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# **A DIFFERENCE OF INTERPRETATION?**

## **A content analysis of the ‘Evidence’ of the Scottish Area Tourism Board Review, 2002-2004**

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January 2009

### **ABSTRACT**

The Scottish Area Tourism Board (ATB) Review, 2002-2004, based upon submitted ‘evidence’, found in favour of the dissolution of the ATBs. Upon their dissolution autonomous local tourism groups have emerged and, further, two Area Tourism Partnerships (ATPs) have proposed the formation of membership based Area organisations. This suggests that the current structure of Scottish tourism is dysfunctional and invites the question of what constitutes an effective structure? What issues need to be considered? The ATB Review invited responses from the tourism industry to the question of whether there was a need to change the existing ATB structure and what might these changes be. These responses have been published by the Scottish Executive, as a series of “Annexes” which include ‘summaries’ of each of the 322 responses. These summaries provide insight into the issues of concern and their significance.

The aim of this paper is to establish the issues that need to be considered when examining the structure and dynamics of the Scottish tourism industry by examining the issues raised in the ‘evidence’ contained within the “Annexes” listed in the Scottish Government’s analysis of responses to their ‘Call for Evidence’ on the Review of ATBs? A simple content analysis has been used to identify the issues and their significance, both geographically and by respondent type. The findings have been compared with those presented in these “Annexes”. It is suggested that there is an alternative interpretation of the evidence. This interpretation disagrees with several of the points raised in the Annexes.

The content analysis reveals that two thirds of respondents were in support of the retention of the ATBs, with only one sixth of respondents in favour of their dissolution. The issues raised by the respondents were diverse, but a basic frequency analysis reveals the three main concerns. The most important of which was the need to improve ATB funding. The second highlighted the necessity to improve ATB relations with other organisations (e.g. other ATBs, VisitScotland and Scottish Enterprise), while the third emphasised the importance of Local Authority involvement.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The structure of the Scottish tourism industry is undergoing a period of change following the dissolution of the Area Tourist Boards (ATBs). Their dissolution was a decision which resulted from a Review of the ATBs conducted between 2002 and 2004 by the Scottish Government. This Review sought views from participants in the tourism industry about the adequacy of the ATB structure and what changes, if any, should be made. The decision to dissolve the ATBs resulted in, what appears to be, a dysfunctional tourism structure, which is re-establishing stability, not through institutional reforms, but through the collective activity of local businesses and their establishment of local tourism groups. Furthermore, at the level of the 'Area', several of the replacement and newly established Area Tourism Partnerships<sup>1</sup> (ATPs) have proposed the formation of membership-based tourism group, thus resurrecting the ATB in a pseudo form (Harwood, 2009<sup>2</sup>).

Indeed, the announcement on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2004 of the findings of the review and consultation over the future of the Area Tourist Boards (2002-2004) could be regarded as one of the more significant events within the Scottish Tourism public sector, for it marked the dissolution of "local" membership based tourism organisations. Whilst not without their faults, the ATBs provided a democratic organisation which allowed the 'voice' of the local tourism product provider to be heard, albeit this voice was that of their members and not the tourism sector in the area as whole. The ATBs also acted as an instrument to focus the visitors' gaze upon their locality and persuade them to visit the area. The full effect of their dissolution can only be speculated upon.

However, one direct consequence of this has been the formation of local membership based tourism organisations (destination marketing organisations, DMOs) such as the "Orkney Tourism Group" (private communication). Further, the setting up of these DMOs has raised concern within VisitScotland, as evidenced in VisitScotland's Board meeting' minutes for 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2006:

*"The Chief Executive recognised the concerns about the proliferation of DMOs, particularly given that they might lead to a diluting of the marketing effort"*

Moreover, a negative symptom of the dissolution is recorded in the VisitScotland Board meeting' minutes for 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2007 in the context of improving business engagement

*"there is a real sense of a loss of belonging with the move away from membership and that this was a real factor that required consideration going forward"*.

Collectively, the retrospective recognition of the need for "belonging", the associated loss of the opportunity for "membership" through the dissolution of the ATBs and the co-incidental "proliferation" of local membership based tourism organisations, raises the question of why this situation has arisen.

This need for reorganisation is explored in the policy context by Kerr (2003, p215-216). He discusses the role of the ATBs and states that "nobody is advocating the demise of the ATBs". Indeed he predicts that their dissolution would "most probably see a proliferation of unstructured and unaccountable local tourism bodies formed throughout Scotland, some more competent than others, accountable to no-one, worsening an already deteriorating situation". However, he also suggests that the ATBs serve those (e.g. smaller accommodation providers) who get their business through the Tourist Information Centre (TIC), but fail to contribute significantly to the local economy, particularly in terms of employment, and who do not embrace "modern business principles". Tourism appears to be characterised by local competition as well as the need for collaboration amongst its participants – perhaps two contrary ideals that are difficult to resolve? Thus, it might appear that a membership based local tourism organisation is a necessity, which will surface regardless of whatever national structures are developed?

This overview of the current situation invites two questions. Why were the ATBs dissolved in the first place, and what issues would be considered in the decision to undertake this structural reform? Whilst it may not be possible to answer the first question, it is possible to address the second question.

The aim of this paper is to establish what issues need to be considered when examining the structure and dynamics of the Scottish tourism industry, by examining the issues raised in the 'evidence' contained within

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<sup>1</sup> ATPs were not strictly replacements for the ATBs, rather a mechanism to foster industry engagement at the level of the Area

<sup>2</sup> Harwood, S A (2009) "The changing structural dynamics of the Scottish tourism industry examined using Stafford Beer's VSM", in progress

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the responses to the ‘Call for Evidence’ by the ATB Review. This evidence is presented in the “Annexes” (Scottish Executive, 2004<sup>3</sup>) to the “Consultation on the Review of the Area Tourist Boards”.

This analysis was conducted from research into the online practices of Scottish serviced accommodation providers and their use of online technologies. One feature of which is the revelation that serviced accommodation providers are not only concerned about getting visitors to stay, but also the recognition of the need to have people visit the locality. This was a function performed by the ATBs. Interviews revealed that, upon the announcement of the dissolution of the ATBs, members of several ATBs banded together to form local tourism groups. The subsequent study of these groups and their role within Scottish Tourism has led to a broader examination of the Scottish tourism industry (Harwood, 2008<sup>4</sup>) and an attempt to analyse its current condition (Harwood, 2009<sup>5</sup>). This latter analysis has focused attention upon the ATB Review and the lessons learnt.

The following account is presented in four parts. The first part presents an overview of the ATB review; this is followed by an overview of the methodology used, then an analysis of the findings followed by some short conclusions.

**THE ATB REVIEW (2002 to 2004)**

The ATB review spanned two years, from 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2002 to 11<sup>th</sup> March 2004. It commenced with a ‘Call for Evidence’: an open invitation to submit views “to assist us [the Scottish Executive] to determine whether changes require to be made in the current Area Tourist Board arrangements, and if so, what these might be”. This invitation resulted in 322 responses. The outcome was announced in the Scottish Parliament on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2004 and is summarised in the following section. The key events are outlined in Table 1.

DATE	EVENT	SPOKESPERSON
27 <sup>th</sup> May 2002	launch of ATB consultation <sup>6</sup> : views were invited on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the future role of the ATBs and their relationship with VisitScotland</li> <li>- the structure of the 14 ATBs</li> <li>- the importance of cities as gateways for tourists</li> <li>- the role of local authorities</li> <li>- the ATBs’ relationships with Local Enterprise Companies (LECs) and with businesses</li> <li>- the ways in which information is provided to visitors</li> </ul>	Mike Watson MSP, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport
11 <sup>th</sup> March 2004 <sup>7</sup>	Publication of the Annexes <sup>8</sup> relating to the “ <i>Consultation on the Review of the Area Tourist Boards</i> ”	
11 <sup>th</sup> March 2004	Announcement <sup>9</sup> on outcome of the Review “ <i>ATBs would be replaced by an integrated network of local hubs as part of VisitScotland</i> ”	Frank McAveety, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport

**Table 1 Key Events of the ATB Review**

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Executive (2004) “Consultation on the Review of the Area Tourist Boards: annexes”, [[www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/tourism/atbreview.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/tourism/atbreview.pdf), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009]

<sup>4</sup> Harwood, S A (2008) “A Narrative About Institutional Developments In Scottish Tourism 1969-2008”, Business School Working Paper, Series: 04.04 (Nov. 2008), Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh

<sup>5</sup> Harwood, S A (2009) “The changing structural dynamics of the Scottish tourism industry examined using Stafford Beer’s VSM”, in progress

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Executive (2002) “Call for Evidence”, letter from the Minister for Tourism, Culture & Sport, Mike Watson MSP”, [[www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/tourism/areatourist.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/tourism/areatourist.pdf), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009]

<sup>7</sup> [<http://openscotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/03/O/Page/4>, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009]

<sup>8</sup> Scottish Executive (2004) “Consultation on the Review of the Area Tourist Boards: annexes”, [[www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/tourism/atbreview.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/tourism/atbreview.pdf), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009]

<sup>9</sup> Scottish Parliament (2004a) Scottish Parliament Official Report, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2004, col 6600, [[www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or-04/sor0311-02.htm#Col6600](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or-04/sor0311-02.htm#Col6600), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009]

“Scottish Tourism - Going for Growth”, Tourism Minister Frank McAveety, Statement to the Scottish Parliament, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2004 media release [[www.scotland.gov.uk/News/News-Extras/193](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/News-Extras/193), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009]

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Whether or not significant, the position of Minister for Tourism transferred from Frank McAveety to Mike Watson on 28<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2001

**The outcome of the ATB Review**

The review highlighted the need for “*more good marketing*”, “*a strong brand identity*”, “*consistently high quality*”, “*but most of all we need integrated support for tourism, so that everyone pulls in the same direction*”<sup>10</sup>. The review concluded that Scottish tourism would be best served by replacing the 14 ATBs with an integrated VisitScotland network, similar to the model for the enterprise networks as it then existed. It was intended that the new structure would:

- consist of 14 local tourism hubs responsible for the delivery of the national tourism strategy in their area and able to respond to local circumstances
- charge for services to local tourism businesses;
- work closely with the enterprise networks and LECs to integrate tourism business support;
- receive funding from local authorities on the basis of service level agreements;
- be given specific targets to increase jobs and the value of tourism in rural areas and proactively use the major cities as gateways to the rest of the country;
- develop new products and services in conjunction with businesses.

VisitScotland were given the remit to implement the new Network: “*ministers took the decision not to give VisitScotland a detailed blueprint for the new network, but to ask VisitScotland to design it with the ATBs*”<sup>11</sup>. The deadline for implementation of the revised structure was set for April, 2005. However, winding up the 14 ATBs required primary legislation<sup>12</sup>. To enable the sector to move forward, Ministers introduced two pieces of secondary legislation to create two interim boards, one for the North of Scotland and one for the South, both under the control of VisitScotland.

During the Parliamentary session<sup>13</sup> in which Frank McAveety made the announcement on the outcome of the ATB Review, Mr McGrigor asked:

*“Okay, Presiding Officer. Why has the review taken so long? Will the minister apologise to tourism operators for the fact that it has taken so long? Will the Executive realise that its control-freak mentality of bringing ATBs—under another name—under VisitScotland’s wing is exactly the top-down approach that the industry does not want? When will the Executive understand that VisitScotland’s job should be to market Scotland throughout the United Kingdom and abroad, and that the ATBs’ role is to act as membership organisations that understand what is important in their own areas?”*

Frank McAveety’s response included:

*“As far as the idea of centralisation is concerned, I have in front of me some views that indicate that many local tourist boards have welcomed the idea of integration as part of a national and local strategy of working better in partnership. One of the important questions to come out of the review, in relation to structures and the role of the national tourism agency, was about how we can reduce duplication on things that do not matter and maximise co-operation on things that do matter”*

To another question Frank McAveety replied:

*“Virtually all the submissions argued for an integrated network, but they recognised that there needs to be a local dimension. One or two articles have appeared in the local press in the south of Scotland claiming that the local area tourist board will disappear and that the capacity of the local area to influence tourism product will no longer exist; I understand that calls have been made about Jim Wallace in that respect. I hope that members have been reassured today that we recognise the*

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<sup>10</sup> “Scottish Tourism - Going for Growth”, Tourism Minister Frank McAveety, Statement to the Scottish Parliament, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2004 media release [[www.scotland.gov.uk/News/News-Extras/193](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/News-Extras/193), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009]

<sup>11</sup> “Area Tourist Boards Review”, Enterprise and Culture Committee 28<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2004, Session 2; Enterprise and Culture Committee Official Report 7<sup>th</sup> December 2004, Col 1398, [[www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/enterprise/or-04/ec04-2802.htm#Col1384](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/enterprise/or-04/ec04-2802.htm#Col1384), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009]

<sup>12</sup> This was achieved with the “Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill”, which was introduced to the Scottish Parliament on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2006 and received Royal Assent on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006

<sup>13</sup> Scottish Parliament (2004a) Scottish Parliament Official Report, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2004, col 6600, [[www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or-04/sor0311-02.htm#Col6600](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or-04/sor0311-02.htm#Col6600), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009]

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*role of the local area and, more importantly, that we want to work with tourism hubs, VisitScotland and the marketing money to make a genuine difference”*

**An Investigation into the ATB Review**

Between 25<sup>th</sup> May 2004 and 25<sup>th</sup> January 2005 the Enterprise & Culture Committee conducted an investigation into the Scottish Executive’s Area Tourist Board review. Look at the membership of this Committee – you should not be surprised that it supported the Executive? . It was carried out in two stages.

An interim report<sup>14</sup> was published on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2004, this concluding the first stage (May-June 2004). It suggested satisfaction with the ‘principles’ of the new structure:

*“The overall principles underpinning the new structure are welcomed by most of those affected, e.g. the private sector”*

However, in view of the fact that the review took two years, it also passed criticism that there was still uncertainty about the structure

*“the great deal of uncertainty as to the structure that will replace the Area Tourist Boards (ATBs)”*

The committee stated that it would examine the progress of the restructuring in late 2004.

The second stage took place between November, 2004 and January, 2005, with a final report<sup>15</sup> published on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2005. The report concluded:

*“The Committee concludes that there continues to be broad support for the general principle of restructuring the ATB networks and that, as the Committee concluded in June 2004, the new structure has the potential to create a more consistent and co-ordinated service to improve support for tourism across Scotland. The Committee supports the general principles of the restructuring. However, the Committee will continue to monitor progress and examine whether the eventual structure delivers on the promised improvements to Scotland’s tourism industry in the coming months and years”*

The Committee’s perception was that the restructuring of the ATBs, one year after the decision to disband them, was still widely supported. However, the Committee also revealed that it would continue to monitor the impact of the emerging structure over future years, though it can be asked whether this has been followed through.

Moreover, the evidence submitted to the Committee suggested that there were tensions during the setting up of the new network. This is poignantly captured in the summary statement of evidence submitted by the Chair of the Scottish Area Tourist Board Network

*“In brief summary, it is our firm opinion that despite the outward appearance that over 120 people from ATBs, local authorities and the enterprise networks were involved in planning the new Scottish Tourism Network, and despite VisitScotland’s and the Scottish Executive’s stated commitment to openness and collaboration, in practice the key decisions have been - and continue to be – taken by a few key individuals behind closed doors, and all too often “on the hoof” rather than in a considered manner. It is this secrecy and apparent lack of trust in ATBs more than anything else which has fuelled the persisting belief around the country amongst ATBs, local authorities and tourism businesses that – despite claims to the contrary – this is indeed “takeover” and not “merger”. ”<sup>16</sup>.*

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<sup>14</sup> Scottish Parliament (2004b) “Interim Report on the Area Tourist Board Review”, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2004, Enterprise and Culture Committee Report, SP Paper 195, 7<sup>th</sup> Report, 2004 (Session 2)  
[[www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/enterprise/reports-04/elr04-07-01.htm](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/enterprise/reports-04/elr04-07-01.htm), last accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May 2008]

<sup>15</sup> “Restructuring Scotland’s Tourism Industry: Report on the Review of Area Tourist Boards” 8<sup>th</sup> March 2005, Enterprise and Culture Committee Report, SP Paper 305, EC/S2/05/R3, 3<sup>rd</sup> Report, 2005 (Session 2)  
[[www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/enterprise/reports-05/elr05-03-00.htm](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/enterprise/reports-05/elr05-03-00.htm), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009]

<sup>16</sup> Written evidence to Enterprise and Culture Committee ATB Review, “Scottish Area Tourist Board Network Follow-Up Statement to Enterprise and Culture Committee”, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2004,  
[[www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/enterprise/papers-04/ecp04-28a.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/enterprise/papers-04/ecp04-28a.pdf), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009]

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VisitScotland's response<sup>17</sup> to this commenced with the statement "*we have at all times, tried to strike a balance between both inclusivity and participation, and delivering on the integration project*".

The new structure went live on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A variety of documents are available online relating to the debates about the Area Tourist Boards, the Review and the ensuing Inquiry, the main documents and their links being identified in the preceding section. This analysis focuses specifically upon the annexes<sup>18</sup> to the "Consultation on the Review of the Area Tourist Boards". Annex D contains "synopses" of the 322 responses to the 'Call for Evidence'. These "synopses" are assumed to be 'valid' translations of the original responses.

The analysis was conducted in three stages. The first stage was an initial content analysis conducted in November, 2006. It involved a basic iterative process to identify specific themes to categorise the content of the 322 responses. The categorisation of locations and respondents was derived from the 'names' provided.

The next stage was carried out in January, 2009. This involved repeating the content analysis starting with the same categories. However, it became quickly apparent that it was desirable to add two new themes and add and amend several categories. The two themes added concerned public sector responsibility for local development and the desirability of smaller local forums or tourism groups. The final model of the categories is presented in Figure 1, which identifies the different elements, their relations and issues, and is expanded upon in Table 2, revealing the views sought from the evidence about the issues raised.

The final stage involved comparing and reconciling the results of the two analyses. This produced the results presented in Table 4 which highlights the variation in which the data had been viewed. Since bias is inherent in a content analysis conducted by a single analyst, it would have been desirable to have had the analysis performed by two independent analysts. However, this was not possible due to unavailability of resources. Instead, the replication of the analysis after a significant time lag (in this case, over two years between the first and second stages) is postulated to reduce this possible bias. Indeed, the final reconciliation highlighted deficiencies in both the first and second stages, thereby raising the level of confidence in the presented results.

There are two other sources of bias which cannot be accommodated. The first concerns respondent bias. Since the 'evidence' is the result of an open invitation (the 'Call for Evidence'<sup>19</sup>) to submit views, then there is the issue of the motives of the 322 respondents who submitted evidence. This contrasts with the reasons of those who did not submit evidence, but were aware of the "Call for Evidence", and also with the reasons why there was no response from potential respondents because they did not know about the "Call".

Another source of bias which cannot be accounted for is that introduced by the translation of the evidence into summations. There are errors as exemplified by the incomplete entry for the Chair of The Scottish ATB Network<sup>20</sup> and the apparent contradiction offered by "*increase accountability to members... Remove membership - instead those meeting minimum standard buy into...*"<sup>21</sup>. However, the magnitude or significance of these errors remains to be assessed should it be possible to access the original response documents.

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<sup>17</sup> Written evidence to Enterprise and Culture Committee ATB Review, "Submission from VisitScotland", 21<sup>st</sup> January 2005, [www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/enterprise/papers-05/ecp05-02.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/enterprise/papers-05/ecp05-02.pdf), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009]

<sup>18</sup> [www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/tourism/atbreview.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/tourism/atbreview.pdf) [last accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May 2008]

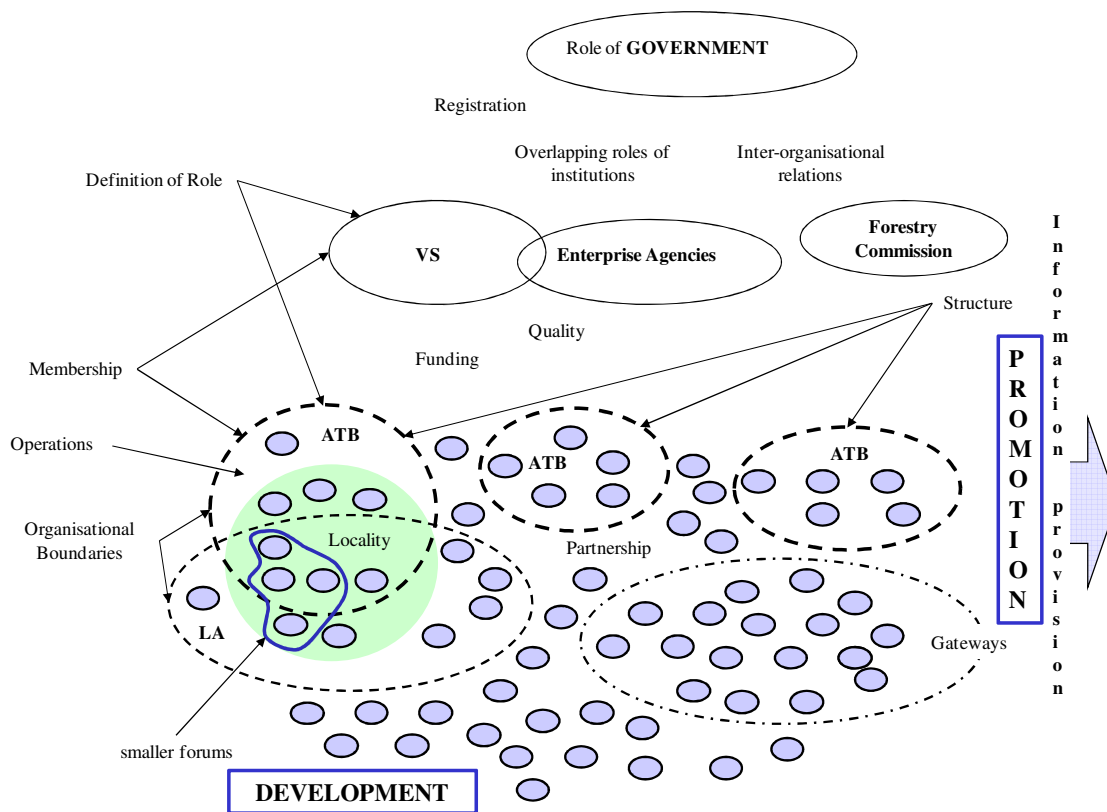
<sup>19</sup> Scottish Executive (2002) "Call for Evidence", letter from the Minister for Tourism, Culture & Sport, Mike Watson MSP", [[www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/tourism/areatourist.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/tourism/areatourist.pdf), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009]

<sup>20</sup> 293<sup>rd</sup> response: Chair, The Scottish Area Tourist Board Network, Perth

<sup>21</sup> 263<sup>rd</sup> response: Company Secretary, Highlands Loch Ness Ltd, Inverness

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It was anticipated that specific issues raised and manner of response would cluster according to disposition about ATB retention. A simple analysis (Table 12) compared the responses in favour of retention with those in favour of dissolution. Both views reveal these clusters of responses as might be expected on the basis of common relations between categories, e.g. retain ATBs, improve ATB funding and improve involvement through an improved membership package.



**Figure 1 A model of issues raised in the evidence submitted to the Inquiry**



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THEME	ISSUE	VIEWS CAPTURED
Role of government	Degree of government intervention	- less government interference - more private sector promotion
Inter-organisational relations	Inter-organisational relations	- improve ATB relations with other organisations (e.g. other ATBs, VS, SE)
Overlapping roles of institutions	Need for clarification of roles	- clarify roles of VS and ATB
Funding	Funding requirements and by whom	- improve ATB funding - VS /Exec/ LA funding of ATBs
Gateways	Importance of gateways to Scotland	- gateways recognised as important - importance of cities as conduits - gateways - importance of Borders as Gateway ---> special needs
Local Authority (LA)	Importance of LA involvement in tourism	- importance of LA involvement - TICs important
Tourism Information	Importance and management of TICs	- scrap TICs - opportunity to improve TIC
Locality	Issues relating to locality: - Knowledge about locality - Importance of grass roots views and involvement - Local delivery mechanisms important - Need to improve promotion of different facets of the locality	- importance of local knowledge - importance of local business involvement : grass roots views - importance of local delivery mechanisms - improve promotion of local areas - improve promotion of remote location - improve promotion of niche areas
Smaller forums	Smaller tourism groups to complement or replace ATBs	- endorse - against
Membership	- Need for involvement - Involvement through existing membership scheme - Need to overhaul membership scheme - Have single membership to VS - Dissolve membership scheme	- importance of membership - improve membership / local involvement - no membership - overhaul membership scheme - single membership of VS
Misc	Miscellaneous	- confidential - improve relationship between tourism and environment - OTHER
Operations	Attitudes, practices and manner of promotion	- equitable promotion of all tourism businesses - improve attitudes / practices
Organisational Boundaries	Boundary overlap between LA and ATBs	- coterminous boundaries desirable / advantageous
Partnership	Relevance of partnership	- need for better partnership
Quality	Importance of quality	- importance of quality standards
Registration	Registration compliance	- compulsory registration of businesses
Role of VS	VS's role:	- centralise under VS - greater control / centralised admin - purchase of VS services - VS not to market accommodation - VS promotes Scotland and all areas - VS run as trade association
Structure	Retain – Consolidate - Dissolve	- dissolve ATBs - fewer ATBs - consolidate - retain existing structure

**Table 2 Issues raised in the evidence submitted and the themes and categories examined in the content analysis**

## **ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSES TO THE “CONSULTATION ON THE REVIEW OF THE AREA TOURIST BOARDS”<sup>22</sup>**

The analysis of the “synopses” (Annex D) of the 322 responses to the “Call for Evidence” is contained within the following five tables (Table 3, Table 4, Table 5, Table 6 and Table 12). The data has been categorised by respondent type, respondent location and response. This reveals many relatively solitary views which span a wide range of issues. Nevertheless, patterns can be discerned.

### **Profile of respondents**

The first table (Table 3) presents a profile of the respondents by organisational category or ‘interest group’ and geographical locality. Respondents derive from all parts of Scotland with 44 localities identified. However, their distribution is not equitable with 11% (35) of respondents from Edinburgh and nearly a quarter (23% : 75) of all respondents from the Borders, with 60 (19% of all respondents) from the locality ‘Borders – E’.

The table reveals the predominance of ‘Associations’ (87 : 27% of all respondents)<sup>23</sup> of which 18 (6%) were local ‘Tourism Action Groups’ (TAGs), a similar amount comprises of both local tourism and ‘economic’ forums and 25 (8%) were mainly national bodies. Indeed Association’ responses represented 46%, of respondents from Edinburgh, possibly reflecting Edinburgh’s importance as an administrative centre. Whilst seven Associations represented the interests of accommodation providers<sup>24</sup> only three associations related specifically to serviced accommodation providers and each was a city hotel association.

Accommodation providers accounted for 24% (77) of all responses. Of these, 75% (58) were from serviced accommodation providers, the rest from self-caterers (17) and caravan sites (2). Bed & Breakfast establishment (B&Bs) comprised the largest category of all respondents (34 : 11%)

Institutional representation at both local and national levels, excluding educational institutions, comprised 13% (43) of all respondents. The four Local Authorities who did not respond were Aberdeen City, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and North Lanarkshire. All ATBs responded.

Overall, the respondents were a heterogeneous mix of tourism participants with 115 (36% of all respondents) representing 21 different non-governmental groups, which included education and excluded both the ‘Associations’ (87 : 27%) and ‘accommodation providers’ (77 : 24%).

One significant aspect of this profile is that the percentage of respondents from the Borders areas is 23% (75) of all respondents, though it should be noted that this includes both Dumfries and Galloway in the west and the eastern Scottish Borders area. This contrasts with Edinburgh from which there were only 35 responses (11%). What is perhaps more significant is the composition of Borders respondents, with 32% (24) of responses from self-catering and serviced accommodation providers. This is placed into perspective in that responses from hotels in this locality represented 44% of all hotel respondents and likewise B&Bs comprised 32 % of all B&B responses.

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<sup>22</sup> [www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/tourism/atbreview.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/tourism/atbreview.pdf) [last accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May 2008]

<sup>23</sup> This excludes the ATBs and CofCs (Chambers of Commerce), which, if included, increases the proportion of Associations to 27%. (87)

<sup>24</sup> Aberdeen Hotels Association, Edinburgh Principal Hotels Association, Independent Backpackers Hostels, Greater Glasgow Hotels Association, Scottish Youth Hostels Association (SYHA), The Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers, National Caravan Council (Scotland)



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THEME	ISSUE	reconciled	%	Jan-08	Nov-06
role of government	less government interference - more private sector promotion LESS CENTRALISED CONTROL	9	3%	3	3
inter-organisational relations	improve ATB relations with other organisations (e.g. other ATBs, VS, SE)	77	24%	72	60
roles	clarify roles of VS/ATB	57	18%	57	52
funding	improve ATB funding	84	26%	74	77
	centralised funding (SE/acc / VS)	55	17%	57	51
	funded by LA	30	9%		
gateway	importance of Borders as Gateway --> special needs	13	4%	13	13
	importance of gateways recognised but unspecific	22	7%	15	16
	importance of cities as conduits - gateways	42	13%	30	40
LA	importance of LA involvement	65	20%	46	78
TICs	importance of TICs raised or implied by its mention	42	13%	36	55
	scrap TICs	2	1%	2	2
	make more effective - longer hrs, better access, franchise / PPP-TICs	64	20%	38	17
	importance of local knowledge	33	10%	30	24
	importance of local business involvement	31	10%	18	
	importance of grass roots views	14	4%	9	33
locality	importance of local delivery mechanisms	33	10%	25	131
	improve promotion of local areas (reflect local circumstances)	2	1%	5	20
	improve promotion of remote-rural locations	6	2%	3	14
	improve promotion of niche areas	8	2%	7	10
smaller forums	smaller tourism groups complement or replace ATBs	40	12%	29	
	against smaller groups	1	0%		
local development	local development by VS	1	0%	2	
	local development by JEC	56	17%	56	
	local development by ATB	12	4%	8	
membership	explicit statement about importance of membership - improve membership / local involvement	31	10%	28	43
	no membership	15	5%	15	13
	single membership of VS	4	1%	5	6
	overhaul membership scheme	65	20%	57	55
misc	improve relationship between tourism and environment	1	0%	1	2
	OTHER	139	43%	130	51
operations	improve attitudes / practices	5	2%	1	12
boundaries	equitable promotion of all tourism businesses	3	1%	3	5
partnership	coterminus borders desirable	30	9%	27	24
quality	need for better partnership	40	12%	47	40
registration	importance of quality standards	30	9%	24	35
	supports compulsory registration of businesses	15	5%	15	12
	centralise under VS - greater control / centralised admin	54	17%	50	62
	VS promotes Scotland as a whole	42	13%	43	66
	reduce role - size of VS	3	1%	3	3
role VS	revise VS board	8	2%	8	5
	VS provides support locally as required	0	0%	1	
	VS services are purchased as required	10	3%	11	7
	VS not to market accommodation	1	0%	1	1
	VS run as trade association	1	0%	1	5
structure	retain ATBs (stated or by implication)	221	69%	208	220
	retain existing structure	38	12%	38	50
	fewer ATBs - consolidate	35	11%	42	49
	dissolve ATBs (stated or by implication)	55	17%	47	39
	integrate ATB within VS	23	7%	16	
confidential	confidential - no comment	4	1%	4	10

**Table 4 Analysis of responses by category presenting results from both first and second stages and the reconciled results**





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**Diversity of views**

The diversity and popularity of the views contained within the evidence is revealed in Table 4. Table 7, derived from Table 4, reveals those issues which were raised by more than 15% of all respondents.

THEME	ISSUE	reconciled	%
inter-organisational relations	improve ATB relations with other organisations (e.g. other ATBs, VS, SE)	77	24%
roles	clarify roles of VS / ATB	57	18%
funding	improve ATB funding	84	26%
	centralised funding (SExec / VS)	55	17%
LA	Importance of LA Involvement	65	20%
TICs	make more effective - longer hrs, better access, franchise / PPP TICs	64	20%
local development	local development by LEC	56	17%
membership	overhaul membership scheme	65	20%
misc	OTHER	139	43%
role VS	centralise under VS - greater control / centralised admin	54	17%
structure	retain ATBs (stated or by implication)	221	69%
	dissolve ATBs (stated or by implication)	55	17%

**Table 7 Issues raised by over 15% of all respondents. ‘Other’ comprises a broad mixture of issues not readily accommodated by the existing range**

The dominant issue relates directly to the question of whether the ATBs should be retained or dissolved (discussed further in next section). Over two thirds of all respondents favoured the retention of the ATB in contrast to around one sixth who favoured their dissolution. The next main issue concerned ATB funding and the need to improve it, with over a quarter of all respondents raising this issue. Just under a quarter proposed that ATBs needed to improve their relations with other organisations, whether this is with other ATBs, VisitScotland or other public sector bodies. Also raised as dominant issues were the importance of Local Authorities involvement in local tourism (20%), the need to improve TICs (20%), the need to overhaul the membership scheme (but not to eliminate it) (20%) and the need to clarify the roles of both the ATBs and VisitScotland (18%). The three other issues which were highlighted were the need for secured centralised funding of ATBs whether by the Scottish Executive (renamed the Scottish Government in 2007) or through Visit Scotland (17%), the use of Local Enterprise Councils (LECs) to support local development (17%) and the proposal for the centralisation of the ATBs activities within VisitScotland (17%).

**The central question of ATB retention-dissolution**

The critical question of the review concerns whether to retain or dissolve the ATBs. The evidence was critically reappraised during the reconciliation to establish whether there was clear indication of the desire to retain the ATBs or dissolve them. Whilst the final number supporting dissolution was higher than the previous two analyses, this still only accounted for around one sixth of all respondents. Around one seventh (46) provided no indication of preference. Of the respondents who supported the retention of the ATBs, 17% (12% of total) supported the existing structure, whilst a marginally smaller number (16%) were in favour of reducing the number of ATBs.

Table 5 (respondent category [interest group]) and Table 6 (location) provide insight into the nature of responses. Table 5 reveals that the predominant interest group supporting ATB retention is the smaller serviced accommodation provider, i.e. the B&B. The non-descript category ‘none’, is a dominant interest group (29) with 59% of them disposed to retention in contrast to 17% who are against. There is no group strongly supporting the dissolution of ATBs. However, all B&Bs that support the dissolution of the ATBs were from Jedburgh in Borders – E.

Other groups predominantly in support of retention are institutional, i.e. Local Authorities (‘local government’) and Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs). Examination of the Local Authority (LA) responses reveals three LAs who supported the dissolution of ATBs. This is contrasted with 24 who

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supported retention of which seven explicitly supported the existing structure whilst four supported fewer ATBs.

Unsurprisingly, all the ATBs, but one, indicate support for retention of the ATBs, with three explicitly supporting the existing structure. Two ATBs proposed consolidation. The ATB which did not indicate support endorsed the view of COSLA, which 'could' be viewed as supportive, but this is open to debate.

Of the heterogeneous mix (115) which excludes Associations, institutions and accommodation providers, but includes education, 74 (23% of all respondents) support retention and 21 (7%) are against.

When respondent location is examined (Table 6) retention appears to be favoured in most localities. Where there is borderline support or support is for dissolution, these tend to be in localities which have few responses. However, one location, 'Borders – E', is conspicuous in terms of its number of respondents (60 : 19% of all respondents), the number of respondents in favour of retention (40 : 18% of all those in support of retention) and those against retention (19 : 35% of all those in support of dissolution). As well as inviting the question of why one locality has been so responsive to the 'Call for Evidence', the high number of responses provides an opportunity to establish whether more insight can be gained into the manner of response.

An analysis of the composition of the respondents is provided in Table 8. This suggests that the disposition of respondents towards ATB retention is not confined to a specific type of respondent. However, analysis of respondents by named location, e.g. town is more revealing. This is presented in Table 9. This suggests a disposition towards retention in most locations. However it also reveals polarisation of views between those in Hawick and Melrose, who support retention, and those in Jedburgh, who are in favour of dissolution. This raises the question of why this is so, though an explanation is open to conjecture.

An analysis of these two contrasting 'locations' is presented in Table 10 and Table 11. It reveals the stark contrast between those in favour of retention and those against it. Aside from three accommodation providers, all respondents from Jedburgh appeared to favour dissolution. Of the Hawick respondents, seven were from Hawick Community Council, and, in contrast to Melrose, no Hawick respondents were private sector organisations. This presents a potentially confusing picture and invites the question of whether there are underlying issues which affected the views being presented? The 'evidence' suggests that Jedburgh respondent's supported local group activity for marketing and information services rather than through ATBs raising the question of whether this was symptomatic of local dissatisfaction with its ATB.

Organizational Category	retain ATBs (stated or by implication)	retain existing structure	fewer ATBs - consolidate	dissolve ATBs (stated or by implication)
Association	1			1
Association: Area Tourist Board	1			
Association: Forum	1			
Association: TAG	1			1
Accommodation: Self-catering	3			1
Accommodation: B&B	5		1	5
Accommodation: Guest House				1
Accommodation: Hotel	4	1		1
Art / craft and support businesses	1			4
Community Council	8			1
Consultancy				1
Government	1			
Local government	2	1		
none	5	2		1
Online Intermediary	1			
Partnership	1	1		
Restaurant				1
Retail				1
Sports	1			
Visitor Attraction	4			
Total	40	5	1	19

**Table 8 The disposition of respondents towards ATB retention for 'Borders – E' by respondent type**



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Town	Organizational Category	retain existing structure	retain ATBs (stated or by implication)		fewer ATBs - consolidate	dissolve ATBs (stated or by implication)
			retain existing structure	structure2		
Ashkirk	1		1			
Berwick upon Tweed	1		1			
Coldstream	1	1	1	1		
Duns	1		1			
Ettrick & Lauderdale	1		1			
Ettrick Valley	1		1			
Eyemouth	2	1	2	1		
Galashiels	1					1
Hawick	10		10			
Jedburgh	21		3		1	17
Kelso	3		3			
Melrose	11	3	10	3		1
no	1		1			
Peebles	1		1			
Roxburghshire	1		1			
Selkirk	3		3			
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>19</b>

**Table 9 The disposition of respondents towards ATB retention for 'Borders – E' by town**  
['no' = no location specified by respondent]

JEDBURGH Organizational Category	retain ATBs (stated or by implication)	retain existing structure	fewer ATBs - consolidate	dissolve ATBs (stated or by implication)
Association: TAG				1
Accommodation: Self-catering	1			1
Accommodation: B&B	2		1	5
Accommodation: Guest House				1
Accommodation: Hotel				1
Art / craft and support businesses				3
Community Council				1
none				1
Restaurant				1
Retail				1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>17</b>

**Table 10 The disposition of respondents from Jedburgh towards retention of ATBs**

Town	Organizational Category	retain ATBs (stated or by implication)	retain existing structure	fewer ATBs - consolidate	dissolve ATBs (stated or by implication)
Hawick	Association: Area Tourist Board	1			
	Association: Forum	1			
	Community Council	7			
	Local government	1			
Melrose	Accommodation: B&B	1			
	Accommodation: Hotel	2	1		
	Art / craft and support businesses	1			
	Consultancy				1
	Local government	1	1		
	none	2			
	Partnership	1	1		
	Visitor Attraction	2			
<b>Total</b>		<b>20</b>	<b>3</b>		<b>1</b>

**Table 11 The disposition of respondents from Hawick-Melrose towards retention of ATBs**

Aside from this anomalous finding, this analysis suggests that the general disposition of respondents is towards ATB retention, both geographically and across all respondent types, and especially by the ATBs themselves.

**Clustering of views**

Whether in support of, or against, the retention of ATBs, this view will have other views associated with it. A simple analysis was conducted to identify the issues raised in association with both disposition and also any issues raised for those of no disposition. The results are presented in Table 12. This reveals that that the

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retention of ATBs is likely to give rise to the mention of other issues associated with retention. This is not so readily apparent for the dissolution of ATBs.

Theme	Issue	retain ATB	% of Total for issue	dissolve ATB	% of Total for issue	neither	% of Total for issue
role of government	less government interference - more private sector promotion LESS CENTRALISED CONTROL	8	89%	1	11%		
inter-organisational relations	improve ATB relations with other organisations (e.g. other ATBs, VS, SE)	68	88%	3	4%	6	8%
roles	clarify roles of VS / ATB	50	88%	4	7%	3	5%
funding	improve ATB funding	82	98%			2	2%
	centralised funding (SExec / VS)	48	87%	6	11%	1	2%
	funded by LA	25	83%	2	7%	3	10%
gateway	importance of Borders as Gateway ---> special needs	13	100%				
	importance of gateways recognised but unspecific	19	86%	3	14%		
	importance of cities as conduits - gateways	36	86%	5	12%	1	2%
LA	Importance of LA Involvement	53	82%	8	12%	4	6%
TICs	importance of TICs raised or implied by its mention	31	74%	4	10%	7	17%
	scrap TICs	2	100%				
	make more effective - longer hrs, better access, franchise / PPP TICs	31	48%	27	42%	6	9%
locality	importance of local knowledge	28	85%	1	3%	4	12%
	importance of local business involvement	28	90%	3	10%		
	importance of grass roots views	12	86%			2	14%
	importance of local delivery mechanisms	24	73%	1	3%	8	24%
	improve promotion of local areas [reflect local circumstances]	2	100%				
	improve promotion of remote-rural locations	6	100%				
	improve promotion of niche areas	5	63%	1	13%	2	25%
smaller forums	smaller tourism groups complement or replace ATBs	14	35%	22	55%	4	10%
	against smaller groups	1	100%				
local development	local development by VS			1	100%		
	local development by LEC	28	50%	24	43%	4	7%
	local development by ATB	9	75%	1	8%	2	17%
membership	explicit statement about importance of membership - improve membership / local involvement	29	94%	2	6%		
	no membership	8	53%	7	47%		
	single membership of VS			3	75%	1	25%
	overhaul membership scheme	50	77%	8	12%	7	11%
misc	improve relationship between tourism and environment	1	100%				
	OTHER	83	60%	23	17%	33	24%
operations	improve attitudes / practices	3	60%	2	40%		
	equitable promotion of all tourism businesses	2	67%			1	33%
boundaries	coterminus borders desirable	30	100%				
partnership	need for better partnership	35	88%	1	3%	4	10%
quality	importance of quality standards	23	77%	4	13%	3	10%
registration	supports compulsory registration of businesses	11	73%	1	7%	3	20%
role VS	centralise under VS - greater control / centralised admin	16	30%	30	56%	8	15%
	VS promotes Scotland as a whole	31	74%	8	19%	3	7%
	reduce role - size of VS	2	67%	1	33%		
	revise VS board	6	75%	2	25%		
	VS provides support locally as required						
	VS services are purchased as required	6	60%	4	40%		
	VS not to market accommodation					1	100%
	VS run as trade association			1	100%		
structure	retain ATBs (stated or by implication)	221	100%				
	retain existing structure	38	100%				
	fewer ATBs - consolidate	35	100%				
	dissolve ATBs (stated or by implication)			55	100%		
	integrate ATB within VS	1	4%	16	70%	6	26%
confidential	confidential - no comment					4	100%

**Table 12 Comparing the responses of those for and against retention of the ATB and also those who indicate neither preference**

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The issues most likely to be raised in association with a pro-ATB view in decreasing order are:

1. the need to improve ATB funding
2. the need to improve ATB relations with other organisations (e.g. other ATBs, VisitScotland, Scottish Enterprise)
3. the importance of Local Authority involvement
4. the need to overhaul the membership scheme
5. the need to clarify the roles of VisitScotland / ATBs
6. the desirability of centralised funding provided either by the Scottish Executive or by VisitScotland
7. the importance of cities as conduits - gateways
8. the need for better partnerships
9. the importance of TICs
10. the need to improve the effectiveness of TICs: e.g. longer hours, better access, operate through franchise or PPP
11. the desirability of coterminous borders
12. the importance of membership and the need to improve membership / local involvement
13. the importance of local knowledge
14. the importance of local business involvement
15. the role of Local Enterprise Companies (LEC) for local development

The emphasis is upon clarification of the ATB role, improved relations with other organisations, particularly public sector bodies, sustainable funding and the involvement of local businesses and local expertise, particularly in the context of improving delivery for tourism at a local level. The importance of coterminous borders raises the practical difficulties associated with the different boundaries of local public bodies, particular in the context of funding. Perhaps the surprising issue is that concerning the role of cities as gateways or conduits to other locations.

The issues most likely to be raised in association with an anti-ATB view in decreasing order are:

1. centralise under VisitScotland thereby giving greater control
2. the need to improve the effectiveness of TICs: e.g. longer hours, better access, operate through franchise or PPP
3. the role of Local Enterprise Companies (LEC) for local development
4. explicit recognition that smaller tourism groups complement or replace ATBs

Those in favour of dissolving the ATB also propose the transferral of the ATBs' activities to VisitScotland. Further, over half (22) of these respondents explicitly recognise the role of smaller more local tourism groups. In contrast, those supporting retention are less likely to explicitly recognise the role of these smaller groups (14), suggesting that a complementary role for ATBs and local groups was not an issue. However, when the composition of these respondents is examined, it reveals that small groups (TAGs) or forums are more likely to raise small groups as an issue if they support ATB retention (five respondents), than if they oppose it (two respondents). Further, private sector respondents are more likely to raise small groups if they oppose ATB retention (16: 73% of all those who both raised the issue of small groups and support ATBs), than if they support it (7: 50%). Is there any significance in this? Is this viewed as an opportunity by those disillusioned with ATBs to establish small groups in areas where no groups exist?

Irrespective of the differences between the pro- and anti-ATB groups, both raised the second and third issues, which highlighted the need for better local delivery and local development involving the LEC.

#### **Examination of the Annex 'Overviews'**

The preceding analysis has presented an interpretation of the 'evidence' presented to the public, on the assumption that this 'evidence' is a valid translation of the original evidence submitted. This section compares these findings with the findings or 'Overviews' presented in Annexes A, B and C (see APPENDIX) of the Scottish Executive's analysis of the responses? The three Annexes provide an overall summation (Annex A), an overview of responses by Local Authorities (Annex B) and an overview of responses by tourism businesses (Annex C).

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A comparison reveals that the interpretation offered here differs from that offered in these Annexes. Whilst differences with Annex B are perhaps trivial, there is a subtle, but significant difference with Annex A and more fundamental differences with Annex C. Thus, attention will focus upon Annex A and C.

ANNEX A to the “Consultation on the Review of the Area Tourist Boards” (Scottish Executive, 2004)

Whilst there was agreement with a number of issues presented in Annex A, there is disagreement with the summation in point 3.

The issue raised in Annex A as the most mentioned was “*the need for a much more coherent way of integrating support for tourism businesses in each locality with the national tourism strategy being delivered by VisitScotland*”. In other words, it was claimed that support needed to be integrated with the strategy. However, the analysis indicates that this was raised by only a limited number of respondents. Indeed, there were only 26 occurrences of the word ‘strategy’ in the summaries contained in Annex D and it was used in a number of contexts. Nine occurrences were related to dispersion, information gathering, marketing and economy. A further eight occurrences were used in the context of Area Tourist Boards. Only nine occurrences were used in the context of the national strategy. The interpretation offered here of the Annex D ‘evidence’ suggests that the main issue concerned, not integration with the national strategy, but better relationships; that the ATBs needed better relations with VisitScotland, other ATBs and any other organisations. Whilst not undermining the importance of the national strategy, the analysis suggests that this was not regarded as a paramount issue.

Furthermore, it was stated in the Annex that there was polarisation between retention of existing facilities and abolition of the ATB. Instead, the analysis suggests that opinion is skewed towards the retention of ATBs, with little difference in the number supporting the existing structure (38) and those proposing their consolidation (35). Only one sixth of all respondents favoured the dissolution of the ATBs.

ANNEX C to the “Consultation on the Review of the Area Tourist Boards” (Scottish Executive, 2004)

That the first point appears to be concerned with the views of “hotel groups” or “large tourism businesses” is questioned. A significant proportion of tourism businesses are small (e.g. serviced accommodation providers, (Harwood, 2007<sup>25</sup>). Whilst, these larger businesses may be represented by their appropriate trade association, the assumption that all tourism businesses are ‘represented’ is also questioned. Serviced accommodation providers constituted 18% (58) of all respondents, of which many are smaller businesses. Their representative body is their ATB. As individual businesses, 40 supported the ATBs, whilst 11 proposed dissolution. All ATBs supported retention.

Further, the claim that there was “almost” united opposition to the current structure of the ATB by tourism businesses is questioned. The analysis suggests that this was far from the case. Of those who supported retention of the existing structure, these comprise 38 institutional bodies (includes education) and 61 Associations, with the remainder 122 respondents being predominantly tourism businesses covering a wide range of activities. In contrast, there were 15 Associations, five institutions and 35 others, being predominantly tourism businesses in support of the abolition of the ATBs.

Indeed, the analysis suggests that the four bullet-points raised in the Scottish Executive’s summation (point 3) of Annex C, were relatively insignificant in comparison to other views which have already been raised and support retention of the ATBs.

Summation

Counter to the view of opposition to the ATBs espoused in the two Annexes examined, this analysis finds that there was much support for their retention, with ideas about a wide range of issues that would allow the existing ATB structure to be improved. These ideas are important as they reveal the issues which needed to be addressed in whatever subsequent reforms were proposed.

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<sup>25</sup> Harwood, S A (2007) “A Quantitative Analysis of Serviced Accommodation Providers in Scotland over the Period 2003 to 2007”, Working Paper, Series: 07.01, Business School, University of Edinburgh

## **FURTHER THOUGHTS**

Two questions were presented in the Introduction. Why were the ATBs dissolved, and what issues should be considered in any decision for structural reform?

Whilst it was not expected to answer the first, insight has been provided into the second question. The preceding analysis has provided a reassessment of the 'evidence' presented in the Annexes to the "Consultation on the Review of the Area Tourist Boards" (Scottish, 2004). It raises a wide variety of issues, though many relate to the expectation that ATBs would be retained. The dominant issue was the funding of ATBs. Furthermore, there was concern about the roles of all the different bodies and duplication / overlap of effort. Engagement was a recurrent theme, whether it was through membership, better relations with other organisations or involvement of Local Authorities. Likewise the 'local dimension' was recognised in terms of local knowledge and the delivery of tourism information.

One unexpected outcome from the analysis was to find that the respondents tended to favour retention of the ATBs, which was in contrast to the view expressed in the Annexes and favoured their abolition. This raises the question of why this significant difference should arise. The analysis presented here appears robust and thus focuses attention upon how the responses were evaluated during the Review. It is assumed that the 'evidence' formed the basis of the decision to dissolve the ATBs. Indeed, the decision appears to be consistent with the views presented in Annexes. However, this assumption is based upon the assumption that the decision was based upon a democratic consultation process, which invites the question of the manner of institutional decision making in Scotland.

One concern about this evidence relates to the respondents and their stakeholder interests in the ATBs. It is difficult to assess the relative interest in ATBs of these different stakeholders, but it can be argued that the ATB has more significance to a serviced accommodation provider who will advertise through the ATB, than to an Internet Services Provider, who may be interested in accommodation providers as clients. Indeed the local ATB lobbied on behalf of its members, many of which were serviced accommodation providers and who were solely represented by their ATB. Serviced accommodation providers comprised 18% (58) of all respondents, whilst all accommodation providers comprised 24% (77). Thus, of the 322 responses, the question arises as to whether some stakeholder views should, or do, carry more weight than others, in view of their different interests.

Whilst the decision is perhaps surprising in light of the analysis here, this analysis does not have the benefit of access to the original evidence. Thus, it is not known how valid the translation of the original evidence is into the published summaries used for this analysis. Were issues raised in the original evidence that have informed the decision, but are not present in the published summaries?

One final question that arises concerns the proposed structural reforms in light of the findings. Would the structural reforms improve 'integration', this being the priority of the reforms as highlighted in the Tourism Minister's media statement<sup>26</sup> which announced the reforms

*"But most of all we need integrated support for tourism, so that everyone pulls in the same direction".*

What is meant by 'integrated support'? The emphasis appears to be upon absorption within a centralised authority distributing services on a transactional basis through 'hubs'. The 'principle' of a 'hub' might be expected to deliver the desired integration. However, would the proposals meet the requirements of more stable funding, clarity of roles and improved relations between the different public sector bodies, better engagement with tourism business and improved delivery of tourism services at the local level? How are local tourism businesses to be involved in tourism related decisions affecting their locality? Eighteen local tourism groups responded to the 'Call for Evidence', highlighting another dimension to be considered. What mechanisms for co-ordination and engagement would there be? The emphasis is upon transactions, but does a transaction based relationship have the same quality as a membership based relationship? Transactions are contractual and discretionary whilst membership implies commitment and belonging to something. These issues appear to underpin the exchange following the announcement of the Review findings between Mr

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<sup>26</sup> "Scottish Tourism - Going for Growth", Tourism Minister Frank McAveety, Statement to the Scottish Parliament, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2004 media release [[www.scotland.gov.uk/News/News-Extras/193](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/News-Extras/193), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009]

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McGrigor and Frank McAveety. Further, Frank McAveety's reply that "*we recognise the role of the local area*" elevates the importance of the local area, but with no indication of its engagement.

The issues raised in the evidence highlight a wealth of issues, relevant irrespective of whether ATBs are retained or dissolved which do not appear to be accommodated within the proposal. Indeed, the proposal lacks clarity of how it would work, despite the Review taking two years. It appears to make the assumption that all stakeholders will buy into the proposal, with claims being made of acceptance

*"The overall principles underpinning the new structure are welcomed by most of those affected, e.g. the private sector"*<sup>27</sup> (Enterprise & Culture Committee, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2004)

Whilst this detail was to emerge through the network's design by VisitScotland with the involvement of the ATBs, this assumes participation within this process. However, the effectiveness of this process is itself open to question. As the private sector were affected by the reforms, how were they to be enrolled? Indeed the lack of clarity of how the proposal would work and the apparent tensions within the implementation process are perhaps portents of the current dysfunctionality of the Scottish tourism industry.

One further development which may undermine the whole notion of engagement at a local level was the announcement<sup>28</sup> on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2007 by John Swinney (Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth) on the restructuring of the Enterprise Agencies and by implication VisitScotland. This resulted in the consolidation of VisitScotland's 14 tourism regions, which corresponded to that of the former ATBs, into six regions. The new structure went live on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. The effects of this remain to be seen.

#### TO CONCLUDE

The content analysis has provided a rich insight into the range of issues of concern to those, both public and private sector, with an interest in the structure of Scottish tourism. Issues included funding, clarification of roles, engagement, business involvement, local knowledge and the delivery of tourism information. However, the analysis also suggests that explicit opposition to the disbandment of the ATBs was relatively strong (two thirds of responses) and that only around one sixth of the responses explicitly supported their disbandment. This is in contrast to the interpretation offered in the Annexes of the consultation documentation. In conclusion, it is questioned whether inadequate attention to the issues raised in the evidence has given rise to the apparent dysfunctionality of the Scottish tourism industry.

#### ACRONYMS

ATB	Area Tourist Board
ATP	Area Tourism Partnership
B&B	Bed & Breakfast accommodation provider
CofC	Chamber of Commerce
COSLA	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
D&G	Dumfries and Galloway
DMO	Destination Management / Marketing Organisation
DMkO	Destination Organisation
HIE	Highlands & Islands Enterprise
LA	Local Authority
LEC	Local Enterprise Company
NDPB	Non-Departmental Public Bodies
PPP	Public-Private-Partnership
SE	Scottish Enterprise

<sup>27</sup> Scottish Parliament (2004b) "Interim Report on the Area Tourist Board Review", 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2004, Enterprise and Culture Committee Report, SP Paper 195, 7th Report, 2004 (Session 2)  
[[www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/enterprise/reports-04/elr04-07-01.htm](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/enterprise/reports-04/elr04-07-01.htm), last accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May 2008]

<sup>28</sup> Scottish Parliament (2007) "Official Report 26<sup>th</sup> September 2007 – Contents: ENTERPRISE NETWORKS" Official Report, Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament  
[[www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or-07/sor0926-02.htm#Col2071](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or-07/sor0926-02.htm#Col2071), last accessed 7<sup>th</sup> November 2008]

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SExec Scottish Executive  
TAG Tourism Action Group  
TIC Tourist Information Centre  
VS VisitScotland

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## **APPENDIX: Annexes A, B & C to the “Consultation on the Review of the Area Tourist Boards” (Scottish Executive, 2004)**

### **ANNEX A**

#### **OVERVIEW OF RESPONSES TO THE AREA TOURIST BOARD REVIEW**

1. The consultation on the review of the ATBs revealed a range of views on the future structure of local tourism support. Responses tended to be polarised between retention of the existing arrangements, and abolition or privatisation of the ATB network. Of those who favoured retention of the existing ATB arrangements, quite a number called for a reduction in the number of ATBs while retaining the basic structure. Many of these respondents also made a case for increased funding for ATBs and for tourism in general. A second and smaller group of respondents favoured more radical changes to the area tourism support structure.
2. However a number of common themes did emerge, as follows:
  - There needs to be a much more coherent way of integrating support for tourism businesses at the area level with the VisitScotland national tourism strategy;
  - The issue of adequate and equitable funding for the area tourism support mechanism was seen as crucially important;
  - There needs to be more clarity of public sector roles and responsibilities;
  - Particular gateway locations (especially Glasgow and Edinburgh) are of vital importance to tourism across Scotland;
  - Despite the increased use of the internet, there is a continuing role for local provision of information to visitors through some form of Tourist Information Centre network;
  - ATB boundaries are less relevant than before, or even irrelevant; and
  - Local authority input is vitally important, and they should maintain their involvement with tourism in their areas, as should the Local Enterprise Companies.
3. The one most often mentioned was the first - the need for a much more coherent way of integrating support for tourism businesses in each locality with the national tourism strategy being delivered by VisitScotland.

### **ANNEX B**

#### **OVERVIEW OF LOCAL AUTHORITY RESPONSE TO THE AREA TOURIST BOARD REVIEW**

1. Twenty eight (of 32) local authorities (LAs) responded. One or two were critical of the current structure and advocated change, but most were in favour of the status quo, but with more funding.
2. Most LAs supported local destination marketing to complement the VisitScotland national strategy. Some LAs stressed the distinction between the nature of rural and urban tourism, and their need to be marketed differently, with several commenting on the issue of cities as gateways to the rest of Scotland.
3. Most LAs stressed the benefits to be gained from Area Tourist Board (ATB)(s) having coterminous boundaries with LECs and LAs, since this would result in greater collaboration and addresses the acknowledged problem of duplication.
4. All of the responses were very much in favour of continuing the LA role in supporting tourism, including their core funding of ATBs. All LAs would like to see that role maintained and secured to allow for longer-term financial planning. Many LAs also felt that this enhanced role should be recognised with a formal LA/COSLA representation on the Board of VisitScotland. Practically all the LAs think that central services (pay, pensions etc) of the ATBs could be transferred to VisitScotland to make financial savings.
5. Two respondents argued that “in a small country such as Scotland it would make more sense if ATBs were fully integrated with VisitScotland and operate as a network.” Some LAs wished to see the link between ATBs and LAs strengthen to encourage greater cooperation between ATBs, they felt that structural change was desirable as there were currently too many ATBs, and they supported a closer marriage with VS.
6. The LA views can be summarised as follows:

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- Some in favour of structural status quo, but greater co-operation between ATBs;
- ATB central services transferred to VisitScotland;
- Coterminous boundaries for ATBs/LECs/LAs;
- Maintain/secure LA role in core -funding ATBs; and
- LA representation on VisitScotland Board.

**ANNEX C**

**OVERVIEW OF TOURISM BUSINESS RESPONSE TO THE AREA TOURIST BOARD REVIEW**

1. Few hotel groups or other examples of large tourism businesses responded directly; instead they relied on their trade associations to represent their views. These bodies, such as the British Hospitality Association, hotel associations or the Scottish Retail Consortium, include companies such as Hilton, Best Western, Macdonald Hotels, Jenners, Debenhams and Whitbread. The responses from these industry bodies are therefore representative of the views of a large number of significant tourism businesses across Scotland.
2. Almost all of them were united in their opposition to the current ATB structure, suggesting it was outdated, inefficient and uncoordinated. Two solutions emerged:
  - Some bodies felt that the number of ATBs should be reduced, and replaced by local branches of a VS network, ensuring national targets and priorities were adhered to.
  - Some bodies were more radical - abolish the ATBs completely, and leave it to local industry groups to support tourism at local level.
3. Generally, the tourism businesses can be summarised as follows:
  - Abolish or reduce number of ATBs;
  - Replace with some kind of centralised network under VisitScotland;
  - All marketing should be carried out at national level by VisitScotland; and
  - Businesses should be able to have all-Scotland membership of the network