



Alyn  
Smith  
February 2014

Happy New Year!

This is my first letter of 2014 and I hope it finds you in good health.

2014 has started as 2013 ended, seven day weeks and lots of doorsteps to knock.

It's going to be an exhausting year. With the referendum in September and European election in May, there's not going to be much time for any sort of break.

As we move closer to the election in May, it allows me to spend more time back here in Scotland. The campaign diary is beginning to fill up and it doesn't look like there is a place in the country that I won't be visiting over the next few months.

If you have not been in touch to get me to your patch yet, why not? I'll most likely have the area pencilled in already but if not, we can't have me missing anywhere.

The great thing about election campaigns is that it allows you to speak to so many people, and that's what I'll be doing. Already I've seen, as I'm sure many of you have, a shift taking place. More and more people are coming towards independence. Doors that were 'no' just a month ago, are now 'unsure' or leaning towards a yes vote.

The shift is definitely on and the momentum is clearly behind the Yes Scotland campaign.

The referendum, like the European election, is anyone's game if they work at it. We can't afford to take anything for granted and must work for every single vote. As I said, it's going to be an exhausting year. But it's also going to be an enjoyable one and one I'm sure nobody is going to forget.

I don't tend to use language like this, but we are blessed to be living in times like these. Books will be written about the days we are part of, and I have been inspired to see people working up and down the country like we have never worked before.

You'll find just a few things in this newsletter that I've been involved with this month that I hope you find interesting.

As always, please get in touch if you have an issue you want to raise with me or if there's something you want to make me aware of. You can reach me via email, facebook, twitter, the website or by picking up the phone.

Yours for Scotland,

Alyn Smith MEP



The Greens | European Free Alliance  
in the European Parliament

Design and typesetting by Patrick Robertshaw, Edinburgh: [splateagle.com](http://splateagle.com)



# Equal Marriage Arrives In Scotland



The Scottish Parliament has now voted into law equal marriage, meaning that same-sex couples are to have the same right to marriage as heterosexual couples.

The debate in Scotland has, in general, been conducted well and the mature way in which we went about the process is a testament to our society. We've had our own discussion and delivered what I (and the majority of Scots) believe - that equality is a key part of Scottish society.

We now join our European neighbours England and Wales, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, France,

Belgium, Portugal and Spain. Further afield, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and some US and Mexican states have also taken the step, but of the 193 members of the United Nations, that's it.

Being gay remains illegal in umpteen countries, meaning there's a lot of work still to be done but Scotland, through this legislation, has helped make a positive contribution. We should all be proud of that.

You can read Alyn's piece for the Sunday Herald on equal marriage here: <http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/home-news/scotland-can-be-proud-of-itself-but-the-fights-not-over-yet.23324214>

## Major Opportunity For Scots Exports



image: Sébastien Bertrand, via flickr under CC-BY 2.0  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>

The European Commission has published a revised funding package for the promotion of agricultural products, which promises to be a "major opportunity for Scottish exports".

Although eligible schemes can target both the internal market and third countries, the Commission, as part of a new targeted strategy, wants to focus on external markets, with a higher EU funding rate and an aim to spend 75% of the budget on these measures, coordinated with potential free trade deals.

This is a golden age for Scotland's food and drink, thanks to the determined efforts of the Scottish Government to support expansion of the sector through our first ever National Food and Drink Strategy.

Overall food and drink exports increased from £3.7 billion in 2007 to £5.3 billion in 2011, while our red meat exports beyond the UK increased from £38m to £81m over the same period.

This fund is an added bonus for our producers and all Scottish food and drink organisations are encouraged to take the opportunity to apply.

# EU Hole In One For Scots Golf Clubs

An EU ruling means that Scottish golf clubs could be in line for windfalls of thousands of pounds. The European Court of Justice has ruled that current VAT exemptions should not be restricted to just members of not-for-profit clubs, meaning that golf clubs across Scotland could start reclaiming VAT from the UK treasury which was paid on non-members for over a decade.

## In Brief

**Irn Bru was almost banned from Canada** last week after a misunderstanding saw a shopkeeper in Sakatoon, Saskatchewan have a shipment confiscated. Alyn was quick to interject in the debate and jovially suggested a retaliation ban on Justin Bieber and Celine Dion entering the EU.



The misunderstanding was soon cleared up however, after the Canadian Government issued a statement clarifying that Irn Bru was allowed in the country. Alyn sent Bieber and Dion a case of Irn Bru each to show that there was no hard feelings.

**Scotland's International exports reach £26 billion.** The USA remains the largest single country market for Scottish exports totalling £3.6 billion in 2012. This is followed by the Netherlands (£2.7 billion), France (£2.2 billion) and Germany (£1.5 billion). John Swinney said that 'with independence Scotland will be able to build its own more effective overseas representation to promote our good and services to the world and tackle trading barriers that are not being addressed by the Westminster Government.'

The decision from the ECJ is a welcome one and it's good to see that common-sense shone through. It's been a very difficult time for golf clubs across Scotland with the financial downturn resulting in many clubs losing members.

However, 2014 is set to be Scotland's year of sport and this ruling has certainly provided a good start.

The Ryder Cup and Commonwealth Games will be great sporting events but the legacy they leave will perhaps be more important. It's just as much about ensuring more people get involved in sporting activity as it is about the events themselves."

**Alyn visited the Edinburgh school for the blind and visually impaired** earlier this month to talk about their expanding collaboration with Europe and their aspirations for the future. The Royal Blind School is a perfect example of a school that, through the Comenius programme, successfully engages with our European partners for the benefit of our children.



This collaboration on a European level means that a delegation from the Royal Blind School was able to travel to Sweden and Luxembourg to exchange ideas with participants from eight other countries, and the school was also proud to host international delegations here in Edinburgh.

## Contact Alyn

@ [alyn.smith@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:alyn.smith@europarl.europa.eu)

 c/o SNP Headquarters, Gordon Lamb House, 3 Jackson's Entry, Edinburgh, EH8 8PJ

f [alynsmithSNP](https://www.facebook.com/alynsmithSNP)

 @AlynSmithMEP

 [www.alynsmith.eu](http://www.alynsmith.eu)