

Tavish Scott  
2016 Liberal Party Conference speech

Today I ask Conference to endorse a new Plan for the Islands. It is badly needed. On mobile phone coverage.

And on broadband. Tens of millions of pounds have been spent on superfast broadband. But in many areas the speed is glacial.

Steven Spence runs a music business from Unst. This week he emailed me –

**Hi Tavish**

**I am emailing you from my work computer on the ferry as I couldn't get BT mail to open when I was home this afternoon.**

**Our BT Broadband here in Uyeasound is pathetic and is getting worse.**

**I have done a few speed tests over the last few months and the best we ever get is under 0.5 Mb/s.**

**It is so annoying to hear on the radio about Shetland getting super fast broadband when we are getting such a poor service. I would be happy if we could get as much as 1 Mb/s.**

The Islands need a new approach that installs fast broadband at the most isolated croft. Not population driven targets that concentrate on where most people live. This approach fails all of us who live more than a mile from our telephone exchange.

Islanders are fed up with a one size fits all approach to public services. It does not work. This SNP Government want to run everything from the central belt. The SNP used to be considered competent. Try telling that to Island crofters and farmers.

They were promised their CAP payments by the end of January. For most that has not happened. Crofters have lost trust in their government. Promises to deliver have not been met.

The SNP has spent an unbelievable £178 million on a computer to make just 14,000 payments. It has failed. The Agriculture Minister does not command the confidence of the industry. So Scotland's First Minister should step in, take charge, and sort out this shambles. This is her government, her shambles and her responsibility to resolve it. Crofters and farmers expect nothing less.

Was the disastrous creation of Police Scotland competent government? No. This centralisation brought us

- armed police on the streets;
- industrial scale stop and search of young people;
- and the disastrous closure of police call centres.

The SNP have forgotten the value of community policing and replaced it with targets

designed for the central belt. All Shetland's outlying police stations have closed. A police presence in Whalsay or Yell, is an occasional event.

So Islanders are saying there has to be a better way?

A vote on our future as part of Europe will now happen in June. For the London press the Scottish elections will barely register. But the sharing of power between Holyrood and Lerwick is just as important to islanders as the relationship between the UK and Brussels. So the Scottish elections really matter.

In June we may be heading for a vote that takes the UK out of Europe. This is what most Tories want. It's what a lot of nationalists want too. They just don't admit it. Brexit means a second vote on Scottish independence. Nicola Sturgeon has said so.

So once again, the Tories and the SNP are hand in hand. This week they combined to oppose tax changes at Holyrood. They voted against £475 million for our schools.

Remember too the 2007-11 Holyrood Parliament where the Tories propped up the SNP minority administration every day. That was the launch pad for the SNP in 2011. So the Tories are the willing accomplices of nationalism. It is the Tories who delivered the 2015 referendum and now the potential for Yes2? In the chaos of European and Scottish opt outs, the relationship between Holyrood and Lerwick, between Islands and Edinburgh, will be forgotten. And SNP cuts.

Enough is enough. I have canvassed a lot of doors across the islands already. The mood is for decisions that affect us to be taken by us.

- Not by SNP Ministers who cut ferry fares for the Western Isles but hike them for the Northern Isles.
- Not by SNP Ministers who cut schools budgets.
- Not by SNP ministers who are putting local health services under enormous financial pressure. £300,000 in cuts will hit local GP's across Shetland.

It is this endless centralisation, the arrogance of a central belt government, who always know best, that has encouraged the formation of *Wir Shetland*. They represent a wide group of islanders who want self-determination for Shetland.

I have visited the Isle of Man. There is little they decide there that Shetland could not determine. So if the UK withdraws from the EU, and the SNP force a second independence referendum, Shetland should have the right to decide where we want to be. The way this country is going that might be back to Norway! But at the very least we want the chance to explore an opt-out of our own.

On May 5th, Shetland can vote for rule from Edinburgh. Or to explore what is in the Islands' best interests. We need a real debate about the best constitutional future for Shetland. One thing is for sure, the SNP will not give us that. After 9 years of a nationalist government they offer jam tomorrow, in the hope that it will keep us quiet. I am sure *Wir Shetland* will not keep quiet and nor will I.

I take a pragmatic liberal approach to where powers lie - as close to the people they

affect as is practical. There are some things which have to be decided by the UN - only by all nations working together can we hope to tackle the major problems the world faces. Other things need to be agreed at a continental level - combatting pollution which does not recognise national boundaries.

The UK and Scotland are still far too centralised in the way power is shared. Devolution of powers to Holyrood, the *Smith Commission* blueprint is a step forwards.

But we need to be more radical. Passing powers to island communities. The islands have their own unique challenges. Islanders know best how to address these.

I sat on the Smith Commission, alongside my friend, Mike Moore. I argued for the management of the seabed around the islands not just to be devolved to Edinburgh, but to pass to islands control. I strongly believe these management powers should pass to the Lerwick Port Authority and to Shetland Islands Council.

Such arrangements should happen for other Islands too.

That is unfinished business for me.

That is an Islands Plan.

That is what Conference should back.