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'Hobby' comment prompts wrangle

GAELIC SUPPORTERS HIT BACK AT CRITIC

A DEBATE about the relevance of Gaelic struck a sore spot at the weekend when one panellist dubbed the language "a hobby".

Wick businessman Harry Gray made the comment during a forum in the town organised by the committee in charge of this year's Royal National Mod, which will be held in Caithness in October.

Mr Gray took issue with the resources being spent on promoting Gaelic, although he acknowledged the place that Gaelic had in the cultural heritage of Caithness.

But he said: "I'm not too sure how successful the Gaelic plan has been - I think it's gone too far."

"I don't see any need for (bilingual) signs going up in hospitals or outside libraries."

"I'd say that Gaelic is a hobby, the same as Caithness dialect is, and I'm more concerned about the demise of Caithness dialect than about the demise of Gaelic."

Fellow panellist James Campbell, from Thurso, claimed the Gaelic lobby was one of the most powerful in Scotland.

He said: "It's a minority movement, with the backing of the Gaelic Act - they are ramming it down our throats."

Art Cormack, who chairs Bord na Gaidhlig, took umbrage at the "hobby" remark, saying that Gaelic was the language he speaks daily at home and at work.

"It's certainly not a hobby," said Mr Cormack. "It's a way of life."

He continued: "A whole swathe of Scottish culture would be lost if Gaelic disappeared."

Mr Cormack said he doubted whether there had been a part of Caithness where Gaelic had not been spoken at some time in the past.

He said: "The place is littered with place-names that have Gaelic origins."

"That seems to indicate to me that Caithness has a strong Gaelic heritage."

The debate on Saturday afternoon regularly returned to the row over whether Caithness should have bilingual signs.

Most of the 70-plus people present agreed the language was relevant, though the controversial policy of introducing bilingual signs into the county failed to win majority support.

A call was also made to support the flagging fortunes of Caithness dialect.