

The Newsletter of Argyll and Bute Conservatives

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TIME TO TALK ABOUT THE POSITIVE BENEFITS

By **Jamie McGrigor MSP**

Welcome to the first Argyll and Bute In Touch newsletter of 2014. I make no apology for getting straight down to business. As the Independence Referendum draws ever closer, I continue to make the case for our United Kingdom at every opportunity and to expose the fallacies of the SNP's arguments, not least over EU membership, currency, and defence.

Like so many, I am a proud Scot, proud to be British, and proud also to be part of our United Kingdom partnership of nations which, we should never let anyone forget, is one of the most successful political, economic, and social unions in history. And it is because I am a proud Scot and want the best for Scotland that I support our United Kingdom.

Modern Scotland benefits from the best of both worlds. We have the combination of a strong, accessible, and open Scottish Parliament that deals with all the key domestic issues such as health, education, housing, farming, and transport - recognising Scotland's different legal and education systems and particular needs - while, as part of our United Kingdom, we have the security of the UK's defence capabilities (we still have the



Scottish Conservative European candidate Ian Duncan and Jamie McGrigor MSP visit the South Pier, Oban, where they discussed fishing industry issues with John MacAlister of John MacAlister (Oban) Ltd. and Peter Tosh of Caley Fisheries.

fourth largest military budget in the world), considerable international standing, and membership of key global organisations including the UN Security Council and the G8.

Being part of the UK is also vital for Scotland's farmers and rural businesses. In the event of a Yes vote this September, Scottish farmers and crofters would face real uncertainty over their Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) support payments. Indeed, given that almost certainly Scotland would need to re-apply from outwith the EU, she would receive no

CAP support at all in any interim period. I will continue to argue that Scottish farmers benefit greatly from being part of the UK, with free access to a big home market in addition to membership of the EU with key opt-outs, such as on Euro membership, and the UK rebate.

Our farmers and fishermen benefit also from the UK's large voting strength of 29 votes in the Council of the EU; a separate Scotland might have only a handful of votes in comparison, and would lose the substantial influence which the UK enjoys as one of the largest

EU member states.

I encourage you all to continue to help Better Together in every way you can, and to keep talking to friends, relatives, and neighbours about the positive benefits of our United Kingdom and the very real risks of separation.

It is crucial that we maximise the 'No' vote on 18 September and decisively reaffirm Scotland's rightful place within our UK family of nations.

WHEELS COME OFF SNP'S EU BANDWAGON



Struan Stevenson MEP

This is my final article for In Touch written as a Member of the European Parliament. When, in April, I pack my bags in Strasbourg for the final time, I will have served as your MEP for 15 years. It has been a great privilege.

Our next major electoral test will be the European elections on 22 May, and Ian Duncan, who tops our Euro candidates list, has been campaigning up and down the length and breadth of Scotland to get his face known and to build support. Because we must be under no illusions; the European elections will be of vital

importance to our Party and to the future of the UK. They will be the last major test of public opinion prior to the 18 September referendum on independence.

So, our task between now and mid-September is to ensure that the nationalists don't go into the Referendum with their tails up. And we have plenty of ammunition at our disposal, because Alex Salmond's policy on Europe continues to unravel, week by week. The wheels are well and truly coming off his independence bandwagon!

European Commission President Jose-Manuel Barroso and European Council President Herman Van Rompuy have confirmed repeatedly that an independent Scotland would not enjoy a seamless transition into Europe. Indeed, Barroso suggested to Andrew Marr on BBC TV that, as an accession state, Scotland would find it "extremely difficult, if not impossible" to achieve the necessary unanimous approval of all 28 member states.

Of course, Alex Salmond said that they were both wrong! He also told George Osborne, Ed Balls, and Danny Alexander that they were wrong in declaring that there will be no currency union between Scotland and the rest of the UK.

The facts are that an independent Scotland would lose its share of the UK rebate - worth £400 million to Scots every year. In addition, we would be forced to join the Eurozone and the Schengen zone, raising further serious concerns about costly border controls and currency exchange rates every time we sell something to our biggest trading partner, south of the Border.

ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL - BACK ON TRACK



By Cllr Gary Mulvaney,
Helensburgh Central

The Independence Referendum naturally has dominated the political debate for the last two years, with the political class and the pundits pondering endlessly on the minutiae of every aspect and nuance of the argument. Thankfully, the people will soon have their final say on this momentous decision, and, having finally snared the SNP fox, we will be able to return to the day-to-day items that have been neglected.

Not even your local Council has been immune from the political games which the referendum debate fosters. The SNP council group and its political masters largely created the public debacle which has afflicted Argyll & Bute Council since May 2012. However, having drunk in the last chance saloon for too long, and with the Accounts Commission telling us to get our act together, councillors finally came to their senses and, as a collective, agreed to change.

We have a new administration, with Independents, Lib Dems, and Conservatives back in power. The SNP are on the back benches, just where SNP hacks want them to be, with no difficult decisions to make as we approach September or the elections thereafter. Last month, the council agreed to improve scrutiny and decision-

making, courtesy of a new committee structure, with everyone - not least the Accounts Commission - agreeing that the status quo, with all matters going to the full council, was not fit for purpose.

So, with a new administration and a better way of working, a sense of calm and purpose has returned to Argyll & Bute, ready for the challenges ahead. And the challenges are immense, with money or lack thereof being the key. Our council budget was agreed unanimously in February and had stability at its heart. The flat cash settlement of Government monies for the next two years helps Argyll & Bute and gives us time to plan ahead.

The real challenge is that, with Scotland's population rising and Argyll's falling, our share of the money pot will get smaller. So, a flat cash settlement helps us meantime. As an aside, this is what has triggered the current COSLA dispute, with some local authorities serving notice of their intention to quit the COSLA group - they would be winners if the updated population indicators were used straightaway, instead of being implemented in two years' time.

It will be in 2016-17 that Argyll will face the "cliff edge" where our money from government - so closely tied to population - reduces, and these reductions will be around £3-4 million per year. So, over a two or three year period, this becomes a hefty reduction; and if left unchecked it will affect services, especially when you consider also that the population is ageing, a factor which puts cost pressures on social care budgets. So, that is the difficult challenge we all face, and in simple terms we need more people, jobs, and houses in Argyll & Bute. You will hear much about this growth agenda in the next few years - our future depends on it.