



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Environment

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Marine Bill: Northern Ireland Schools'
Marine Bill Advocacy Group

24 May 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Ms Anna Lo (Chairperson)
Mr Simon Hamilton (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan
Mr Gregory Campbell
Mr John Dallat
Mr Tom Elliott
Mrs Dolores Kelly
Lord Morrow
Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Mr Matthew Ferguson	Northern Ireland Schools' Marine Bill Advocacy Group
Miss Hannah Geary	Northern Ireland Schools' Marine Bill Advocacy Group
Miss Carol Moorehead	Northern Ireland Schools' Marine Bill Advocacy Group
Mr Emmett Rice	Northern Ireland Schools' Marine Bill Advocacy Group

The Chairperson: I welcome Carol Moorehead, a zoology student at Queen's University Belfast; Matthew Ferguson from Down High School; Hannah Geary from Glenlola Collegiate; and Emmett Rice from St Malachy's College.

Hello, you are all very welcome. It is nice to see you all again. I think that we met at Castle Espie. I am delighted that you are here with us. You gave us a very thorough paper, which I read last night. Many congratulations on writing such a good paper. We usually ask witnesses to give us a five- to 10-minute presentation. Given that we already have your written paper, perhaps you can reiterate the main points, and then Committee members can ask questions. I am sure that they will be very kind to you.

Miss Carol Moorehead (Northern Ireland Schools' Marine Bill Advocacy Group): Thank you very much for inviting us to present to you. The Northern Ireland Schools' Marine Bill Advocacy Group (NISMBAG) is made up of sixth formers from seven schools across Northern Ireland and one zoology student from Queen's University Belfast. We have been supported by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Northern Ireland Marine Task Force (NIMTF) to form the group. As young people passionate about our marine environment, we welcome the opportunity to present formally to the Committee, and we feel honoured and excited to be a part of this and to take an active role in shaping the legislation.

We have put considerable effort into gathering, reflecting on and presenting the opinions of local people from coastal communities. We see the Environment Committee's members as stewards, with

the duty and responsibility of ensuring effective management of our marine inheritance. We support the NIMTF's suggested amendment to clause 18, which would include highly protected areas (HPAs) within the marine conservation zones (MCZs), and ask that an independent marine management organisation or a single government body be set up to implement the Bill.

We first attempted to demonstrate the benefits of a well-managed HPA. We are aware of the benefits of HPAs for biodiversity, people and the economy. They are recognised by management bodies in the rest of the UK. Those bodies have decided to implement their Bills to include them. I will hand over to Emmett from St Malachy's College. He will highlight how the Lundy Island marine conservation zone benefits biodiversity, people and the economy, and he will point out the implications for Northern Ireland.

Mr Emmett Rice (Northern Ireland Schools' Marine Bill Advocacy Group): Lundy Island became England's first marine conservation site and a no-take fishing zone in 2003, and there are already noticeable positive effects for many species, including lobsters. When monitoring began in 2004, the mean abundance of landable-sized lobsters in the no-take zone was already 205% greater than the average for control and reference locations, and, by 2007, it was 427% greater. Visitors' calculated aggregate expenditure was £1.3 million, compared with the reported annual turnover for 2005 of £1.7 million. Lundy also generates revenue from selling Lundy lamb over the internet.

Good management is achieved through biannual meetings of partners and all marine stakeholders feeding into an annual management forum of partners. Monitoring, education and enforcement is carried out by the wardens, and any infringements are reported to the local fisheries authority. For Rathlin Island, we feel that Lundy Island's marine conservation zone demonstrates the environmental and economic viability of a well-managed highly protected area.

That has implications for marine conservation zones in Northern Ireland, and I will highlight a couple of local examples from Rathlin Island. The RSPB seabird centre on the island supports tens of thousands of nesting birds, and that increasing population is a tourist attraction. It now receives more than 14,500 visitors a year, which is critical to the health of the local economy. Visitor evaluations show that around 60% of visitors to the reserve come to the island specifically because of the RSPB's presence. Rathlin Island benefits from visitor expenditure of £230,000 annually owing to the existence of the RSPB centre, and that equates to over five full-time equivalent jobs. Added to 2.8 people directly employed by the RSPB and 1.4 people employed in farming, that amounts to 9.2 full-time equivalent jobs.

One Rathlin Island fisherman operates sustainable rod fishing and pot fishing for lobsters and crabs. He ensures that all fish caught on line are used either for personal use, or served in the Manor House or the new fish and chip shop on the island. The fisherman organises sea angling and wildlife-watching trips. He feels that his fishing methods are reasonably sustainable, and the wildlife-watching trips entertain and attract tourists, bringing sorely needed money into the local island economy.

As young people, we have visited Rathlin Island. We found it difficult to spend money, and we feel that there need to be improvements to the infrastructure, which would help people on the island attract tourists to stay overnight and spend money there. We have ideas that we can share, particularly with teenagers in mind.

Miss Moorehead: I will pass you over to Matthew Ferguson from Down High School and Hannah Geary from Glenlola Collegiate, who will share their ideas on how to grow marine-based activities in Northern Ireland, which is a hugely untapped area for our future economy.

Mr Matthew Ferguson (Northern Ireland Schools' Marine Bill Advocacy Group): We talked to a wide range of marine users and began to build up an idea of how highly protected areas could increase revenue in Northern Ireland through leisure and tourism. I am a regular diver in Strangford lough, and I feel that our dive sites have an advantage, as they are easily accessible. For example, a diver could arrive at Belfast City Airport on a Friday night and get a dive in before the sun sets. We need to promote those dive sites in Britain, in Europe and on the world stage.

One of the divers whom I interviewed highlighted the fact that the benefits of MCZs far outweigh any commercial gains from overfishing and overuse of the environment. Greater marine life would increase the health of our ecosystem, which could generate a whole new environmentally driven industry. A properly managed coastline would accommodate all forms of water users without causing conflict. It has been shown throughout the world that environmental ecotourism is more profitable for

local communities than traditional fishing. That is backed up by Labour's charter for angling in 2005, which stated:

"A recent study of the sea fishing industry in England and Wales showed that recreational angling is worth £538 million a year (nearly as much as a commercial fleet at £600m)."

Labour's bass management plan goes on to recognise:

"there are some species of sea fish which could return Best Value for the UK, and the overall marine environment, if designated and managed primarily as recreational species."

That plan also exists in Eire. The good news is that more sea bass remain in our waters owing to temperature increases caused by climate change.

Miss Hannah Geary (Northern Ireland Schools' Marine Bill Advocacy Group): Coming from Bangor, where many dinghy sailors take part in national and international competitions, I can say that our loughs give protection from the prevailing westerly winds, thus increasing the number of days available for marine leisure users. That makes Northern Ireland extremely desirable as a host for both sailing and sea angling competitions.

From talking to local marine users for our research, we found the consensus of opinion to be that the present system of managing our seas is simply not working. Many are asking for the urgent restriction of existing damaging and unsustainable fishing activity and the establishment of no-take zones or highly protected areas. A Belfast lough mussels grower, who harvests by dredging, mentioned the environmental benefits of his industry, with mussels filtering impurities and thus improving water quality. He recognises that his activities could damage the habitat where he collects sea mussels around the Copeland Islands. With subsidies, he could update his equipment so that it would cause less damage.

An Ulster Museum marine biologist and diver has seen at first hand the damage caused by mussel dredging in Belfast lough and would like a reduction in that activity, along with marine conservation zones or highly protected areas to protect our already overexploited marine environment.

A Rathlin Island rod and line fisherman was seriously concerned by the deep trawling from mainland and Scottish boats, which resulted in dramatically declining fish stocks. He indicated on his sea chart of Rathlin Island the best sites for various species that are now under threat, claiming that the sites should become no-take zones.

Miss Moorehead: We have demonstrated that well-managed HPAs should benefit biodiversity, people and the economy and that they already have support from many local marine stakeholders. We agree that the present system of managing the marine environment is failing. Without an independent marine management organisation or, at least, a single government body such as Marine Scotland, we feel that it will be impossible to create an effectively managed and coherent network of marine protected areas of local importance to Northern Ireland.

We are greatly concerned that the existence of a confusing array of six primary government bodies with responsibility for the marine environment in Northern Ireland will hinder the effective implementation of the Marine Bill. Our first preference is for an independent body similar to the one in England, but we would accept the establishment of one governmental body solely in charge of marine activities, similar to that in Scotland, as long as it had proper enforcement powers and resources.

From our discussions with a wide variety of marine stakeholders, including the NIMTF, commercial fishermen and recreational marine users, we feel that it is vital to have them represented on any new body. The simplest solution is to create a new organisation that will start to manage all the activities on the water and will act as a one-stop shop for all issues concerning them.

We need a single management body that is responsible for co-ordinating the many authorities and stakeholders to ensure that we have established an ecologically coherent network of well-managed marine conservation zones and highly protected areas. That includes carrying out environmental impact assessments (EIAs) for all existing and proposed activities. We are personally aware of delays in addressing damage to the marine environment. That demonstrates that the existing Departments do not have the time or resources to manage our marine inheritance effectively.

We need a single management body to be responsible for collating and analysing existing data and for collecting new data to take into account the highly mobile nature of many marine species, and for analysing human pressures and climate change. The Departments do not have the capacity to perform the vital task of ensuring that the selection of appropriate marine conservation zones and highly protected areas is based on sound scientific evidence.

We need a single management body to be responsible for ensuring the effective management and enforcement of protected sites to deliver for biodiversity and for people so that we do not incur potentially expensive infractions from Europe. Although it might be easy to monitor and enforce an MCZ or HPA near an inhabited island, such as Lundy Island or Rathlin Island, it would be considerably more difficult to achieve that for uninhabited islands, such as the Copeland Islands, or around rocks, such as the Maidens.

We will conclude by offering a short thought from each of us.

Miss Geary: I thank the Environment Committee for recognising that the Marine Bill is essential for the survival of the wonderful and diverse marine wildlife that populates our shores and for all your hard work in covering all the bases to ensure the Bill's success. The conservation of the deep blue sea that cradles our emerald isle is a cause that is well worth fighting for.

Miss Moorehead: I became aware of damage to rare sponges from deep dredging around Rathlin Island in 2010. In response to a letter outlining my concerns to Mr Liam McKibben, the then director of fisheries, climate change and renewable energy, I was made aware of the proposed consultation, which is only happening now in 2012. The trawling has still not been banned.

As a young person studying zoology at Queen's, I am concerned about the delay. We risk losing our marine heritage. We may even see the extinction of some species before we have a chance to learn about them. I seek reassurance that sufficient protection will be put in place now for our marine species to ensure that I can enjoy going out and seeing their world in their company.

Mr Ferguson: The writing is on the wall for the Northern Ireland marine environment. To continue as present would devastate our seas and cripple that resource that we have. It would deny the sea for the future generations to live, work and play on. The Bill needs to deliver a clear objective to protect the everyday species and the rare ones to ensure that they do not disappear from our waters. If that were to happen, it would prevent me from seeing a spectacular species that my dad sees every day. The future of our seas — today, tomorrow and for ever — lies in your hands.

Mr Rice: We understand that our Government are still striving to cut spending. A single management organisation in place would, because of HPAs, result in the recovery of fish stocks and an increase in leisure and tourism. That would, in the long term, be money well spent for our futures. We are aware that the Chairperson enjoys local seafood, such as lobster. [*Laughter.*] Hopefully, we can ensure that our future generations will, too.

Can the Environment Committee reassure us that an amendment to clause 18 will include highly protected areas with marine conservation zones, and also that an independent marine management organisation (MMO), or, at the very least, a single government body like Marine Scotland will be set up to manage effectively our marine inheritance for our future?

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your very thorough presentation. I thank you for your passion for protecting the environment. You are right: it is for current and future generations to enjoy and share.

I want to talk about your main issue, which is the independent MMO. You mentioned funding. The Department has said that an interdepartmental group is bringing all the other Departments together for consultation and to talk about the issue. There may be a move to step up that group's terms of reference once the Bill has gone through. What is your view on that? Do you think that that interdepartmental group is adequate to carry out the work?

Miss Moorehead: Yes, as long as it can co-ordinate those activities properly and as long as there is good communication between the Departments. Again, it would be more efficient if all those responsibilities were put in the one place and in the one body, whether that is an independent body or a Department.

Mr Dallat: Hannah and Matthew both referred to their conversations with divers. Have any of you been under the water to see the wonders of the sea?

Mr Ferguson: I have.

Mr Dallat: I thought that I picked that up.

Mr Ferguson: Given that we sit between the tropics and the poles, we get a certain tidal range that brings in loads of species from the south and the north. We get a massive variety, such as certain types of nudibranch, that you just do not really get anywhere else. My dad first spotted that species in this area, as it was seen only in the tropics before. We cannot let those sorts of things just slip away; we need to protect them. On the wreck of the Alastor, there are things such as conger eels, which are massive. They grow very big because of the large amounts of food material fluxing in and out of the lough. We need to look after things such as that. I am the diver among us, and I have seen these things at first hand.

Mr Dallat: Many, many, many years ago, I had the opportunity to do what you have done. I have lasting memories of the wonder, splendour and beauty of what is under the water. To see it is a rare opportunity, and I understand why Matthew speaks with such passion. It is fundamental that your proposals are taken seriously. The public at large see only what is on the surface. They do not see the heavenly image that is underneath the water. For that reason, your inspiration is very valuable. Your presentation was absolutely splendid.

Hannah, you also spoke to divers. What did you learn from them?

Miss Geary: I did not speak to the divers personally, but our school sent some girls out to speak to them. I have not had that privilege myself.

Mr Dallat: We have heard a lot of evidence on this, but I think that this is the first time that we have spoken to a group that bothered to talk to the people who have gone down under the water to see what is worth protecting. I applaud you for that alone, but that is not to take away from the rest of your presentation. As a former teacher, I am so proud that young people have done this. I just hope that you are the inspiration for the future, because my generation has not been very good to the marine. Somebody needs to save it and protect it. Whichever of you spoke on the radio this morning — was it you, Carol?

Miss Moorehead: Yes.

Mr Dallat: You spoke with such eloquence. I take a lot of confidence from this. It really helps the Committee to put its full thrust behind having a Marine Bill that has the content to deliver what we all want.

The Chairperson: I endorse that. Thank you for the inspiration that you have given us. I, too, love Rathlin Island; I have lost count of the number of times that I have been there. I love that you can now get there so quickly on the express boat.

Mr Campbell: Your presentation was very good. I think that it was Matthew who said that responsibility for protecting the marine for future generations rests with us. Thanks for that; there is no pressure on us now. *[Laughter.]* That was a good way to start.

Seriously, I think that everybody is committed to trying to work towards having an effective Marine Bill that will secure the future for generations to come. Although everyone is trying to work towards a long-term sustainability project, did you research the implications that there could be for the local economy and for those who derive their living or enjoyment from the marine environment, particularly over the next three to five years as we adjust to life after the Marine Bill and its consequences?

Miss Moorehead: Yes. It will affect them. However, it is about trying to find that balance and compensating or compromising. We need to involve those stakeholders. It is their livelihoods, and they have to have an opinion. So, if we involve them from the beginning, we can really work towards —

Mr Ferguson: — long-term sustainability.

Miss Moorehead: Yes, and we can make sure that they can still go about their business in the short term.

Mr Campbell: That was a very useful contribution.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you very much for your presentation. I congratulate the RSPB, which I think was behind the overall project. You noted in your comments that you spoke to a range of service users, particularly those in the fishing industry. It has been suggested that some of those who will lose out from the creation of MCZs might well be in that industry. You got a different response when you spoke to individual fishermen. Did you speak to a range of fishermen who had a contrary view to your own?

Miss Moorehead: By and large, they were in support of the Marine Bill. We did not come across anybody who was unwilling to speak to us or who was not in favour of the Bill.

Miss Geary: They wanted to play their part and have their say so that they could ensure that their livelihoods are not lost.

Miss Moorehead: We spoke to people such as mussel fishermen and sea anglers. There was a range.

Mrs D Kelly: So, overall you got a fairly positive response. Matthew, I think that it was you who talked about the tourism and leisure potential. How do you see that being taken forward? Did you gauge the value of the industry through diving and other activities? Did you compare that to other sites around the island of Ireland or, indeed, GB?

Mr Ferguson: Various places around the Isle of Man such as Pisces Reef attract a lot of visitors. We are in a good geographical place because of the tidal flows and so forth, and it needs that promotion and kick-start to get people interested. Kate Humble did an 'Autumnwatch' programme with my local dive centre in Strangford lough. That sort of thing is a chance that cannot be missed, and we need to really promote that and push it forward. We also have a number of wrecks in the lough that act as artificial reefs and help to harbour marine life. Promotion is the key thing. The resource is there, and we just need to say that it is there, if that makes sense.

Mrs D Kelly: Chair, that is perhaps a challenge for the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

Mr Boylan: Thank you very much for your presentation. I have to say that you work very well together and have backed each other up.

I have a couple of questions. Obviously, it is important to talk to all the stakeholders. I hope that you took that into account, because we have to listen to everyone's view when we come to make a decision. You are keen on having an MMO. We had a very good trip to Scotland, where they did not go down the route of having an MMO. Why are you so keen on it? If we were to create an MMO, who would fund it?

Miss Moorehead: It is ideal, and that is because it is efficient and because people on the MMO will be very passionate and willing to put in the effort of working for it. The NGOs will give advice for free, so in the long term, the MMO could be cheaper than a government body. However, we are not single-minded about the MMO. It is not the only available option, and, if we go down the route that Marine Scotland took, that may be what gets the job done, and if so, that will be acceptable.

Mr Rice: As long as it has the appropriate power of management, enforcement and resources to conduct it, that is fine. It should possibly have independence from undue government influence, which would probably make it healthier.

Mr Boylan: What about the funding?

Miss Moorehead: Our research has not gone as far as that.

Mr Ferguson: I think that a famous economist once said, "Make polluters pay." I think that those were his words. If the polluters damage our marine environment, it should be their responsibility to shoulder the cost.

Mr Boylan: That is a fair enough point. You have put me in the notion for fish and chips, by the way. *[Laughter.]* I have just one more question. Obviously, the conservation zones will be the main issue for us, because they will impact on everyone. When we were in Scotland, the officials told us that the policy was evidence based. Have you looked into the evidence that we have?

Miss Moorehead: Our data could exist, but they exist in several places. That is part of the reason why an MMO or a single body would be really useful. Then we could see the full picture. We would have all the data in one place, so it would be easier to know where to put those zones. That has to be based on scientific evidence, so we need those data before we decide.

Mr Boylan: Chair, it has been a breath of fresh air. We have had presentations for five years on the Environment Committee, but this has been one of the better ones. Thank you very much.

The Chairperson: I am afraid that I have to slip outside; I am going to speak at an event in a couple of minutes, but I will join you for lunch later. So, I will see you then. Simon, the Deputy Chairperson, will take over.

(The Deputy Chairperson [Mr Hamilton] in the Chair)

Mr Elliott: Thank you for your presentation. It was very good. I have a couple of questions to ask. You concentrated quite a lot on leisure and tourism activities. Do you have any concerns about possible pollution from those industries?

Miss Moorehead: We advocate the more sustainable leisure activities, such as sailing and diving. However, pollution is a worry.

Miss Geary: That is also why highly protected areas are necessary. They are areas where nothing that damages the marine environment is allowed to happen.

Mr Elliott: Do you think that the income that would be generated from that leisure and tourism would make up for the downturn that other economic activities, such as fishing, would experience? As we heard from the previous presentation, the fishing industry would obviously be a loser.

Miss Moorehead: Ultimately, it will be a winner in the long term. If this is done properly and if these highly protected areas are put in the right places, it will see a return. Fishing will see a benefit from that. Leisure activities could cover the losses of commercial fishing. We just have to promote it in the right way and make sure that we tap into it and that people take part in it.

Mr Ferguson: When no-take zones and highly protected areas and so forth are put in place, you get an effect called "spill over". That is where the bigger species that survive in highly protected areas grow, mature, breed and move outside the highly protected areas in search of food, thus providing a bigger catch for fishermen in the area. In the long term, that will suit them better, as they are getting bigger fish and bigger oysters and things like that. Those species came out of the sea the size of dinner plates 100 years ago, but, because of our neglect, they are dying off. Therefore, those highly protected areas will benefit fishermen and the leisure industry in the long term.

Mr Rice: I want to make a last point. Tourism helps in highly protected areas, because it makes stakeholders more aware that they are there and it increases their concern. As to leisure, we have suggested possible boat tours around Rathlin, but, to be fair, that may be slightly polluting. That would make it possible to bring people into the water for diving. It was mentioned that tourism could offset a downturn in the fishing industry, and that could happen people stayed in places overnight and were offered more activities that do not pollute the environment.

Miss Geary: KleenSocks, a type of bilge socks, for example, can stop pollution. They absorb the oil on the bilges of boats so that the oil does not contaminate the water.

Mr Elliott: We have talked to a lot of stakeholders about the Bill, and I do not think that we have heard from anyone who is opposed to it. Generally, we are all at one on that, but, once you get into the nitty-gritty of the MMO, you will find that a number of stakeholders who are opposed to it appeared before the Committee. Have you had any discussions with any of those stakeholders about their opposition to an MMO or about your support for it?

Miss Moorehead: Our primary objective was to include the highly protected areas in the marine conservation zones. The MMO is an instrument for putting that in place. We are not single-minded about it. We have not spoken to those stakeholders. We do not have anecdotal evidence on the MMO, because, initially, we were focused on the highly protected areas.

Mr Elliott: Of course, some stakeholders are also opposed to the highly protected areas in the MCZs.

Miss Moorehead: They will see a long-term benefit, but we recognise that, in the short term, it will be tough. We will have to compensate as much as we can for that.

Lord Morrow: I congratulate you on your paper, your presentation and your performance on the radio this morning. I would love to have you beside me when I do some of my radio interviews, because you do so well. Well done.

You strongly advocate an MMO. Do you feel that, without it, your aims and objectives can be achieved? Matthew, when it was put to you, you said that the polluter should be made to pay. That is fine, and it is a good theory. The polluter has to be caught. Pollution has to be policed and legislation has to be enforced. That all costs colossal sums of money, but we are not sure that your paper deals with that.

I am very interested in the example that you gave of the fisherman who fishes with a rod and line and who can sustain himself and keep the fish and chip shop going. As one who has been fishing with a rod and line since I was a youngster, I can tell you that, if I had been depending on that, I would have been dead of starvation long ago. It is very interesting. Are you sure that you are not taking us on when you tell us that this actually happens? I saw others around the Committee smiling when it was said that that fisherman can sustain the fish and chip shop and himself. I find that very good. Do you want to tell us any more about him? What secrets does he use, and how does he do it? Do you have his phone number?

Can you deal with the MMO in a bit more detail, please?

Miss Moorehead: We could get our objectives without it, but that would involve a lot of hard work and a lot of communicating back and forth so that all the information can be put in the highly protected areas in the right places. It would take a long time, and we might not meet our deadline that we need to make for the European Union. So, a single body that has all the information and that will be responsible for co-ordinating all the activities is really necessary and would be a really efficient way of doing things with a lot less hassle.

Lord Morrow: Do you accept that, although you may be disappointed that an MMO does not exist, the emergence of a Marine Bill might change attitudes, create awareness and make the approach to the issue completely different? We have a society that seems to be built on quangos. As one who is not enthusiastic about quangos or the creation of more of them, I would not advocate an MMO. That is me being truthful with you.

Miss Moorehead: I can really only emphasise what I said. It is doable, but it is so labour-intensive. A lot of work has to be put in. The data really are everywhere, and people do not know where to go if the marine environment has been damaged. Do they go to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) or to the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)? Who do they go to? If there were somewhere that they could go, that would be very helpful. Yes, the Marine Bill has created awareness, and, if we promote it more, we will have more awareness and there should be more calls from the public.

Could I ask you what you would advocate?

Lord Morrow: You have put it to us that we are the custodians and that we are the people who are going to be looking after it. What you are advocating is not adequate, despite your saying that in your

paper. You reminded us of it, and rightly so. However, you are now saying that this is not adequate and that an MMO needs to be built on top of all that. So, we are getting into more layers of bureaucracy and red tape. Is there real accountability there? I do not think so. I think that an MMO is maybe not the way to go. We are in the throes of the debate on the issue, and we will see how it comes out at the end. Those issues will all be up there. Personally, at this stage, I am not an advocate for it.

Miss Moorehead: What about putting all the responsibilities in one Department?

Lord Morrow: That is what government is here for. We were told that things will probably change as a result of what we have here at Stormont; let us hope that they do. Let us hope that there is going to be accountability and that people will stand up and take responsibility. I hope that, whether that is now or in the distant future when we are long gone, that will be the case.

I am not an advocate for building more bureaucracy. We have a fairly bureaucratic system of government here, and it is not the simplest to understand. Even those of us working on the inside find it quite difficult to understand — I am sure that Mr Dallat would agree. We find it quite bureaucratic and difficult. I suspect that it would be even more so if you were sitting on the Executive, where conclusions have to be arrived at and decisions made in a certain way. Therefore, we would not want to put in other activities to slow the process down even further and make accountability even more difficult to get to.

Miss Moorehead: OK, but if you move those responsibilities and completely remove them from some places and give them to one body, you would have only that one-stop shop, so to speak.

Lord Morrow: Is that your idea of an MMO?

Miss Moorehead: It does not have to be independent, but it is about putting the responsibility in one place. That is what we are trying to understand.

Lord Morrow: The buck stops here. Everything stops with government — or it should. Accountability should be there.

The Deputy Chairperson: Carol very deftly turned that around. Maybe you two should swap places. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Dallat: I will be very brief. Like Lord Morrow, I was not very skilful with a rod and line. *[Laughter.]* Thirty years ago, you could take a half-decker boat 50 yards off the shore anywhere and you would be sure that, if you dropped a hand line with six hooks, you would have six fish. That is gone. That is the reason why the Marine Bill is critical.

The Deputy Chairperson: You have two oul' boys here reminiscing about by-laws. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Dallat: You young people do not understand.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thank you very much. I echo what others said. Thank you for the quality of your evidence and, above all, thank you for the time that you have taken out of your very busy educational duties to take this on. Irrespective of what comes out at the end of the Marine Bill, there will certainly be an Act, and you can be very proud of your input to that. It is great that, in this place, you have felt able to engage with us in this way. As Lord Morrow said, this place is sometimes a bit confusing and impenetrable, and that is just for those of us who work here. This is the first time that I have seen anybody who is studying at school or university coming to give evidence before a Committee. So, we thank you for that. You are trailblazers for that. Very well done for coming up here. Thank you very much.

Miss Moorehead: Thank you for listening.