory bodies which are independent of Government and charged with safeguarding the public interest in broadcasting by treating controversial subjects with due accuracy and impartiality.
- It is for the broadcasters to make judgements about the content of individual programmes; experience at the recent General Election confirmed that broadcasters can provide impartial coverage; every confidence that they will cover the referendum campaigns fairly.

Background Note

Opposition amendments to the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill in the Lords (first Committee day today) propose that Broadcasting Authorities and their employees should be put under a duty to observe impartiality and would prohibit "party political broadcasts" relating to the Referendums on Scottish and Welsh affairs in the build-up to the Referendum. There is already provision in place for broadcasting impartiality and responsibility for this rests with the broadcasters and the broadcasting regulatory bodies which have to safeguard the public interest in broadcasting.