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**ASSC Briefing on Scottish Tourism Month 2022**

**Introduction**

* The ASSC welcomes the Members’ Business Debate on Scottish Tourism Month 2022 led by Evelyn Tweed MSP and supports her motion highlighting the economic impact of tourism to Scotland and the recognition that it is “a force for good”, as well as noting the devasting effect of Covid-19 on the sector and the importance of a sustainable recovery for all concerned.
* Self-catering has been a **mainstay of the Scottish tourism industry for generations and is integral to its success and future vitality**. To be such an essential part of Scotland’s tourism mix is even more remarkable for our sector when **most self-caterers operate small or micro businesses**. However, like other sectors, self-catering has been hit by the pandemic but faces additional challenges through disproportionate regulation – from short-term let licensing to planning control areas – which have exacerbated the threat to jobs and livelihoods of small business owners throughout Scotland.
* Scottish policymakers should back small businesses by encouraging self-catering as a sustainable option for domestic/international visitors alike so that it can continue its economic boost to local economies and contribute to our country’s diverse, authentic and welcoming tourism offering.

**The Economic Value of Self-Catering to Local Communities**

* Professional self-caterers are diligent and considerate business owners who are too often unfairly maligned. They do not, for example, ‘hollow out communities’, as some have claimed, but rather are part of local communities across Scotland and have been for many, many years.
* Their value is demonstrated by the considerable economic contribution. Self-catering provides a **£867m** per annum boost to the Scottish economy, benefiting local communities the length and breadth of Scotland, supporting **23,979 FTE jobs**.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Self-catering is worth the following to our local areas:
* Highlands and Islands: **Highlands and Western Isles**, **£211m;** **£25m for Orkney & Shetland**; and **Argyll & Bute / Dunbartonshire**, **£89m.**
* Lothians: **£71m for Edinburgh.**
* North East: **£44m in Grampian** and **£54m in Tayside.**
* Glasgow: **£8m to Glasgow.**
* Mid Scotland and Fife: **£26m to Fife.**
* Central Scotland: **£24m to Central Scotland.**
* South Scotland: **£53m to Dumfries & Galloway**; **£32m for Ayrshire**; and **£30m for Scottish Borders**.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Self-Catering as a Sustainable Option**

* For Scotland to remain competitive as a leading tourism destination, it needs to be **responsive and adaptive to consumer trends**, both in respect of the range of accommodation available, as well as for more environmentally conscious options. Self-catering provides this.
* During the earlier stages of the pandemic, when international travel was severely restricted, the demand for ‘staycations’ within Scotland increased. However, **holidaying within Scotland, rather than jumping on a plane to a resort overseas, should not only be encouraged during a global pandemic – but as an environmental, social and economic positive going forward**.
* **Self-catering properties can, therefore, be viewed as a solution to sustainability, not the problem**. Indeed, as one ASSC member – Louise Dickins (owner of Dickins Edinburgh Ltd) – so ably put it: “Quite often in our rural locations [self-catering units] are the main choice of where to stay. And they’re an opportunity to stay in the heart of nature. They’re affordable to families too. Scotland is one of the most beautiful countries in the world and so we’re so lucky across the UK to be able to holiday here and not damage the planet in the process.”[[3]](#footnote-3)
* Self-catering units can **help to disperse guests around Scotland and are available in areas that are not often well-served by hotel chains, thereby spreading the economic benefits even wider**.

**Towards a Sustainable Recovery**

* Self-cateringcan lead the way in providing holiday accommodation that balances the creation of memory-making vacations for our guests while also being a key part of our cities, towns, and villages.
* We are immensely proud of our businesses, of those we employ, and our record of not only being a fundamental part of our wonderful tourism offering but also of the communities that we live and work in.
* Given the importance of self-catering to the Scottish tourism industry, which has experienced such a challenging time due to the impact of Covid-19, an **appropriate regulatory balance is a necessity**, as is a supportive environment to help businesses recover and flourish.
* **The recovery of Scottish tourism will benefit small businesses, while responsible and sustainable tourism can help communities to recover too**.

**The Need for Smart and Effective Regulation**

* The ASSC endorses moves towards sustainable tourism in Scotland as **we offer authentic, local, diverse, and sustainable accommodation for guests and visitors**. We believe that **traditional self-catering provides both economic and environmental benefits** for the communities and the country as a whole.
* In order to achieve this, **we need smart regulation** which is enabling and not draconian in nature. At the present time**, self-catering is facing a perfect storm** through the impact of Covid-19, the prospect of planning control areas in Edinburgh, the Highlands, and East Lothian; as well as the introduction of an onerous licensing scheme for short-term lets. That’s *before* we even consider the **possibility of local tourist taxes** which re-surfaced in September’s Programme for Government.
* We are concerned that **the proposals for short-term let control areas lack a firm evidence base**,[[4]](#footnote-4) that **licensing will cost livelihoods and jobs in self-catering and B&Bs**, and that the **revised guidance for short-term let regulation has not adequately responded to stakeholder comments**.
* The ASSC therefore believes that the industry and government – both local and national – need to **work together to mitigate the worst effects of this regulation** and undertake a fair, robust and thorough review of licensing in Summer 2023.
* The ASSC also maintain thatthere **should be no further short-term let regulations in Scotland until the cumulative effect of licensing and control areas has been fully analysed to ensure there are no unintended consequences and that they are clearly meeting policy objectives.**
* A **tourist tax should also be taken off the table** until the tourist industry has had a chance to properly recover from Covid-19.
* At this crucial stage of Covid recovery, we must work collaboratively to protect Scotland’s £867m self-catering industry and not burden small businesses who do so much to promote and enhance the country’s unique tourism offering and boost local economies.
1. Frontline Consultants, *Economic Impact of the Scottish Self-Catering Sector to the Scottish Economy* (2021). Url: <https://www.assc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Economic-Impact-Study%E2%80%93Scotland.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. All figures taken from Frontline Consultants, *Economic Impact of the Scottish Self-Catering Sector to the Scottish Economy* (2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ASSC, ‘Short-Term Lets Vital for Sustainable Tourism in Scotland’, Jan 2021. Url: <https://www.assc.co.uk/short-term-lets-vital-for-sustainable-tourism-in-scotland/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ASSC responses to the consultations from City of Edinburgh Council (<https://www.assc.co.uk/assc-submission-to-edinburgh-city-council-short-term-let-control-area-consultation-response/>) and The Highland Council (<https://www.assc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ASSC-Highland-Council-PCA-Consultation-Response.pdf>) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)