


Government publishes draft Independence Referendum bill



The Scottish Government has today published a draft bill which will allow consideration of independence for Scotland for a second time, before the UK leaves the EU.

There will now follow a twelve week consultation period on a bill which looks at first glance much like the last Independence Bill. That is not to say that Holyrood will do anything about acting on it, or indeed that a referendum will actually take place, but the government says it has been published to protect Scotland in the event of Brexit actually happening.

Despite opposition views about there being no need for such measures and that there is no appetite in Scotland for it, the Scottish Government feels it is necessary that a bill is ready to invoke if independence is the only way to look after the interests of Scotland.

 The First Minister said: “My priority is clear – we will do everything we can to protect Scotland’s interests.

“The damage to jobs and Scotland’s economy that will be caused by Brexit – especially a hard Brexit – is now plain to see.

“We will continue to work UK wide to seek to avert a hard Brexit and we will also bring forward proposals that seek to protect our place in the single market, even if the rest of the UK leaves.

“However, if we find that our interests cannot be properly or fully protected within a UK context then independence must be one of the options open to us and the Scottish people must

have the right to consider it.

“Any decision on holding a referendum, including the timing of it, would be for the Scottish Parliament to take having considered all the options for Scotland’s future relationship with the EU and the associated impact of being forced to leave against our will.”

Constitution Secretary Derek Mackay said: “This government remains committed to working with the UK Government on areas of common interest and where we can come up with constructive solutions to problems that we both face.

“It is important that a referendum on independence, like that in 2014, meets the gold standard in terms of fairness, transparency and propriety.

“The franchise will be the same as that for the Scottish Parliament. That will mean two important groups of people would have a voice denied to them in the recent referendum on EU membership: 16 and 17 year-olds and citizens of EU countries who have made Scotland their home.

“We are now publishing the bill for consultation so that it is ready for introduction should the Scottish Government decide that seeking the views of the Scottish people on independence is the best or only way to protect Scotland’s interests in the wake of the EU referendum. In stark contrast with the UK Government, we have a clear plan of action.”

✘ Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said: “We promised during the election to fight proposals for a second independence referendum every step of the way, and that’s exactly what we are going to do.

“The First Minister says she respects the result from 2014, but there will be more than two million Scots who now know otherwise.

“Instead of using Brexit to further her own political ambitions, Nicola Sturgeon should be working closely with the UK Government to address the risks and explore the opportunities this decision creates for industries and sectors across Scotland.

“Scotland’s business community doesn’t want another independence referendum, and the majority of the people of Scotland don’t want another independence referendum.

“The fact that Nicola Sturgeon is desperately pushing for one shows she has given up on being a First Minister for all of Scotland in favour of championing her own separatist agenda.”

✘ **Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale said:** “Nicola Sturgeon’s draft Referendum Bill is irresponsible economic vandalism.

“Our economy is in trouble following David Cameron’s reckless Brexit gamble, and the very last thing we need is more uncertainty for employers.

“This publication confirms that the SNP’s top priority is to divide our country. My message to the First Minister is this: we are divided enough – do not divide us again.

“Instead of seeking fresh divisions, the SNP should be prioritising our public services such as education and healthcare.

“This is a referendum that Scotland does not need or want. Nicola Sturgeon should keep the promise she made that the 2014 referendum was a once-in-a-generation vote.

“Scottish Labour stands for what the majority of Scots want – remaining part of the UK and maintaining our relationship with Europe. We will vote against any referendum Bill that the SNP brings before parliament.”

✘ **Scottish Greens leader Patrick Harvie MSP** said: “Several months after the EU referendum, we’re still none the wiser as to what Brexit will look like or fully mean for the UK. The Westminster government’s inability to acknowledge the overwhelming mandate for Remain in Scotland, or demonstrate any kind of flexibility the union could take in the individual UK nations’ forging relations with Europe, shows that independence is quickly becoming the most realistic option for Scotland to shape its own partnership with the European Union.

“Evidently the referendum results in 2014 and 2016 can no longer sit side by side because the UK that Scotland narrowly voted to remain a part of two years ago no longer exists. Every opportunity must be explored to keeping Scotland in the European Union and that now includes the option of an independence referendum. It would be foolish for the UK government to stand in Scotland’s way having already disregarded the 62 percent who voted to Remain earlier this year.” Commenting on the publication of the bill, Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Willie Rennie MSP said:

“Just two short years after we voted decisively to remain part of the United Kingdom, the SNP are dragging Scotland back to division over the constitution.

“School attainment has worsened, our police are in crisis, children have been forced to wait years for mental health treatment and roads are crumbling. Meanwhile, the First Minister had her civil servants dusting off her indyref rule book and working all hours to deliver this draft referendum bill.

“Scotland has not had a mental health strategy since the end of last year but the SNP managed to turn around a referendum bill in weeks. It is now crystal clear that the SNP’s priority is not education. It is not health, or even working to protect the benefits of our EU membership. It is independence.”

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