

# The Dangers of Ship-to-Ship transfers

by Robin Harper MSP

✘ I was not born or educated in Edinburgh, but have lived here for over forty years, and have had the honour and pleasure of representing Edinburgh and the wider Lothians region in the Scottish Parliament since I was elected in its first term over a decade ago.

Over the past decade, I have enjoyed unprecedented access to the city and its people, and have been delighted and surprised in equal measure. Edinburgh is my adopted and naturalised home and I cannot envisage ever leaving here in the future.

I love living and working in Edinburgh; its small scale, its rugged beauty, its spectacular architecture, its turbulent history, its wonderful green spaces, and its cosmopolitan people have together won me over and captured my heart.

I am as much now part of Edinburgh as Edinburgh is part of me, and I enjoy a fantastic relationship with the place that has been my home, my work and my most important interest for so long.

This is why I have sought to protect Edinburgh from the worst examples of the often well-intentioned schemes that are regularly foisted upon it by inconsiderate developers, selfish big business or blinkered local politicians.

For example, in recent years, I have worked with local residents and community campaigns to stop inappropriate developments in Haymarket and the Old Town, and I have thrown my weight behind campaigns to save important community assets such as Meadowbank Stadium and the Hillend Ski Centre.

Unfortunately, yet another threat to the city is looming over the horizon. Controls that were approved by the last UK Government, which put an end to plans for ship-to-ship oil transfers in the Firth of Forth are under threat from Tory and LibDem MPs in the UK Parliament.

These hard won controls were the result of a long campaign that was supported by local communities on the Firth of Forth coastline and the environmental movement as a whole. They were prompted by fears of a disastrous oil spill in the Firth, which is a Special Area of Conservation and provides a livelihood for the communities that surround it through tourism, fishing and outdoor pursuits. The shipping industry is fiercely lobbying the new UK Government to backtrack on the controls that were put in place, and a significant group of 'ConDem' MPs have been convinced. Interestingly, none of them are Scottish and all of them live in and represent the south-west of England.

The need for regulation of the oil industry has been starkly highlighted recently by the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. I am determined to make sure that a similar kind of tragedy does not happen in the Firth of Forth.

Oil transfers should be confined to licensed ports where the proper safety measures are fully in place. They should not be allowed in open water, where the potential for accidents and pollution is increased many-fold and they should not be allowed in an area that is so important both ecologically but also economically.

Oil from the Torrey Canyon disaster off the Welsh coast is still adversely affecting wildlife some forty years later. We cannot afford to risk the Firth of Forth in this way.

The regulations to restrict ship-to-ship oil transfers are essential if we are to meet our international legal obligations to protect the environment. Now, just as those

regulations are finally delivered, it is disturbing to see LibDem and Tory MPs in Westminster encouraging ministers to backtrack, especially when the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico shows how high the price can be when corners are cut by the oil industry.