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18 Mar 2017



Uncertainty over Scottish independence is putting jobs and investment in the North Sea at risk, a new report from a respected energy consultancy has said today.

Edinburgh-based analysts Wood Mackenzie (WoodMac) have said that Nicola Sturgeon's fresh drive for separation could deter investors from committing to new projects.

The report states that prospects for the future tax take are being overshadowed by questions about who will subsidise decommissioning liabilities.

While WoodMac points to 11 billion barrels of oil equivalent (boe) lying in Scottish waters, there is also an obligation to break-up the majority of fields, equating to 80% of the total UK decommissioning bill.

The report adds: "Critically, political uncertainty could deter investors from committing to new projects. With new investment and jobs at risk, and the complicating factors of boundaries and decommissioning tax relief, much is at stake."

Scottish Conservative Energy spokesman Alexander Burnett said:

"It is clear from this report that the currently fragile recovery we are seeing in the North Sea could be put at risk by Nicola Sturgeon's reckless and irresponsible drive for independence.

"Wood Mackenzie have correctly pointed out that the uncertainty caused by the looming threat of a repeat vote on separation could deter crucial investment in the sector.

"The SNP spent part of yesterday's conference in Aberdeen bemoaning the apparent lack of support from the UK Government, which has delivered £2.3 billion in tax breaks in the last three years.

"Far from supporting the industry, the SNP's obsession with independence

could cost jobs, reduce investment and cause huge confusion for the decommissioning market.

“Nicola Sturgeon does not have public support for a referendum, and she is now being warned that it will be damaging for the economy. She should drop these plans immediately.”

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16 Mar 2017



Below is a statement by Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson on Nicola Sturgeon's plan for a repeat independence referendum.

“Thank-you.

On Monday this week, the First Minister chose the wrong course for Scotland.

I profoundly regret the course of action she took.

And on behalf of the many, many Scots who do not want to go back to a second referendum – people who voted both No and Yes to independence – I tell her, it is not too late to change course.

The fact is that there are so many other urgent issues that require our attention

...from managing the Scottish Parliament's important new powers over tax and welfare, to the future of our NHS.

The First Minister herself has said that that improving the quality of Scottish schooling would be her number one priority.

In our view, an all-consuming referendum campaign over the next 18 months would show this promise to be worthless.

So I ask the First Minister to act – and act now – to show she is prepared to deliver on those pledges she made.

Unfortunately, all the signs are that the Scottish Government will not take that step.

In addition to Monday's statement, a website for its referendum campaign was set up at the start of this month, and fundraising has already commenced.

That is why the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State and myself have decided today to make clear to the Scottish people what response we will adopt.

As David has already said, we reject conclusively the timetable for a referendum set out by the Scottish Government.

For a key reason – because it is unfair to Scottish voters.

We have just come through a referendum campaign when a key complaint among many people was that they did not have the necessary information to help them make an informed decision.

If we were to keep to the First Minister's timetable, this is exactly what would happen in Scotland, too.

On the most important political decision a country can make, we would be voting blind.

I believe that it is only right that people have the opportunity to examine the UK's new relationship with the European Union once it is up and running.

People should only be asked to make a judgement about whether to leave or remain within a 300-year old Union of nations when they have seen for themselves how that Union is functioning, following Brexit.

They should also know what the alternative entails, and we have seen no clarity from the SNP on even the basic questions of their proposition.

But I believe there is another fundamental reason why now is not the right time to take Scotland back to the precipice.

And that is because there is no clear political or public consent for this to take place.

The country – and our Parliament – is divided not over just the question of independence, but over whether we should even hold a referendum or not.

Prior to 2014, this was not the case.

We all accepted – Unionist, Nationalist and those who sat on the fence – that it was right and proper for the question to be asked.

Today, however, that consent is simply not there.

In Scotland, we know to our cost that referenda are divisive.

At an absolute minimum, therefore, I believe there should be agreement across political parties and from the public at large, that it is right and fair for such a referendum to proceed.

And I say:

just three years after the last one

when the SNP promised to respect the previous vote

and when the Scottish public are weary and divided over the prospect of an immediate second vote

that the SNP must earn the right to ask the question again.

They cannot simply claim it. And through that claim, pretend it is true.

In short, I oppose a referendum on independence.

But if the SNP insists on pressing ahead, we will argue that a referendum cannot happen when the Scottish people have not been given the opportunity to see how our new relationship with the European Union is working.

And until there is clarity over the alternative.

And we will maintain that it should not take place when there is no clear public or political consent for it to happen.

Our country does not want to go back to the divisions and uncertainty of the last few years.

Another referendum campaign will not solve the challenges this country will face.

It is my deep regret that the SNP has chosen the path of trying to divide Scotland yet further. It would be irresponsible not to do all I can, to ensure that does not happen.”

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15 Mar 2017



A report published by YouGov has revealed an increase in disappointment over the SNP's handling of vital issues.

The report includes survey results from numerous polls aimed at gauging how well or badly the public believe the SNP government is doing in handling education, the NHS, justice, the economy and policing issues.

Every question asked about the SNP's governing performance revealed an increase in disappointment over its handlings.

48 per cent of respondents felt the SNP managed the NHS 'fairly badly' or 'very badly' – a five per cent increase from when previously asked in November last year.

The issue of justice also recorded significantly negative results – with 39 per cent of respondents viewing the SNP's performance as not being good enough.

The report shows the need for a Scottish Government that spends its every waking hour improving standards across the country, and the Scottish Conservatives are now calling for the SNP to start focusing its time on tackling the real issues people are worried about.

Scottish Conservative chief whip John Lamont said:

"This report makes the growing scepticism of the SNP's ability to effectively run the country clear.

"The SNP has simply brushed aside so many important issues they've described as a priority in its bid to break up Britain.

"It shows that behind a government whose clear raison d'être is independence, is a government that has done next to nothing to improve the many issues Scotland faces.

"Nicola Sturgeon needs to take a very clear message from this report – people don't want independence, they want a government that is fully focused on improving issues that clearly need addressed."

For a copy of the YouGov report click here:

https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/k39gmatrzb/Times_Scotland_Results_170314_VI_Indy2_Trade_Domestic_Website.pdf

[Grounds for indyref2 have 'collapsed'](#)

15 Mar 2017



The Scottish Conservatives have said the justification for a second referendum on independence has “collapsed” following SNP admissions it has dumped plans for immediate EU membership.

In reports today, SNP sources confirmed that an independent Scotland would no longer seek to apply to become a member of EU after a vote for separation.

This is despite the fact that Nicola Sturgeon has used the decision to leave the European Union as a reason for holding another divisive referendum on independence – and has consistently said her plan is to apply for EU membership.

It comes as new polls today reveal that support for independence has fallen.

The same poll shows that only 35 per cent of people want the SNP to spend the next two years diverting attention away from the day job and on another referendum campaign.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“Nicola Sturgeon’s grounds for a referendum have simply given way beneath her.

“We are told an immediate referendum campaign is necessary because we are leaving the European Union.

“Yet the SNP is u-turning on immediate EU membership and saying Scotland wouldn’t seek to become a member.

“If European Union membership is the reason for a referendum, what is the point of holding one if the plan isn’t go back in?

“Nicola Sturgeon’s reckless referendum plan has collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions.

“As even the SNP acknowledges, the UK union is by far Scotland’s most important market place and partner.

“Independence would wreck that union. It is time for the SNP to stop the games, and get back to the day job it has ignored for the last 10 years.”

It was reported today that the SNP no longer wants to immediately reapply for EU membership in the event of independence:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/15/nicola-sturgeon-abandons-bid-remain-eu-poll-shows-record-level/>

SNP's new separation plans have 'unravelling within 24 hours'

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14 Mar 2017



The SNP's independence plans have "unravelling within 24 hours", the Scottish Conservatives have said today – amid total confusion over the SNP's stance on EU membership.

In interviews this morning, SNP ministers failed to spell out whether an independent Scotland would seek membership of the European Union.

It comes after Nicola Sturgeon was also unable to say whether an independent Scotland would apply for full EU membership in her press conference yesterday.

The Scottish Conservatives said the confusion only serves to underline the "reckless" proposal for a rushed referendum – which would force people to vote on "a pig in a poke".

It comes after senior EU figures made it clear yesterday that an independent Scotland would have to apply to become a member – even if an independence referendum was held before Britain left the EU.

This is also the view of leading experts who have said that an independent Scotland would have to apply as a new country to get into the EU after independence.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"The SNP's plans to impose a referendum on independence on Scotland have unravelling within 24 hours.

"Nicola Sturgeon is demanding that people are forced to make another choice on their future in as little as 18 months. And yet faced with reasonable questions about what independence means, she and her ministers cannot answer.

"We know Scotland will leave the EU along with the rest of the United Kingdom in 2019. Yet the SNP can't say whether an independent Scotland would then seek full membership of the EU or not.

"This is the opposite of the informed choice proposed by Nicola Sturgeon. The truth is she wants people to vote blind because she calculates this is the best way to increase support for separation.

"The First Minister is proposing the opposite of a fair, democratic vote – she is demanding that people across Scotland vote on a pig in a poke.

"The SNP is trying to have it both ways.

"It is demanding a referendum because of our decision to leave the European Union. But, in order to keep Leave voters on board, it won't say whether Scotland would seek to get back in."□

Below are transcripts from various SNP ministers on radio this morning:

Studio: You talk about clarity being very clear on that. How would an independent Scotland for example if it were to go that way, continue this relationship with Europe? Because that would surely mean a whole re-negotiation.

Fiona Hyslop MSP: Well, we have already set out a very comprehensive, technically detailed paper, how all of the UK could have a continuing relationship even outside the EU but continuing our relationship with the single market, so that is indeed possible. But in terms of the EU relationship future, much of course will depend on the views and opinions of our colleagues in the capitals and indeed the institutions of Europe. The European institutions are flexible and indeed the single market, the sheer size of that single market, means that a continued relationship is really important. The idea of having your very expensive customs tariffs in relation to our goods and services will be a problem for not just for Scottish business but for UK business. We want to make sure we can continue to trade with the biggest single market in the world and that is very important to us.

Studio: How would you continue that relationship? Presumably, you are imagining doing it, correct me if I am wrong, as an independent Scotland which would, as the rules are at the moment, mean a renegotiation.

Fiona Hyslop MSP: We are in a period of complete and utter renegotiation under Brexit. We do not know the terms of that. You are anticipating that I will know and anticipate what the exact details will be of our independence position, when we have the referendum, now that's sometime off and we want to make sure there's clarity on our independence position and our future relationship with the EU. A lot of it will depend on what state, what will be the state of the transition, if we get a transition from the UK Government in relation to exiting the EU, what will be the position of Scotland at the time the UK leaves? We want to make sure there is a choice before the UK leaves the EU and that is why we have that window of opportunity between autumn 2018 and spring 2019 but this has to be about choice. And that's what we want to offer the people of Scotland. We'll perhaps be the only part of the United Kingdom that can have a choice about whether this hard BREXIT deal is what we want or not

Nicola Sturgeon answer to Brian Taylor yesterday...

Question (non-verbatim) – are you assuming you can continue Scottish membership of the EU? If not, are you saying you'd definitely seek to re-join Scotland to full membership?

Nicola Sturgeon: What I'm saying today very clearly is that for Scotland to be in a position to **negotiate in a timely fashion our own relationship with Europe**, it's important that we indicate that desire and intention, before the UK leaves, or at the very least within a short timeframe after they do so. To leave it any longer than that would make that process more difficult. I do accept that that will be a process of discussion. **In terms of the second clause of your question, the SNP's long standing policy and commitment has been to membership of the European Union. Obviously we are in different circumstances now than we have been in the past, but that has been and remains our position. But on this issue, as on all of the many other issues that people will want to consider in advance of a choice, I've said very clearly that we will set out our proposition in advance of that choice so that it is an informed choice.**

...

Question (non-verbatim) – What reassurances do you have from other EU members that Scotland can be in or re-join?

Nicola Sturgeon: We have over the past 9 months been working very hard to influence the UK Government's negotiating position, and that has been partly as a result of some of the advice and feedback we've had from other countries across Europe, that if we wanted to seek a differential arrangement for Scotland then Europe would be open to that, but it had to come through the track of the UK Article 50 negotiations. So that has been our focus. Clearly we will continue to discuss with the other countries of the European Union and indeed with the institutions of the European Union. I know from my own experience across Europe that there is an incredible warmth of feeling towards Scotland, an incredible support, and a feeling that should Scotland democratically choose to be an independent country, then that is something that the EU would accept and respect and these discussions will continue no doubt in the months to come.