



Alyn Smith MEP 



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SMITH PLEDGES TO DEFEAT “ALICE IN WONDERLAND” FISHERIES PROPOSAL

Alyn has pledged to defeat new EU laws regarding the treatment of diseased fish caught at sea. The new rules would see skippers obliged to bring suspected diseased fish to shore for incineration as potentially hazardous waste; while the Common Fisheries Policy obliges the same skipper to throw healthy fish overboard, if caught over quota. The proposals are contained in the new proposed Animal By-Products Regulation which proposes to bring diseased fish within its scope. Alyn has pledged to see diseased fish deleted from the scope of the Regulation and called on other MEPs to support his case.

He said: "The new regulation is largely welcome; it will be good news for farmers, will help biofuels and I'm delighted the Commission is coming in the SNP's direction. But to extend the scope to fisheries is neither logical nor workable, and if the Commission will not withdraw it then it must be defeated.

"I understand the logic in that, hypothetically, if fish caught are suspected of disease then throwing diseased fish back into the sea could run the risk of the disease spreading, so the fish should be quarantined and destroyed safely. But any hypothetical positive impact on marine disease control will be negligible compared to the massive financial and practical burdens on the already struggling fishing industry.

"The Commission claim that this is only designed to apply to factory vessels which freeze fish on board, yet the wording is not clear. It would be difficult for fishing vessels in general to simply ignore the regulation, especially considering that the supposed health risk comes from the gut of the fish, and most fishing vessels gut fish. It is also clear that that there would be major costs for fishing vessels if they had to demonstrate the ability to comply. Ports would also be burdened by the cost of having to transfer the waste to an approved plant.

"As Draftsman for the Agriculture Committee on the By-Products Regulation, I will be deleting diseased fish from the scope of the Regulation. I will also be holding discussions with Horst Schnellhardt, the Rapporteur for this Regulation in the Environment Committee, and will seek to ensure that identical proposals are contained in the final Report. We have a very good opportunity to defeat this."

DON'T SIGN, DON'T GET CAUGHT OUT

Alyn has highlighted an investigation into the "European City Guide" scam and launched a campaign to make Scots businesses aware of the dangers under the slogan "Don't sign, don't get caught out". He has published advice on his website in order to warn other businesses of the dangers. The scam typically involves small businesses being tricked into signing up to contracts for inclusion in worthless "city guides" and thereby incurring bills of hundreds if not thousands of pounds in inflated advertising costs. The fraudsters then threaten legal action in the expectation that some of their victims will pay up in an attempt to make them go away. As the police draw near they simply collapse their companies in one location only to set up again in another.

He said: "The "European City Guide" scam is as old as the hills but still we see many Scots businesses being caught out each year. The legal situation is not as clear as it could be, so the Parliament's inquiry is welcome, especially as it seems to be seriously considering criminal sanctions for the fraudsters. However, the best advice remains to avoid being caught out at all, so I have published guidance on my website, please take a look."

EU VOTE ON SYMBOLS & SONGS

Alyn criticised a vote in the EU Parliament to formalise the symbols, motto, song and celebration day of the European Union.

He said: "This report is a technical recognition of existing practice and will not change much, the twelve stars of Europe were flying above the Parliament building last night and still do today. My problem is that to vote on this now is a gift to the opponents of the EU, who would seek to present us as out of touch, self-aggrandizing and obsessed with trinkets, image and flummery. It would be difficult to prove them wrong.

"Europe's citizens, and the majority of MEPs, are concerned about the state of the economy and the evident fragility of our banking sector. Thousands of my own constituents, and I, are deadly worried about the state of the economy, how safe are jobs, savings, pensions? The citizens of Europe, far from being 'united in diversity', as our new motto says, are more accurately 'frightened in adversity' and will look at our move with disbelief.

"For the Parliament to indulge in a pointless navel-gazing exercise today undermines all the good work the Parliament does in making a real difference to people."



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Above: Alyn with John Erskine, who was stopped by French Customs Officers, and Councillor Isabel Hutton of West Lothian Council.

RISKS TO HAULIERS OF CONTINENTAL TRAVEL

Alyn has raised the plight of Scots hauliers travelling to and from the continent, in light of claims of unfair and heavy handed treatment by foreign Customs Officers. Mr Smith was contacted by one such haulier, Mr John Erskine of Armadale, after being referred to him by his fellow SNP colleague Councillor Isabel Hutton. Mr Erskine complained of his treatment by three French Customs Officers in a service area in Nantes, France.

Mr Erskine purchased cigarettes and rolling tobacco on a boat from the UK to mainland Spain, dropped off his load in Madrid and proceeded to travel back to the UK through France. Mr Erskine claims that the French Customs Officers fined him on the spot for having too much tobacco. However, he claims that the Officers advised him that had he been a tourist this would not have been an issue. In light of these claims Alyn wrote to the French Consul General in Edinburgh requesting that this matter be investigated thoroughly.

Alyn said: "From what Mr Erskine has told me, the way he was treated by the French Customs Officials is very disappointing. I have raised this matter with the French Consul General, as after consulting with the Road Haulage Association, apparently they are inundated with complaints from hauliers regarding the conduct of foreign Customs Officers.

"I have been advised that Mr Erskine was open and co-operative with the Customs Officers, yet they saw fit to frog march him to the nearest cash machine to demand the €250 fine.

"To be honest, this is by no means the best way to foster good relations if our hauliers are afraid to purchase goods on the continent for fear of being fined.

"I look forward to the Consul General's response and hope that Scots hauliers can feel safe and secure in their rights when travelling to and from the continent in future."

SCOTS LEAD ANTI SHEEP ID FIGHT IN BRUSSELS

A top level delegation from Scotland's sheep sector has presented to the EU Parliament's Agriculture Committee the practical objections to the flawed EID scheme. EID proposals have been agreed to by member state governments and the European Commission has been tasked to implement the scheme by the end of 2009. However, Smith fears that the technology is unproven and as well as being undeliverable it will actually represent a step backwards from current Scots best practice. He also fears that the increased cost and inconvenience will be the straw that breaks the back of many already struggling farms if the scheme is implemented.

Alyn has been in the vanguard of efforts in the European Parliament to combat the scheme, drafting a Written Declaration for other MEPs to sign on the issue, organising the presentation of the Scottish Farmer Magazine petition to the Parliament's Petitions Committee and organising the presentation to the Agriculture Committee.

Speaking afterwards, he said: "This was a hugely powerful and credible presentation, and I'm glad that colleagues from across Europe gave the issue such a sympathetic response. Scotland is ahead of the game in recognising the implications of this scheme, but this is an EU wide obligation so we did other countries a service by encouraging them to consider what impact EID will have on their flock. With doubts on the scheme being voiced in Germany, France, Spain and Italy it is clear that the coalition to force a reworking of this scheme is growing.

"I was also proud of our delegation. They looked every inch the serious, credible and persuasive individuals they are, and the representatives from other farming unions rose to the occasion too, representing in all some 40 million sheep and the most sheep intensive areas of the EU. This presentation could not be ignored.

"I have my teeth firmly into this issue and will not let it rest until we have secured the opt-out from this scheme. We have a number of irons in the fire in the Parliament on this, but we will also be paying close attention to the Scottish Government trials of this technology and will not be shy in highlighting the deficiencies in it as we catalogue them."

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