



The Internal Market Bill



Quite a number of constituents, including some readers of this e-letter, have written to me expressing their dismay at the possibility of the Westminster Government, most especially a Conservative one, breaking the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement which it signed (and fought a general election upon), and disregarding international law. I understand and share many of these concerns.

Clearly, the sight of five former Prime Ministers and two former Conservative Party leaders (a mixture of Leave and Remain in their views), plus the resignation of one senior law officer and a very critical House of Lords unnerved many people.

Let me set this controversy in context however.

The Internal Market Bill is essential for two reasons; firstly, to protect the internal trade flows

within the United Kingdom after the Brexit transition period and secondly, to ensure that there is no trading discrimination against any one part of the United Kingdom.

From a Scottish perspective, this is crucial given the dependence we have on rest of the UK trade (as they do with us). It matters hugely to jobs, investment, economies of scale and, of course, to economic growth.

It is therefore not a case of voting against the bill in principle but it is a case of amending it to ensure that the internal market is protected and that the possible transgression of international law is addressed. This debate will happen this week. One of the amendments, should it pass, will allow Parliament to vote on any contested clauses, including whether it is acceptable to break international law. This will give good scope for the controversy to be properly debated.

The other part of the context is, of course, the actions of the EU and whether they will uphold the integrity of their negotiations. There are some people who think they are bluffing, others who think they can't be trusted and others who think they can. The mood of Parliament this week will be interesting in this context!

The Hate Crime Bill



On 9th September, we used our Opposition Business time to demand that the iniquitous SNP Hate Crime Bill is withdrawn and completely re-drafted without the offensive part 2 of the current bill. This is the part which, if left alone, would curtail free speech and criminalise innocent people. It is the part which has caused very serious concern amongst the legal profession, specifically the Faculty of Advocates and the Law Society of Scotland, amongst

the police, churches and faith groups, journalists, many in the entertainment sector and amongst right-minded members of the public.

We did not win the debate to have the bill removed and re-drafted so we will now turn our attention to a whole host of amendments which will remove part 2.

My speech concentrated on the comparisons between the Hate Crime Bill and the Named Persons fiasco.

It took us six years to overturn the Named Person policy (at considerable expense to the taxpayer!) thanks to the fact that it took so long for the other parties to finally realise it was completely unworkable so hopefully we can amend the Hate Crime Bill a bit more quickly.

**Only the Scottish Conservatives
oppose the SNP's Hate Crime Bill
which could lead to freedom of
speech being criminalised**

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Save Your Outdoor Centres – They Are Never More Needed Than Now

Third Force News Article;

Liz Smith MSP on why she's championing the Save Your Outdoor Centres campaign in the Scottish Parliament #NeverMoreNeeded

If Covid-19 has taught us anything it is just how much we have come to rely on the voluntary sector. Its work – often unsung and as challenging as that undertaken by those who are on the frontline in our public services – has been a lifeline for many families, most especially those who have suffered the most.

I want to pay tribute to SCVO for the work it has done to support young people's education and wellbeing during this very difficult time and, most especially, for initiating the Never More Needed campaign to support the sector.

I think I was one of the first people to sign the [Save Your Outdoor Centres petition](#) following which I lodged a motion in the Scottish Parliament and requested a member's business slot from the presiding officer so that the whole issue can be properly debated. This was immediately granted and the debate will happen on 22 September. I am pleased to say it is already attracting a huge amount of interest.

I come to this debate with two very personal experiences in mind; the first, from my own teaching days in the 1980s and 1990s, when I was privileged to take charge of several outdoor education projects across Scotland and the second, as an MSP since 2007, when I have been privileged to be on the receiving end of many emails over the years which have told me just how much constituents value the opportunities which outdoor education affords.

As everyone knows, education debates are, too often these days, all about numbers; the number of teachers, the number of SQA passes, the percentage scores in literacy and numeracy, class sizes, to name just a few. What we should be doing, is to turn our attention to more of the qualitative aspects of education – aspects which can never be reduced to numbers but which, I would argue, are just as important when it comes to developing life skills.

I have no doubt whatsoever that education in an outdoor environment provides one of the most valuable and rewarding learning experiences for a wide range of pupils, no matter their backgrounds or abilities.

There is widespread evidence from educational research that these experiences enrich the lives of the young people involved, that they provide them with a knowledge and appreciation

of environments and communities other than those with which they are most familiar, and that they help build confidence and self-esteem. In particular, these activities teach pupils leadership skills, the need for responsible behaviour and how to deal with new challenges and risk factors. Indeed, they often discover positive attributes they didn't know they had.

In an age when there is growing concern about young people's physical and mental health and lifestyles, and when there is also growing concern that many children from some of the more deprived areas do not get the same opportunities as their counterparts elsewhere, it is time to treasure our outdoor education centres in the same way that we treasure our schools.

Sadly, however, far too many of these centres now find themselves facing extremely challenging financial circumstances – so much so, that there is talk that around a third of them might have to close down. We simply can't allow that to happen, otherwise we would be guilty of discriminating against a whole generation of young people whose education would be devoid of something very special which goes well beyond what can be learnt in any classroom.



[Click here to see my video on the plight of outdoor centres](#)

Environmental Issues

It has been a busy couple of weeks in the environment port folio.

After the concerns raised by several game groups about the culling of red deer calves out of the normal culling season, I wrote to the Minister, Mairi Gougeon, to ask her to intervene. The early cull is unacceptable practice and is likely to leave the young calves starving to death on

hillsides and forests so I have asked for a change to policy. My call has been supported by deer managers and by gamekeepers.

Mairi Gougeon MSP
Minister for Rural Affairs and Natural Environment
The Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

7th September 2020

Dear Mairi,

You will not be surprised that I have been contacted by several game conservationists and countryside groups, including the Scottish Gamekeepers' Association, regarding the disturbing decision of Forestry and Land Scotland to begin culling female roe deer a full seven weeks before the start of the legal season on 21st October.

You will be well aware that the calves in September are usually just a few months old and very dependent on their mother's milk. If the mother is killed, the young cannot survive. Should the calves also be shot too, they are far too small to be part of the food chain and will likely be left on the hillside or in the forest where they fell.

Whilst I appreciate that Forestry and Land Scotland policy has usually been to begin culling females on October 1st – still 3 weeks before the beginning of the season – with the intention of protecting tree crops, there has been no clear evidence presented to defend this new policy or any considered debate about its merits.

Last week, the Scottish Government confirmed that it had not yet responded to the independent working group's review of deer management, yet the new policy is apparently being pursued.

Time is of the essence in this matter. May I ask you to respond with urgency and halt the cull meantime.

Yours sincerely,

Liz

On 8th September Professor Dieter Helm of Oxford University made a very interesting presentation to Holyrood's Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee on the question of the green recovery.

Holyrood often gets criticised for enacting legislation that isn't sufficiently well evidenced so it was good to see one of the UK's top experts in environmental policy harness not only the relevant facts to back up his recommendations but also take a very objective and balanced approach to the whole issue of climate change and green economics.

It was refreshingly free of the bias which some of our younger members were concerned about when they wrote in a previous edition of this newsletter.



On 11th September, I was invited by Scottish Land and Estates to discuss the muirburn issue across our grouse-moors. I am very grateful to them for all the information they provided particularly when it comes to carbon capture and also the conservation of our iconic species.



[**Click here to watch my video on the Muirburn issue**](#)

In the afternoon, I was able to see what work was being undertaken by some primary children when it comes to learning about the environment in primary school.



Kinross Colts Football

These past few days, I have been working with council officials and Live Active Leisure to ensure that the youngsters who are involved with Kinross Colts Football Club can access the facilities at Loch Leven Community Campus. The club now has over 300 members spread across several teams and, throughout the Covid19 pandemic, they have had to train at the The Myre and at Donaldson Park. This however, will no longer be practicable when the darker evenings arrive so it is important that they get back to Loch Leven Campus's synthetic pitches and floodlights.

Both the Scottish Government and Scottish Football Association have permitted the resumption of outdoor football activity since mid August and it is now possible for youngsters to play local friendly matches. It is therefore important that the club can access more suitable training facilities.



Visit to Glenalmond College



It was a pleasure to meet Dr Michael Alderson, the new Warden at Glenalmond last week and to hear about how the school has been re-adjusting to the Covid19 restrictions, most especially for its many boarders who come from overseas and who have therefore encountered additional restrictions including quarantine in some cases. It was also good to

hear about its growing links with other schools and its plans to offer use of College facilities to other communities around Perth City.

Visit to St Andrews University



Last Friday, I spent the day dealing with various constituency issues in or near St Andrews and then finished with my regular visit to meet Vice Chancellor Sally Mapstone. This was principally to hear about the University's participation in the Zero Emission Train Project which will see a redundant class 314 electric multiple unit equipped with hydrogen fuel cells, but also about how the University has been coping with the return of students and the ongoing covid restrictions. All 19 higher education institutions issued this joint statement at the weekend.

“Students need to get on with their lives and their education in a safe, positive and constructive way, but the pandemic is still very much a reality. Universities have worked tirelessly to ensure everyone's safety as we plan for the new academic year. We have taken all possible steps to create a safe and supportive environment in which students can make a phased return. It has been a huge undertaking, with substantial adaptations to courses, timetables, and to the physical and online spaces needed to support them and ensure public health guidance is implemented. The entire university community has been part of this planning process in every institution, up and down the country.

“Universities were immensely proud to support the NHS, community health and the testing and research programmes from the beginning of the pandemic. Our staff and students were an integral part of that national effort. As a university community, we all feel a responsibility to follow the public health guidance and continue to protect and support each other and the wider communities of which we are part.”

Thank you NHS Fly-past



Some readers will have seen the famous Spitfire fly across Fife and Perthshire, Stirlingshire on 15th and 16th September as the 80th anniversary of Battle of Britain day was commemorated. It was, as always, quite a sight especially with the “Thank you NHS” message painted under its wings.

To mark Battle of Britain Day the Telegraph printed this article from the Air Chief Marshal Mike Wigston about the current challenges facing the RAF.

And finally.....

Given the current circumstances, we do not yet know, if the two by-elections in Perth City planned for November will be going ahead but, if they are, we are all ready to campaign on behalf of the two excellent candidates formally adopted at the Association executive on Monday 7th September. They are Andy Chan and Aziz Ur Rehman who both live and work in Perth City and are extremely well known and respected in their local communities. We have the by-election literature ready to be printed if we get the go-ahead and I will keep readers posted about when they can help with delivery.

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