

Findlay calls for the SNP to ditch gender agenda

Russell Findlay, the Scottish Conservative leader has called upon the SNP to stop wasting taxpayers' money on gender self-ID.

He demands that the summit which the First Minister, John Swinney, is calling next week ends this "divisive policy", and in a bold move he has called upon SNP politicians to "tell the truth".

The Conservatives have a group of 30 MSPs after Jamie Greene defected to the Scottish Liberal Democrats just recently saying that the party has abandoned the centre ground for a "Reform-lite agenda".

Mr Greene said: "The Scottish Conservative Party I joined did the unthinkable and overtook the Labour Party to become Scotland's main opposition in Holyrood. Twice. There was a point at which I, and others, believed we might have a genuine chance to govern Scotland as a successful broad-appeal centre right party. That now feels like a distant memory."

The Conservative leader claimed in Edinburgh on Thursday that net zero is just an "empty slogan" for the SNP who have "no clue" about how to deliver the policy. The SNP dropped their target of reducing emissions by 30% by 2030 saying they would focus instead on 2045. This target is also ridiculed by Mr Findlay in his speech which is set out in full below:

Mr Findlay said: "I'm here to talk about energy and net zero but I must begin by addressing yesterday's Supreme Court

ruling which confirms that biological sex is protected in law.
Women are women.

So let me send this message to John Swinney and the SNP:
Enough is enough.

Drop your divisive policy of gender self-ID for good.

Far too much time and taxpayers' money has been wasted on this fringe issue, at the expense of what really matters to people in the real world.

Nicola Sturgeon and John Swinney's focus on gender has driven a disconnect between mainstream Scotland and the Scottish Parliament.

The SNP have spent years obsessing about they/them instead of building a better Scotland for everyone.

John Swinney must use his summit next week to formally end the divisive policy of gender self-identification.

He must send a clear message that he and his government fully respect the law and women's rights.

He must confirm that the Gender Recognition Reform Bill will not return in any form.

He must also instruct all public bodies to adhere to this landmark ruling.

To restore trust in politics, John Swinney must be big enough to admit his mistakes and apologise for the bitter divisions that this has created.

If he really wants to bring people together, he should start with the women and girls who have lost faith in Scotland's political establishment.

Only by dropping the policy of gender self-ID can he begin to bring people together.

Now, turning to the substance of today's speech ...

I believe the gender fiasco is an example of how priorities inside the Scottish Parliament no longer reflect the priorities of ordinary people outside it.

Holyrood has become a parliament for politicians, not for those who they are supposed to represent.

Instead of listening to what people want, too many Holyrood politicians wag their fingers and tell people what they think they need.

To these left-wing MSPs, the views and priorities of real people are an afterthought.

This is especially evident in their approach to climate change and net zero.

Of course, climate change is real.

To any SNP MSP, or anyone else, please don't try to misconstrue what I say here today.

Protecting our environment and tackling climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our age.

But the SNP's approach is ill-conceived, inconsistent, chaotic and fundamentally dishonest.

John Swinney's SNP government says it wants to achieve net zero in just 20 years' time.

They seriously expect people to believe that our country will be carbon neutral by 2045.

The truth is that net zero is just another empty slogan for the SNP.

A political party that governs by press release.

All headline-grabbing announcements but no clue about delivery.

This time last year, the SNP scrapped their interim target of a 75 per cent reduction in emissions by 2030.

This was always pie in the sky.

But they only came clean with people after a damning reality check from the independent statutory UK body that advises governments on emission targets.

The Climate Change Committee's report confirmed that the SNP had no chance of meeting that target.

This forced the SNP to drop the 2030 interim pledge.

But still, they continue to spin.

They say they only dropped the interim target to focus on net zero emissions by 2045.

Yet since the committee's report, we've heard absolutely nothing about how they intend to do this.

The SNP are also failing to be straight with the paying public about what this will mean for them.

They tell people that this will require simple measures such as walking more or recycling domestic rubbish.

If you feel charitable, this is patronising nonsense. I'd call it lies.

To meet the SNP's 2045 target, people and businesses would be forced to make radical changes that would cause huge harm to our lifestyles.

And these would come with an eye-watering financial cost.

From ripping out gas boilers and installing heat pumps, to

upgrading older homes and buying expensive electric vehicles.

These are the changes the SNP want to force on households within the next 20 years.

Ordinary Scots should not be told what to do by politicians. And then told they're picking up the tab.

Taxpayers are already being rinsed.

Business in this country pay more for energy than any other country in the G20.

This is crippling our manufacturing sector.

Yet some politicians also demand that we further impede the economy by shutting down our oil and gas sector.

The SNP in Edinburgh and Labour in London would throw 100,000 skilled North Sea workers on the scrapheap.

A few weeks ago, Kemi Badenoch came clean about the realities of the UK government's net zero target of 2050.

She was refreshingly honest about the sacrifices this will require.

She told it straight – decarbonisation risks making families and our country poorer, and less secure.

We need to do the same in Scotland. Politicians must start telling the truth.

It is now clear that the SNP's 2045 target is pie in the sky.

They didn't set out any credible or affordable plan to reach it.

A date plucked out of thin air by a posturing government for the purpose of headline-chasing and virtue-signalling.

They wanted to be seen as greener than Westminster. So, they

deducted 5 years from the 2050 UK target.

But they have already failed to meet – by a mile – the interim targets they set themselves.

In a few weeks' time, the Climate Change Committee will publish a new report on the SNP's net zero strategy.

I'd bet John Swinney – or anyone in this room – that this report will be yet another reality check.

Today, I'd like to lay down another challenge to the First Minister.

Reaching net zero by 2045 will not be affordable for the public.

So today I am calling for the SNP's so-called just transition to be scrapped – in favour of an affordable transition.

If that means ditching the 2045 target, then so be it.

My party will publish plans on how we would reduce bills for consumers.

The priority has to be bringing down costs for the public.

Not setting arbitrary targets for nationalist ministers to virtue signal about.

I urge the SNP to ditch their empty sloganeering and embrace a considered and pragmatic environmentalism.

A new approach that understands the need to protect our economy and jobs.

That takes the common-sense position of using oil and gas in the North Sea before importing fossil fuels from abroad.

A Scottish Conservative transition is an honest, affordable and pragmatic transition.

It keeps household bills low and gives business a level playing field in a brutally competitive world.

Energy is vital to our economy because it powers industry and drives growth.

But the production of energy should also continue to be one of our greatest industries.

While the demand for oil and gas remains, we should produce it domestically.

North Sea oil and gas is greener than foreign imports.

It's worth billions to our economy.

To sacrifice this would be madness of the highest order ... while other countries continue to drill and increase their emissions.

Why should Scottish jobs be sacrificed for net zero?

Just to pretend that if we don't produce oil and gas – while still needing to use it – then our hands will somehow be clean.

Scotland is blessed in its sources of renewable energy – wind, tidal and solar.

But the SNP want to shut down oil and gas while also refusing to embrace clean nuclear energy.

When the sun doesn't shine and the wind doesn't blow, what will power our homes, transport, and businesses?

Yesterday, less than a third of the amount of energy generated in the UK came from renewables.

Some politicians claim that advances in battery storage will solve the problem of how intermittent renewables are.

But even if we increase storage capacity eight-fold, as Ed Miliband wants, reports suggest we will still fall far short of being able to deliver consistent power.

It is blindingly obvious that Scotland also needs nuclear.

Yet our nation faces losing out on abundant clean nuclear energy and jobs because of the SNP's bone-headed ideological opposition.

Nuclear power generated 31 per cent of our electricity in 2021.

When Hunterston B in Ayrshire closed, that dropped to 19 per cent two years later.

This leaves us even more reliant on fossil fuels for a steady baseline of supply.

Torness in East Lothian is Scotland's last nuclear power station and is set to close as soon as 2030.

I had the privilege of paying a recent visit and even stood on top of the nuclear reactor.

The operational footprint at Torness covers an area of just 0.1 square miles.

Yet this can power more than 2 million homes.

By blocking new nuclear power stations in Scotland, the SNP are harming our economy and impeding efforts to reach net zero.

That's why my party would commit to starting construction on new Small Modular Reactors in the next five years.

We would overturn the SNP government's refusal to grant planning permission for nuclear power plants.

As long as the local community gives its consent, there is no

reason for nuclear energy to be blocked.

This would be the first step towards undoing years of SNP damage to our nuclear energy capacity.

We would aim to build enough SMRs to replace the amount of power lost by the closures of Hunterston B and Torness.

That means approximately 9 would be needed.

This will guarantee clean and stable energy.

It will bring down bills for householders.

It will give business a boost.

It is basic common sense.

The SNP are anti-nuclear.

But they are also failing when it comes to renewables.

They promised 130,000 green jobs by 2020 but only delivered around 20,000.

New jobs in renewables are now falling.

If new technology benefits Scotland by growing our economy and generating green jobs, we must support it.

Having an honest conversation about the affordability of net zero and delivery timelines does not mean deterring investment in green industries.

But the push for green energy cannot come at any financial price.

Nor can it come at any price to Scotland's natural beauty.

Our great nation is blessed with some of the of the most stunning scenery in the world.

The instinct to safeguard our landscape is fundamentally Conservative.

Yet some politicians at Holyrood take a different view.

They back vast new pylons to connect renewable energy sources to the national grid regardless of the harm they cause.

There are also plans for vast banks of batteries to be installed across the country.

Many residents are concerned about the impact on their communities, including fears about fire.

Rural communities across Scotland are enraged and worried at the mass industrialisation of our countryside.

Labour at Westminster is trying to change planning rules to make it easier to ride roughshod over local concerns.

That's why our new pragmatic proposal is for overhead pylons to be used as a last resort, where no other options are available.

And we would give communities the legal right to object to devolved planning decisions.

We need to put the priorities of the people of Scotland first.

When it comes to the bills they pay for power and the impact of net zero on communities.

Most folk get this.

They are happy to do their bit to tackle climate change ... but it must be fair and affordable.

We must also recognise the realities of our geography and demographics.

It is absurd to expect remote off-grid homes to replace oil-

powered heating in a few years.

Nor should car drivers in rural areas with little or no public transport be punished.

And it's preposterous to ban new lifeline wood-burning stoves.

There are other aspects of the SNP's net zero chaos that need called out.

They are sending around £27 million of taxpayers' cash to fund green initiatives overseas.

Some money from the climate justice fund subsidises research in Sweden.

More than £200,000 has been spent training 'climate youth negotiators' for some UN talking shop.

Furthermore, the so-called 'climate justice fund' has also financed 'gender, equality, disability and social inclusion'.

How will any of this solve our environmental problems?

With climate change and net zero, the SNP's priorities are all wrong.

Their so-called 'just transition' is a fiction.

They tell Scots what they must do – then tell them that they have to pay for it.

They make up random targets with no plan to meet them.

They seek to shut down Scotland's oil and gas sector and refuse to embrace nuclear energy.

They back monster pylons regardless of how they scar Scotland.

And they throw public money at daft schemes that don't reduce a single bill.

Since becoming Scottish Conservative leader, I have repeatedly called for politicians to show some common sense.

Today's challenges are complex.

The answers are not easy.

But the SNP think they can dupe the Scottish public with sophistry and slogans.

People in Scotland are sick and tired of politicians and parliament for precisely that reason.

If my party is to win back trust, we need to be different.

We need to present credible plans based on real conservative values.

And we need to start by being candid about the challenges facing our country.

Conservatism is the politics of reality and common sense – not wishful thinking.

And as Scottish Conservatives, we have a duty to be honest.

The 'just transition' proposed by the SNP and Labour is anything but.

I recognise the need to tackle climate change.

But the people of Scotland should not be expected to pay a heavy and damaging price for net zero.

So today, I am challenging John Swinney to face up to reality and start being honest with the public.

To set out a credible and affordable transition towards net zero.

A transition that puts the people of Scotland first."