

***"Thinking Globally –
Acting with, and within, Scotland"***

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Introduction

Ladies & Gentlemen

I am grateful to Edinburgh University, and to the sponsor of this series of lectures, Brodies, for giving me the opportunity to address some important environmental issues in a public setting.

I am particularly pleased to be making my first major statement on these matters since my appointment as Minister for Environment in May 2007 here in Edinburgh University because that puts me very much on home turf.

As a child, whose grandparents lived in Edinburgh, I was a regular visitor to this city – a city in which my mother grew up. In her childhood she would most probably never have heard the word “environment” or at least not in the sense in which it is used today. And when I graduated from this University some 34 years ago, environmentalism was still a topic in its infancy.

Now, however, it is a concern which every one of us should have, and which most of us – fortunately – do have, even if we are not entirely sure what we should be doing about it.

Helping individual citizens to find the correct response, and enabling them to make that correct response is very much part of my job as Minister and that is why, tonight, here in

Edinburgh University, I want to focus not on the wider and sometimes over academic questions of climate change but on the very personal ones – the questions and the answers which involve individual actions. The questions and the answers that lead to acting locally in order to resolve global dilemmas.

Of course I am glad to say that the Scottish Government is already active in that field. Last week we launched a major campaign seeking personal buy-in to individual actions that will produce environmental benefits and I shall come back to that campaign shortly.

And earlier today, Richard Lochhead launched a public debate on a national food policy, which is in great part a response to the growing appetite (if I may be forgiven the pun) of individuals who want to know where their food comes from and to be able to make informed individual choices about what they choose to buy and eat.

As a government we see the need for localism to be an underpinning foundation of all our policies and localism, by definition, rests on individuals and what they can do and contribute, each to each, and each to society.

Building that type of informed, active and concerned society is an SNP aim, very much bound up with creating an informed, active and concerned Scotland, able to make its own decisions and play an effective role in the world.

Scotland – our responsibility.

Of course, convener, it is hardly revolutionary to assert that Scots are likely to be at their best when they take responsibility for their own actions and the future of the country in which we all share our lives.

One of the founding documents of our nation, the “Complaynt of Scotland” (published anonymously in 1549 but probably written by Robert Wedderburn, one of the three celebrated Wedderburn brothers from Dundee) makes just such a claim, and moreover uses it as an argument for Scottish independence.

Perhaps its most telling passage for us is this:

“.....the natural love of your native cunyre suld be inseperblye rutit in your hartis, considerand that your lyvis, your bodies, your habitatone, your frendis, your lyvyngis, and sutentain, your hail, your pace, your refuge, the rest of your eild ande your sepulture is in it.”

That holistic view of what the country is and its relationship to the individual is an important one. It should provide, in my view, not just the underpinning of our political philosophy but also the context for our entire approach to the world in which we live – an approach driven by our concern for our country and what is around us as the starting point for all our concerns. An approach that realizes that we are responsible for what is around us and what we make of it, and no one else.

That is the basis of modern environmentalism – or should be. It should tell us that we are responsible for Scotland's environment and its biodiversity. Consequently we have to take that responsibility very seriously indeed and act up on it with urgency. All of us.

The international context.

In previous generations the Scottish cringe would have led some, when hearing that assertion – the assertion that we are responsible for Scotland and no one else – to cry “parochialism” and to loudly argue that such thoughts were unworthy.

Of course Scotland is not an island which has barricaded off the rest of the world and it is vital that we realise that taking responsibility here for what is here does not mean ignoring what is happening elsewhere. Such facts are axiomatic.

And their outcomes are axiomatic too. For once we have taken responsibility for our own actions, then we will be keen to see others do so too wherever they are. Once we have taken responsibility for our own actions we will recognise that success in the wider sphere needs similar individual action world wide. And we will then become pro-active in our desire to join hands and pool effort across the planet.

The basis of internationalism is nationalism, said Lenin. If we understand that – and I think at last we do – then we have an obligation as a nationalist government to live up to our role as a responsible member of the international community. This Scottish Government remains committed to International Development and recognises Scotland's long standing and historic role in international engagement. We support projects in the priority areas of health, education and civic governance, which will help Scotland play our part in meeting the UN Millennium Development Goals and helping to tackle and eradicate the causes of world poverty.

But success in this cannot be achieved by Government alone. This is why our international involvement goes deeper than Government to Government. It is about

community to community and ultimately people to people, with Government encouraging organisations and individuals to work with their colleagues to develop programmes which meet the needs identified by local communities.

In all these actions our message is a simple one - 'Scotland Cares'. And increasingly what it cares about nationally and internationally is the environment.

We acknowledge that much of our wealth comes from interdependency. But that fact alone places upon us a responsibility – and, to be honest, a self interest – to act responsibly and responsively when the global environment which is the source of our well being is so obviously threatened.

In those circumstances it is VERY UNWISE to leave actions to others. We must act and persuade others to act. Environmentally and politically!

Climate change – the biggest challenge. Why it matters and what needs to happen?

There are many environmental issues that I could use to illustrate the necessity for individual action which will lead to collective progress, but let me use as the prime exemplar the issue of climate change.

We now know beyond reasonable doubt that climate change is a reality. That it is happening here and now. And that humanity is driving it.

Research on climate trends in Scotland between 1961 and 2004 by the *Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research (SNIFFER)* indicates that there is no doubt that Scotland has become wetter since 1961.

*"...an increase of almost seventy per cent in winter precipitation since 1961 has been identified in North Scotland. This is equivalent to an average increase of approximately three millimetres a day throughout the winter season (December to February)."*¹

Further evidence that climate change is upon us comes from SEPA's network of gauging stations around Scotland². Data from these show that winter river flows from selected

1 SNIFFER (2006) "A Handbook of Climate Trends Across Scotland" p.24 www.sniffer.org.uk/result.asp

2 SEPA (2006) Measured Trend 1961-2005: Dee 38% increase in winter flow, Tweed 63%, Tay 64%, Nith 66%, Kelvin 69%, Teith 91%.

rivers around Scotland have been increasing for the past 40 years. Indeed many rivers have produced their highest floods in the last two decades, causing millions of pounds worth of damage to property and affecting the lives of thousands of people across the country. The 1994 Strathclyde flood alone caused £100m of damage.

That is one of the imperatives driving the work now being taking forward on the new **Flooding Bill**, which will create a new legislative framework for sustainable flood management and flood risk management which is much more relevant than that contained in the present 1961 Act. We hope to publish the consultation document for the bill shortly.

Climate change will continue to alter – sometimes dramatically - the world in which we and our children will have to live and make our way. Scotland needs to make national, UK, European and global commitments and to undertake action at all those levels. This Scottish Government is determined to play its part and more, in particular by meeting the challenge of growing the economy while bearing down on the emissions which are contributing to climate change.

That is why we have put sustainable economic growth at the heart of our Purpose for Government, and set ourselves the target of reducing emissions by 80% by 2050.

Acting with Scotland

The target of an 80% reduction within 42 years is an ambitious one. So what does it mean in practical terms ?

For a start, we need to use less energy in Scotland and to get more of our electricity and heat from renewable sources. We need to find ways to capture and store the carbon released by non-renewables. We need to exploit and capitalise on our strengths and opportunities in low carbon energy: our plentiful renewable energy sources and potential carbon sinks – including wind, waves, tides and forests – and our strength in renewable and associated technologies. All those matters will come to debate in the Parliament this Thursday, for the first time in great detail, and they will shape our energy policy in the years to come.

We need to run our homes, offices, shops, farms and factories more energy-efficiently.

And as consumers we need to buy goods and services - wherever they come from – which cause less emissions throughout their life.

We need to tackle growing demand for transport, which is a major contributor to Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions³, and find more carbon-efficient ways of travel. Both the recently-published King review, and the recent report from the Commission for Integrated Transport on climate change present powerful cases for taking a mixed approach - embracing new sustainable technologies as they come to market, but also seeking behavioural change - from individuals, businesses, and public sector organisations.

Addressing behavioural change can be complex and politically fraught - the debate is often more polarised than the reality - particularly when fiscal measures are considered. However, we know from Scottish research that many people are willing to make changes in the way that they travel - prepared to move now from the car to the bus, from the plane to the train, to walk their children to school instead of driving them.

Role of legislation.

One way in which Government can help is by introducing appropriate legislation. It is clear that law has an important part to play in enabling and encouraging action:

- setting targets and providing a framework to support them, and
- creating financial incentives for business and consumers to act – making polluters pay and making it easier with incentives and infrastructure to be greener.

We will shortly be consulting formally on our proposals for the **Scottish Climate Change Bill**, which will enable us to strengthen our response to the challenges of climate change. We shall be setting out to deliver the ambitious emissions reduction target proposed for the Bill and to safeguard Scotland's communities from the unavoidable impacts of a changing climate. Our proposals are likely to include:

- statutory targets for 2050 and interim carbon budget periods or targets, set ten or more years in advance;

3 . In 2005 Transport produced 12.4 mega tonnes of CO2 equivalent - accounting for nearly 23% of total Scottish emissions. Road transport has the greatest proportion of these emissions (83.5%), and cars are the source of the greatest emissions within the road transport sector. The fastest growing sectors are domestic civil aviation, and within road transport - freight.

- mandatory annual reporting;
- provision for a source of independent advice and monitoring; and
- any provisions we need to deliver policies to meet the 2050 target or to adapt to climate change, either in the form of primary legislation or enabling powers to allow proposals to be taken forward through future secondary legislation.

But I do not want to pre-empt the consultation document. You will soon be able to read the full proposals yourselves. Let me just say that we welcome good ideas, wherever they come from, and I hope that you will make your views known by responding to the consultation.

In keeping with our theme of thinking beyond Scotland, you will know that a **UK Climate Change Bill** is currently being considered in the Westminster Parliament. That Bill provides a shared framework for the UK as a whole. Through it we shall work with our UK partners towards an emissions reduction target and to demonstrate international leadership. But the UK Bill does not dictate the measures which we should take in Scotland – and which we shall determine in Scotland.

The action we take will contribute towards the target set for the UK by the UK Climate Change Bill - to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by at least 60% by 2050. The UK Bill will require government to set 5-year carbon budgets as milestones along the way towards the 2050 target.

An important feature of the UK Bill is that it will also establish an independent expert advisory Committee on Climate Change to advise government on targets, carbon budgets and other climate change issues. This Committee will advise the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations on the UK target. Additionally the Bill enables the Devolved Administrations to seek the Committee's advice, if we wish, on any targets of our own.

The Bill also provides for a joint UK-wide assessment of the impacts of climate change to which we need to adapt.

Need for individual action

I have outlined the legislation currently being brought forward by government at UK and at Scottish level. These Bills will provide the framework which will enable and encourage action to achieve ambitious emissions targets.

But this is not a challenge that government or legislation can address alone. Success is dependent on every one of us accepting his or her responsibility and adopting more sustainable patterns of behaviour.

Activity to raise awareness of climate change is important, but more critical is the need to encourage more people to take practical action **now**. There is much that we can do as individuals in our daily lives to help. Small changes can make a difference, such as:

- switching lights off when they are not needed
- choosing energy saving light bulbs
- insulating our homes
- not travelling by car when we can walk, cycle or use public transport.

By adopting sustainable lifestyles and behaviours we can help to make Scotland, and the world we live in, a more sustainable place.

As I have said, law can help, but we face limits, not least in terms of public acceptability, in how far and how fast the law can go, for example in compelling private behaviours. The ban on smoking in public places was a major advance in terms of public health, and one which was generally welcomed by the public at large. But we do need to acknowledge that it came in the wake of growing public understanding and acceptance of the dangers of active and passive smoking over several decades - or even centuries if we go back to James VI's Counterblast to Tobacco with its ringing denunciation of

“a custom loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs, and in the black stinking fume thereof nearest resembling the horrible stygian smoke of the pit that is bottomless.”

So it would be best if we could unlock a way to get willing, and indeed enthusiastic, individual support for individual actions. In other words if government could and would provide leadership to inspire change, not just legislation to enforce change.

Leadership

Indeed many studies indicate that only by providing inspirational leadership are we likely to secure the widespread behaviour changes which are so urgently needed. Legislating makes a contribution, but needs to sit alongside other approaches.

I hope that many of you will have seen *The Scotsman* newspaper's Green edition last week, which featured 10 simple personal pledges designed to help people do their bit for the environment. I also hope that many of you have signed up or will sign up to one or more of them.

The point about these pledges is to demonstrate the considerable collective impact that simple actions can have and to show that together we can make a difference by accepting and acting on our individual responsibilities for our actions and the impacts our lifestyle choices have on our immediate and global environment.

They are designed to provide leadership and to engage people so that they can discover and implement meaningful and easily achievable actions which we can all do and which in time can – and hopefully will - become second nature for all of us.

Of course, making Scotland greener both in thought and action is not as simple as just switching to low-energy bulbs, but for many people the pledges will represent the first easy steps of a journey towards a more sustainable society.

We will be working with our partners across government and beyond to support people and help them understand that their actions can make a real contribution and what more they can do, and why.

We want to show that Scotland is an environmentally-responsible nation capable of leading the change to a low-carbon economy and to whom the rest of the world can look for inspiration. But not just a nation – a place of people who act on their concern in order to improve the part of planet they share. If you haven't already made your own personal commitment to the pledges I encourage you to do so - you can sign-up for all or any of the pledges at: www.infoscotland.com/ourfuture

Setting an example

“Practising what you preach” and *“walking the talk”* are well-established maxims,. It is harder, of course, to do what we encourage others to do – harder not to renege on the commitments we want others to make.

So I can confirm that I do recycle – but that it is easier , strangely enough, in rural Argyll than in urban Edinburgh, and that that must change. I do use rechargeable batteries, I do try and avoid using plastic carrier bags and I do turn off the water when brushing my teeth.

And if I have not yet done enough cycling that perhaps is due to my distance from my work, so to speak, rather than any reluctance to cut down on driving.

Ministers do have to set a good example. But so does the entire Scottish Government. We need to be determined that all in Scotland's public sector should act as exemplars and pioneers of good environmental performance. That's why we are developing a public sector environmental performance programme to build on and expand previous work with public bodies to encourage pioneering behaviour in respect of the environment and sustainability across the public sector.

We want to see a step change under this Government in the pace and level of aspiration on environmental performance across the public sector, offering leadership by ensuring our own house is in order, and modelling greener behaviour. The five strategic objectives now in place should make that easier and more obvious, though change is always hard. Greener government is and remains a priority, and by greening government we should be able to move creating a greener Scottish society.

Providing practical support

But, finally convener, I have to admit that even with such good intentions compulsion, persuasion and example – taken together and used sensitively – are still not always enough. Government has to go a step further too and ensure that practical help is backed up with adequate information, finance and infrastructure.

And in this regard I want to say a few brief words – by way of illustration, - about the Scottish Government's new waste policy, which my colleague Richard Lochhead will outline next week in a statement to Parliament.

Our manifesto commits us to aspire to achieve a *zero waste Scotland*. There is no single definition of zero waste. But when we held a waste summit on 3 October, one of the speakers - David Dougherty from the United States - summed it up very well when he said that zero waste was really about a society that has recognised that it must aim for zero misuse of the planet's resources.

One of the things that means is continuing to move Scotland away from landfill.

Surveys show that people are prepared to act to help in the move away from landfill. Both the *Scottish Household Survey* and surveys by SWAG, the *Scottish Waste*

Awareness Group, show that over 80% of Scottish households recycle at least some material at the moment, on a regular basis.

We now have a recycling/composting rate of nearly 30%: still low by comparison with many other countries but a vast improvement on the 5% rate we had at devolution.

As well as action by households, there are clear economic reasons for business to act and support the move away from landfill. Landfill Tax is on an escalator and is going up by £8 a year. And landfill gate fees are going up too, as standards at landfill sites get better – these higher standards have to be paid for.

One clear message is the need for good infrastructure, and good information, to help in the move away from landfill. *Scottish Waste Awareness Group* surveys show that 75% of those households who do not recycle at the moment would be prepared to do so. And the main barrier for these householders continues to be the lack of recycling facilities. There are still some parts of the country – such as remote, rural areas and areas with high density housing – where we need to work further with local authorities to improve recycling facilities.

In waste, like in many other environmental issues, we need to strike the right balance between, on the one hand, education, encouragement and facilitation and, on the other hand, penalties and incentives and compulsion. But all of those have to be targeted to engaging individual action.

Up until now, on household recycling we have relied on good publicity campaigns and voluntary participation in recycling. However, other countries with higher recycling rates than ours often have compulsory recycling and waste charging. The balance between those approaches is where the debate lies and where the public will take positions and examine the credentials, and the credibility, of politicians as they propose solutions.

Broader issues

I have used climate change and waste today to illustrate the reasons – both moral and self-interested – why we in Scotland need to accept our environmental responsibilities to the global community and future generations, and the different levels at which we need to think and act – globally, regionally, nationally and locally

Yet even these vital issues can be seen as merely examples of a bigger challenge still. Overall we must ask ourselves how we , and all the life forms around us for which we

bear ultimate responsibility, can be helped to adapt in a time of unprecedented change in the environment, and how we can reduce and eliminate a misuse of the planet's resources which is so great as to threaten life on earth itself.

And wrapped up in those matters are other issues of great import to communities and individuals – issue such as biodiversity, and issues such environmental justice and the long overdue recognition that rich countries and more wealthy communities are better able to change and adjust to global and local threats , and that inequalities in wealth and resources mean greater suffering by the poor and the marginalised. The recognition, in other words, that the challenge of the environment is political as well as economic and moral as well as social.

Which brings us back to individuals.

Conclusions

Convener, in this brief address I have been able to do more than scrape the surface of the topic you allocated to me.

I am more and more conscious in government that the challenge of the environment is vast and complex and that I share it not just with one or two other specific ministers such as Stewart Stevenson in Climate Change, but with the whole ministerial team , with the Parliament and with all the people of this diverse nation.

And I realise with increasingly clarity that the challenge of the environment is not about abstracts, or even about ideas. It is basically about people and changing people's behaviour. Indeed if it does not lead to behavioural change and to individual action then all our effort in this area will be pointless, and that will mean that our planet will continue to sicken and die.

Traditionally in a democracy, a combination of means have been used to change behaviour – carrots and sticks .

Legislation is undoubtedly needed but the scale and nature of this challenge is so unique that it is now vitally important to work work for willing and active (and enthusiastic) buy-in, and through incentives rather than coercion where we can.

That is likely to lead to longer term benefit too: more active and participatory democracy. Indeed reacting in this way may produce not just environmental benefit but also additional benefits for society: new ways of working with each other.

It should if we lead with enthusiasm, work with commitment and collaborate with determination , result in a country and a world in which we do indeed think locally, and act internationally. And that means of acting as agents of change would produce a real win / win if we can achieve it.

A better environment and a better democracy as well.

What I have no doubt about, convener is that the place for each of us to start doing that is here , at home, in the country we are responsible for – in Scotland.

(4413 words)