



EURO NEWS MONTHLY MAY 2008



Alyn, out on a sheep farm getting to grips with shearing.

ALYN EMBARKS ON NATIONWIDE NFUS SURGERY - "ASK ME, TELL ME, CHIN ME!"

Alyn has announced a nationwide programme of farmer surgeries organised by National Farmers Union Scotland, one to be held in each of the NFUS regions nationwide. The working title of the programme of meetings is 'the ask me tell me chin me tour'.

Alyn said: "I'm delighted NFUS has been able to set this up, and pleased as ever to be working closely with them. After sixteen months on the Agriculture Committee I hope I have a pretty good handle on my remit, but there is no substitute for getting out and speaking to the people who work in the industry.

"We're being slightly provocative with the title of the programme, but that is the idea. I'll make myself available to the members in every NFUS region with no subjects or issues off limits. I will be getting in touch with local SNP representatives and members from each of the regions and hope that this can be a real joint effort from the SNP at all levels of Government.

"I think that there is a recognition amongst the farmers of Scotland that the SNP government in Scotland is making a real difference to farming and rural life. I urge any NFU members who have any questions or problems they want to discuss with me to come along to their nearest surgery."

Jim McLaren, NFUS President said: "We recognise the vital work Alyn Smith carries out on behalf of all Scottish farmers and his grasp of the issues is second to none. Alyn is giving up nine days of his summer recess to spend with members in each of NFU Scotland's nine regions and I hope that many of our members will participate in their nearest event as it is such a good opportunity to put across any issues you may have."

Alyn's surgeries are taking place in each of the regions on the following dates:
11th June – Inverness, 12th June - Edinburgh, 13th June - Stirling, 27th June - Perth, 21st July - Dumfries, 23rd July - Ayr, 25th July - Oban, 28th July - Aberdeen, 30th July - Lerwick.

ALYN IN PLEA TO RETAIN 'SCOTS VOICE IN EU'

Alyn joined a cross-party group of MEPs in a meeting at Westminster to press the case for Scotland not to take a reduction in MEP numbers from seven to six. All seven current MEPs believe the cut, caused by the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, is unfair. The group met with Bridget Prentice, deputy to Justice Secretary Jack Straw, to try to avert the reduction.

Before the meeting, Alyn said: "This is about Scotland having as effective a voice in the EU as possible, not least at a time when the UK Government representing Scotland on issues like agriculture, energy, fisheries is just not working in Scotland's interests."

He said the cut based on population was "iniquitous", given Scotland represents one-third of the UK land mass, most of the coastline, and vast majority of the islands, with a distinct identity, legal system, and government.

"I hope the minister will be persuaded that Scotland's civic society, political parties and government are united in our desire to retain the seven seats," he added.

EU BACKING FOR SCOTS SPORT

Alyn welcomed a vote in the European Parliament backing continued support for national sports teams in countries like Scotland. MEPs were voting on the European Commission's strategy on sport - an influential policy document that will guide the European Commission's approach to promoting sport across the EU.

Speaking after the vote Alyn said: "I'm glad that common sense prevailed here and we voted to preserve the principle of subsidiarity in sport. Although this didn't go as far as I would like, it is a clear signal to the European Commission that MEPs value local and national identity and independence in world sport.

"We in Scotland have a proud sporting history and long will that continue. Our national teams are very important to us and it would have made no sense at all for EU policy to ignore their distinctiveness, and distinctive contribution.

"The European Commission has major plans to develop and promote sport across the continent over the coming years and there is a clear role for the EU structures in working across borders. I welcome the broad thrust of their strategy which will now explicitly pay proper heed to our independence in world sport."



Alyn Smith MEP 



Alyn attending a Europe Day session on 9 May in the Scottish Parliament organised by Christian Aid. The sessions, attended by school-children from across Scotland, covered topics such as fair-trade and international development.

Alyn said: "I am delighted to be involved with the celebrations taking place to mark Europe Day. The aims of the conference are admirable and I am looking forward to hearing the opinions of the young Scots who will be taking part."

ANGER AT "AGRICULTURALLY-ILLITERATE" PROPOSALS

Alyn reacted with anger at the news that Alistair Darling has written to fellow EU finance ministers calling for the abolition of all import tariffs on agricultural commodities, before any substantive negotiations even commenced.

Alyn said: "This is yet another demonstration of how the UK government is just not working in the interests of Scotland's farmers and growers. This agriculturally-illiterate proposal is ill-considered, ill-timed and from a Brussels perspective, breathtakingly naïve. It will go down like a lead balloon, the same as previous UK government initiatives and only underscores the need for a strong and stronger Scottish voice in the EU.

"While it is clearly necessary to address the issue of rising food prices, the CAP is only one strand of the problem that must be looked at. That the Chancellor seems to believe that the CAP is the root of the problem shows his ignorance of the environment which European food producers have been working in for the last few years. A move such as this only helps to make the SNP's arguments for them."

PLEAS FOR UK CLUSTER BOMB POLICY U-TURN

Alyn has reiterated his call for the UK to join the international consensus on banning cluster bombs at the international conference in Dublin, and has written to UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown to personally plead for a UK u-turn on the issue.

His call was made in the wake of reports that the UK may be about to reverse the previous negotiating position and finally accept an international ban on the munitions. Scottish National Party Spring Conference in April unanimously adopted a motion proposed by Alyn committing the party to the abolition of such munitions and he has been a persistent and vocal critic of the UK stance.

Alyn commented: "There is no doubt that cluster bombs are ineffective, unjustified and immoral, and it is no coincidence that the countries leading these negotiations are Norway and Ireland. Represented by the UK, I have no sources in the Ministry of Defence but I read this morning that the UK may be about to u-turn on policy and accept a ban on cluster bombs. I would like to see Scotland, like any other progressive internationalist nation, play a natural lead role in such talks rather than last minute convert.

"However these reports are very, very welcome news, and I welcome the fact that international pressure, the hard work of NGOs, church groups and citizens has paid off and I pay tribute to them. I have this morning written direct to the UK Prime Minister urging a u-turn on this issue and hope that in the coming days we may hear good news from Dublin.

"Attempts to spin that the Prime Minister is so in favour of a u-turn look a little tenuous given his own Defence Secretary just last month said very clearly the munitions have 'significant military value', but the fact is that if the UK does change policy and endorse a treaty banning these odious bombs then nobody will be happier than I."

EU MOVES AGAINST MOSQUITO DEVICE

Alyn has pledged his support to moves to ban the 'mosquito' device in the European Union. A written declaration has been put forward by MEPs which Alyn added his name to. The declaration calls for the European Commission to promote a ban on the marketing and use of the device in the EU. It comes at the same time as a motion was put to Glasgow City Council calling for a ban on the device within the city, and in the wake of the successful motion backed by the Young Scots for Independence which was passed at the SNP conference in April.

Alyn commented: "It is quite bizarre that we can countenance a scheme that so indiscriminately targets our young people and this should have been recognised some time ago.

"I hope that the European Parliament can supplement the good work that has already taken place and implement a total EU-wide ban on this odious device."

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