

Manifesto 2007



SNP It's time

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It's time to move forward.

On May 3 Scotland will choose a new government.

After 8 years of low ambition and low achievement from the current Scottish Executive we believe it is time for fresh thinking and a new approach.

This manifesto sets out our ideas and proposals to build a more successful Scotland.

It's time for a nation that is healthier, with vital health services kept local; communities that are safer with a more visible police presence on our streets and families that are wealthier, with lower and fairer local tax leaving more money in peoples pockets at the end of every month.

As First Minister I will do everything in my power to deliver greater opportunity for all of Scotland.

I have no doubt Scotland can match the achievement of similar nations and secure a future built on shared prosperity, justice and peace.

We are working hard to earn the trust and support of the people of Scotland and we will trust Scots to take the decision on Scotland's future in an independence referendum. The choice will be yours. That is the fair and democratic way.

It's time for a Scottish government that cares about success for our nation. Nicola Sturgeon and I are ready to take Scotland forward.

It's time for the SNP.

Our vision for government

Fresh thinking and a new approach

The SNP has clear ambitions for Scotland. We have no doubt Scotland can be more successful.

Healthier

Our nation can be healthier. The SNP will keep vital health services local and reverse the decision to close Ayr and Monklands A&E. With an SNP government there will be a presumption against centralisation of core hospital services to protect local access to healthcare.

Wealthier

Families in Scotland can be wealthier. An SNP government will remove the burden of business rates from 120,000 small businesses, freeing them to grow and create more and better paid jobs. Small businesses sit at the heart of local economies and with the right support they will flourish.

Safer

Local communities can be safer. An SNP government will put more police on our streets to detect and deter crime. And we will come down hard on those who sell alcohol to underage Scots and fuel anti-social behaviour.

Fairer

Local taxes can be fairer. The SNP will scrap the Council Tax and introduce a fairer system based on ability to pay. Families and individuals on low and middle incomes will on average be between £260 and £350 a year better off. Nine out of ten pensioners will pay less local tax.

Easier

Life should be easier for young families. The SNP will increase by 50% the amount of free nursery education available for 3 and 4 year olds.

Greener

Scotland can be greener. An SNP government will not give the go ahead for new nuclear power stations. We will invest instead in developing Scotland's extensive renewable energy potential.

Smarter

Scotland can be smarter. It's time for more opportunities for young Scots with smaller class sizes and it's time to dump student debt.

A more successful Scotland

The SNP cares about success for families in Scotland. That is why we are passionate about independence and equality for our nation.

The 300-year old Union is no longer fit for purpose. It was never designed for the 21st century world. It is well past its sell by date and is holding Scotland back.

The SNP believe Scotland and England should be equal nations – friends and partners – both free to make our own choices.

Success for Scotland

Scotland can be more successful. Looking around at home and at our near neighbours abroad, more and more Scots believe this too. Independence is the natural state for nations like our own.

Scotland has the people, the talent and potential to become one of the big success stories of the 21st century. We can match the success of independent Norway – according to the UN the best place in the world to live. We can do as well as independent Ireland, now the fourth most prosperous nation on the planet.

With independence Scotland will be free to flourish and grow. We can give our nation a competitive edge.

Peace and Prosperity

Together we can build a more prosperous nation, a Scotland that is a force for good, a voice for peace in our world.

Free to bring Scottish troops home from Iraq.

Free to remove nuclear weapons from Scotland's shores.

Free to invest our oil wealth in a fund for future generations.

Peace and prosperity – equality and opportunity.

These are some of the best reasons for independence and why the SNP trust the people of Scotland to decide on independence in a referendum.

The choice will rest with you – that is the fair and democratic way.

Summary and highlights of our programme

Office of the First Minister

The responsibilities of the First Minister will be:

- Make sure Scottish government is working efficiently
- Build a wealthier and more successful Scotland
- Ensure that Scotland is making progress across the full range of policy portfolios so our nation becomes healthier, safer and fairer
- Increase Scotland's profile world wide

Priorities include:

- The creation of a smaller and better focused ministerial team including a review of the agency structure with the aim of reducing bureaucracy and overlap and improving local delivery
- The creation of a Council of Economic Advisers to provide independent advice so we can make Scotland the best place in Europe to do business
- Publication of a White Paper detailing the concept of Scottish independence in the modern world as part of preparations for offering Scots the opportunity to decide on independence in a referendum, with a likely date of 2010
- An enhanced relationship with the EU and a partnership of equals with the government in London
- Doubling Scotland's international aid budget

Department of Finance and Sustainable Growth

The responsibilities of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth will be:

- Better value in the Scottish budget
- Higher sustainable economic growth
- More Scots in better paid jobs
- Easing the commute
- A greener Scotland
- Making the most of Scotland's renewable and green energy potential

Priorities include:

- Delivering a more efficient government with annual efficiency savings of 1.5% per annum and smaller government, meeting the Treasury target of 5% annual administration savings
- Taking the right choices to ensure best value on capital spending, freeing up £1.1 billion for reallocation to new national infrastructure projects

- Ensuring 70% of released resources are focused on enhanced frontline delivery of public services and 30% to deliver lower local tax as part of our social democratic contract with Scotland
- Introduction of a small business bonus, removing the burden of business rates from 120,000 Scottish small businesses and reducing the rates bill for a further 30,000
- Scrapping the unfair council tax and replacing it with a system based on ability to pay. The local income tax rate will be set at 3p
- Establishing a Scottish Investment Fund to get best value from Scottish underspends with income from the fund allocated to support business start ups, research and social enterprises
- Securing better value funding for capital projects with a Scottish Futures Trust
- Steps to reduce red-tape and widen access to public procurement contracts for small businesses
- Refocus the Enterprise network to provide a more streamlined service for the Scottish business community and support key industries such as the tourism sector
- New measures to support innovation and extend access to vocational skills
- Substantial investment in improvements to our rail infrastructure to ease the commute and cut journey times between our major cities
- Additional efforts to cut congestion
- A commitment to early delivery of a new Forth crossing
- Commissioning a study into Road Equivalent Tariff with a pilot project to the Western Isles

Minister for Energy and the Environment

- New ambitious targets for carbon reduction and generation from low carbon sources
- Ensuring no new nuclear power stations are built in Scotland
- Higher building standards and new efforts to increase energy efficiency
- Development of community and household generation with decentralisation of generation capacity and the development of local heat and power grids
- Introduction of a Climate Change Bill based on building cross-party consensus on measures to reduce Scotland's carbon footprint
- Making better use of public procurement to recognise environmental and community aspects, with a particular emphasis on sustainability

Summary and highlights of our programme

Department of Health and Wellbeing

The responsibilities of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing will be:

- Build a stronger, patient focused NHS
- Greater independence through quality care
- Helping people to lead healthier lives
- A new focus on the needs of Scotland's communities

Priorities include:

- Making the most of NHS capacity to treat more patients faster. This will enable us to give every patient a legally binding waiting time
- A presumption against centralisation of core hospital services to protect local access to healthcare
- Direct elections to health boards to give local people a say when decisions are made
- Phasing out prescription charges to end an unfair tax on ill health
- Improved access to counselling and talking therapies in every health board area
- Annual health checks and individual health plans for school pupils with a doubling of the number of school nurses
- A school based dental service to improve oral health and reduce dental decay
- The introduction of free school meals, beginning with our youngest children and expanding free entitlement for children in poverty
- More opportunities for youngsters to be fit and active with 2 hours PE per week for every pupil, a moratorium on the sale of playing fields and free access to council swimming pools
- Introducing 'Life begins' health checks and individual health plans for all men and women when they reach the age of 40 with the aim to extend this initiative to Scots reaching retirement age
- Improving support for carers, including additional funding for young carers and improved access to respite care
- Increasing payments for free personal and nursing care in line with inflation
- Introducing a first time buyers' grant of £2000 and the creation of a Scottish Housing Support Fund, to provide loans to first time buyers on a shared equity basis

Department of Education, Skills, Culture and Arts

The responsibilities of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills will be:

- Building firm foundations for learning
- Providing improved opportunities to learn
- Creating a springboard for life through Higher and Further education
- Supporting culture and creativity

Priorities include:

- Delivery of a 50 per cent increase in free nursery education for 3 and 4 year olds, with a nursery teacher for every centre
- Smaller class sizes, starting with a reduction in the first three years of primary to 18 or less
- Putting science, modern languages and technology at the heart of the curriculum
- Expansion of school-college partnerships for S3 and S4 so that all pupils can experience vocational learning
- Creating an Additional Support Fund
- Introduction of a Scottish Science Baccalaureate and a Scottish Language Baccalaureate
- Focusing the skills agenda so that people of all ages have access to relevant, valued and quality assured training opportunities throughout their working lives
- Abolition of the Graduate Endowment tuition fee
- Replacing the expensive and discredited Student Loans system
- Removing the burden of the debt repayments owed to the Student Loans Company by Scottish domiciled and resident graduates.
- Providing an additional £10 million for cutting edge research in Scotland
- Introducing a range of measures to benefit emerging and existing artists and the creation of a £2million 'Edinburgh Festival Expo Fund' to promote Scottish work at the Festivals

Summary and highlights of our programme

Department of Justice

The responsibilities of the Cabinet Secretary for Justice will be:

- Providing a stronger focus on safer communities
- Increase public protection
- Addressing the causes of crime
- Ensuring the most appropriate sentencing, punishment and rehabilitation

Priorities include:

- Putting more police onto local streets with a more visible police presence
- Early discussions with the UK government to enable the Scottish Parliament to legislate on firearms and ensure tight restrictions on air weapons
- A new system, giving communities more information on dangerous paedophiles in their area
- Getting tough on the sale of alcohol to underage Scots and extending controls on heavy discounting of alcohol to the supermarkets
- Creating a new Serious Crime Taskforce bringing together a range of expertise to best tackle organised crime
- Increasing support for schemes that offer a route out of crime
- Introducing a new emphasis on tough community punishments to end what is often a rotating door of short-term custodial sentencing

Department for Rural Affairs

The responsibilities of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs will be:

- Support sustainable growth in the rural economy
- Growing Scotland's agriculture sector
- Building a better future for the fishing industry

Priorities include:

- Supporting renewable generation with a particular focus on increasing the use and supply of energy crops as bio-fuels
- Introducing a £10 million new entrants scheme for the farming community
- Delivering a range of initiatives to reduce the burden of regulation on the farming community
- Maximising the use of locally produced food in public sector contracts
- Taking a lead role in the UK delegation to EU fisheries negotiations
- Enlisting support among EU partners for repatriation of fisheries responsibilities
- Involving the fishing community more closely in conservation policy
- Working to secure quota allocation from decommissioned vessels for active vessels
- Additional support for the onshore fishing sector and specific marketing support for abundant supplies

This programme builds on our proposals already set out in *Building a more successful Scotland*, *Let Scotland Flourish* and *It's time to look forward*.

I. Office of the First Minister

Scotland deserves better. As a nation we have so much potential. The SNP has no doubt Scottish communities can be safer, our families wealthier, and our country healthier. Day to day life should be easier and the way we run our country fairer.

We only have to look around us at similar nations – Ireland and Norway to name just two – to see the levels of success Scotland should be reaching. With determination and a new approach we believe Scotland can be the better place we all seek.

As leader of the Scottish government, the role of the First Minister is to drive our nation forward and to maximise Scottish success. Improvement and progress will not happen overnight, however with fresh thinking and a total belief in Scotland and our abilities, we can begin to move closer to the levels of wealth and quality of life that are enjoyed in nearby nations.

Departmental Priorities

Make sure Scottish government is working efficiently

There will be a deputy minister in the Office of the First Minister with responsibility for Parliament and Public Sector Reform.

Reform of the structure of government

We will deliver a smaller, better-focused ministerial team, and more powerful and effective departments to ensure delivery of our key public policy priorities. We propose a new structure for government in Scotland that will focus on improving leadership and delivery in a way that has not been achieved by the current Labour and Liberal Democrat Executive.

Departments will be led by new Cabinet Secretaries who will drive forward government policy on economic growth and public service improvements. The number of Scottish Executive Departments will be cut from 9 to 6. These will be:

- Office of the First Minister
- Finance and Sustainable Growth
- Health and Wellbeing
- Education and Skills
- Justice
- Rural Affairs

Review of agency structure

We will conduct an early review of our agency structure, with a clear aim of reducing bureaucracy, and overlap, and improving local delivery. The functions of some agencies will be shared between central and local government.

A people's parliament

We will begin discussions on strengthening the role of the Futures' Forum so it works more closely with government to investigate and recommend long-term goals for our nation. We will publish proposals to bring parliament closer to the people, with greater support for backbench legislative proposals, an opportunity for citizens to propose debates in parliament and a mechanism to allow for the best supported public petition in any year to be brought forward as a detailed legislative proposal.

Scottish Civil Service

We will also seek early discussions on the creation of a wholly devolved Scottish civil service on the same model and basis as the Northern Irish civil service.

Build a wealthier and more successful Scotland

Council of Economic Advisers

A key priority for government is increasing Scotland's economic growth and the First Minister will convene a Council of Economic Advisers to provide independent advice so we can make Scotland the best place in Europe to do business. This will be supported by a National Economic Forum to ensure input from key stakeholders including Scotland's trade unions and the business community.

White Paper and Referendum

Publication of a White Paper, encompassing a Bill, detailing the concept of Scottish independence in the modern world as part of preparations for offering Scots the opportunity to decide on independence in a referendum, with a likely date of 2010.

Ensure that Scotland is making progress

New monitoring arrangements

We will bring forward proposals for new management and monitoring arrangements for government and agencies, based on the successful model in Virginia, USA, so we can bring greater rigour and success to the delivery of public policy in our nation.

Health of the Nation Report

The SNP in government will produce an annual 'Health of the Nation' report, bringing together key targets on crime, health, education, the environment, opportunity, social mobility, life expectancy, business start-ups and the number of Scots who are economically active. We must be in a position to judge Scotland's progress, and be able to link what we know about the economy and society to tailor new policies, ensuring that no section of Scotland is left behind.

Increase Scotland's profile worldwide

There will be a deputy minister in the Office of the First Minister with responsibility for Europe and External Relations.

EU Relations

In the EU we will press for Scotland to take the lead in negotiations on fisheries. We will work with the UK government to increase and enhance Scotland's role across the full range of policy areas for which the Scottish Parliament has responsibility. We will also engage with our European partners to press for the creation of an EU Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Research Centre, based in Scotland.

The SNP wants a stronger voice for Scotland in the EU and we will seek to improve direct contacts with the Commission, reform Scottish Parliamentary scrutiny of EU legislative proposals and seek closer relations with other parliaments. We propose enhanced procedures for implementing European legislation in Scotland and better post-implementation monitoring to reduce the burden and free Ministers to introduce legislation that suits Scotland.

Working with Whitehall

We will seek to strengthen the concordats between the Scottish Executive and Whitehall departments to maximise the role and influence of the Scottish government across the full range of reserved and devolved policy areas.

We will engage positively and constructively with the UK government across a range of issues in order to secure the best deal for Scotland. Early discussions will include options for the transfer of responsibility for North Sea oil and gas to the Scottish parliament, as an extension of arrangements already in place with Northern Ireland and formerly with the Isle of Man. We will seek to restart meetings of the Joint Ministerial Committees.

International Aid

For the wider world, we will double the International Development budget. We will work with Scotland's Aid Agencies to ensure this support meets the needs of those in greatest need.

Co-operation on energy

We will build on initial discussions with the Norwegian government and EU Commission on proposals for a North Sea super-grid, able to take electricity from offshore Scotland and Norway direct to markets in mainland Europe. Taking forward this initiative will be a priority for an SNP led government and we will seek an early meeting with Norwegian ministers to explore options.

We will also seek co-operation with the UK government on steps to develop Scotland's carbon capture and storage potential and in particular to see the early go ahead for the Peterhead Hydrogen Power Project.

Scotland in the world

The Office of the First Minister will oversee efforts across Scotland's departments and agencies to maximise Scotland's international profile. Our focus will be on presenting Scotland as the ideal location for investment and tourism, supporting Scottish business initiatives overseas and working with the Scottish diaspora to make the most of Scotland's reputation worldwide.

In particular, we believe we can get a far better return for public investment with support for Scotland Houses opened by Scottish business people internationally – similar to the one recently opened in Estonia. We propose £1 million kick-start funding to develop similar initiatives world-wide.

II. Department of Finance and Sustainable Growth

Scotland is surrounded by an Arc of Prosperity. In Norway, Iceland and Ireland we have three of the six wealthiest nations in the world. There is no doubt Scotland has the people, talent and resources to match their success.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth will be responsible for the effective management of Scotland's budget and delivering the right mix of policies to ensure faster, sustainable growth in the Scottish economy.

Departmental Priorities

Better value in the Scottish budget

We want to see a new rigour in Scotland's finances so we can deliver better value and get the best possible return for frontline public services and Scottish taxpayers.

As with any budget, whether it is the billions of government or the thousands for Scottish families, we must make sure we get the best return from our investment and our resources are directed towards what is good and effective.

We know from the most recent UK budget that the Comprehensive Spending Review will allocate an additional £1.8 billion to the Scottish block. We will use this additional resource to invest in the frontline with a particular focus on health, education and tackling crime.

The Scottish budget process for 2007-08 is well under way and there is only limited room for manoeuvre. However, with anticipated underspends of £200 million and a Scottish reserve of unallocated money worth some £800 million, there is a pool of potential available resources of £1 billion for next year. This provides the flexibility to allow us to deliver on new policy priorities.

Our financial plans for 2008-11 represent a strengthened approach to good government that we believe will deliver key advantages to Scottish families and communities. Together they will release £4.3 billion over the three years of the spending review period and allow us to take forward our key priorities in government – a healthier Scotland with healthcare kept local; a safer Scotland with more police on our streets and a wealthier Scotland with lower local tax and our small businesses freed from the burden of business rates and able to grow.

Efficient Government

We will deliver annual efficiency savings equivalent to 1.5% of the Scottish budget. This is well within the target set by the Treasury for efficiency savings across UK government and matches savings achieved by the current Executive over the previous 3 year spending period. However, this process of improvement must continue. In 2011 ongoing efficiencies will release over £1.3 billion of funding for new priorities – a total over three years of almost £2.7 billion.

As part of this process we will extend e-procurement, delivering a system of Smart Purchasing that provides savings at all levels of government and gives Scottish companies of all sizes greater access to the full range of government contracts.

Smaller Government

We will meet UK Treasury targets for a 5% annual saving from administration costs with Scotland's Executive Agencies expected to match annual savings in core Scottish Executive departments.

The number of Scottish Executive Departments will be cut by one third from nine to six and we will conduct an early review of our agency structure. We will ask each part of government, including agencies and Scotland's local authorities, to identify potential surplus assets and set out a timetable for disposal through the period covered by the 2008-11 spending review.

Together, this process of streamlining government will release nearly £500 million over the three years.

Capital

We will seek national best value for our capital spending, with £1.1 billion of current planned expenditure on EARL and Edinburgh trams redirected.

We also propose a new system of infrastructure funding as an alternative to the costly and flawed PFI/PPP. Over the first term of an SNP government we will introduce a not-for-profit Scottish Futures Trust, which will provide lower cost borrowing opportunities. We expect the Scottish Futures Trust to emerge as a more attractive source of funding for both national and local projects which will effectively crowd out PFI/PPP over time.

Current PFI/PPP contracts will be unaffected and it will be open to local authorities and other public bodies to choose between PFI/PPP and Scottish Futures Bonds for planned and future projects. In particular, we will match brick for brick current plans for improvements in our schools and hospitals.

Finance and Sustainable Growth

Prioritising the frontline

We will allocate 70% of released resources for our new priorities to improve frontline delivery of public services – keeping vital health services local, reducing class sizes and putting more police on local streets. That is part of our social democratic contract with Scotland. This will free £3 billion to invest in the people's priorities over the three years of the spending review period.

Lower local tax

An SNP government will set local taxes low and fair. We will assign the remaining 30% of released resources to lower local tax for Scottish families and businesses, cash-back worth £500, for example, to the average pensioner couple.

Our commitment will put almost £1.3 billion back into the accounts of Scottish families and the tills of Scottish businesses. It will provide a welcome boost to family budgets and Scotland's economy.

We will scrap the unfair Council Tax and introduce a Local Income Tax set at 3p. This will apply at both the basic and higher income tax rate and will not be levied on savings income. Second homes will continue to be liable to local tax and will make the same level of contribution as present, with payments made through business rates.

We will reform business rates with the introduction of a Small Business Bonus. Businesses with a rateable value of £8,000 or less will no longer pay business rates. Those with a rateable value of between £8,001 and £10,000 will be entitled to a 50% business rate relief; and businesses with a rateable value of between £10,001 and £15,000 will be entitled to a relief of 25%.

Higher Sustainable Economic Growth

The SNP's economic growth strategy, Let Scotland Flourish, sets out a range of proposals to give Scotland an economic edge. It forms part of our manifesto package.

Economy Targets

To ensure Scotland matches the success of similar nations, we propose three specific targets:

- be among the top 15 most competitive countries in the world
 - including being the most competitive among the present UK nations, building on the fact that Bavaria is ranked more competitively than Germany, Catalonia is ranked higher than Spain and Lombardy is ranked higher than Italy

- match the growth rate of small European nations
 - performing like other small European nations would mean an independence bonus of an additional £19bn in the economy over 10 years, or £10,000 per family in Scotland
- grow the population by 3% over the next 10 years
 - gain 150,000 by creating opportunities so fewer Scots would feel the need to leave, more Scots would return, and more 'new Scots' would come to Scotland

Growth must include the whole society and not come at the expense of our environment. We set ourselves a new commitment to deliver high levels of sustainable growth for Scotland, with three Scottish standards – solidarity, cohesion and sustainability:

- i. Solidarity** - overall wealth and the proportion of national wealth held by each of the lowest six income deciles to increase.
- ii. Cohesion** – the wealth of every region to increase, and for there to be a 10 per cent reduction in GDP (gross value added) disparity per head between the richest and poorest parts of Scotland.
- iii. Sustainability** – extend the current emissions commitment beyond 2012 to ensure continued cuts in CO₂ output equivalent to a 3 per cent annual reduction.

These new golden rules for Scottish economic growth will require an SNP government to focus on the social and environmental quality of growth.

Lower business taxation

In government, the SNP is determined to deliver a more competitive tax environment for Scottish business. Our proposals to reduce business rates will see 120,000 small businesses paying no rates and 30,000 with reduced local tax bills.

We will send a clear signal of our intention to reduce Corporation Tax rates in Scotland in stages to 20% when the Scottish government has responsibility for this financial lever.

Reduce business burdens

There are three common-sense policies we will follow to minimise business burdens. First, we will only introduce regulations once they have been approved by a majority of our EU neighbours, unless there is a clear benefit to Scotland of early adoption. Second, we will minimise the burden of bureaucracy by ensuring Scottish regulations do not have British gold-plating. Finally, we would adopt the Better Regulation Commission's policy of 'one in, one out' meaning each new regulation must replace another.

We also propose that businesses only have to apply for our Small Business Bonus relief once every five years as long as the circumstances of the business have not changed, coinciding with the revaluation of rateable values.

Finance and Sustainable Growth

Widen access to public sector contracts

We will set a minimum target of 20% of public sector contracts by value to be sourced from small and medium sized enterprises.

Immigration

We will seek an enhanced role for the Scottish parliament in the Shortage Occupation List. We will press the case for a Scottish green-card that is awarded to eager, qualified immigrants, who want to come to Scotland for five years or longer.

More Scots in Better Paid Jobs

Let Scotland Flourish sets out in full details our ideas for creating the conditions that will see more Scots in better paid jobs.

Refocus the business support network

As part of our review of Scotland's agency structure, we will consider the creation of a strategic Scottish Enterprise Board. Our aim is to reinvigorate the enterprise network by directing attention on key tasks through a trimmer Scottish Enterprise that provides strategic direction, while delivery is devolved to more focused agencies.

We will keep Scottish Development International, with Locate in Scotland and Export from Scotland under its umbrella:

- Locate in Scotland will continue the new emphasis on the Knowledge Economy and our world-class universities.
- Export from Scotland will support individual and collective enterprise by creating market awareness for companies and for Scotland, and by helping companies develop and build profitable sales and effective marketing capabilities.

We will protect the independence of HIE and enhance their position within the broader decision making structures of the reformed enterprise network. We will begin early consultation on extending HIE's role in relation to community land purchase to cover the whole of the country so that their expertise can be available for urban communities in other parts of Scotland.

We will also consult on proposals to transfer responsibility for local enterprise delivery to existing local authority Economic Development Departments. Our aim is to cut back on overlap in bureaucracy while maintaining a strong business input into local economic strategy and policy.

Tourism

The promotion of Scotland's tourism industry will be a key priority for the SNP in government. We will bring together responsibility for enterprise, tourism and infrastructure under a single minister in the Department of Finance and Sustainable Growth, so that policy as a whole reflects the needs and interests of the industry.

Within the Enterprise structure, Welcome to Scotland will acknowledge Scottish tourism as the major industry and employer that it is, linking tourism directly with economic development. Welcome to Scotland will deliver a lighter regulatory touch and stronger marketing role, and decentralise tourism information and services so that we can better connect areas with their visitors.

Key infrastructure improvements, including investment to reduce rail journey times between our major cities and reductions in business rates for small businesses will be of particular benefit to the tourism sector.

We will also support new training for Scotland's tourism industry to maximise the use of and benefit from online marketing and sales opportunities.

Scottish Investment Fund

We will make better use of underspends in the Scottish budget to establish a Scottish Investment Fund. The annual income will be allocated to encourage business start-ups, fund cutting edge research and support the expansion of the social enterprise sector.

Supporting skills

We will use the new Skills Committee of the Scottish Funding Council to ensure that the Further Education Sector is geared up to deliver the required local and national skills.

We will align Careers Scotland more closely with the education sector to tackle the extremely high number of 16-19 year olds currently not in education, work or training, and deliver a greater focus on apprenticeships in key core skills.

Support innovation and increase access to capital

We will deliver a series of measures to support access to loans for small businesses, increase access to venture capital and provide support for innovators seeking to take their product from concept to market place

We will launch a Saltire prize to promote future innovation and technological endeavour. Set at £5 million the aim of the prize would be to encourage and harness Scotland's creative energy. The first Saltire Prize will focus on developing Scotland's renewable generation capacity.

Easing the Commute

In government the SNP will be directed by three core principles for future transport projects:

- **Full utilisation of current rail and road network** – we believe many parts of our transport network require only cost-effective upgrades with moderate investment bringing maximum return.
- **Delivering the right infrastructure for business success** – transport policy must be designed to meet the strategic needs of Scotland's wealth creators, with a focus on delivering a competitive and effective road, rail, sea and air infrastructure which ensures all parts of Scotland are open for business.
- **A focus on the needs of Scottish commuters** – our aim is to make the biggest difference for the most number of Scots, which means that we will prioritise projects designed to ease the commute, remove bottlenecks and improve the quality of life for people in all parts of our country.

In addition, it is our aim and ambition that year on year the journeys Scots make are greener, safer and easier.

Greener

By combining responsibility for the environment, transport and sustainable economic growth within one department of government we will ensure that our broader commitment to lower emissions in Scotland is met, while ensuring we have the necessary infrastructure to allow Scotland's economy to more effectively compete and succeed.

In government we will set an ambitious target for the use of alternative road fuels, believing that this is a crucial step to ensure lower emissions while protecting drivers in rural Scotland who can be offered too few effective or viable alternatives to the car.

We will begin early consultations on the most effective target for the use of bio-fuels and hydrogen powered vehicles, and put forward as the starting point for discussion a twin target of a 100% use of alternative fuels by public sector vehicles by 2020 combined with a national target of 30% for other road users. As part of this commitment, we will examine incentives for industry to develop bio-fuels in Scotland and for motorists to make greater use of these lower emission fuels.

Safer

In government the SNP will publish a 10-year plan to transform Scottish road safety. The case put forward by organisations including the AA motoring trust proves that a range of measures – including dualling of key roads, such as the A9 – would contribute to fewer lives being lost.

We will begin a nation wide debate to identify options to provide greater protection for young drivers, involving youth groups, the police and advanced driving experts in this process.

We will encourage the insurance industry to work with us to offer incentives to young drivers, for example lower costs for teenagers who drive only during the day.

In the long-term we believe better education and enhanced driving skills are key and in government we will examine options for extending access to Pass Plus advanced driving for young Scots.

We also propose a specific pilot project to enable Scottish school pupils to sit and pass the first theory stage of their driving test in school. We believe this initiative could contribute to improved safety and help create a stronger safety culture among young Scots.

Easier

A central priority of any national transport policy must be providing maximum benefit for Scotland's commuters.

Railways – Our railway is nearly full up, that is why we will give the go ahead for the second stage increases to capacity at Waverley. And we will ask Network Rail to bring forward proposals for:

- improvements to the Glasgow Queen Street to Edinburgh Waverley so we can reduce the journey time on this route
- extensive electrification of Scotland's rail network so we can identify and then implement any schemes that offer a clear benefit for the travelling public
- a connection to an overland station at Edinburgh airport, avoiding the additional cost and risk of the proposed new hub station under the airport runway

Our immediate priority however is to improve services for Scotland's commuters. Our aim is to provide more space, more frequent services and faster journey times. That means giving the go ahead for a new National Rail Improvement Plan.

Finance and Sustainable Growth

We will work with Network Rail following the results of their own consultation around the Rail Utilisation Strategy for Scotland to ensure that there is maximum benefit for the estimated £300 million investment that will be required to get the most from our current Rail Network.

We will give the go ahead for the necessary track improvements to cut journey times from Inverness to Edinburgh by 45 minutes.

And for Aberdeen, the best option for a significant time saving is the introduction of tilting trains. This has already been achieved on the west coast main line and we will request options from Network Rail so we can look to cut as much as 25 or 30 minutes off the journey from the North East to the central belt.

Integrated Public Transport - We will bring together Scotland's transport stakeholders to take forward measures to ensure greater integration of our public transport network and will put forward for consideration the development of an integrated payment card.

Congestion on our roads - We do not believe Labour and Liberal Democrat proposals for a Toll Tax – charging motorists a new tax for using Scotland's roads – is the right approach especially as so many Scottish families today do not have adequate access to alternative public transport.

The SNP will aim to decouple ownership and usage of cars. We will persuade and not punish car users to use other modes. We will take three specific measures each of which will bring about a modal shift:

- By encouraging the increased use of **flexi working** in the public sector, and home working. Every public sector body will be required within 6 months of our taking office to explain what its policy is and what has been preventing it from doing more, and to provide an action plan of measures.
- Park and Ride Schemes have been terrifically successful. The SNP in government will require each city to provide its strategy within 6 months of the election showing what they will do to enhance Park and Ride provision by bus or train or both, in their area. We will work with Local Authorities to ensure every effort is made to fast-track schemes.
- There should be greater consolidation of delivery services. In government we will work with the haulage industry to encourage consolidation of loads when doing deliveries into cities.

We will also pilot a new scheme to tackle congestion during the school run. In Edinburgh school pupils will be given free bus travel before and after school to encourage greater use of public transport. This will include £4 million investment in modern buses, as a more effective alternative to the Edinburgh Trams scheme.

Clearing our transport arteries - Alongside vital investment in our railway network to get the best return for our investment and make the most of current infrastructure, an SNP led Scottish government will take forward key improvements to nationally significant trunk routes, including among others the A9, A96 and A77. We will work closely with Regional Transport partnerships to ensure long-term planning for future road improvements.

A new Forth crossing - Making the right decision on a replacement for the Forth Bridge is the most important transport task facing Scotland today. As a bottom line, we must be in a position to give early go-ahead for a replacement crossing. We must do all we can to remove any risk of a period of closure, with the devastating effect that would have on the economy of Scotland and in particular the economy of the east coast and north of our country.

A new bridge remains an option, however we have concerns about both the construction cost and the time it will take from decision to delivery. In government we will do all we can to fast-track the planning and parliamentary process. And we will give full consideration to all options for the new crossing including a Forth Tunnel.

Freight industry - We will build on the work of the freight transport inquiry in the Scottish Parliament, looking at opportunities to assist the industry and in particular deal with issues of congestion.

A fairer deal for Scotland's Islands - The benefits of an improved transport network must be felt in all parts of Scotland and to this end, the Scottish government will commission a study into Road Equivalent Tariff (RET), reporting on options for improved connection to our northern and western isles by end of 2007. As part of this we will undertake a pilot project on RET to the Western Isles which will include support for freight and tourist journeys.

International connections - We must be prepared to match the best on offer elsewhere in Europe with high-speed or bullet trains connecting our major cities. In government we will conduct an early study into options for inter-city high-speed links in Scotland.

There is a strong case for a fast rail link to London to reduce demand for the current domestic shuttle flights to London. We recognise the contribution air travel makes to carbon emissions and in this light will aim to promote and encourage an extension of international connections alongside practical steps to reduce reliance on internal UK flights.

We also support the expansion of direct ferry connections from Scotland and will convene an early meeting with ferry operators in Scotland to discuss ways an SNP government can support the development of these important routes. We see international ferry connections playing a part in our wider economic and tourism promotion strategies.

Finance and Sustainable Growth

In government we will seek to open discussions with the UK government on the development of a high-speed service between Scotland and London, connecting to mainland Europe through the Channel Tunnel rail link.

Improved Delivery

The SNP is determined to deliver a fast-track system for major infrastructure projects.

This will include early and full public debate and a requirement on government agencies and quangos to meet tight deadlines for their own response to or assessment of projects, with agency Chief Executives personally charged with the speedy completion of their bodies' functions.

For major national transport projects, consultation will be front-loaded and comprehensive.

We will ensure proper timing of projects so that we can ensure continued capacity at all stages of the construction process. We will integrate programmes with a view to a steady release of design and construction. This is joined up thinking and will save money.

We will establish a regular meeting between the industry and private sector civil engineering side to discuss practical constraints in order to anticipate problems and manage the process taking account of the needs of industry.

To ensure streamlined delivery, we propose the creation of a preparation pool of projects that have been worked up past the design and land purchase stage, ready to go ahead in the event of delays. This will provide continuity for the construction industry and for Scottish transport users. We are determined to avoid peaks and troughs in available work.

Minister for Energy and the Environment

Within the Department for Finance and Sustainable Growth, there will be a particular focus on Scotland's contribution to tackling climate change overseen by our nation's first Climate Change Minister. This Minister for Energy and the Environment will drive forward the following departmental priorities:

A Greener Scotland

Protecting and enhancing Scotland's environment will be central priorities for the SNP in government.

In government we will introduce a Climate Change Bill with mandatory carbon reduction targets of 3% per annum and also set a long-term target of cutting emissions by a minimum of 80% by 2050 – above the UK target of 60%.

To take forward this commitment, we will assess and then offset the carbon impact of major government projects, including much needed improvements to Scotland's road network.

No to Nuclear

As a starting point a Scotland led by the SNP will say no to new nuclear – power stations or dumps. An SNP government will make clear that Scotland does not require a new nuclear power station.

We will involve all of Scotland in the preparation of extensive and effective clean energy legislation.

It is important for Scotland that we have comprehensive legislation to take forward our clean energy ambitions. We will therefore bring together stakeholders on a cross-party and non-party basis so that we can agree a joint approach to clean energy legislation and introduce a bill in the second year of government that can attract a consensus in parliament.

Have the public sector lead the way in best practice

Government, its agencies and other public bodies including the NHS and Local Authorities have a responsibility to take a lead. Together we are responsible for spending a large amount of public money and there is no doubt that we have the opportunity to make a big green impact. In government the SNP will set out proposals to ensure there is a renewable capability in each public building – starting with a commitment to renewable generation in every Scottish school.

We will also examine options for including environmental and community clauses in public procurement contracts. In particular we recognise both the sustainability and nutritional advantages of encouraging the sourcing of fresh food in our schools and hospitals.

Finance and Sustainable Growth

Energy Saving

We all have a part to play in meeting the challenge of global warming and so we will establish an expert panel to report on the changes we need to make to building regulations in Scotland to increase energy efficiency and encourage more local energy production. We will consult on proposals to introduce a planning presumption requiring new buildings in Scotland to include sufficient renewable generation on-site to deliver between 20% and 50% of energy needs.

Beyond this, our target must be that new build houses should meet the same rigorous standards that exist in Scandinavia, allowing householders to significantly reduce their energy use and energy bills. We will consult on setting a new guideline for energy saving in new buildings with the aim of reducing their energy footprint by between 20% and 33%.

In government we will send a clear signal of support and will work with the organisers of Glasgow 2014 to ensure that a commitment to zero-carbon athletes' accommodation is part of their bid for the Commonwealth Games.

We will also examine options to ensure new build schools and hospitals meet the highest energy efficiency design standards.

Improving energy efficiency is central to our task of delivering a greener Scotland and so in the first 100 days of the SNP in government we will institute a Scottish Energy Efficiency Design Awards to bring together our best designers, the construction and manufacturing industries so we can create the best energy efficiency solutions for Scotland. In total £1 million will be available in prize money and development incentives so we can turn our best energy saving ideas into workable energy efficient products.

A sustainable approach to flood prevention

In government we will review the interaction of current flooding legislation to ensure adequate access to funding for sustainable flood prevention measures. We believe the inclusion of sustainable measures is important to provide long-term solutions to reduce flooding threats on Scotland's rivers. Sustainable flood management techniques, such as planting more trees along riverbanks and restoring wetlands, complement traditional engineering solutions. They reduce the flow of water and thus lessen the risk of flooding.

Towards Zero Waste

The SNP believe that we must aspire to achieve a zero waste Scotland. We view waste prevention as the key. The SNP will begin early consultation with industry and other stakeholders to agree national standards. Scotland has come a long way in reducing domestic waste. We have a long way to go in tackling commercial waste.

We welcome the progress made towards household recycling and would wish to extend kerbside recycling throughout Scotland. This should include plastics recycling. We will investigate the potential to introduce used cooking oil collections for biodiesel and kerbside collections for batteries. The SNP will seek to learn from other countries that have far better records for recycling.

Making the most of Scotland's renewable and green energy potential

Scotland has extensive renewable energy potential. We will take forward a distinct Scottish Energy Policy.

Involve communities more in renewable energy decisions

A Scottish energy revolution has greatest chance of success if it comes from the bottom up rather than just being imposed from the top down. Community opposition to industrial scale wind-farms is just one example.

We will take forward the creation of Community Energy Plans to allow local communities to identify and set their own local renewable needs and then contract with energy suppliers to deliver community based energy generation and energy saving solutions.

Alongside this initiative we will encourage the establishment of community energy companies and trusts, with local micro-grids allowing for the decentralisation of energy production. Instead of a small number of large generators, our aim is to see an expansion of local generation, in particular Combined Heat and Power plants and household generation capacity, which together will increasingly meet local energy needs.

We want more householders contributing to local energy supply and so will remove unnecessary planning obstacles that stand in the way of micro-generation.

In our first Budget for Scotland, the SNP in government will also set out plans to quadruple the financial support for family and community micro-generation schemes. As part of this step change, we will bring forward plans to support the long-term deployment of energy generation or energy saving in 1 million Scottish homes.

Finance and Sustainable Growth

Europe's Green Energy Capital

In government the SNP will make the creation of an EU wide green energy research centre a focus of our external affairs efforts in the EU. The centre, which we propose should be based in Aberdeen, would allow us to build on decades of offshore energy expertise and the proximity to some of the world's most promising renewable energy locations - from Peterhead and the North Sea for carbon capture and storage to the Pentland Firth, described as the Saudi Arabia of tidal power.

Taking a technological lead

We want to see Scotland take the lead in providing the engineering solutions that allow for the full exploitation of these clean energy sources. As we have indicated earlier, the first £5 million Saltire prize will be an opportunity for Scottish and international scientists to design and develop the answers we need to take forward these vital technologies and deliver workable commercial scale generators around Scotland's shores.

Support for Carbon Capture

An SNP led government will give full backing to proposals to develop cutting edge carbon capture and storage schemes so we can generate clean energy from hydrocarbon sources. We will support the upgrade of current coal generation with new clean coal technologies.

A North Sea Super-Grid

We will begin early discussions with the Norwegian Government and EU Commission on co-operation to take forward proposals for an electricity inter-connector linking renewable generation off Scottish and Norwegian shores with energy hungry markets in mainland Europe.

Investment in offshore renewables

The SNP will continue current investment and look to extend support available for research into and the deployment of offshore generation capacity. It is our ambition that Scotland takes the lead in these technologies in the way Denmark was able to become the lead nation for onshore wind over the last decade.

National and Local Planning Progress

We will begin an early review of planning, including proposals to require Local Authorities to take account of renewable energy as part of their local planning process. We will expect each Scottish council to assess suitable and appropriate sites for renewable generation in their area, with full engagement with communities in this process. This review will include assessment of the suitability of infrastructure and grid access. This local initiative will feed into a nationwide assessment of renewable sites.

This one year community and national consultation will allow us to produce a clear national strategy on the approach to the planning and siting of renewable generation, allowing us to move forward more effectively. Current schemes will continue through the planning process during this review. We will also encourage generators to consider expansion of current wind sites where this is agreed with the local community.

III. Department of Health and Wellbeing

Scotland can be healthier, with the benefits felt in higher quality of life for Scottish families and communities.

Our new approach will see vital local health services protected. In hospital you will have your own personal and legally guaranteed waiting time. Our commitment is to deliver healthcare that is quick and close to home.

It's time for fresh thinking to give Scots the support they need to improve their health and fitness. It's time to build on the success of NHS staff and deliver a system that works for Scottish patients.

Health policy should be as much about preventing ill-health as treating it. The SNP will focus on improving public health, as well as ensuring good and timely medical treatment.

We will pay particular attention to reducing health inequalities within Scotland - as well as between Scotland and the rest of Western Europe - by expanding primary and preventative healthcare services in our most deprived areas.

And we will do more to empower individuals and communities to have more control over their own lives and more choice in how their needs are met.

Departmental Priorities

Building a stronger NHS

We will make better use of NHS capacity to deliver a better deal for patients.

By investing in more fast-track diagnostic and treatment centres within the NHS, by giving every patient a legally binding waiting time guarantee appropriate for their needs, and by providing the right incentives for hospitals to do more, we can drive down waiting times for everyone, not just those lucky enough to have a waiting time guarantee – something now denied to over one third of patients waiting for treatment.

Reducing waiting times

Individuals sometimes need to be treated more quickly than the national waiting time guarantees. To ensure this happens we will introduce a Patients Rights Bill to give every patient a legally binding waiting time guarantee appropriate for their condition.

Together with our determination to make better use of NHS capacity, this will enable us to deliver a new national waiting time guarantee. We will set a target that no patient should wait longer than 18 weeks from GP referral to treatment by the end of 2011.

We will also ensure that the two-month waiting target for cancer patients to be diagnosed and treated is met.

To further reduce waiting times we will increase the numbers of NHS physiotherapists and examine the potential to expand the numbers of other allied health professionals.

Accessible healthcare

Working patterns and lifestyles have changed dramatically over the past decades, yet access to non-emergency healthcare is still based on office-hours availability. We will work with healthcare providers and health boards to deliver more flexible access to health services.

We will issue new guidance to health boards to reduce excessive charges for car parking and other services and review public transport links to hospitals to make sure they are sufficiently accessible.

Access to alternative therapies such as homeopathy can help improve the quality of life of patients. We will support patient choice in this respect and encourage GPs to do likewise.

We will support measures to improve access to independent sexual health information and advice services in rural as well as urban areas and support the role of school nurses in secondary schools in the delivery of a sexual health strategy.

Health and Wellbeing

Local healthcare

Most people accept that they may have to travel if they need specialist health treatment. They also expect to have local access to core services like A&E and maternity services. An SNP government will support this expectation by operating a presumption against the centralisation of core hospital services.

We will reverse the decision taken by the current Executive to downgrade the Accident and Emergency departments at Monklands and Ayr Hospitals.

We will make sure that health board plans to change the way services are delivered are independently scrutinised before going through a more open consultation process. Health boards will have to show that changes will lead to better services and demonstrate how redesigned services will operate in practice before they can withdraw existing services.

To help support local services in the long term we will train more generalist doctors and make better use of primary care services, support nurses and other healthcare professionals.

Local health services are particularly important in rural communities. We will support the model of rural general hospitals and consider incentives to encourage people to train in rural medicine and commit to working in rural areas. We will ensure that training in specialist rural areas medicine is properly supported.

We will improve the quality of NHS24 by delivering the service through more local mini-centres co-located with out-of-hours services in each health board area.

Accountable healthcare

Many recent decisions taken by health boards have run counter to the wishes of local communities. Sometimes difficult decisions must be made and local people should always be at the heart of the process. To ensure this is the case we will introduce direct elections to health boards. At least half of health board members will be elected by the public. Those elected will be encouraged to serve on their local community health partnership as well as the health board.

Because we believe in a more accountable health service an SNP government will hold a public inquiry to find out why people were infected with hepatitis C through NHS treatment.

Staff safety

Those who work in the NHS do Scotland proud. They deserve the right to a safe working environment without the fear of assault. All too often they face violence and aggression. An SNP government will tackle this by extending Emergency Workers legislation to cover all NHS staff.

Dental care

Scotland has one of the worst records in Europe for dental health, with children from deprived communities being least likely to have regular dental check ups and treatment. We will re-introduce a school-based dental service, starting in the most deprived areas. To improve general access to NHS dentistry, we will work with the dental profession to solve recruitment and retention problems and seek to open a third dental school by expanding the Aberdeen Dental Institute.

Ending the blame culture

We will replace the current NHS clinical negligence scheme with a no-fault system of compensation to help foster a more open and respectful relationship between patients and clinical staff. This will help eliminate the blame culture that can inhibit the actions of medical staff and deliver fairer, quicker and less costly outcomes. Our NHS Redress Bill will give patients an alternative to pursuing a medical negligence claim by introducing a right to redress without having to go through a lengthy legal battle.

Mental health

Improved early intervention can help prevent the development of serious mental health problems and reduce over prescribing of anti-depressants. An SNP government will support the development of mental health and wellbeing services, such as counselling and talking therapies, in each community health partnership area, backed with ring-fenced funding to health boards and local authorities. With this support we aim to reduce the use of anti depressants by 10 per cent by 2009.

Voluntary partnerships

We will work in partnership with the voluntary sector to support new ways of delivering services, including direct payments to service providers. By supporting the voluntary sector to provide services such as palliative care we can make an immeasurable improvement to the quality of life of patients.

Health and Wellbeing

Greater independence through quality care

The SNP believes that everyone has the right to control their own lives. Care services for disabled people and others should help maintain the independence of the individual by giving them greater choice over the ways in which their needs are met.

To support this we will encourage the wider use of direct payments, particularly in groups where take-up has been low. We will also trial the development of individual budgets to extend the flexibility and choice of services available for people with a disability and who have an assessed need for care support.

Free personal care

The SNP is committed to delivering free personal and nursing care for the elderly. We will ensure it is implemented properly across the country.

As an immediate priority we will increase the payments for personal and nursing care in line with inflation. To secure the policy in the longer term we will establish an independent review to investigate both the level and distribution of resources to local authorities, advised by Lord Sutherland, chair of the Royal Commission that paved the way for the introduction of free personal care.

We will reopen with Westminster the issue of attendance allowance. When the Scottish Parliament introduced free personal care the UK government decided to claw back £40 million that was already being paid to pensioners in attendance allowance. That is money that rightly belongs in Scotland and we will seek to recover it.

Residential care

We will invest an additional £6 million each year to ensure an appropriate availability of care home places for those who need residential care.

Support for unpaid carers

The SNP will do more to help the hundreds of thousands of unpaid carers who make such a huge contribution to Scotland's health and wellbeing. We will intensify initiatives to implement the conclusions of the Care 21 Report on the Future of Unpaid care in Scotland.

We will extend direct payments to carers and provide additional funding to provide dedicated services to support young carers.

We will invest in providing training for carers and provide additional funding for the support and development of carer organisations across Scotland.

We will start to improve the provision of respite care by providing sufficient resources for an additional 10,000 respite weeks per year, either at home or in a care setting. By 2011 carers in greatest need will have a guaranteed annual entitlement to breaks from caring.

Improving public health

Government has a responsibility to deliver excellent healthcare free at the point of need and individuals also have a responsibility to look after their own health and avoid damaging behaviour.

An SNP government will make it easier for people to take better care of themselves by providing personalised advice and information and making healthy choices more accessible.

Health checks

To identify health problems early we will introduce annual health and fitness checks in schools, delivered by doubling the number of school nurses. School nurses will play a crucial role in tackling problems such as childhood obesity through education, working with parents and individual intervention.

To ensure that health problems in later life can be identified we will introduce 'Life begins' health checks for all men and women when they reach the age of 40, delivered through GP surgeries or local health centres. Patients will be given an individual health plan based on the findings of their health check with information on any lifestyle changes which may be necessary.

By the end of our first term in government we will aim to extend this initiative to Scots reaching retirement age, allowing the right health intervention and support at this important time of life.

Health and Wellbeing

Protecting against cervical cancer

An SNP government will offer free vaccination against the most common viruses that cause cervical cancer. Subject to the recommendation of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, we will make the vaccine available to all girls aged between 12 and 14, through a school-based vaccination programme.

Dementia as a national priority

An SNP government will ensure dementia is a national priority. We will seek both to increase public understanding and help people reduce their risk of dementia.

It is important that across Scotland public bodies work to the same care standards and an SNP government will work with Local Authorities and Health Boards to agree a way forward.

Prescription charges

Prescription charges are a tax on ill health and a barrier to good health for many people. They are also expensive to administer. An SNP government will immediately abolish prescription charges for people with chronic health conditions, people with cancer, and people in full time education or training. We will phase out prescription charges for the rest of the population by 2012.

Improving the food we eat

The SNP supported the introduction of the 'Hungry for success' policy to improve school meals and we can do more to improve the diet of our children.

We will pilot free nutritious school meals for pupils in Primary 1-3, starting in areas of deprivation, and increase entitlement to free school meals for a further 40,000 children living in poverty.

We will also ensure that all primary school children receive free fruit and provide free fruit for pregnant women and pre-school children using the model of market-led pregnancy cards from the major supermarkets.

We will work constructively with food producers and retailers to increase the availability of fresh, nutritious and locally produced food - particularly in areas of deprivation - and address pricing policies so that healthy food becomes more affordable.

We will seek clearer labeling and kite marking of foods with a health benefit. As part of this process we will consult on replacing the Supermarket Code of Conduct with independent regulation to ensure that supermarkets give space to fresh local and seasonal produce.

We will examine how the public sector can help promote good eating habits by ensuring food procurement policies meet progressively higher nutritional standards, starting in hospitals, nurseries and care homes. By making nutritional specifications available to private sector workplaces and other institutions we can encourage the private sector to follow suit.

We will place an upper limit on artificially produced fats (trans-fats) both in food and in oils and fats used in the preparation of food.

Physical activity and sport

We will expand measures to increase physical activity among children and in the general population, including exercise on prescription schemes. Policy will focus on increasing participation in grassroots sport, as well as doing more to nurture the sporting stars of the future.

To achieve this, national policy and targets will become a ministerial responsibility, advised by sports governing bodies and other organisations involved in physical recreation. We will abolish sportscotland and establish the 3 national centres currently run by sportscotland as not-for-profit trusts.

Starting young

To help Scottish children develop the habit of physical fitness we will ensure that every pupil has 2 hours of quality PE each week delivered by specialist PE teachers. We will continue the Active Schools Programme and improve it by building greater links between schools and local sports clubs and governing bodies. We will establish an innovative sport volunteer programme with schools and after school clubs, to introduce youngsters to the range of sporting activities available in their areas.

We will introduce a moratorium on loss or reduction of school playing fields and facilities, where there are no equivalent or improved facilities provided, to ensure cheap lets are available to sporting and activity groups. We will prioritise making school grounds and facilities more accessible after school hours and during weekends. Children will be given free, year-round access to council swimming pools.

Scotland has one of the most spectacular and challenging outdoor environments in the world and all of our youngsters should have the opportunity to experience it. We will work towards a guarantee of 5 days outdoor education for every school pupil. To start this process, we will provide an additional £250,000 each year to support the expansion of 5 days subsidised outdoor education targeted at children from our most deprived communities.

Health and Wellbeing

We will strengthen national planning guidelines to give greater protection to green spaces for sport and informal recreational activity, particularly in urban and deprived communities. We will work with local authorities and the voluntary sector to develop an effective play strategy to increase the range of quality play opportunities for children and young people in every part of Scotland.

Supporting sporting excellence

To nurture future sporting success we will expand the number of centres of sporting excellence in Scotland, based on the model of the Bellahouston School of Sport in Glasgow. We will ensure that the Regional Institutes of Sport and sports governing bodies work closely with the designated schools to provide seamless support to young athletes throughout their school years and beyond. This will enable young athletes competing at elite level to receive specialised training in an educational setting, so that students can combine training with academic learning.

We will task the Scottish Institute of Sport with the primary responsibility for the elite athlete programme. The Institute will work with the Regional Institutes of Sport, sports governing bodies and others to support our elite athletes and ensure sporting success for them and for Scotland.

International teams and competitions

The SNP has been 100 per cent behind Glasgow's bid to win the 2014 Commonwealth Games. In government we will continue to back the bid to bring the Games to Scotland.

We will launch a feasibility study into the possibility of Scotland bidding for the 2016 European Football Championships and pursue access to more international sporting events for Scottish teams. This will give the maximum number of Scottish athletes the opportunity to compete on the international stage and assist in developing sport throughout Scotland.

Improving community sports facilities

Lack of community facilities is the biggest barrier to participation in sport and physical activity for all age groups. We will work with local authorities to develop local facility strategies to deliver community sports facilities fit for 21st century and ensure that school facilities can become part of community sports provision.

We will give more direct financial support to sports clubs and sports governing bodies to improve their club facilities. Funding will be targeted through a national Sports Facilities Fund. To receive funding, local projects will be required to demonstrate community involvement and access as well as a focus on improving public health.

Physical activity in daily life

Being physically active is not just about participating in organised activities, it is also about the way we live our daily lives. We will promote simple everyday activities like walking, cycling and playing. This will help reduce carbon emissions as well as improving physical fitness.

Reducing smoking

The ban on smoking in enclosed public places was a major step forward for Scotland and more can be done to reduce smoking levels. We will raise the smoking age to 18, promote the introduction of plain packaging and photographic warnings on tobacco products and enforce legislation prohibiting the sale of tobacco to people who are under age more strictly.

Reducing alcohol misuse

Irresponsible drinking poses major health risks for individuals and demands effective action from government. An SNP government will do more to address public concerns about licensing laws and the advertising, availability and affordability of alcohol.

Working with the industry, we will deliver clearer labeling of the unit content on alcoholic products, with health and sensible drinking messages included.

Working with local authorities, we will make sure that every school operates an effective alcohol education programme, starting in primary schools.

SNP justice policy will ensure a tough clampdown on irresponsible drinks promotions and underage drinking, including action to stop the deep discounting of alcohol in shops and supermarkets. It is not acceptable that a bottle of water can be more expensive than alcohol. This sends entirely the wrong health message to young Scots, as well as contributing to alcohol-fuelled anti-social behaviour.

A longer term drugs strategy

There are no short term fixes to the problems of drug misuse in Scotland. That is why an SNP government will establish a national Drugs Commission to develop and agree a long term national strategy backed up by a more robust evidence base.

SNP justice policy will deliver tough action against the drugs dealers.

We will increase counselling and support services for addicts, with a 20 per cent increase in funding for drug treatment and rehabilitation programmes. We will seek to extend access to abstinence programs to the whole of Scotland and to ensure that treatment is accompanied by employability support to help those escaping a chemical lifestyle move on successfully.

Schools are often the first line of defence in the fight against drug abuse. An SNP government will restore ring-fenced funding for drugs education, with £10 million of dedicated funding for drugs education in classrooms.

A new focus on the needs of Scotland's communities

Good health is about more than physical fitness, it is also about quality of life. The homes we live in, the environment we work in and the extent to which we feel in control of our own lives have a vital impact on our sense of wellbeing

Reducing poverty and dependency

Scotland has one of the highest levels of income inequality in Western Europe. Too many deprived areas suffer from persistent inter-generational poverty and dependency, damaging the health and limiting the life chances of the individuals who live there.

Inequality on this scale is a sign of serious political and economic failure. Reducing poverty and dependency will be an SNP priority.

As part of our drive to grow the Scottish economy we will set specific targets to increase the proportion of national wealth held by the each of the lowest six income deciles. We can ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared by all.

Post-independence we plan to develop a fully integrated tax and benefit system to guarantee every citizen a minimum income, remove financial barriers to work, and help people lift themselves out of poverty. Prior to independence we will work to reduce dependency by improving educational and economic opportunities, particularly in areas of deprivation.

We will also seek responsibilities to tackle Scotland's spiralling levels of personal debt by establishing a Scottish Lenders Code of Conduct that sets minimum standards of lending practices with appropriate safeguards against exploitation. This would provide consumers with greater protection against unscrupulous lenders.

Communities in control

The SNP's aim is to give individuals, families and communities more control of their own destiny. We will opt for de-centralist policy solutions that devolve power to local level wherever that is possible and seek ways to devolve power from local authorities to community level.

New powers for communities

We will review the role of community councils to make them more responsive, dynamic and representative. Devolving greater responsibilities to community councils will be a central consideration of this review.

We will consult on proposals to make new local government ward boundaries the structural basis for new community councils, with increased powers. These powers could include directing a portion of current local spending in their area. As a starting point the consultation will seek views on a figure of £30,000 for every 1000 Scots or £300,000 for a community of 10,000 people – approximately the size of Fort William.

We particularly want to empower Scots living in areas of deprivation. We will pilot a community empowerment scheme giving deprived communities the ability to opt for empowered status, allowing local people to co-manage a proportion of public spending and services. We believe that this will deliver better outcomes and build community capacity and self-reliance, enabling people in disadvantaged communities to have more control of their own futures.

More community level management and ownership

We will consult on measures to enable new models of community management of facilities within local authority control, such as parks or libraries, to ensure that local people get the best use out of them. We will also consider ways to transfer under-used public assets into community ownership without the need for ministerial approval, where community benefit can be clearly demonstrated.

Volunteering communities

Volunteers make an enormous contribution to the lives of individuals and communities across Scotland. An SNP government will seek to extend the involvement of the voluntary sector as co-producers of public services and drivers of community development.

We will conclude and implement the strategic funding review to progress sustainable three year funding and full cost recovery as soon as is practicable.

We will work with the sector and regulatory and monitoring bodies to develop a charter of best practice to regulate the activities of voluntary organisations which minimises barriers to volunteering.

Health and Wellbeing

Housing

Everyone should be able to have a secure, warm home at a cost they can afford. For many in Scotland today that remains out of reach. The Scottish Parliament has passed a raft of legislation to tackle homelessness and improve the quality of Scottish housing. Now it's time to deliver.

An SNP government will give particular help to first time buyers who are struggling to afford a home of their own. We have already announced plans to introduce a first time buyers' grant of £2,000, to help with the costs and outlays of buying their first home.

We will provide additional support with the creation of a Scottish Housing Support Fund to work in partnership with lenders to provide loans to first time buyers on a shared equity basis. The Scottish Housing Support Fund will assist over a thousand additional first time buyers into the housing market each year. By reinvesting the returns made on the loans it gives to assist future first time buyers it will become self financing over time.

The SNP recognises the acute shortage of affordable homes in many areas of Scotland. We value the community rented sector provided by local authorities and housing associations and will assist them to identify need and ensure that the house building and improvement programme is appropriate to local needs.

We will require all public authorities to identify surplus land suitable for house building and encourage local authorities to make greater use of the planning process to ensure that house building permissions are appropriate to the housing needs of their communities. We will expect that a minimum of 25 per cent of all new housing developments are reserved for affordable housing.

We will review current right to buy legislation – while protecting the rights of existing tenants – to make it more responsive to local needs. We will ensure that any new build community housing is not sold for less than the valuation placed on it by a District Valuer.

We will transfer the functions of Communities Scotland that can be appropriately delivered locally to local authorities, while retaining a national regulatory and monitoring framework for Registered Social Landlords.

Inadequate water and sewerage capacity is currently restricting new housing developments. We will take action to remove the barriers which impede investment in water and sewerage infrastructure where this is necessary.

Building standards

The SNP will improve the enforcement of building regulations. We will give clear political direction to the Scottish Building Standards Agency to provide stronger leadership and consult on proposals to ensure that completion certificates comply with regulations by requiring sign-off of work by a professional with professional liability.

IV. Department for Education, Skills, Culture and Arts

The SNP wants to deliver more opportunities for Scots to succeed.

Our approach will see a new emphasis on children's early years, with an increase in free nursery education and smaller class sizes in primary schools.

We will work with education professionals to stretch every child to achieve their full potential, providing them with the individual attention and support they need to flourish.

We will pay particular attention to raising the achievement of the poorest performing 20 per cent of school pupils, with increased early intervention and support.

We recognise and respect the crucial role of education professionals in this vital task.

We believe that access to further and higher education should be based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay. We will deliver a return to free education.

And we will deliver more targeted support for Scotland's creative community to boost success and maximise the economic potential of the cultural sector.

Departmental Priorities

Building firm foundations

Children and young people

An SNP government will tackle early the things that hold children back in later life, with a focus on delivering high quality integrated services for children and families. Creating more joined-up services will ensure that children's needs are at the centre of policy and provision. We will consider the impact on children in all areas of policy development and legislation.

We support the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We believe that asylum seeker children have the same rights as other children.

Supporting families

Children do best in a strong and supportive family environment.

Getting the right work-life balance is important for families. We want to see all parents and carers having the right to request flexible working. We will promote more home and flexi working in the public sector and encourage the private sector to follow suit.

Making life easier

We will seek to extend access to high quality, affordable and flexible childcare services which match children's needs and parents' working patterns. We will increase the provision of free nursery education for 3 and 4 year olds by 50 per cent, with families benefiting from longer hours of free provision.

Our long term goal is to deliver universal integrated early education and care services, similar to the Scandinavian model, giving every family access to affordable, high quality childcare and support from the end of maternity leave. In the short term we will look at what we can do to support the increasing number of grandparents providing childcare for grandchildren under 3.

Education, Skills, Culture and Arts

The right support

Sometimes families need help when there are problems at home. We will work to ensure that parents can access information and support services in every community in Scotland. We will also seek to ensure that support services are more widely available for the families of drug addicts and for the families of those who misuse alcohol.

Involving the wider family in decisions about children can reduce the number of children taken into care. We will work to expand kinship care, where that is possible, and expand family group conferencing from the local authorities which currently use it out to the whole country.

We will develop improved national support for foster carers and make sure better and more responsive support is made available to looked-after children.

Protecting all our children

Children should live in a secure environment, free from fear. Protecting children will be a priority for an SNP government.

We will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of recent legislation on child protection and disclosure and review and amend it if necessary.

We will introduce legislation to improve Scotland's important and distinctive Children's Hearing system.

We will make sure that all agencies share information and intervene promptly to identify and support children at risk. And we will review the funding of children's services to ensure that it meets need and that there is greater integration of service delivery, putting the child at the heart of the system.

Giving children and young people a voice

Children and young people have the right to have their needs taken into account and their views listened to when decisions are taken that affect them.

We will encourage community planning partnerships to engage young people in their areas and deliver a Youth Strategy to promote better opportunities and activities for young people.

We support reducing the voting age to 16 to allow young people to exercise their democratic rights.

Providing improved opportunities to learn

An early start is the best start

High quality early years education helps to give children a head start in life, particularly in communities where opportunities are limited by other factors.

We will increase the provision of free nursery education for 3 and 4 year olds by 50 per cent. That means increasing the entitlement from 400 hours a year to 600 hours a year. We are concerned at the removal of nursery teachers from nurseries in some council areas. We will deliver access to a fully qualified nursery teacher for every nursery age child, starting with children in deprived communities.

Early intervention, identification of need and provision of service is essential for children who have additional support needs. We will require agencies to work together to deliver this.

We will promote the nurture groups that have proved successful in improving the attainment and behaviour of children in the early years of primary.

Working with teacher training colleges we will begin to develop a flexible, dedicated 'Early years development' teaching degree.

Platform for success

Early intervention, identification of need and provision of service is essential for children who have additional support needs. We will require agencies to work together to deliver this.

We propose to create an Additional Support Fund to improve services for children with additional support needs, for example dyslexia and autism. This £10 million fund will be focused on providing continuous professional development for teachers. It will also ensure that initial teacher training emphasises early identification of additional support needs and that specialist training is rolled out to each and every teacher in Scotland.

We will also review the operation and implementation of mainstreaming of children with additional support needs to make sure that children receive the support they need.

Education, Skills, Culture and Arts

Smaller class sizes in P1-P3

We will reduce class sizes in Primary 1, 2 and 3 to eighteen pupils or less to give children more time with their teacher at this vital stage of their development.

Headteachers will have the power to decide on the most appropriate class sizes in later years, within national guidelines. We will maintain teacher numbers in the face of falling school rolls to cut class sizes and place greater emphasis on teacher recruitment for the early years, languages and science.

Smaller class sizes and increased early intervention will help tackle indiscipline in schools and ensure that pupils and teachers enjoy the right conditions for learning throughout their careers.

We will also examine models of single teacher support in S1 to tackle behaviour and guidance issues.

A modern Scottish curriculum

We will place science, modern languages and technology at the heart of education. Scottish history, culture and heritage will be embedded in school life to provide a Scottish world view. This will include the teaching of enterprise skills.

We will support teachers to expand personalised learning in every school to allow children to make progress at a pace that suits their individual abilities.

We will provide opportunities for all pupils to experience vocational education by expanding school-college partnerships for 14 – 16 year olds. Vocational skills will have parity of esteem with academic qualifications.

We will provide leadership and drive to promote the Curriculum for Excellence agenda. We will cut over-assessment and bureaucracy which gets in the way of quality teaching and learning.

We will investigate the option of elective time in the school week, to free up time for vocational opportunities and allow pupils to pursue interests such as creative arts, community volunteering or sport.

We will ensure that children's education has a European and international dimension, with a greater emphasis on modern foreign languages to extend horizons and widen opportunities in later life.

We will introduce a Scottish Science Baccalaureate and a Scottish Language Baccalaureate, initially as group awards, recognising high attainment in a number of Highers and Advanced Highers. We will examine the case for introducing the International Baccalaureate.

Learning about citizenship

We will help schools engage pupils in citizenship education which teaches them to understand their responsibilities towards the environment, prepares them to play a full part in society and promotes a culture of respect and tolerance.

We will encourage every pupil to learn about the institutions and governance of their country, as well as the EU and other supranational bodies.

Financial and housing education will ensure that young people are equipped with skills for life.

We will pilot an initiative to allow 17 year old pupils to take the theory part of the driving test at school to equip them with road safety knowledge they will need in later life.

Indiscipline

We will produce new guidelines to help schools establish peaceful working and learning environments. Smaller classes and early intervention will help improve behaviour. As part of our citizenship agenda we will provide advice to tackle bullying in all its forms, including racial and homophobic bullying, violence and anti-social behaviour.

Schools will be able to set local policies on issues such as abuse of mobile phones, uniform and exclusion.

Schools at the heart of communities

We will match the current school building programme brick for brick, and offer an alternative funding mechanism through the Scottish Futures Trust. With better value bonds we can release more money to invest in the frontline. And with buildings held in trust, local communities will have better access to use school facilities.

We will work with local authorities to develop more schools as community hubs, providing out-of-school activities and, where possible, family, childcare and other community services on site.

Access to a local school is particularly important in rural communities. We will introduce a legislative presumption against closure of rural schools and tighten the regulations for closing all schools.

We will ensure that our education system meets the distinctive needs and interests of all of our communities. The SNP will continue to support denominational schools as long as parents want them. We will guarantee in law the right to a Gaelic medium education at primary level, where reasonable demand exists, and actively pursue the Gaelic teacher strategy.

Creating a springboard for life through Higher and further education

Access to education should be based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay.

An SNP government will abolish the Graduate Endowment tuition fee and replace the expensive and discredited Student Loans system with means-tested student grants. We will remove the burden of debt repayments owed by Scottish domiciled and resident graduates. We will promote widening access to Higher and Further education in Scotland encouraging and creating opportunities for people who may not have been able to access continuing education previously.

We will review the situation of part-time and post-graduate students and support efforts to attract more international students.

We recognise the key role colleges play in the economy and in their communities and will help them develop this role as part of a revitalised life-long learning agenda. Our universities compete on a global basis in research and development, and we need to provide more government support for them to continue to do so as a key driver in Scotland's economic and enterprise agenda. That is why we will allocate an additional £10 million to support cutting edge research in Scotland.

We will also support the creation of a Scottish Life Sciences Institute. We believe such an Institute could play an important role in retaining and attracting the best scientists to Scotland and would act as a magnet for excellence in this important area of scientific research.

A skilled workforce

By getting it right in schools and other educational institutions we can ensure that more people have the qualities and skills that employers are looking for. That means we can save a great deal of time and money on remedial action in the post-school environment.

We will aim to ensure that people of all ages can access relevant, valued and quality assured training opportunities throughout their working lives to keep pace with the rapidly changing demands of the global economy. We will work with employers to help them with the practical support they need to tackle skills shortages and work with national agencies, training agencies, the voluntary sector and local community enterprises to promote activities which help increase the employability of individuals.

We will focus our skills strategy on real, marketable skills and ensure that the strategy is demand-led. We will review the modern apprenticeships programme to make sure that the skills being taught match skills gaps and that the system is flexible enough to encourage the maximum participation. In particular, we will aim to increase the number of small businesses taking part. In the long term, we will seek to relax the age restrictions on modern apprenticeships so that older workers can benefit from the programme too.

Supporting culture and creativity

The SNP wants to see a culturally cosmopolitan Scotland, capable of attracting and retaining gifted people, where our creative community is supported and their contribution to the economy is maximised.

The creative industries already generate more than £5 billion of turnover in the Scottish economy and we think they could do even better with the right support. Scotland has talent in abundance and we need to work harder at supporting success. We will introduce a range of measures to benefit emerging and existing artists.

Supporting Scottish artists

The SNP favours the introduction of a limited tax exemption scheme for artists. At present the Scottish Parliament does not have the fiscal powers to deliver this directly. We will therefore introduce a new grant enabling artists to reclaim the cost of the tax paid on work they have sold up to a maximum of £15,000.

We will also expand the range of funding options available to artists. As well as non-repayable grants we will introduce a system of loans. A third type of funding will be made available in the form of the government taking a stake in the artist's next work, with the government's share of any profits being reinvested in the creative sector.

We will transfer the budgets for the creative industries from Scottish Enterprise to Creative Scotland.

We will also explore modelling the film tax incentives that have been successful in Ireland, Canada and the United States, to bring more film production to Scotland.

Education, Skills, Culture and Arts

Supporting Scotland's Festivals

The Edinburgh Festivals are crucial to attracting tourists and showcasing Scottish talent on the international stage. The SNP will do more to support Scottish artists by creating a new £2million 'Edinburgh Festival Expo Fund' to promote Scottish work at the Festivals. The Expo fund will help support the costs of new productions, events or exhibitions which involve Scottish-based participants that are premiered at any of the Edinburgh Festivals and could also be used to support touring of events or performances after their premiere at the festival.

We will also do more to promote our distinctive national identity and attract tourists on a year round basis. We will mobilise our national days - St Andrew's Day, Hogmanay and Burns Night - for the benefit of the Scottish economy by the promotion of a Scottish Winter Festival. As part of this we will make St Andrew's Day a full national holiday, celebrating the best of our traditional and contemporary culture.

Widening access to the arts

Culture is not just the domain of professional practitioners. We want to see access to, and participation in, cultural activities being as wide as possible. We will promote this by ensuring that local authorities include cultural activities within the community planning process.

Broadcasting

Scotland needs a dedicated news service and more quality programming made in Scotland. An SNP government will push for the devolution of broadcasting powers to the Scottish Parliament.

Currently Scotland generates 8.8% of BBC revenues in licence fees and only receives 5.7% of the revenues raised. We want BBC Scotland to retain more of the licence fee raised in Scotland. This would allow it to determine its own broadcasting priorities and increase investment in programme-making in Scotland, while retaining access to the rest of the BBC network.

As a very minimum we will demand the creation of a Scottish news service. Devolution has resulted in significant divergences in policy and practice north and south of the Border. This must be reflected in news coverage.

We will encourage programme-makers, in both the BBC and independent sectors, to do more to market and promote Scotland's distinctive culture internationally. There is great potential to make better use of events such as the Edinburgh Festival or Celtic Connections to target the global market, particularly the Scottish diaspora.

We will monitor the operation of the Gaelic digital channel to ensure that it brings economic as well as cultural benefits, to the islands in particular, and push to make it available on freeview.

Scotland's languages

An SNP government will focus on increasing the place of Gaelic in education, improving the status of the language throughout Scotland and supporting Gaelic speaking communities.

To stabilise the language we will set a target of ensuring that by the 2021 census, the proportion of Gaelic speakers is back up to 2001 levels at the very least. We will also set a target to expand the number of children in Gaelic medium education within our first term.

We will promote an increased awareness of Scots and its literature. This will include introducing a question on Scots in the census and ensuring that European obligations to develop the language are honoured. We will actively encourage the use of Scots in education, broadcasting and the arts.

Safeguarding our heritage

Current legislation on built heritage is complex and piece-meal, with significant gaps. For example, there is no statutory protection for battlefield sites in Scotland. An SNP government will conduct a full review and consultation on the legislation covering heritage protection, with a view to bringing forward a Heritage Bill in the next session of Parliament.

We will reduce duplication by merging the 'Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland' into 'Historic Scotland'.

V. Department of Justice

Scottish families and communities can be safer. Our new approach will see more police on Scottish streets. We believe that this more visible police presence will reassure communities and deter the criminals. It is an investment that will provide wider benefits and will be a key element of the SNP's justice plans.

We will place responsibility at the heart of the department's activities. Individuals must accept that their actions have consequences. People are tired of excuses for bad behaviour and it is time that we dealt firmly and effectively with the crime and anti-social behaviour that disrupts the lives of too many of our citizens.

Scotland as a whole and Scotland's government must also take responsibility for all our communities and seriously address the issues that are too often the driving force behind – never a justification for – crime and anti-social behaviour – drink, drugs and deprivation. It is a phrase tarnished by 10 years of disappointment, and yet it remains true today – we must address crime and the causes of crime.

Departmental Priorities

A stronger focus on safer communities

More Police on Local Streets

There is no doubt we could be doing more to fight crime and make Scotland's communities safer. Creating a safer Scotland will be a top priority for the Department of Justice, with all our actions focused on cutting crime and reducing the fear of crime.

It is essential that we have sufficient police on local streets. That's why we will set out plans in our first Budget for Scotland for 1000 more police and will encourage Chief Constables to focus these new resources on community policing. We want to see these new police officers becoming part of the fabric of communities and through local knowledge and by building strong relationships with families and businesses in the local area, they will be in a better position to deter crime, solve crime and make you and your family feel safer as you go about your daily business.

Visible policing plays a vital role in reducing the fear of crime, which can be as destructive as the level of crime, which is why we are putting the emphasis on front line police.

Increased public protection

Guns, air weapons and the Protection of Local Communities

There are too many guns – and in particular airguns – in Scotland and too many Scottish communities where these weapons cause fear and real harm. Where the Liberal/Labour Executive have failed to act and passed the buck to Westminster, we will seek specifically Scottish solutions.

Current government proposals are entirely inadequate to address this serious problem in Scotland. It is no longer good enough for Scotland to sit back and wait for our neighbours to decide on a solution. Instead Scotland must take responsibility itself.

An SNP government will begin early negotiations with the government in London to have powers over firearms repatriated to Scotland. This will free our parliament to produce legislation that deals with specific firearms issues. In particular, we propose a move away from the piecemeal legislation of today with a consolidated Firearms Act designed for Scottish needs and Scottish circumstances.

We need determined action to combat the dangers of airgun misuse. It is not enough to simply restrict the sale of airguns. We will introduce strict conditions on who can acquire airguns and where they can be used. An SNP led government will introduce a strict licensing scheme, covering the sale, purchase and use of airguns. This is the only effective way of dealing with this problem.

Sex Offenders and the Protection of Young Scots

We propose a new approach to strengthen the current system for dealing with serious sex offenders in our communities. We believe the protection of young Scots is the top priority and favour new rights for communities to be told when a paedophile poses a threat.

If a dangerous sex offender goes underground we will ask the police and local Procurator Fiscal to take the lead and do what is necessary to apprehend. This will include releasing the name and photograph of the offender to the community.

If a child goes missing, then there will be a tough response with sex offenders in the area visited, and if necessary premises searched, without a warrant.

There will be a traffic light system, with the police and Procurator Fiscal able to trigger a 'red alert' in a variety of circumstances in which case there would be all necessary steps to protect the local community. For amber, where there is some concern about a sex offender's behaviour, key organisations in a community will be informed. For example, these might include the local schools or a local swimming pool. The green light would only be applied for the range of less serious offences and where there was no assessed risk. The current arrangements would apply in these cases.

Justice

More Say for Communities in Anti-Social Behaviour Orders

Labour say vandalism is anti-social behaviour, we believe it is a crime. We believe anti-social behaviour orders should not be used when the criminal justice system is a more appropriate way of dealing with offenders.

Putting more police into local communities and our new focus on tough community punishments will help move the focus more effectively onto police deterrence and strong action against low level criminal activities that reduce the quality of life for too many people across Scotland.

In government we will look to review and improve the working of the system of ASBOs and as part of this, will consult on giving revamped community councils a greater role in the process of applying for anti-social behaviour orders.

Tackling the causes of crime

A clamp down on underage sales

It's time to get tough on the irresponsible sale of alcohol. Alcohol fuels the anti-social behaviour that blights too many communities. The SNP will hit hard off-licenses that sell to and adults who buy for under-18s. There are no excuses for the sale of booze to young Scots. The sale of alcohol to underage Scots will result in the loss of a premises' license and buying alcohol for under-18s will lead to prosecution.

The Home Office estimates that 40% of violent crime, 78% of assaults and 88% of criminal damage offences were committed when the offender was under the influence of alcohol. For many communities the biggest problems relate to excessive drinking on the streets and not the more regulated alcohol consumption in local bars.

As long as retailers are allowed to use deep discounting of alcohol as a method of undercutting competitors and luring customers into stores over consumption of alcohol and frequent binge drinking will remain a part of our culture. Concrete action is needed in this area if the damage alcohol does to our society is to be reversed.

Extend national licence conditions to the off trade.

Irresponsible drinks promotions in pubs and clubs are to be outlawed via national licence conditions set by central government, yet no such action is being taken with regard to the off trade. This anomaly can be rectified by ministers using the powers granted to them to set national licence conditions for the off trade. Such conditions would include the banning of irresponsible drinks promotions - that is those that sell alcohol at very cheap prices and/or large amounts of alcohol at deep discounts.

Strict penalties for supermarkets that flout licence conditions

Of course, if using Licensing conditions to ensure supermarkets sell and promote alcohol in a responsible manner are to be effective, then strict sanctions must be in place for those that flout the law.

The 2005 Licensing Act has introduced both tough sanctions and a proper policing system to ensure pubs and clubs meet their social responsibilities when selling alcohol. Under the Act, each Local Authority must employ Licensing Standards Officers to police the system and ensure publicans are selling alcohol in a responsible manner. Should a pub or a club fail to do so, the Licensing Boards have far reaching powers to clamp down on them, including changing the conditions of the existing licence, suspending the licence for as long as they see fit, or revoking the licence altogether.

However, these powers do not extend to the off trade, meaning supermarkets are free to continue the deep discounting of alcohol. Under the regulations of the Licensing Act, the Scottish Executive has the power to extend both the policing role and the Licensing Board sanctions to include the off-license trade. In government the SNP will use the powers available to, first, extend the role of the Licensing Standards Officers to include the policing of supermarkets and second, widen the jurisdiction of the Licensing Boards so they can impose the same sanctions on supermarkets that sell alcohol irresponsibly as they can with pubs and clubs.

Going after organised crime

The SNP in government will come down hard on serious and organised crime.

While the steps forward already taken through the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency and the Serious Organised Crime Agency are welcome, our concern is that current efforts are too one dimensional. Looking to the most successful models overseas it is clear Scotland would benefit from a more joined up approach, with the full range of necessary expertise brought together as part of a new Serious Crime Taskforce.

Our proposal would add new strength and depth to current efforts, with police investigations supported by dedicated prosecutors and specialists including forensic accountants, IT and corporate law experts.

We want to build the broadest and most effective enquiry and prosecution team to maximise the chance of success in any investigation and success in identifying and seizing the assets of these criminal organisations.

Justice

Offering an escape route

As part of our wider commitment to the right intervention we will reinstate the Airborne scheme and also support the further development of work-based mentoring for young Scots, along the lines of the Working Rite model.

The re-offending rate for offenders who took part in the Airborne Initiative was 21%, compared to 79% for those sent to prison. And Airborne proved to be good value for money for the tax payer in comparison to prison. When it was operating at full capacity, Airborne cost £116 per place per week, compared to £574 per week for a prison place at the time.

The SNP strongly supports efforts, such as the Pathfinder programme, to provide young people who risk not reaching their full potential, with opportunities for learning and personal development.

Such early intervention schemes have an important part to play in the wider battle against anti-social behaviour and in government the SNP will look to expand provision in this area by making this a priority area as additional funding emerges.

Ensuring the most appropriate sentencing, punishment and rehabilitation

A Scottish Sentencing Council

Public confidence is an integral part of any well functioning and effective criminal justice system. No matter how well a system operates, if the perception of it amongst the general public is negative then it is fundamentally undermined.

That's why the SNP will update and improve the current arrangements to provide greater consistency and transparency in the decisions of our courts.

The public are confused by the methods courts use to sentence criminals and believe, often with good reason, that similar offences result in significantly different sentences. Many within the criminal justice system share that belief.

Our solution is to create a new Sentencing Council to provide sentencing guidelines for the Judiciary. This will increase consistency, fairness and transparency in sentencing so that there is increased public confidence that justice is being done.

The final decision on a sentence based on the facts of the case would be for the Judge or Sheriff. The guidelines set by the Council will show the tariff to be applied and the sentence our communities expect to be imposed.

If a Judge or Sheriff wished to impose a sentence outwith the guidelines there would have to be some good reason to justify such an action. They would need to state on the record the specific reasons for doing so and in the few cases where a sentence falls outwith the guidelines it would be subject to Appeal by the Prosecution.

The SNP believes there should be an end to the automatic release of offenders. We support the recent legislation in this area and in government will drive forward this important area of reform.

Tough Community Punishments

The SNP propose a marked shift away from short custodial sentences to tough community-based punishments. Community based punishment serves the vital purpose of punishing a criminal for their offence, and has the added benefit of the offender repaying his debt to society directly to the community that has been harmed.

In addition, community punishment forces the offender to face up to their underlying problems, meaning re-offending is less likely and making society safer in the long term. This is considerably harder than sitting in a prison cell for a couple of months, often doing nothing more than learning the 'tricks' of the criminal trade.

The prime objective of our reforms will be to tackle re-offending, and therefore cut crime in Scotland and the size of our prison population. To achieve this, we propose a number of practical changes

The presumption will be that an offender given a custodial sentence of less than 6 months will have that sentence turned into an equivalent punishment in the community. However, if an offender commits a further crime while serving a community punishment they will be punished severely. This will involve serving their original sentence in full, plus any sentence given for their later offence, with no prospect of remission.

Although there will be a presumption against short prison sentences, sheriffs must retain independence in sentencing. Therefore if a Sheriff felt that, in an exceptional case, a short sentence was appropriate, perhaps to give an offender a 'short sharp shock', that option would remain open. However, the Sheriff will require to state in open court why no alternative community based sentence was viewed as appropriate.

The effect of this reform will be to drastically reduce the number of petty criminals and fine defaulters in our prison system, leaving prison for serious offenders and those that are a threat to the public. Prison workers will be free to concentrate on rehabilitating such offenders, and tax-payers money saved will be directed to areas that genuinely make communities safer.

Justice

Fighting crime through rehabilitation

If fewer petty offenders are to be incarcerated, well financed alternatives to custody will be essential if a sheriff is to be able to hand out a suitable punishment that also gives the best chance of rehabilitation.

If sheriffs had a wider selection of alternatives to custody, prison would be kept for those who are a danger to society, while less serious offenders are punished in the community, where rehabilitation is most likely. This will also require investment in social work services and other bodies that work to rehabilitate offenders and offer punishment in the community in a variety of schemes from community service to other disposals.

We will support a range of rehabilitation schemes and in particular increase spending on drug rehabilitation services by 20%.

6 months in prison costs more than 10 times as much as a community service order. Offenders who serve a community order instead of a custodial sentence are a third less likely to re-offend and four times less likely to end up in custody for a future offence.

In government we will therefore transfer a proportion of savings from reducing our prison population as a result of the new focus on tough community alternatives into rehabilitation and criminal justice social work. Savings will be delivered on a £ for £ basis up to a total of £35 million to provide a valuable increase in the resources available for these vital community services.

A 5% saving in prisons expenditure will deliver this £35 million increase in services and provide the range of support in the community that will offer additional protection and help direct offenders away from a life of crime.

Clearing space in our court system

We want to see Scotland's court system working more effectively, with our sheriffs and judges focused on the most serious cases.

We will give consideration to changes to the system for small claims, where decisions are, more often than not, based on questions of fact rather than questions of law. Options for reform will include piloting a fast-track tribunal system or mediation as alternatives to free up court time.

International Arbitration

As world trade continues to expand, there will be increasing demand for high quality arbitration services as the preferred method to resolve cross-border commercial disputes.

Scotland, with its international reputation in finance and law is ideally placed to offer world-class arbitration services. With arbitration offering greater flexibility and lower cost than traditional legal processes, an international arbitration service in Edinburgh would be well placed to attract a significant share of this growing market.

In government we will work with Scotland's legal community to take forward plans to create a Scottish International Arbitration Centre.

The Prison Estate

We are committed to a publicly owned and run prison service. In government, we will use public sector resources and innovative ideas such as Not for Profit Trusts to deliver investment.

We are committed to the long-term future of Peterhead Prison including the rebuilding of the prison and will seek to protect and enhance the valuable resource it provides in dealing with sex offenders in Scotland.

Justice

Promoting Equality in Scotland

The SNP supports a written constitution for an independent Scotland to guarantee the rights and liberties of citizens and limit the power of government.

Prior to independence the SNP will not promote or support legislation or policies which discriminate on the grounds of race, disability, age, gender, faith or religion, social background or sexual orientation.

The Act of Settlement 1701 is discriminatory and has no place in a modern society. Accordingly we will seek agreement with the government in London on its repeal.

In government we will pull together the different strands of equality legislation under our control to deliver an integrated equality strategy based on the recognition that discrimination harms people and communities, undermines our economic competitiveness and damages our international reputation.

This will include measures to:

- Ensure that the Disability Equality Duty and Race Equality Duty are implemented effectively
- Assess legislation and public service reforms for impact on equality
- Develop the One Scotland, Many Cultures campaign
- Increase measures to ensure that disabled people are made aware of their rights and service providers are made aware of their responsibilities in making provision for disabled people
- Expand hate crime legislation to protect disabled people, and people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community, as recommended by the Working Group on Hate Crimes set up by the Scottish Executive

VI. Department of Rural Affairs

The SNP believes in a more successful future for Scotland and for our rural communities.

Rural Scotland already makes a substantial contribution to the Scottish economy. This can and will grow as we develop our nation's renewable potential and support our important farming and fishing sectors.

The SNP wants a vibrant rural economy and vibrant rural communities and the Department will work closely with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth to ensure the benefits of improved infrastructure, business growth and job creation are felt by all parts of our nation.

Departmental Priorities

Supporting sustainable growth in the rural economy

The SNP in government is determined to deliver strong sustainable growth that is enjoyed by communities in all parts of Scotland.

Our proposals will see a new focus on renewable generation so that the green energy revolution brings benefit in terms of high quality jobs and investment across rural Scotland. In particular, our support for offshore generation will produce particular spin offs for Scotland's coastal communities.

One area of growing importance with the SNP will be the development of bio-fuels. We will set out plans to promote the growing of energy crops in Scotland's forestry industry and agriculture sector so that Scotland takes full advantage of this important route to reduced carbon emissions.

We believe energy crops and the development of local bio-fuels generation capacity will provide an important boost to Scotland's rural economy.

More details of our plans for sustainable economic growth are contained in the Finance and Sustainable growth section of this manifesto. The Department of Rural Affairs will work closely with our minister for energy and the environment to ensure national economic policies deliver substantial advantages in Scotland's rural communities.

Growing Scotland's agriculture sector

Scotland has a high quality and highly valuable reputation in its agriculture industries. These industries make a substantial contribution to the Scottish economy as well as providing jobs and other benefits for our rural communities. We will ensure that this important sector receives the support it deserves to energise those involved and let them maximise their profit, grow their businesses and achieve their full potential. Our approach will be driven by these central principles.

New entrants to farming

Our agriculture sector is renowned throughout the world for its high quality, high value products. We believe nations should aspire to food security and this should be a key aim. We must build on Scotland's international reputation for producing quality and healthy food. The agricultural industry provides the economic backbone for much of rural Scotland as well as the lifeblood of many rural communities. However Scotland's vital farming skills are in danger of dying out due to a failure by the Scottish Executive to attract new blood to the industry. The needs of rural areas have been given too low a priority.

It is vital that we build a viable future for the agriculture sector. The SNP will introduce a new entrants scheme for farmers. Our aim is to build a system that works best in a Scottish context and we will support this initiative with annual funding of £10 million. This may be further augmented by European funds.

An SNP-led Scottish government will work with the industry to ensure that this policy provides continuity and new opportunities for owners, tenant farmers and crofters. We will also work with stakeholders to reach agreement on removing entry barriers to the industry.

A Sustainable Future for the Tenanted Sector

The SNP will work in partnership with the industry to support a thriving and healthy tenanted sector. We will reflect on the success or otherwise of recent legislation and seek opportunities to make land available in the tenanted sector. The SNP will encourage estate owners to make available starter units for new tenants.

Empowering the Industry - A Fairer Deal for Primary Producers

The SNP supports the introduction of an independent ombudsman to give teeth to the Supermarket Code of Practice. A priority for the SNP in Government will be addressing the imbalance in power between the big supermarkets and our primary producers at the bottom of the supply chain. The SNP will not allow the big multi-national supermarkets to exploit suppliers.

We will also establish a new dialogue with the supermarkets to help develop a better working relationship between the various players in the supply chain.

Building on Our International Reputation

Scotland is famous around the world for producing premium food and drink products. We believe that we can do much more. The SNP is impressed by Ireland's Bord Bia and will discuss with the industry establishing a similar food and drink body for Scotland to work in partnership with Scotland's existing overseas promotion network.

Making the Job Easier and Fairer

The SNP is concerned by the failure of the recent CAP reforms to cut down the amount of red tape and paperwork.

We will support a review of the enforcement of subsidy regulations. The SNP recognises that farmers who commit innocent errors in their paperwork are made to feel like criminals and that the resulting penalties imposed are often disproportionate to the offence. The SNP will raise the system's lack of flexibility at European Union level. At home, we will introduce a truly independent appeals panel in response to the existing system's shortcomings. SERAD officials should not sit in judgement on decisions made by colleagues.

Tackling the Regulatory Burden

The SNP recognises the concern expressed by farmers and other sectors in response to the constant stream of regulations and associated charges flowing from Scotland's quangos especially SEPA. Indeed, official statistics indicate that in our rural areas regulation is seen as the biggest obstacle to the success of business. Regulations must deliver benefits and not just costs.

In government we are determined to deliver lighter and effective regulation. This commitment will include a policy of 'one in, one out' so new regulations replace rather than add to old regulations.

The SNP will seek ways to reduce the burden on the farming community and will pilot schemes so that agencies work in partnership to ensure single visits to farms, to deal with a wider range of regulatory issues.

We have undertaken to review the role of enforcement agencies SEPA and SNH. The SNP is proposing to merge these two agencies and review the implementation of the plethora of regulations relating to agriculture.

The SNP will also explore how the planning regime can be made more sympathetic to the needs of our farmers and other rural sectors to help promote appropriate development.

Rural Affairs

A stronger voice in Europe

The SNP recognises the important role that Europe has to play in our agriculture policy. The Labour-Lib Dem coalition have little or no sway in Brussels and the industry's interests are poorly served by a UK approach that gives too little priority to Scottish farming interests. This situation has gone on for too long at the expense of our farmers. A voice for Scotland to protect our distinct interests will be essential in light of the "health check" of recent CAP reforms due in 2008 and the review of the LFA Scheme in 2010. We will pro-actively act to safeguard agriculture support for Scotland's farmers.

We will provide Scotland with a strong and independent voice in Europe that will speak up for Scotland's Agricultural interests. Scotland cannot and should not be denied a say in the EU. We will work to deliver a stronger role for Scottish Ministers, so a Scottish government is given direct input into EU decision making that has an impact on our farmers.

In Europe and across the world, Scotland's overseas representation and economic agencies will be given the task of helping to promote Scottish food more effectively.

Supporting locally grown Scottish produce

Consumers are beginning to think about the consequences of the supermarket-led dash for cheap, often imported, food and the impact of 'food miles' on the environment. A return to shopping locally at Farmers' Markets and local shops must be encouraged. The continued expansion of the Farmers' Market network is one of the huge success stories of Scottish agriculture in recent times and will be supported by the SNP.

We want to see more locally grown produce used in Scotland's public sector. It is ridiculous that some of Scotland's hospitals transport ready-prepared meals hundreds of miles from Wales to be reheated and served to patients. This is bad for our environment and bad for local producers.

In government the SNP will encourage the use of fresh, local food throughout the public sector. We will examine options for introducing a requirement in future public contracts for the use of fresh food, which will favour locally sourced and produced meals. And we will consult on changes to planning regulations to allow for a requirement on supermarkets that a proportion of goods stocked are sourced and delivered locally.

A key element of the SNP's strategy will be food education especially in our schools. The SNP will support education initiatives that teach our children where their food comes from and its relationship with their health, environment and the local economy.

Country of Origin Labelling

Scotland's food producers invest in meeting the highest animal welfare and environmental standards that can be found anywhere yet must compete in the same market as other foreign producers who fail to meet such high standards and don't incur the same expense.

Consumers must be provided with clear and concise labelling to allow them make informed choices. The SNP will tackle the issues that arise from cheap and inferior imports making their ways to our supermarket shelves.

The Organic Sector

Scotland is world-renowned for our clean environment and the quality of our produce. In government we will work to support increased production of organic food and will ask Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to come forward with specific proposals for improved access to equity based financial support for farm businesses looking to make the transition to organic production.

Co-operatives

The SNP will promote Farmers' Co-operatives that are currently under-developed in Scotland in comparison to other countries. We believe that co-operation can empower primary producers in the marketplace and improve profitability. Our farmers and rural businesses can reap social and economic benefits through further co-operation.

Crofting

The SNP supports the development of crofting as a nature-friendly, small-scale agriculture system well fitted to provide home bases for many who live in our most fragile remote and island communities.

The SNP's priorities will include speeding up the development of forest crofts across Scotland and tackling transport costs for crofting areas. We will also ensure LFASS meets the continued needs of the least favoured areas. We pledge to act on the findings of the crofting inquiry chaired by Professor Shucksmith due to report later in 2007.

Rural Affairs

GM Crops

The SNP will maintain a moratorium on planting GM crops in Scotland. This respects the consumers who demand locally-produced conventional and organic food.

Building a better future for the fishing industry

Scotland's fishing industry provides tens of thousands of jobs and generates hundreds of millions of pounds for the Scottish economy. It also provides the heart of many of our coastal communities who depend on the success of that industry. Fishing is vital to our national economic interest and should be given the support that it deserves. The UK has always given, and always will give, fishing a low priority status. We will give it the representation it deserves.

Leading in Europe

The failure of successive UK Conservative and Labour governments as well as the Labour-Lib Dem Executive to adequately represent or protect the interests of our fishing industry is one of the biggest failings of the current constitutional settlement. We now know that our fishermen were described as being "expendable" when we entered the European Union and that attitude has been the hallmark of successive governments' treatment of this industry. That failure is reflected in the disastrous Common Fisheries Policy and its impact on our fishing industry.

Two recent events, the cut in days at sea at last December's negotiations in Brussels and in March of this year when DEFRA decided to give away valuable prawn quota to Germany without consulting our own fishermen, confirm the need for a new approach.

We will give Scotland's fishermen better representation and a stronger voice. With about three quarters of the UK fishery Scotland should lead the UK's Ministerial delegation at EU meetings, just as Flanders does for Belgium. The current system whereby landlocked Austria and Luxembourg have a greater say over Scotland's fisheries than Scotland does is unsustainable.

We propose that industry representatives will be seconded to ministerial teams participating in international negotiations. No longer will industry representatives be locked out of negotiations and ignored.

In Government, the SNP's First Minister will seek an early meeting with the UK Government to seek the lead role in EU fisheries negotiations. Likewise, we will meet with the European Commission to discuss the impact of the CFP on Scotland.

A better future outside the CFP

The SNP will continue to work for withdrawal from the Common Fisheries Policy and will not support any future European Constitution that grants the EU "exclusive competence" over this valuable resource. We will work with our partners to enlist support for the repatriation of fisheries responsibilities to member states.

We favour national control over fisheries, which conserves stocks as well as the livelihoods of fishing communities. While we recognise that international cooperation is required in the management of fish stocks, conservation is not being achieved in the CFP. Our maritime neighbours Norway, Iceland and the Faeroe Islands all operate economically successful and environmentally sustainable fisheries outside the CFP. Scotland can emulate their success.

Conservation that works

Our fishermen will get a fishing conservation policy that is designed to provide long term sustainability to the industry and deliver a management regime for Scottish waters with direct input from both fishing and scientific stakeholders.

Given their knowledge and expertise it is right that fishermen and other stakeholders should be given a greater say over the management of our fisheries. Such a fishing conservation policy will also take into account the demands of a mixed fishery.

In particular we will argue in Europe for the decoupling of cod management from other species and for sustainable increases in quotas for other stocks, including the haddock quota.

The SNP will ensure that future marine legislation including proposed Marine Bills strike a balance between the needs of our environment and those of sectors such as fisheries that have an economic stake in our waters. The interests of our fishermen must be central to any marine strategy. In particular, the SNP will only support the introduction of closed areas where strong scientific evidence is presented and following full consultation with all users including the fishing industry.

The SNP in government will establish a Convention on the Future of Scotland's Fishing Communities to frame a new fisheries management regime. We will create a permanent Scottish Fisheries Council, comprising industry representatives. It will have sub-committees for each sector and will also act as a ministerial advisory group.

We will work in partnership with the industry to take forward many of the proposals and aspirations contained in the recently published Sea Fisheries Strategy. This will be updated as and when required.

To help attract the crews and skippers of the future, the SNP will consult the industry on the introduction of a new entrants scheme.

Rural Affairs

In government we will work to secure quota allocation from decommissioned vessels for active vessels. Fishing entitlement will be allocated only to active fishermen and coastal communities with historic rights. The SNP opposes the introduction of Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs) that would effectively privatise Scotland's historic fishing rights.

We recognise the important contribution increasing stocks within coastal waters can make to a viable and growing fishing industry and we will work with industry to put in place best practice, including support for nursery zones and if appropriate no-fish zones to support the recovery of coastal stocks following consultation with the industry.

The industry onshore

The SNP also recognises the importance of the onshore sector. A Development Plan for the Fish Processing sector and seafood companies will be published. This will include additional support for Seafood Scotland and specific marketing support for abundant supplies such as haddock, shellfish and pelagic species.

The essential role of the on-shore sector including the scores of companies that congregate around Scotland's harbours will be recognised and offered tailored support through Scotland's current Enterprise network.

In government we will also support training and professional development initiatives to help attract and retain deck hands. Similar initiatives will be made available for other sectors.

The role and remit of existing organisations such as the Sea Fish Industry Authority will be reviewed.

Aquaculture

The SNP supports the development of fin fish and shellfish farming. We wish to see the highest quality of product and support the measures adopted to achieve this in the recent Aquaculture and Fisheries Act.

We are aware of the large numbers of unused licences that sterilise site and tend to inhibit the entry of new firms, local firms and organic-based firms to the aquaculture industry. We will keep in close contact with the needs of the industry to maintain jobs vital to the economy of remote areas.


We recognise the need to ensure that the industry benefits from smart regulation and the need to keep bureaucracy to a minimum.

Freshwater fishing

The SNP supports a sustainable and vibrant freshwater fisheries sector. We will work with anglers and local communities to create a national freshwater fisheries policy that seeks to protect biodiversity and our environment as well as enhancing the economic benefit for our rural economy that results from angling.

We will take forward the work of the Freshwater Fisheries Forum with a view to modernising the sector's management structures. We support the view that our rivers should be managed on a catchment area basis that includes all freshwater stocks.

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