

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

First Delegated Legislation Committee

DRAFT FLAGS (NORTHERN IRELAND)
(AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2023

Tuesday 2 May 2023

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Saturday 6 May 2023

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chair: CAROLINE NOKES

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|---|--|
| † Afriyie, Adam (<i>Windsor</i>) (Con) | † Hunt, Tom (<i>Ipswich</i>) (Con) |
| † Antoniazzi, Tonia (<i>Gower</i>) (Lab) | † Largan, Robert (<i>High Peak</i>) (Con) |
| † Atherton, Sarah (<i>Wrexham</i>) (Con) | † Longhi, Marco (<i>Dudley North</i>) (Con) |
| † Baker, Mr Steve (<i>Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office</i>) | Osamor, Kate (<i>Edmonton</i>) (Lab/Co-op) |
| † Blunt, Crispin (<i>Reigate</i>) (Con) | † Poulter, Dr Dan (<i>Central Suffolk and North Ipswich</i>) (Con) |
| † Collins, Damian (<i>Folkestone and Hythe</i>) (Con) | † Winter, Beth (<i>Cynon Valley</i>) (Lab) |
| Creasy, Stella (<i>Walthamstow</i>) (Lab/Co-op) | Yasin, Mohammad (<i>Bedford</i>) (Lab) |
| † David, Wayne (<i>Caerphilly</i>) (Lab) | |
| † Elmore, Chris (<i>Ogmore</i>) (Lab) | Zereena Arshad, Bethan Harding, <i>Committee Clerks</i> |
| † Henderson, Gordon (<i>Sittingbourne and Sheppey</i>) (Con) | † attended the Committee |

First Delegated Legislation Committee

Tuesday 2 May 2023

[CAROLINE NOKES *in the Chair*]

Draft Flags (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2023

4.30 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr Steve Baker): I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the draft Flags (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations.

I am most grateful to you, Ms Nokes, and to all members of the Committee for being here today. The draft regulations seek to align flag flying days in Northern Ireland with the rest of the UK, as agreed in the New Decade, New Approach agreement. Following the sad passing of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II last year, a number of changes have been made to flag flying days in the UK.

The updated list of designated days for 2023 was published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on 9 February and states that all dates related to Her late Majesty the Queen are removed and several new entries relating to His Majesty the King are added, including the coronation day. A new flag flying day will also be added for the birthday of the Queen Consort, and the date of the Prince of Wales's birthday will be amended.

The Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 provided that on certain designated days the Union flag, and in certain circumstances other flags, must be flown on Government buildings. For the purposes of the regulations, a Northern Ireland Government building is a building wholly or mainly occupied by members of the Northern Ireland civil service. The 2000 regulations also set out a number of so-called specified buildings at which the Union flag must be flown on the designated days in question. Those buildings were chosen as they are the headquarters of the Northern Ireland Government Departments. In 2002, the provisions of the regulations were extended to court buildings in Northern Ireland.

In January 2020, New Decade, New Approach saw the restoration of devolved government in Northern Ireland after an almost three-year impasse. That agreement contained a UK commitment to update

“the Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 to bring the list of designated flag flying days from Northern Ireland government buildings and court-houses into line with the DCMS designated days, meaning the same designated days will be observed in Northern Ireland as in the rest of the UK.”

The draft regulations will align flag flying in Northern Ireland with the 2023 DCMS guidance and the policy followed across the rest of the UK. Prior to publishing

the list of designated days, DCMS consulted a range of stakeholders, and the updated designated days reflect the wishes of the palace.

The Government's approach to flag flying in Northern Ireland through the flags regulations has consistently sought to reflect Northern Ireland's clear constitutional status as an integral part of the United Kingdom, as well as the reality of the different political aspirations and sensitivities across society in Northern Ireland.

The Flags (Northern Ireland) Order 2000 also requires that consideration be given by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to the Belfast/Good Friday agreement when making or amending flags regulations. I can confirm that the Secretary of State is satisfied that the draft regulations have regard to that agreement and treat flags and emblems in a manner that is respectful of Northern Ireland's particular circumstances.

Our approach to flag flying in Northern Ireland through the flags regulations has consistently sought to reflect Northern Ireland's clear constitutional status as part of the United Kingdom, as well as the reality of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement and the different political ambitions within society in Northern Ireland. The draft regulations align flag flying in Northern Ireland with the rest of the UK while ensuring that the Government continue to meet their commitments in New Decade, New Approach.

4.33 pm

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Ms Nokes. I thank the Minister for bringing the regulations forward and I shall keep my remarks short.

This statutory instrument is pursuant to the accession to the throne of King Charles III and makes provisions for the flying of the Union flag over Government buildings in Northern Ireland on key days in his life and that of the Queen Consort. The sad passing of Queen Elizabeth II after 70 years of rule laid the foundations for these changes and I would like to take this opportunity to once again pay tribute to her for her lifetime of service. On visits to Northern Ireland, particularly in the later years of her reign, she advocated for the endurance of peace and reconciliation. That message still stands today.

The passing of a monarch invites a period of flux, which is felt keenly as we look to the coronation of King Charles III this weekend. It is vital that communities in Northern Ireland feel represented during these huge changes to our country. The regulations represent sad but necessary changes that need to be made, and we will support them. Going forward, it is important that communication with the parties in Northern Ireland remains strong. It is vital that we work in the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland in the absence of an Executive. I thank the Minister once again for bringing the regulations forward and ensuring that Northern Ireland continues to be a valued part of the United Kingdom.

4.35 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I would be very grateful if the Minister could respond to a quick question about the language in the draft regulations, which refer to the

Queen Consort. I thought that Her Majesty was now Queen Camilla, Her Majesty the Queen, and that the term Queen Consort was now otiose.

4.35 pm

Mr Baker: I confess that my hon. Friend has me at a disadvantage and I cannot give him an authoritative answer today. I believe that Her Majesty will become the Queen after the coronation; that is my understanding and I will write to him to confirm the correct position.

I am most grateful to the Opposition and to all Members who have attended the Committee today. As I have said, the regulations seek to align flag flying days in Northern Ireland with those in the rest of the UK and we believe that they meet with general consent.

Question put and agreed to.

4.36 pm

Committee rose.

