

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

[Inquiry into Tourism](#)

Evidence from Wales Association of Self Catering Operators (WASCO) –
TOU 08

The National Assembly for Wales' [Enterprise and Business Committee](#) inquiry into tourism.

Written submission by

Wales Association of Self Catering Operators (WASCO)

Wales Association of Self Catering Operators (WASCO) has a membership of approximately 130 comprised of single property owners to agencies with in excess of 300 properties. In total our membership operates almost 2500 self catering properties ranging from 1 bedroom properties to castles located throughout Wales.

The objects of the Association are: -

to represent the collective interests of the members,

to provide an information service to members on all matters affecting the conduct of their self-catering businesses,

to promote the use of Members' self-catering accommodation and to encourage, promote and uphold high quality standards,

to organise conferences, seminars or workshops for members and others on any matters affecting self-catering businesses,

Our Response to the briefing Questions

- The clarity and strength of Wales's tourism "brand";

Whilst WASCO has no direct involvement in this issue members are aware of Mike Ashton's work which was commissioned by the Minister for BETs. To date the limited information available has not inspired any degree of confidence in our members.

WASCO view this as a vital element in developing an international presence for Wales. This should convey a warm and comfortable feeling to prospective clients.

- The effectiveness of Welsh Government attempts to maximise the value of the domestic tourism market;

WASCO recognises that there has been a recent improvement in the initiatives undertaken by VW but remains concerned at the disparity between spend by our major competitors notably Scotland. There is a need for better communication with the industry to maximise on media campaigns through coordinated action.

The recent "Have you Packed for Wales" campaign saw some improvements but comments received have observed that whilst there was commendable use of the Welsh Language (a feature which sets Wales apart) there was no subtitling or voice over to explain what was being shown. If campaigns marketing countries with other languages within Europe are broadcast they invariably are either in English or have voice overs or subtitling.

- The effectiveness of Welsh Government attempts to maximise the value of the international tourism market;

One of the major elements essential to effective representation on an international level is an up to date effective Website along with other media activity eg facebook and twitter. To date the efforts to establish such a website have drawn extensive criticism from our members. We have attempted to engage in a dialogue with those leading this project with limited success.

Without significant additional resources which seems unlikely at the present time WASCO believes it is likely to be more effective and probably best on balance to maintain the balance of spend of existing resources on building our main markets in the UK and Europe.

- Performance of Visit Wales compared with tourism development agencies in the rest of the UK;

There is sufficient information from sources such as ONS to demonstrate that Wales is being outperformed by the rest of the UK. The perception of many WASCO Members is that political decisions by government in both Westminster

and Cardiff have been taken without appropriate consultation with the industry which has caused disruption and dislocation to activity by VW.

This disruption would seem to be reflected in the lack of sufficient personnel with direct experience and knowledge of the Tourism sector within VW in addition to their technical expertise. This would appear to be particularly applicable to the development of an effective web presence.

- The success of Visit Wales marketing activities;

The general feeling expressed by WASCO members is that there is a lack of a spirit of partnership, insufficient consultation and poor communication.

At a time of declining resources from Public Funds it is all the more important for Government and VW to engage fully with the industry and local authorities to maximise the diminishing resources available and avoid costly duplication of time effort and resources.

- The work of Visit Britain as it relates to Wales, and the extent of coordination between Visit Britain and Visit Wales;

Anecdotal evidence suggests that this relationship is less than perfect. It would appear that there is an undue focus in VBs work on London and the South East.

- The sufficiency and effectiveness of Welsh Government resources targeted at promoting tourism and supporting Welsh tourism businesses, and whether it represents good value for money;

WASCO believes the current level of investment in Tourism is not reflective nor appropriate of the significant contribution Tourism makes to the Welsh GDP as evidenced in the BHA report of October 2011 "Hospitality in Wales: driving local economics and underpinning communities" and in the Welsh government Tourism Strategy 2013 – 20 "Partnership for Growth".

- How the Welsh Government monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of its tourism support and marketing activities;

It is felt and noticed that insufficient monitoring and analysis takes place. There is little if any consultation with the industry apart from the occasional telephone sampling. Our own member surveys have delivered far more detailed information with a much bigger sample rate. Eg VWs monthly occupancy survey covers approx 400 properties (units) WASCO's own surveys typically cover 1,000 plus properties.

Better monitoring and analysis should enable more effective targetting of limited resources.

- The use made of opportunities for funding and other support from the EU;

Given the significance of EU Funding within the overall budget for VW whilst it has funded some useful and beneficial activity WASCO do not believe it has always been used to best effect with a disproportionate allocation of funds to larger projects at the expense of micro businesses which often make a significant contribution to their local economy.

- The success of Welsh Government efforts to increase the quality of Wales's tourism offer;

WASCO has worked closely with VW over the issue of harmonisation of grading across the UK and believes this has achieved an improvement in the quality of self catering provision. However an increasing number of operators are questioning the value of grading. Members also report an increase in the number of non-graded properties in the self catering market. This should not be seen as an indication of the need for legislative measures requiring grading of properties but rather that the benefits to be derived from grading are more effectively communicated particularly to those operating ungraded properties.

- The extent to which the marketing and development of tourism in Wales makes the most of Wales's cultural, historical and natural assets;

WASCO believes that there has been considerable confusion within the marketing activity of recent years.

There is much within our heritage, language and geography to offer great opportunity without resort to the gimmickry which has characterised some of the marketing activity in the past.

- The impact of major events on Wales's tourism economy, and the success of Welsh Government attempts to maximise this.

WASCO is always pleased to recognise the efforts in attracting major events to Wales such as the Ryder Cup, Rally GB and the NATO Summit. Much of the beneficial impact of these events has been located in the south east of Wales – with the exception of Rally GB in 2013 which had a significant impact on Mid Wales. However the impact has tended to be shortlived with little discernible long term impact and benefit.