

## **Our policies for rural Scotland**

Almost 30 per cent of us live in areas of Scotland classified as rural. Many issues that concern people in rural Scotland also concern people in towns or cities – such as affordable housing, the health service or the economy. Other issues may mean very little to urban Scotland, but are of particular concern to our fishermen, farmers or forestry workers.

But, wherever you live, ensuring a prosperous and sustainable future for our rural and coastal communities is something we all want to see.

### **Developing the rural economy**

The SNP will place economic growth and enterprise at the centre of our commitment to revitalise rural Scotland. We will support the economic development of existing industries, and promote new ones, as well as ensuring that rural amenities and public services are of a high standard. We will implement an aggressive tourist marketing strategy to boost visitor numbers and develop a green jobs strategy, based on the enormous potential of renewable energy, ensuring that rural Scotland plays a central part in our national economic regeneration.

### **Supporting business**

The SNP wants Scotland to be a competitive, prosperous and aspirational small nation. We believe in the talent and ingenuity of Scotland's people and our ability to participate successfully in the world market.

We will lower corporation tax to 20 per cent and reduce business rates to below the English level. We will also reduce business burdens. We will only introduce regulations once they have been adopted by a majority of our EU

neighbours, unless there is a clear benefit to Scotland of early adoption. And we will refocus the business support network by directing its attention on key tasks through a trimmer Scottish Enterprise.

### **Green jobs**

We will invest in a green jobs strategy, focused on the development of Scotland's huge renewable energy potential. Scotland has 25 per cent of Europe's wind capacity, 25 per cent of Europe's tidal resource and 10 per cent of its wave power. There are huge, untapped opportunities for offshore energy production.

Indeed, the opportunities offshore for these technologies dwarf the potential for onshore wind development. In many parts of Scotland, large-scale onshore projects encounter understandable public concern and so the overwhelming bulk of wind developments should be offshore – like the thousand mega-watt development in the Beatrice oil field.

Onshore developments should be community based and have clear community benefits.

We will increase research and development investment in renewable energy technologies to harness this immense potential and turn it into a profitable and environmentally sustainable industry. We want Scotland to become the renewable energy centre of Europe. But Westminster doesn't. Instead, the UK government wants to charge electricity generators in the north of Scotland for connecting to the national grid—while they subsidise generators in the south of England for doing the same thing.

That means that if you wanted to build an offshore windfarm in the Moray Firth the government would charge you. But if you wanted to build

it on top of Big Ben, they would pay you instead.

The SNP is fighting to stop Westminster sabotaging our future in renewable energy but we need your support to win. We want to meet our current and future energy requirements in a clean, sustainable way, which also generates jobs for Scotland. We can only do it with Independence.

### **Connectivity**

Connectivity is vital for a vibrant economy. Scotland has lagged behind other small European countries when it comes to take-up and coverage of broadband services in rural areas. The SNP will ensure that we lead from the front.

And as well as delivering complete access to broadband across Scotland the SNP also supports new initiatives to provide wireless access. Wireless access to the internet allows businesses become truly mobile, and opens up the marketing opportunities of the world wide web to everyone, wherever they are.

The SNP will pilot a wi-fi initiative for the north east of Scotland. This will be a first step to making Scotland a wireless nation.

### **Transport**

The maintenance of direct and affordable air, sea, and rail links will be crucial for our future success. We will promote the development of Highlands & Islands airports and maintain key connections. We will implement a maritime strategy to improve sea links from northern Scotland to the central belt and northern Europe. And we will deal with the appalling state of many of our rural roads.

Our Scottish Trust for Public Investment will channel public and

private capital into transport infrastructure investment, prioritising in a way that combines democratic parliamentary debate with market testing through bond issues. This will mean cheaper finance and greater opportunities to renew our rural transport networks.

Good, affordable transport links are particularly important for remote and island communities. We will commission a wide-ranging study on how to make remote and island communities more accessible, drawing on the experience of countries like Norway, Sweden and Denmark. This will include a thorough analysis of the effect of introducing a road equivalent tariff scheme.

### **Agriculture**

Scotland relies on a high quality, high-value reputation in agriculture and we should build on these strengths. However much of the potential of this sector is not being realised. For a start, Scotland needs a direct voice in the EU to ensure that our interests are properly represented.

Agricultural policy shouldn't just be about securing a quality, affordable food supply, it should also attempt to ensure that rural farming and crofting communities prosper, and that issues such as depopulation and rural degradation are tackled. CAP reform should redirect money away from support based on production, and ensure that support is directed at rural communities.

In government, the SNP will strengthen control of agricultural imports and promote a workable organic farming plan and a fairer rural stewardship scheme. We will introduce single 'country of origin' labelling and a marketing scheme to take advantage of Scotland's high quality reputation. We will promote the interests of small farmers and

crofters and the emergence of new markets in the organic sector.

### **Genetic modification**

The introduction of genetically-modified (GM) crops to Scotland would undermine the reputation of Scottish farming and fly in the face of public opinion, introducing a product which consumers do not want, as well as threatening Scotland's reputation for a high quality natural environment. Once the GM genie is out of the bottle, it cannot be put back. The damage is irreversible. The SNP will therefore adopt the precautionary principle and introduce an immediate moratorium on GM crop trials in Scotland.

### **Fishing**

Scotland's fishing industry supports tens of thousands of jobs and generates billions of pounds of value in the Scottish economy. It should be buoyant but the white fish sector, in particular, has suffered years of mismanagement by Westminster and Brussels.

Famously it is now known that a UK civil servant described the industry as 'expendable' compared with Britain's wider European interests in the negotiations over Common Market entry in the early 1970s. This has been the hallmark of how successive governments in London have treated the fishing industry.

Fishing will benefit greatly from the level of priority given to it by an SNP administration in the Scottish Parliament, or indeed any government of an independent Scotland.

The SNP will continue to campaign for withdrawal from the Common Fisheries Policy and will not support a European Constitution which claims fishing policy as an 'exclusive competence' of the European Union.

We favour national resource control to produce policy which both conserves fish stocks and the livelihoods of fishing communities.

In the short term the SNP believes that quota ownership should be contained within the active fishing community. We will resist any further decommissioning programme, offer a programme of assistance to the onshore service companies and provide increased funding for the promotion and marketing of Scottish fisheries products.

In the medium term we propose a system of industry management of the fishery, including the appointment of advisers from the industry itself to assist with fisheries negotiations, reporting to Parliament through a Cabinet ranked Fisheries Minister.

### **Aquaculture**

Produce from fish farming represents nearly half of Scotland's food exports and is a significant source of employment in peripheral areas of the Highlands and Islands. The SNP recognises the higher environmental standards the industry is achieving, although continued progress will be required.

We will introduce a one-stop shop for producers so that they deal with one body, not a plethora as at present, and we will simplify and streamline bureaucracy. We will also encourage development of, and diversification in, farming other species. With Independence, we will scrap the rental of seabed payable to the Crown Estates Commission.

### **Forestry**

Current forestry legislation needs updated and reformed to ensure the industry has a sustainable future. We support the expansion of multi-purpose forestry cover in Scotland, which would bring an additional green

jobs boost. We will also promote biodiversity, and encourage the re-development of Scotland's native woodland.

We believe local communities should have a greater say in the management of their woodlands, and will allow for activities other than on-site operations. In order to develop the industry we must ensure that there is a diverse market for our forestry as it reaches maturity. This includes developing a procurement policy more sympathetic to the use of local timber, as well as the promotion of exports.

We also recognise that there are significant opportunities for Scottish forestry in the development of biomass renewable energy schemes, and our involvement in this emerging market will be developed. The SNP's support for sustainable housing will also increase demand for indigenous timber.

### **Tourism**

Tourism is vital in many parts of rural Scotland, yet our tourist sector faces increasingly stiff competition from other European destinations.

To reverse this, the SNP will launch an aggressive marketing strategy focused on selling Scotland to our key markets and boosting visitor numbers. We will also refocus the work of VisitScotland from its current regulatory role to that of an effective marketing body. In order to compete, Scotland must become more accessible and more affordable as a holiday destination. Good transport links are essential, including direct air links.

### **Affordable housing**

Lack of affordable housing in rural areas frustrates individuals, undermines communities and is one of the biggest inhibitors of economic growth. Young people and families

are being forced out of rural Scotland because they can't afford a roof over their heads, adding to the depopulation that is draining the lifeblood from too many of our communities.

The SNP will increase the number of homes being built in the social rented sector to meet current and future needs, as well as reforming the planning system, ensuring there is adequate water and sewage infrastructure to support housing developments and addressing unnecessary constraints on the supply of land.

We will also do more to help first time buyers. The high cost of home ownership is often a huge obstacle to young people and families who want to settle down. We welcome measures aimed at supporting home ownership, such as shared equity schemes, but we will go further.

We will introduce a first time buyers' grant of £2000 for every first time buyer – a policy already successful in Australia – to help with the costs and outlays for those buying their first home. Together with our policies to boost the Scottish economy, this will provide a real incentive to keep more of our young people in rural Scotland.

### **Health services**

Since 1999 NHS waiting times and lists have increased to record levels. Fewer patients are being treated now than when Labour took office. And hospital services all over Scotland are at risk of being downgraded or closed altogether – which means that many expectant mothers and people needing urgent accident and emergency treatment will have to travel further to get the care they need.

Those who work in the NHS do Scotland proud. But Labour and their

Liberal Democrat partners in government have failed to get to grips with the problems in our health service. The SNP will take action to address the core problems that are holding the NHS back.

We will tackle staff shortages in the NHS. We will train 100 extra doctors every year. And we will offer practical incentives – for example, the reimbursement of fees – to doctors who come from other countries to study here, to stay on and work in the Scottish NHS when they graduate. We will target a recruitment campaign at the many thousands of qualified nurses in Scotland who do not currently work within the NHS. And we will press for changes to the European Working Time Directive which is currently putting so much pressure on our hospitals.

To get waiting times down faster, we will set up fast track diagnostic and treatment centres – within the NHS, not hived off to the private sector. We will keep health services local with a presumption against the centralisation of vital services such as maternity and A&E. To help support local services in the long term, we will train more generalist doctors, make full use of primary care services and support nurses and other health care professionals to reach their full potential.

We particularly recognise the importance of local health services in rural communities and will support the model of rural general hospitals.

We will also make health boards more accountable by ensuring that half of their members are directly elected by the public.

### **Tackling Scotland's dentistry crisis**

Access to NHS dentistry must be improved, not least to deliver the policy of free dental checks.

The SNP will provide better incentives for dentists to undertake preventative work and invest in their practices, in return for a greater commitment to the NHS. We will also reduce bureaucracy for dentists and simplify the fee scale.

We will increase the number of salaried dentists and expand the dental workforce by increasing the number of dental undergraduates and giving an enhanced role to complementary professionals.

We will also re-establish a third dental school in Scotland.

### **Education**

High quality early years education creates a lifelong appetite for learning. The SNP will increase the provision of free nursery education. We will move to a proper half-day of early years' education in nursery school. Every 3 and 4 year old will be entitled to more than 16 hours per week of free nursery education – compared to just 11 hours under Labour. That amounts to an extra 200 hours per year – an increase of 50 per cent.

This will be a first step towards the introduction of a comprehensive national early education and childcare system.

The SNP will cut class sizes, starting with a reduction in all Primary 1, 2 and 3 classes to eighteen pupils or less, and we will progressively reduce class sizes in later primary and early secondary education.

We will encourage pupils who want to, to pursue vocational education opportunities in S3 and S4. Vocational skills are just as important as academic qualifications and should be valued on an equal basis.

To ensure that all pupils enjoy the right conditions for learning, we will tackle the causes of indiscipline and

truancy in schools with a greater emphasis on early intervention to help children.

And to ensure adequate local provision of education, we will introduce a legislative presumption against closure of rural schools and tighten the regulations for closing all schools.

### **Safe communities**

The SNP believes that community policing is the best way to prevent crime, and making us all feel safer in our communities. Our communities want an increased police presence and a designated local police officer, who is an integral part of the community they serve. The vast amount of money that is being set aside to pay for compulsory ID cards could therefore be much better spent on increasing police numbers and matching local policing priorities to the needs of local communities.

But combating crime is about more than just catching criminals. We need to change the behaviour of the people who are committing crimes against us. If we don't, then we face only two alternatives - lock every criminal away for life or send people to prison for a time, release them and wait for many to reoffend. Neither is acceptable.

We need to build a firm but fair justice system that makes offenders take responsibility for their actions and face the consequences. Punishment for committing a crime is central to this process, but the prevention of further crimes is just as important. It is therefore in all of our interests that the justice system operates to help offenders change their behaviour.

### **Active communities**

Community involvement is the bedrock of democracy. We want to put people in control of their own communities and the decisions that

impact on their daily lives, which means we need to reinvigorate local democracy. Community Councils are the integral building blocks of this democratic renewal. At the moment, they are not functioning as effectively as they could be; they have few responsibilities and no resources. However, we believe they have the potential to engage - and change for the better - the communities they represent.

We will reform the role Community Councils with a view to making them more responsive, dynamic and representative. This will involve devolving greater responsibilities and budgets to them. However, a one-size-fits-all approach to Community Councils is not appropriate and so reform will be based on local flexibility.

### **Post offices**

Post offices and postal services are an essential part of cohesive rural communities. We will ensure they have a future by opposing Westminster's privatisation and competition plans, which threaten both the rural post office network and standards of service.

### **Quangos**

Many rural quangos have too much power and too little accountability. Some are necessary but all need to be brought under proper control and scrutiny. We will identify and reform those quangos that create barriers to development and don't respond to local needs.

**MAKE SCOTLAND MATTER**

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