



Alyn Smith

Members Conference 2012

Dear friend,

Welcome to this special conference edition of my newsletter for SNP members.

Our annual get-together is one of the highlights of the party's year - not just so we can debate policy, but also to hear from key people, bounce around ideas, meet friends old and new - and, of course, enjoy ourselves! I'll see you at the karaoke!

Conference is an event I always look forward to - not just for all these things, but because it gives me a chance to spread the message about the work I'm doing in Europe and the important issues at EU level and beyond which affect us all.

As usual, there's loads to talk about, and you'll find plenty of information about what I've been doing recently in this newsletter.

I hope you find it informative and useful. Remember, you can register to receive it directly by logging on to the website alynsmith.eu, or just tell me your email address!

I'm particularly looking forward to the debate on NATO membership. It's an issue on which members have strong feelings, and I'm glad our discussions have been conducted with real passion on both sides, but also with intelligence, respect and maturity.

It's the sort of debate which shows the SNP at its best - principled, but also honest, open and tolerant of the views of others. While other political parties have turned their conferences into media-absorbed pantomimes, we are still prepared to discuss serious issues and conduct our policy discussions in public view. That's real democracy and I'm proud of it.

There are plenty of other debates too, all of them important, and I'm moving three motions. The first of these, on the Thursday, calls on the UK government to make it a legal requirement for nutritional information to be displayed on beer, wine and spirits.

People should know what they're drinking, then make their choices.

On the Friday, I'll be asking conference to note an exceptional 25 years of the ERASMUS exchange programme. It was Winnie Ewing's idea, and Scotland has been an enthusiastic participant in this initiative, which encourages higher education students and staff to teach or train in 33 European countries.

And on conference Saturday, I'm moving a motion acknowledging the great work being carried out all over Scotland by community organisations such as development trusts, allowing people to tackle local issues which really matter.

Away from the conference hall, I'm also hosting three fringe events. On Thursday, I'll be chairing a session on European procurement reforms which will mean a massive boost for the Scottish economy, and the third sector in particular.

On Friday, there'll be a discussion on how Scotland can have the best animal welfare standards in the world, and on Saturday, a lively fringe session on how EU funding is helping Scottish science feed the planet.

Please do come along - you'll find full details of all these events in the official programme.

If you've time at conference, please do come up and have a chat - whether we already know each other or not, I very much look forward to talking to you. See you there!

Yours for Scotland

Alyn Smith MEP



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Green Bosses See Red At UK Electricity Rip-Off

Leading figures within the Scottish renewables sector are publicly backing Alyn's campaign to change the way they are charged for delivering their electricity to the customer.

The current model of electricity transmission charging - which costs Scottish companies a fortune while actually subsidising competitors in the south of England - could threaten the viability of green generation in the Highlands and Islands, they have warned.

Alyn says that the existing system is "obscenely unfair". He is now taking legal action which could eventually see the UK government end up in the European Court of Justice.

He explains: "Scotland has the potential to lead the world in this area, but it is being held back by a series of London-made barriers and hurdles.

"Scotland has less than nine per cent of the UK's population and currently generates about 12 per cent of its electricity, but it pays about 40 per cent of the UK's electricity charges

while similar firms in Cornwall are actually subsidised. That's outrageous and it has to stop."

Many industry leaders agree and warn the high pricing could damage the industry. Niall Stuart, Chief Executive of Scottish Renewables, says: "It makes no sense for charges to be set at a level which could hold back developments," while Aquamarine Power boss Martin McAdam adds that with wave energy "projects have to locate where the waves are."

Alyn plans to present a dossier on the subject to the European Commission when he has finished amassing the evidence.

• As Scotland's representative on the European Parliament's Energy Committee, Alyn has backed a landmark vote there on energy efficiency which ensures member states are on course to achieve energy savings of 20 per cent by 2020.

Take the High Road to European Study

Secondary school pupils from across Scotland are considering going overseas to study as a result of a new Scottish Government initiative launched by Alyn...

Scotland Goes Global: The Year of Study Abroad aims to encourage youngsters and their teachers to think about spending time learning in other countries.

Alyn, who studied in Europe as a student under the EU's hugely successful ERASMUS programme which celebrates its 25th birthday this year, spoke at the launch about his personal journey and how much it has helped him.

He pointed out that initiatives such as ERASMUS help students boost their studies, learn about new cultures, pick up confidence and self-reliance and prepare themselves for international careers.

He told the audience: "It broadens your horizons and trains you to be adaptable and excel in whatever circumstances you find yourself in."

Islands Should Do It For Themselves

Scotland's islands deserve to have as much autonomy as they need and want after independence, Alyn has told an influential gathering of islanders which took place on Mull...

Speaking at the annual meeting of the European Small Islands Network, he said it was really the EU in action - a gathering of communities with strong and proud identities which could share experiences and learn from each other.

As a nice touch, the Isles of Scilly have at Alyn's instigation applied to join the Scottish Islands Federation as associate members, because, in the words of the Scilly Isles delegate "you have a government that works for you".

Independence, Alyn told delegates, didn't stop in Edinburgh. "My view is that we can, and should, create a new country where communities have as much autonomy as they want within a strong Scottish state itself within a wider European network.

"Maybe if we gave islands the power they need to help themselves, we'd see the talent and enthusiasm unleashed to all our benefit."

News In Brief

Alyn is calling for wide distribution of a new report of a study by Compassion in World Farming which shows that high quality animal welfare models, such as free range chicken and extensive pasture farming, produce healthier food.

The report demonstrates that these methods - as often used in Scotland - can produce meat and eggs with less fat, more vitamin E and iron and higher levels of antioxidants and Omega 3.

In another move associated with animal welfare, Alyn - who is also Honorary Vice President of the SSPCA - has condemned a barbaric Spanish blood fiesta in the town of Tordesillas where a bull is stabbed repeatedly and left to slowly die. He has called for a ban, following in the steps of Catalonia, which outlawed bullfighting last year.

Students at Dundee University heard about how Scottish independence in Europe will work when Alyn gave a talk and invited questions from the audience.

The event - partly organised by the university's Student Nationalist Association - allowed him to explain how the European Parliament works, the committee structure and an independent Scotland's position in the EU.

Alyn, who is Honorary President of both the Young Scottish Nationalists and Young Scots for Independence, says: "It was great to see everyone being engaged and wanting to know how Europe works. Hopefully those who came along will have found it useful."



Alyn with student supporters at Dundee University

Alyn has applauded a move by the European Parliament to turn proposed new EU-wide offshore oil and gas safety rules from stringent regulation into a more legally flexible directive.

As the only Scots member of the Energy Committee, he brought together industry experts and European Commission officials to discuss the issue, and lodged the amendment which led to the change.

"This is a victory for common sense," he says. "The proposed new rules would have been to the detriment of our already high standards in the North Sea. The adoption of the amendment is proof that the engagement strategy with workers and the industry has borne fruit.

"We are all committed to ensuring the highest health and safety and environmental standards possible. In Scotland, we take the issue very seriously indeed; having learned from previous disasters such as Piper Alpha."

Plans by the Scottish Government to legalise equal marriage have been given a warm welcome by Alyn. He said he was proud to be a part of the SNP and to see the party put tolerance and progress at the centre of its programme.

Marriage," he added, "is about two people who love each other and it is clear to see a majority of Scots agree with that view."

Getting In Touch

@ e-mail me at: alyn.smith@europarl.europa.eu

✍ Write to me at my office: **c/o SNP Headquarters, Gordon Lamb House, 3 Jackson's Entry, Edinburgh, EH8 8PJ**

📘 Find me on Facebook: **alynsmithSNP**

🐦 Follow me on Twitter: **@AlynSmithMEP**

💻 Visit me at my web site at: **www.alynsmith.eu** where you can also register for future issues of this newsletter.