

New law proposed to protect Welsh devolution

Welsh Ministers have serious concerns about the UK government's EU Withdrawal Bill, which, as currently drafted, allows the UK government to take control of devolved policy areas, such as farming and fishing, once the UK has left the EU.

Assembly members are being asked to consider the introduction of the Continuity Bill as an emergency bill, which seeks to transfer EU law in areas already devolved to Wales into Welsh law on the day the UK leaves the EU. This will provide Welsh businesses with the legal certainty and stability they have long called for.

The Welsh Government's preference remains for the UK government to amend their proposed EU Withdrawal Bill. But, as so much time has passed without any agreement between the governments on the amendments required, they need to proceed with the Continuity Bill as a fall-back option to protect Welsh devolution.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

"The EU Withdrawal Bill , as currently drafted, would allow the UK government to take control of laws and policy areas that are devolved. This is simply not acceptable to the Welsh Government, or the people of Wales who have voted for devolution in 2 referendums.

"Decisions taken now will affect Wales for decades to come. It is vital these decisions are made in a way that respects devolution.

"We remain constructive partners in talks with the UK government about changes to their EU Withdrawal Bill – and this remains our preferred outcome. However, we are running out of time and have developed our bill to prepare for a situation where the UK government does not adequately amend its bill to respect the devolution settlement.

"It would be irresponsible to refuse to give legislative consent to the UK government's bill while also not being prepared to put in place our own measures to give clarity about EU-derived law in Wales relating to devolved matters.

"Let me be clear, our bill will not be an attempt to frustrate or block Brexit. We are simply seeking to protect the current devolution settlement for Wales, while making sure there is legal certainty when the UK leaves the EU. This what Welsh businesses are calling for.

"The vote to leave the EU was not a vote to reverse devolution. The

current devolution settlement in Wales has been backed by 2 referendums – in 1997 and 2011. This bill is about respecting the will of the people of Wales.”