

# Scottish Conservatives to support bulk of emergency legislation

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The Scottish Conservatives will support the majority of proposals tabled tomorrow as part of Holyrood's emergency response to the coronavirus.

However, amendments will be sought on plans to change Freedom of Information laws and to scrap jury trials.

The party said the SNP government's bid to extend the length of time public bodies are allowed to respond to FoI requests should be restricted to health boards and local authorities only.

And MSP Murdo Fraser said alternatives could also be looked at to avoid the complete shutdown of jury trials.

He added that the bill could be scrutinised by a body made up of the Scottish Parliament's party leaders, which should ensure new powers under the bill are properly reviewed and checked regularly.

## **Scottish Conservative MSP Murdo Fraser said:**

"These are extraordinary times and, as such, call for extraordinary measures.

"We are supportive of the majority of the Scottish Government's proposals, and understand the motivation behind them.

"There are some amendments we would like to make, such as removing the proposal to end jury trials.

"Trial by jury for serious criminal cases has been part of the Scottish justice system for hundreds of years.

"It is an important safeguard of human rights which we would be most reluctant to see removed.

"We believe there are ways to work around that particular problem without ending trial by jury altogether.

"And we think the FoI extensions should be granted to the NHS and councils only – we don't agree there's an overall justification for the Scottish Government itself to be afforded this change.

"These measures have to come in fast but, like all legislation, must be scrutinised too.

"That's why we want to see a special 'super-committee' – perhaps made up of

party leaders – who could provide that scrutiny in the most urgent way possible.”