

# **Peter Murrell resigns after two decades at the helm of the SNP**

**In a move which was widely anticipated since Friday night, Peter Murrell has resigned on Saturday in the wake of the incorrect reporting of membership numbers to media over recent weeks.**

Murrell has led the party in the position of Chief Executive for 20 years, and his wife, Nicola Sturgeon, has been SNP leader and First Minister for the last eight.



Peter Murrell, Chief Executive, Scottish National Party appears before the Committee on the Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints to give evidence on Complaints Handling. 08 December 2020. Pic Andrew Cowan/Scottish Parliament

After Nicola Sturgeon took over as First Minister the SNP membership then soared to around 125,000 in 2019, but by the end of 2022 the number quoted was around 85,000. After a joint letter to the SNP demanding up to date figures from two of the candidates in the leadership election, Ash Regan and Kate Forbes, the party disclosed that the current membership is 72,186. Other numbers quoted during the campaign have been around 100,000.

## STATEMENT

Mr Murrell issued a statement: "Responsibility for the SNP's responses to media queries about our membership number lies

with me as Chief Executive. While there was no intent to mislead, I accept that this has been the outcome. I have therefore decided to confirm my intention to step down as Chief Executive with immediate effect.

“I had not planned to confirm this decision until after the leadership election. However as my future has become a distraction from the campaign I have concluded that I should stand down now, so the party can focus fully on issues about Scotland’s future. The election contest is being run by the National Secretary, and I have had no role in it at any point.

“I am very proud of what has been achieved in my time as Chief Executive and of the part I have played in securing the electoral success the party has enjoyed over almost two decades. 14 national election wins is testament to the skills of the dedicated and talented HQ team that I have been privileged to lead. They give their all to the Party and the independence cause and I thank them for it.

“I have worked for independence all my life and will continue to do so, albeit in a different capacity, until it is achieved – and I do firmly believe that independence is now closer than ever.”

One of the three SNP leadership candidates Ash Regan MSP said: “Eight years ago was the point where it was unacceptable to have the husband of the party leader as the CEO.

“I am encouraged to see the democratic foundations of the party now asserting their rightful function.

“The SNP is more than capable of surviving this, as long as we stick true to our roots, and we uphold the values of our members.

“Accountability, transparency, modernity and accessibility are our foundations.

“Every time we believe we have met our capacity to overcome a challenge, we can look up to our guiding lights, and know that our capacity may be limitless.

“I will lead a Stronger SNP, together for Scotland.”



Edinburgh, Scotland, UK. 17 March 2023.

PICTURED: Ash Regan MSP seen leaving St Andrews House in Edinburgh after her meeting with the Permanent Secretary of the Scottish Government.

PHOTO: Colin D Fisher/CDFIMAGES.COM

## **POLITICAL RESPONSE**

Scottish Conservative chairman Craig Hoy MSP said: “A fish rots from the head down – and the same applies to the SNP.

“Peter Murrell’s resignation is long overdue – but there remain serious questions for him to answer, not least over the ‘missing’ £600k from party accounts.

“The brutal, shambolic SNP leadership election appears to have

been the tipping point that's forced the First Minister's husband to quit before he was pushed.

"When two of the three candidates publicly question the integrity of the contest to elect Scotland's First Minister and the party's top spin doctor quits because he was fed lies by senior party figures, then the game is up.

"While he may be quitting as chief executive, Peter Murrell must fully cooperate with any probes into the way this leadership election has been run – and with the police inquiry into the SNP's finances.

"This ongoing SNP civil war is disastrous for the whole of Scotland. How can a party that is unable to govern itself possibly govern the country?

"The public's real priorities are being ignored as the SNP turns inwards on itself – and that will remain the case whoever emerges from this carnage as First Minister."

## **LABOUR RESPONSE**

Scottish Labour deputy leader Jackie Baillie said: "This latest resignation of a top SNP figure goes to show that the wheels have fallen off the SNP wagon.

"When Scotland most needs responsible governance, the SNP has turned inward and begun to tear itself apart.

"If this is what is happening in the party, just imagine the chaos in government.

"Even leadership candidates have cast aspersions on the trustworthiness of the SNP machine.

"While Scots struggle to get by, the SNP are fighting like ferrets in a sack.

"Scotland deserves better than this divided SNP government."

# SNP response

Joanna Cherry, KC, MP, who supports Ash Regan in the leadership election said: “If anyone was in any doubt that [@theSNP](#) needed a reset the events of the last days have proved it. Winning elections isn’t enough. It’s what you do with the wins that matters. Integrity matters. Our party & our country can & will do better than this.”

Ian Blackford MP, the former Westminster leader said: “I would like to thank [@PeterMurrell](#) for his long service as [@thesnp](#) chief executive and his leadership he has delivered that has seen the party win election after election. He can be proud of his achievements. I am grateful for the relationship and friendship we have had for many decades going back to the time we both joined the party in West Edinburgh as teenagers.”

Pamela Nash, chief executive of Scotland in Union, said: “The party of government is imploding, guilty of cover-up and lying to the Scottish people.

“Murrell’s resignation, along with other senior figures in the SNP, shows that the nationalists are no longer fit to govern.

“This has not only shaken people’s confidence in the contest to select the next First Minister, is it also eroding trust in the government elected to run our public services.

“That’s why a growing majority of people in Scotland want a more positive future for our country as part of the United Kingdom.”

## OTHER RESIGNATIONS





Murray Foote resigns as SNP media chief in row over party membership figures

Pic taken at Bute house Feb 2020 PHOTO Alan Simpson Photography

Murray Foote, the SNP media boss for the last four years, [quit on Friday night](#) issuing the following statement: “Acting in good faith and “as a courtesy to colleagues at party HQ, issued agreed party responses to media enquiries regarding membership. It has subsequently become apparent there are serious issues with these responses.

“Consequently I concluded this created a serious impediment to my role and I resigned my position with the SNP Group at Holyrood.”

Foote was previously the editor of the Daily Record and Sunday Mail appointed in 2014, and was editor when the papers published The Vow signed by David Cameron, then Prime Minister, Ed Miliband, Labour Leader and Nick Clegg Leader of the Liberal Democrats telling voters in Scotland that “a No vote would deliver faster safer and better change than separation”.

Humza Yousaf MSP one of the candidates in the leadership election said this after Mr Foote resigned: “Murray has been outstanding since joining SNP media team, he’ll be sorely missed. Reform of our HQ operations has been a key part of my campaign. With fresh party leadership should come a fresh approach to our HQ operation. For me, this will be a key priority as your SNP leader.” Mr Yousaf has not yet made any comment on the resignation of Mr Murrell.

Kate Forbes MSP, another of the three leadership candidates issued this letter after Mr Foote left his position but before Mr Murrell resigned:

*I have written an open letter to SNP members, specifically to those who haven't yet voted in the leadership contest. Don't lose your chance to vote for change. [#Forbes4FM pic.twitter.com/Lq0qJ8WMob](https://twitter.com/Lq0qJ8WMob)*

– Kate Forbes MSP (@\_KateForbes) [March 18, 2023](#)

Michelle Thomson MSP, who is directing Ms Forbes’ campaign, said on Saturday that calling for continuity now “simply won’t cut it”.

Elizabeth Lloyd the Strategic Policy and Political Adviser to the First Minister also announced she would be resigning as the First Minister steps down. She said: “It has been the biggest honour of my life to work with the First Minister and to have had a unique opportunity to serve the people of



Scotland. As Chief of Staff at a time when Scottish and UK politics were reset, with a First Minister who guided the country through austerity, Brexit and Covid, is to have been in the room during a pivotal period in Scotland's political life.

"There will be many people to thank in the coming days before I leave [@scotgov](#). After that it will be time to open the door to new projects and new opportunities."