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- SNP fracking ban 'short-sighted and economically damaging'

3 Oct 2017



A decision by the SNP to ban fracking has been attacked as “short-sighted and economically damaging” by the Scottish Conservatives.

Energy minister Paul Wheelhouse confirmed in a statement to the Scottish Parliament today that the extraction of shale would be prohibited north of the border, continuing on from the current moratorium which was put in place in 2015.

This is despite the Scottish Government’s own scientists saying shale could be explored safely, with many other parts of the world enjoying huge economic boosts as a result of the industry.

The SNP’s hypocrisy on the matter was also pointed out.

Ministers are quite happy for imported shale to be used and refined in Scotland, the Scottish Conservatives said, but won’t embark on the practice of extracting it themselves.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“This is a short-sighted and economically damaging decision which is nothing more than a bid to appease the green elements of the pro-independence movement.

“According to the Scottish Government’s own scientists, the extraction of shale from Scotland, with the right safety checks, could be done safely.

“It could also support thousands of jobs and deliver economic benefits to communities.

“With the struggles the North Sea is facing, there could hardly be a better time to be getting on with this.

“Instead, the Scottish Government is killing this off while other parts of the world press ahead with fracking.

“There’s also a huge hypocrisy from the SNP here.

“It’s happy to receive shale from the US to refine at Grangemouth – a major

industry in itself – yet doesn't want to have that technology here.”

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3 Oct 2017



The Scottish Conservatives are today underlining their ambitions for Scotland by announcing the creation of a major new independent economic body to set out fresh thinking on future growth.

Comprising some of Scotland's pre-eminent figures in commerce, industry and academia, the Scottish Future Growth Council will advise the party on key economic issues – such as how to solve the country's "productivity puzzle".

The group will be chaired by former Scotland Office Minister Lord Dunlop who, in his time in government, pioneered the successful City Deal plans across Scotland.

The unveiling of the group comes as new figures have demonstrated Scotland is lagging behind the UK on business growth.

They show the number of new businesses in Scotland grew by just 1.6 per cent last year, the lowest in the UK.

That compares to a UK average of 4.5 per cent.

Announcing the group today, Lord Dunlop said he hoped it would deliver fresh ideas to help make Scotland "the best part of the UK to do business."

The group's reports will assist the Scottish Conservatives' on-going policy review set up following the General Election of this year.

Shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said the formation of the group demonstrated the party's intent to provide a credible alternative to the SNP, ready to take over in Government in 2021.

The new group will work independently of the Scottish Conservatives and will focus specifically on devolved policy-making, and ways in which Scottish Government policy can boost Scotland's performance.

Lord Dunlop said:

“I am delighted to accept Ruth’s invitation to chair this exciting new venture.

“Scotland has world leading expertise in our universities, a competitive edge in sectors such as life science and oil and gas, and is one of the best places to live and work in the world.

“Scotland has what it takes, we now just need to make more of our potential.

“So our new group’s mission will be to come up with positive and imaginative new ideas for our devolved parliament with the aim of boosting Scottish growth.

“The group includes some of the country’s leading figures from business, academia and industry who have dedicated their lives to creating a more prosperous Scotland. We will report back regularly ahead of the 2021 election and pushing the debate forward.

“While the group has been set up by the Scottish Conservatives, we will work independently of party with the aim of influencing the wider political debate.

“The challenge is urgent. Scottish public spending is now more reliant than ever on our own economic growth.

“And if we don’t keep the economy moving forward, we won’t have the money to pay for vital public services. Our purpose is to show how Scotland can become the best part of the UK to do business, and so deliver the growing tax revenues upon which our schools and hospitals rely.”

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“Having gone from being the third party of Scottish politics to now looking to challenge the SNP to be in government, the Scottish Conservatives are looking to expand our policy offer in advance of the next Scottish elections.

“We are delighted to have assembled such an impressive team of business leaders and economists to advise us on economic and financial matters, under Andrew Dunlop’s leadership. This demonstrates the scale of our ambition.

“With productivity being a key issue for the Scottish economy, we have asked this group to look first at this important area, and come back with suggestions on how productivity can be improved.

“I am sure that their conclusions will be of interest to everyone who wants to see our economy improve.”

Chair

Andrew Dunlop

Lord Dunlop was most recently a Minister in the Scotland office where he led efforts to promote Scottish trade and investment – most prominently through a new generation of city deals. He served as a special adviser to Prime Minister David Cameron during the independence referendum, playing a key role in the Better Together campaign. Prior to that he was a councillor in Horsham District Council. He was elevated to the House of Lords in 2015.

Members

Alice Enders

Alice Enders is head of research at Enders Analysis, a service for media and telecoms sectors mainly in the creative industries and the financial sector. Up until 2009, Alice was an economist for the World Trade Organisation (WTO), having joined the predecessor GATT in 1988. She has also served as Assistant Professor of Economics at York University, having completed a PhD in economics at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.

Belinda Roberts

Belinda Roberts is the founder of WeDO Scotland, the country's most exclusive leadership organisation for transformational business owners and leaders of dynamic companies. She is the co-author of 21st Century Networking, written with former Scotland rugby captain David Sole, which provides practical advice and guidance on networking. She is also the founder and managing director of Marvellous Mustard, a gourmet mustard producer and supplier of the world's only wholegrain flavoured mustard making kits.

Dr John Brown

Dr John Brown is the Chairman of the Roslin Foundation. He has extensive experience in the life sciences sector as Chairman of Synpromics Ltd, BioCity Group and the Cell Therapy Catapult. He was previously Chairman of Touch Bionics, Axis Shield and BTG . He Co- chaired the Life Sciences Advisory Board from 2005 to 2017. He is a Fellow and Trustee of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and Honorary Professor of the University of Edinburgh.

Ian McCormick

Ian McCormick, formally of Scottish Enterprise is a performance improvement specialist who worked principally with manufacturing businesses in Scotland, including companies operating in the food and drink, engineering, energy, agriculture, textile and construction sectors. He is currently a director of Growbiz, a charitable organisation founded in 2007 and based in Perthshire with the purpose of helping those living locally and in rural areas to develop their own business ideas and build successful and sustainable enterprises.

Graham Halstead

Graham Halstead was, until 2015, the Group Tax Director of the Royal Bank of Scotland for 22 years, responsible for the Group's worldwide tax affairs. During this time, he was also Group Financial Controller of RBS for the two years prior to, and the year following, the acquisition of NatWest. Prior to RBS he was Tax Director of NatWest's investment banking sub-group for 7 years.

Nick Parker

Nick Parker was formerly head of Performance and Innovation at the Scottish Executive from 2004 to 2007. He retired as head of Government Corporate finance Services at PwC in 2002. He now holds a portfolio of directorships in the insurance, fintech, and digital media marketing sectors.

Prof Ronald MacDonald

Professor MacDonald is the current Research professor of Macroeconomics and International Finance in the Adam Smith Business School at Glasgow University. Prior to this he held the Bonar Macfie Chair of Economics, 2005-2006, and the Adam Smith Chair of Political Economy 2006-2015, both at the University of Glasgow. He has acted as a consultant to a large number of governments and public agencies, including the IMF, European Commission, General Secretariat for Development Planning, Qatar, the European Central Bank, the Monetary Authority of Singapore, the Reserve Bank of New Zealand, the National Audit office and the World Bank.

Sir Iain McMillan

Sir Iain is one of Scotland's leading business figures and was knighted for his services to the Scottish economy in 2015. He is best known as the director of the Confederation of British Industry in Scotland, a post he held for 19 years until his retirement in 2014. Prior to joining the CBI in 1993, Sir Iain spent 23 years with the TSB Group. His other appointments have included being on the boards of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Scottish Ambulance Service and Teaching Awards Trust. He is currently the Chairman of the University of Strathclyde Business School Advisory Board and a member of the Competition Appeal Tribunal.

Mike Kellard

Mike Kellard has over 30 years experience in the financial services sector in both the UK and Europe. In 2003 he took over as CEO of Credit Suisse's UK group. In 2010 he led a new venture led by Global insurance group AXA called "AXA Wealth". He has also been responsible for launching a new London based UK and European fund manager "Architas" which has to date raised in excess of £20billion. He is a specialist in start up and turn around business situations, with expertise in Asset Management, Distribution and IT platforms.

ONS figures on UK business activity, size and location were released today. Section 6, Table 2 and Figure 4 shows the relevant statistics for Scotland on business growth rate ([link](#)).

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referendum threat “once and for all”

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2 Oct 2017



David Mundell has urged Nicola Sturgeon to take the threat of a second independence referendum off the table once and for all.

He called on the SNP leader to use her party conference next week to make a clear statement abandoning plans for a second vote on removing Scotland from the UK.

If she fails to do so, he says electing Ruth Davidson as Scotland’s First Minister will be the only way to guarantee lifting the threat of another divisive referendum.

In his speech to the Conservative Party conference in Manchester, Mr Mundell said:

“The arrival of a dozen new Scottish Conservative MPs at Westminster in June confirmed something Ruth Davidson has been saying for a long time now.

“Scotland is NOT the SNP.

“The myth was all too easy for the nationalists to peddle when they held 56 of Scotland’s 59 seats.

“But no longer.

“It was never true and the election proved it.

“Indeed, the election showed just how badly out of touch Nicola Sturgeon is with public opinion.

“Instead of addressing the declining standards in Scotland’s schools, instead of tackling the pressures and missed targets that dog Scotland’s NHS, instead of building our way out of Scotland’s growing housing crisis, Nicola Sturgeon subjected Scotland to a year of political game-playing as she sought to turn the EU referendum into an excuse for a second independence poll.

“I’m glad the election result finally forced her to put her constitutional campaign on hold.

“But for how long?

“Nicola Sturgeon is already saying she “doesn’t know” when she wants to hold

another referendum.

“Not if. When. The truth is this: For the SNP, it will always be about securing another independence referendum.

“Forget the democratic decision of 2014.

“Forget the busted economic case for tearing Scotland out the UK.

“Forget the fact that people in Scotland do not want it.

“Just keep fanning the flames of grievance.

“We’re told a second independence referendum is on the back burner.

“Well, it’s time Nicola Sturgeon took a fire extinguisher to it so Scotland can get on with what really matters.

“I hope she takes the opportunity to do so at her party’s conference in a few days’ time.

“If she won’t, we will.

“No-one else. Week in week out we see Scottish Labour flip-flopping on the constitution.

“The only way to guarantee the threat of a second independence referendum is swept off the table once and for all is to install Ruth Davidson as Scotland’s First Minister.”

[Calls for ‘one family, one sheriff’ approach in domestic abuse cases](#)

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28 Sep 2017



The justice system should consider assigning a single sheriff to deal with the entirety of a domestic abuse victim’s court case, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

As part of a debate on domestic violence today, shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said the move would mean families affected by the issue would not have

to recount experiences to different sheriffs or judges.

The approach has been successfully trialled in the US and Australia, with similar trials are underway in England.

As it stands, the entirety of a domestic abuse case and related proceedings could be heard by various members of the judiciary, especially if civil courts become involved in the event of a subsequent divorce.

MSPs were debating the first stage of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) bill in Holyrood this afternoon.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

“Courts can sometimes seem stacked against domestic abuse survivors, and there’s an acceptance that the process can be traumatic.

“As such, steps should be taken to minimise what they have to re-live.

“As it stands, victims of domestic abuse have to recount their cases to multiple sheriffs or judges.

“In these cases, a number of factors can be at play, such as divorce or child residence arrangements, on top of the actual allegations of domestic abuse.

“Domestic violence victims face many barriers to safety and independence. Incomprehensible and complex court proceedings should not be one.

“I accept there would be issues to address in terms of actually making this happen.

“But surely these trials must be considered to help victims of domestic abuse north of the border.”

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28 Sep 2017



The SNP’s £55 million shortfall in land and buildings transaction tax would be nearly three times higher were it not for a copied UK Government policy,

it has emerged.

It was confirmed this week that the Scottish Government's forecast for stamp duty income was 10 per cent off, bringing in £483 million last year.

Now it's been revealed that £100 million of that figure came from a new surcharge on buy-to-let second homes, an initiative the nationalists lifted from the Conservative government in Westminster.

At First Minister's Questions today, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson slammed the SNP's LBTT rates, which she pointed out were not only blowing a hole in the country's budget, but making it harder for people to buy "their first proper home".

Housing experts have said, with fewer homes selling at the higher end of the market, it's slowing down movement for everyone else.

Those organisations have blamed the rates of LBTT set by ministers, suggesting they are amended to encourage an upturn in the sector.

Revenue Scotland papers confirm that, in 2016/17, more than £100 million was received in tax receipts thanks to the Additional Dwelling Supplement, which sees an extra tariff placed on those buying second homes.

That accounted for more than 20 per cent of all LBTT revenues.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"The SNP collected £55 million less than it said it would, blowing a hole in Nicola Sturgeon's budget.

"But this shortfall would have been almost three times worse were it not for a policy it adopted straight from the UK Government.

"It's bad enough that the public purse is suffering from the SNP's botched reform of stamp duty.

"But it's squeezing Scottish families in some parts of the county out of their first home.

"This was the very first new tax administered by this SNP government, but the First Minister has got it completely wrong.

"She should listen to the property and housing experts and make changes to get the market moving."