



## New Shadow Cabinet Responsibility

Having been newly appointed Shadow Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, I have spent these last two weeks on a number of important outdoor visits and also engaging with several key stakeholders in this policy area. I am lucky that I already have good contacts with bodies such as the National Parks (thanks to a huge amount of work that was undertaken by the late Sir Alex Fergusson after he retired from his role as Presiding Officer in Holyrood), the NFUS, the Forestry Commission in Scotland and the Scottish Landowners Association. There are however, many other groups who I am keen to meet in the coming weeks to hear about their priorities for environmental policy, and most especially about the implications for them of the forthcoming SNP bill on the circular economy and the landmark UK Government Environment Bill.

Within 48 hours of being appointed to this new role, I was invited to visit some of the flood sites in Perth and Kinross which were so badly affected by the extreme weather on 11th August and also two of the sites in Fife and Perth and Kinross where irresponsible "camping" in recent weeks has caused serious disturbance to local communities but also damage to the environment and the local eco-system.



As I mentioned in a previous newsletter, the environment ranks first or second (to education and training) in the list of policy priorities for younger voters so

please read this comment from one of our Mid Scotland and Fife election campaign group, **Noah Khogali**.

*Preservation of the environment is just one example of a fundamentally 'Conservative' ideal that has, for too long, been monopolised by the left. With environmental policy rapidly becoming the most important issue for young voters, it is more important than ever that it is reiterated that conservation of Britain's natural heritage and Conservatism go hand in hand. The Conservative party have always been the party of long term solutions - not just focusing on bettering Britain in the short term, but looking to what we leave our children and grandchildren.*

*Groups of young Conservatives passionate about the environment, such as the British Conservation Alliance, are desperately trying to wrestle control of the environmental debate away from radical leftist groups like Extinction Rebellion - and are succeeding in doing so.*

*As more and more young people open their eyes to the importance of the climate debate, ever more are realising in tandem that capitalism built on competitive energy markets, innovation and personal responsibility will provide the solutions that we need to save the environment.*

*The Conservative and Unionist Party have always been, and will always be, the party of real solutions to very real problems. We are forward thinking, pragmatic and innovative. That is what young people have been so desperately looking for in the environmental debate and it is what the Conservative and Unionist party must continue to offer moving forward.*



## The blight of irresponsible camping

On 14th August, Councillor Roz McCall (Strathearn ward) and I met the St Fillan's community council chairman, Stewart Gavigan, secretary, Ruth Graham, and Keep Scotland Beautiful representative, Barry Fisher, to discuss what can be done to address the deeply worrying increase in irresponsible camping on the south side of Loch Earn. We were taken to see the damage caused and to watch some of the videos taken by local residents who had had to endure noise and disruption across whole weekends, sometimes well into the small hours of the morning. We were both horrified by what we saw and by what we were being told.

What was very encouraging however, was the determination amongst the local community to address this issue and, along with the police, both Roz and I are doing everything we can to support them. The new community council in St Fillan's is both well organised and extremely well informed about what is happening to the loch-side. Indeed, it was very impressive to see their commitment to stamp out this type of anti-social behaviour.

It may be a small minority that are causing this destruction but their "fishing visits" to the area, often from west of Scotland locations, are extremely unwelcome and a major worry for Strathearn. Apart from that, they are driving away those who act responsibly and respect the countryside code at every opportunity.



## John Swinney survives but only for now



In the short history of the Scottish Parliament there have only been four votes of no confidence. I recall two of them and on 13th August, I spoke in the debate preceding the vote of no confidence in John Swinney.

It was not just a vote of no confidence in his handling of the SQA situation. It was much wider than that. It related to a long line of SNP failures in education since 2016; to the fiasco over primary school tests, the narrowing of subject choice, the fact that Curriculum for Excellence has failed to deliver better academic results, the disgraceful named person policy and, more recently, the botched “blended learning” approach and the recent SQA chaos.

No parliamentarian takes any pleasure in participating in a vote of no confidence (despite what some in the media might think) but when failure has become endemic and our children’s futures are at stake, then enough is enough. It is little wonder that so many voters said John Swinney should have resigned.

My full speech can be read here;

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12742&i=115242&c=2267577>

## The whole truth and nothing but the truth



Thanks to the Permanent Secretary, we now know officially that Nicola Sturgeon was aware of complaints against Alex Salmond for five months before she admitted she knew anything. Likewise, in November 2017, Lesley Evans warned Nicola Sturgeon about an “incident” at Edinburgh Airport in which Alex Salmond was allegedly involved.

At the first session of the Holyrood committee, which is investigating the Scottish Government’s handling of the complaints, it also emerged that the scale of the evidence which the Scottish Government is, as yet, withholding from the committee, is significant, making the committee’s job even more difficult. Matters were further complicated when certain, perfectly reasonable questions asked by MSPs, including by Murdo Fraser, were ruled out of order. Nonetheless, enough answers – or, more accurately non-answers – emerged to raise even more questions about this whole sordid affair.

Given that each witness at the committee is giving evidence on oath which compels them to speak the whole truth and nothing but the truth, the events of the first committee session have, quite rightly, been a focus of considerable attention. The political reputations of the protagonists may be at stake but so too is the integrity of government and that is a matter that must concern us all.

The inquiry will proceed next week and will explore whether Nicola Sturgeon

broke the ministerial code by remaining in contact with Alex Salmond during an investigation by her officials. Watch this space.

## The glorious 12th



As a result of Covid19, it was not clear if this year's red grouse shooting season could go ahead but thanks to the efforts of various countryside organisations to put in place additional safety and hygiene measures it opened in traditional fashion. Grouse shooting which, in Scotland runs from 12th August -10th December, is estimated to be worth around £32m a year, it supports 11,000 jobs in Scotland and it is crucial to boost local rural business - something that is critical to many parts of Perthshire.

As everyone knows, grouse shooting has become increasingly controversial because of the efforts of various campaign groups and conservationists who argue that grouse shooting fosters the illegal killing of birds of prey such as hen harriers on the moorlands used for grouse. But set against these concerns is

the work being undertaken by the moorland associations and by estate landowners and managers to ensure grouse shooting is properly managed and ecologically sustainable. As well as this, groups representing the shooting industry, gamekeepers and landowners adopted stiffer policies earlier this year to ensure there is a zero tolerance towards the illegal killing of birds of prey.

## A message from the Gamekeepers' Association



You don't often have the hours in the day to turn your hand to much else at this time of the year but after seeing some of the material on social media over the weekend, I thought I'd take a little time to address some of it.

People are rightly angry when there are cases of wildlife crime. I get it. So am I. It kicks the guts from you, but the lack of perspective on this issue is, I believe, presently, off the scale. I am quite staggered at how poisonous things have become, that venom being fuelled by unhealthy doses of misinformation. I only hope that those who are paid to represent constituents take the time to build their knowledge before making big decisions.

There are co-ordinated groups now operating whose reason for existing is to end shooting. They can weaponise big PR and political campaign budgets against busy land managers and their families, trying to make a living. Paid investigators are dispatched across the country from Edinburgh and Glasgow in search of the emotive picture to try to force legislation and to lobby. The invasion is relentless.

The commentary has become increasingly extreme as animal rights groups have become embedded at the centre of the Scottish political scene, trying to force the licensing of grouse moors. Perhaps they will succeed and move onto the next target, leaving the anarchic destruction behind them. You would have thought that, if the case was that strong, you wouldn't have to do things like fit

up fake photos on 'reports' and spout endless fiery rhetoric.

One commentator suggested that SGA and BASC members are killing all Scotland's eagles, forcing them to be reintroduced. What planet are people living on? The Golden Eagle population has never been higher than it is now in Scotland, donor eagles from game estates are currently bolstering the South of Scotland Golden Eagle project and when 59 young eagles were sent to Ireland for their reintroduction project, most of those eagles came from game estates, where productivity is high. Please acknowledge the truth.

All industries, at all times, can improve. Since the Parliament was opened, we have had more change than most industries to deal with. Deer management is under constant review, there were major changes in the Wane Act, snaring has changed, trapping has changed, seasons have changed, muirburn is regularly reviewed, we've had Werritty, 2 land reform acts, sporting rates, Vicarious Liability, General Licence withdrawals, regular General Licence reviews and the recent Animals and Wildlife Bill. These are just off the top of my head- there's been more. This is an industry constantly being reviewed and scrutinised but yet we continue to provide many benefits.

I hope politicians understand fully what is at stake and the type of tactics that are now on the go to discredit working land managers. There's a sniper round every corner for us but we are proud of what we've given back to our country, in peacetime and war of wetlands and woods for shooting, rural stewardship and the preservation of a culture which maintains work and opportunities for families to live in remote places rather than community being eroded through purchases of second homes and Airbnbs.

Alex Hogg

Chairman of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association.

## Thank you to McCains



As we see the combine harvesters in our fields, they are a reminder that we are so privileged to enjoy some of the highest food standards anywhere in the world. Nonetheless, life is becoming increasingly tough for many who are growing and exporting potatoes. Three seasons of very challenging weather conditions plus the serious effects of Covid19 have placed real pressures on many farmers.

So it was very good to hear that McCains have stepped up to the mark, guaranteeing an additional £25m support fund to help with irrigation measures, specialised machinery and new initiatives to attract more workers into the industry.

It was also very good to hear that McCains have been assisting those who have been supporting local communities where many families have found it difficult to acquire basic foodstuffs during the pandemic.

That willing assistance for local communities is given in exactly the same spirit as those Perth based food outlets which donated free take away meals for all the families badly affected by the recent floods. Just like the challenges in farming, these floods were yet another reminder of the serious effects of climate change and the responsibility we have to look after our environment.

## Bank closures



Right across the area, we continue to see more closures of local bank branches. This month it has been the turn of NatWest following hard on the heels of the Royal Bank of Scotland Bank of Scotland in Comrie and the imminent closures of branches in Kinross and Auchterarder and the Clydesdale in Crieff. Along with local councillors, I am continuing to lobby bank officials to see if there can be a moratorium until the effects of the pandemic are better under control. Town centres and local businesses have suffered enough with banks disappearing too.

## The centenary of Chatham House



Occasionally, politicians are privileged to be invited to speak at a Chatham House event. For me, this has happened only once - a few years ago when Jim Naughtie hosted an event about Scotland's place in the international community. It was a fascinating evening, full of forthright but extremely well informed and respectful debate (perhaps Holyrood could learn a few tricks of the trade!) and one of these occasions - too few in number these days - which makes you think deeply about your political convictions.

2020 is the centenary of Chatham House as the Royal Institute of International Affairs, devoted to the study of international affairs and fiercely independent of government. Housed in the magnificent Chatham House in St James's in London it is steeped in history having been at one time residences for William Pitt, the Earl of Chatham, Edward Stanley, the Earl of Derby and Prime Minister Gladstone. The famous "Chatham House rules" allow politicians to speak off the record without fear or favour - a welcome release from the relentless world of "normal politics". Chatham House is an institution to be cherished and I wish it well on its centenary.

**Find Out More About Me Here**

**Perth & Conservative Website**



The Scottish Parliament Corporate Body is not responsible for the content of this publication or other internet sites.

I process personal data in line with my obligations under the general Data Protection Regulation. For more information, see my privacy notice here - <http://www.perthandkinrossconservatives.org.uk/privacy>