

Broad support for heritage steam exemption in the Lords' Environment Bill debate

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In a bid to secure the future of heritage steam, Heritage Railway Association (HRA) President, Lord Faulkner has received wide support for his proposed amendment (No. 279) to the Environment Bill during the Bill's committee stage in the Lords.

The amendment proposes that a specific exemption is placed in the Bill and enshrined in the Act when it finally passes, to protect heritage steam from any wider restrictions on the sale and burning of coal, such as those which now apply to domestic coal consumption in the UK.

In tabling the amendment, Lord Faulkner said: "We believe that the members of the heritage steam alliance – heritage railways, steamboats and ships, steam road vehicles, engineering museums and historic houses – are entitled to have confirmed the guarantee given by the noble Lord, Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park, in a private meeting on 25 May and repeated by him at Second Reading on 7 June, that they will be permitted to continue to burn coal. That guarantee should be placed in the Bill and enshrined in the Act when it finally passes.

At Second Reading, the noble Lord [Lord Goldsmith] said: 'The Government are very confident, as am I,

that heritage railways will continue to operate, because although our electricity systems will no longer rely on coal, it can still be used by a range of industries that need it'. – [Official Report, 7/6/21; col. 1306.]

“In our meeting a fortnight earlier, he said that banning heritage coal use would be a disproportionate response to the clean air and climate change agendas and would damage the great cultural and economic value of the steam sector to our tourism economy ... all Amendment 279 does is to put it beyond any doubt that the assurances Ministers have repeatedly given us that the heritage steam sector will remain in being have the force of law and cannot be reversed without fresh primary legislation.”

During the Lords' debate Chairman of the Steamboat Association Lord Forsyth of Drumlean, Lord Bradshaw, Baroness Neville-Rolfe and others all spoke in support of the amendment.

Baroness Neville-Rolfe said: “My Lords, like all noble Lords, I support this Bill in the round. Having said that, it contains hints of an ugly intolerance; it sometimes gives the impression that those responsible for it know all the answers. A more open attitude would pay dividends and avoid error. After all, a short while ago, some of the same people were confidently and wrongly demanding that we all switch to diesel engines. The truth is that science evolves and new discoveries are made all the time. Humility in scientific matters is essential.

“My concern in this group is with a small matter, economically speaking, where I fear an error could be made. It matters because this Bill could bring about the death of Thomas the Tank Engine and his or her nautical steamboat equivalent ...”

Referring to the support from his fellow peers in moving the amendment, Lord Faulkner said: “This is the strongest demonstration yet of the degree of support for our heritage steam case, particularly from the minister Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist, who was standing in for Lord ‘Zac’ Goldsmith, and from Lord Michael Forsyth, fresh from his run on *The Jacobite*.

“Wanting to preserve heritage steam's right to burn the coal we need doesn't mean we are not committed to being as green as we can. Heritage Railway Association members are involved in trials of a new bio coal this month and we are working with Network Rail to support research in bio fuels.”

The HRA has already previously met with the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Media, Culture and Sport, to lobby to preserve the future of the heritage rail industry which sees 13 million visitors a year, provides 4,000 jobs and has 22,000 active working volunteers. Heritage rail, together with the wider heritage steam sector, also contributes well over £1billion on the national economy.

The heritage steam lobby is hopeful of protecting its future as precedents have been set – for example: permitting historic vehicles to be driven in the Transport for London Low Emission zone after its introduction in 2020. The Irish government has also been reviewing coal burning and has confirmed that it will not ban the use of coal for heritage purposes.

Over the summer recess Lord Faulkner will consult further with colleagues who signed his amendment ahead of report stage for the Bill and voting on amendments in the autumn.

Photo credit: Heritage Railway Association