AM: Nicola Sturgeon, you’ve said that the SNP is the most consistent and unequivocal anti-Brexit voice in these elections. That’s not true, is it?

NS: Yes it is true. We’ve always been anti Brexit. We’ve always said that we wanted to keep Scotland and the UK in the European Union. When it looked as it if wasn’t an option to keep the UK in the European Union yes, we tried to see if there was a compromise around single market and customs union membership, but neither of the main parties have been prepared to discuss that seriously. Both of them are obsessed with ending free movement and now of course it does look as if there is an option to keep not just Scotland but the whole of the UK in the European Union. And of course it’s not just me saying that, there have been polls recently that have asked people who they think the biggest and strongest anti Brexit is and the SNP have tended to top those polls.

AM: Well let’s start with consistent, because it took you two years to come round as a party to the idea of another referendum. Two years after the Liberal Democrats had come to that position. So they were two years ahead of you so they are more consistent than you are.

NS: I don’t accept that. We did for a period, although we always said that staying in the EU was our preference, that’s what we wanted, that’s what the majority of people in Scotland voted for, but we also tried - and I make no apology for this as I hope a reasonable politician. We tried to see whether if staying in the EU wasn’t possible if single market, customs union membership could
win a consensus as an alternative to a hard Brexit. But neither of the main UK parties were prepared to talk about that seriously and also now of course it is possible to keep the UK and Scotland in the European Union. And I do think that putting the issue back to the people is what should happen.

AM: You seem to be making my point almost for me because I was saying you’re not unequivocally anti-Brexit because unlike some of the other anti-Brexit –

NS: I have always been unequivocally anti-Brexit.

AM: Well, the SNP voted last month in April for a version of Brexit, the so-called Common Market version and you have just discussed that was Brexit. So it hardly makes you unequivocal.

NS: But you know how those votes were designed. They were not about voting for your top preference. So in that vote for example the SNP voted to revoke Article 50. The support, if you want to call it that for something short of staying in the EU has always been as an alternative to a hard Brexit or a no deal Brexit, but there’s nobody I don’t think in Scotland or across the UK that could doubt that the SNP is unequivocally and unambiguously anti-Brexit. Scotland’s not for Brexit. Scotland if for Europe and people in Scotland have an opportunity by voting SNP on Thursday to send that message very loudly and very clearly.

AM: Well let’s turn to the mainstream of this. What inside the EU causes Scotland most difficulty? What is the biggest problem with EU membership in your view for Scotland?

NS: Well I think in terms of lots of countries we will often argue for the EU on policy terms to take different views. If I cast my mind back to something I was responsible for in a previous ministerial role, introducing minimum pricing for alcohol, the first
country in the world to do that. That got caught up in a very lengthy court battle and it was over whether it was consistent with European legislation. I’ve always argued that on things where there is a clear national interest, protecting public health for example, the EU shouldn’t interfere so much. So where that balance lies I think we’ll always be open to discussion but that’s an argument you have within the European Union, not outside it.

AM: Well let’s take one of those national interests which is fishing. Your proposal is to lock Scotland in perpetuity into the Commons Fisheries Policy which causes a great deal of distress to fishing communities up and down the coast of Scotland. Bertie Armstrong, Chief Executive of the Scottish Fisherman’s Federation said: “there is a gross unfairness about the Common Fisheries Policy. The notion that adjustments could be made by argument from within is specious. The present distribution of opportunity was enshrined as part of our entry into Europe and reinforced in European treaties. It is almost laughable to suggest that the bargain of a lifetime will be handed back. Why would the EU nations do that?” He is right. Scottish fishermen are stuck inside a policy they hate.

NS: Well I think Scottish fishermen have been misled by the Conservatives. The SNP have always been clear and consistent. I’ll come back to our position in a second. But Scottish fishermen were told by the Tories that voting for Brexit would take them out of the Common Fisheries Policy. Clearly that hasn’t happened and we see from the Withdrawal Agreement –

AM: Well it will.

NS: Let me finish, and the political declaration for the future that the Tories have almost conceded that they would have to bargain around fishing rights in order to retain market access. But the SNP’s position, because that’s what you asked me about, we want
fundamental reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. We have argued and have been arguing that for a lot longer than the Tories have been but there are other things that are important for our-

AM: You haven't got very far, if I may say. You haven't got very far with it.

MS: Well, can I just finish the point. There are other things that are important for our fishing industry as well as the amount of fish that they can catch and land. If we don't have free movement and access to labour to process the fish for example and you can land more fish but if you can't process it then it's not going to get you very far, and if you don't have markets to sell your fish into then that clearly is a disadvantage as well. So we've got to negotiate and we've got to stand up for our fishing industry in a global sense and the Tories have failed to do that and have instead misled the fishing industry which is why I suspect in fishing communities the Tories are in for a bit of a gunk in the European elections on Thursday.

AM: The current proposal is for an independent coastal state for the UK afterwards, but let me put a broader point to you which is you always say you know the SNP is the really strongly anti Brexit party and yet an awful lot of your own members support Brexit. Nigel Farage speaking in Edinburgh last night said: “The impression that’s often given by Nicola Sturgeon is that almost everybody in Scotland thinks the EU is a fantastic idea, when the reality is that 30% of her own voters, because they are actually genuinely nationalists, voted to leave.”

NS: Well let me take that point head on. Firstly the majority, the overwhelming majority of people in Scotland voted to stay in the EU and the SNP position is in line with that. Actually I think you've seen support for remaining in the EU actually consolidate and strengthen in the three years since the Brexit votes so you know
that’s the first point. Secondly, those who voted leave and you know I do think we’ve got to work harder to understand the reasons for that, but they’ve been let down as well. Whatever it was they voted for they didn’t vote for the chaos that has ensued. I’ve spoken to people in the course of this campaign who voted leave who’ll be voting SNP because they think Scotland has been badly let down. But the final point is this. I think politicians owe it to the electorate to be straight and honest with them. I mean we’ve just heard from Jeremy Corbyn, Labour have tried to pretend that they’re both in favour of remain and in favour of leave and they end up fooling nobody and haemorrhaging support and respect as a result. The SNP has been clear and straight with people. We want to keep Scotland in the EU.

AM: We’re almost out of time so a reasonably brisk answer if you will on this one. If you get the second referendum on Brexit that you want and if it goes the other way and the UK stays inside the EU, does that remove the need for an imminent Scottish independence referendum?

NS: Not necessarily no because I think things are changing –

AM: Ah!

NS: Well let me finish. I don’t think – and the last thing I think I should be doing right now is narrowing Scotland’s options. I’m sure if we end up in that scenario I’ll come back on the programme and we can talk about that rather than talk about it hypothetically just now. But we could be facing the prospect in the near future of Boris Johnson as Prime Minister, so the last thing I should be doing is narrowing Scotland’s options. I think after all of the experience of the last three years Scotland should have the opportunity to decide whether we want to become an independent European nation.
AM: Nicola Sturgeon, I have 49 further questions but absolutely zero seconds, so for now thank you very much.

NS: I’m happy to sit here for as long as you want.

Ends