

On the agenda at Holyrood

First Minister Alex Salmond today set out the Scottish Government's priorities for the final year of the parliamentary term and beyond.

In a statement to the Scottish Parliament, the First Minister outlined a programme of legislative and non-legislative action to support businesses, families and communities through tough economic times and protect and improve vital public services.

The measures include a Water Bill to transform Scottish Water from a successful utility into one of the largest generators of renewable electricity in this land, and a Double Jeopardy Bill to overturn the centuries-old law which prevents a person from being tried twice for the same offence.

Mr Salmond also highlighted the urgent need to secure greater economic and financial powers for the Scottish Parliament so that Scotland is better-placed to boost revenues to invest in quality public services.

The First Minister said:-“This programme builds on our significant achievements to date and sets a clear and ambitious course for the years ahead. We want Scottish Water to evolve from a successful utility into a dynamic water agency. If we give Scottish Water room to grow, then we have the makings of a great Scottish company, in public ownership. As Scottish Water expands its activities it will generate the additional revenue to become financially neutral to the Scottish Government's books.

“We are entrusting the management to build on their proven track record with a gradual expansion of functions, not to dilute their existing success, but to seize the growth opportunity in exploitation of the key commodity of the 21st century and beyond. So we will bring forward legislation to enable Scottish Water to play this role.

“Currently Scottish Water is the largest consumer of electrical power in Scotland. We intend to give it the power to instead become one of the largest generators of renewable electricity in this land.

“The Double Jeopardy Bill will reform the law to allow an acquitted person to be prosecuted again in certain clearly and carefully defined circumstances. This is an important change but its time has come. And the Forced Marriage Protection Bill will provide civil remedies for those at risk of forced marriages and victims of forced marriage.

“The Private Rented Housing Bill will tackle unscrupulous rogue landlords who operate outwith the law and make life a misery for tenants and their neighbours and tarnish the reputation of the many good private landlords in Scotland.

“And we will take our case for greater powers to the people. Now that we face an economic hurricane, never was the case for independence and financial responsibility more obvious and true. What Scotland truly needs is not a funding formula whether Barnett or Calman. Scotland needs control of its own resources and the ability to grow revenue rather than just expenditure. We need control over both sides of the Scottish balance sheet.”