

## **SNP response to the MCoFS 2016 election challenge**

### **1. Develop a shared vision for Scotland's uplands.**

We recognise that Scotland's uplands are an irreplaceable natural, cultural and economic asset. We will continue to work with communities and organisations to ensure that these areas work for the benefit of those who live and work in them, as we have done while in Government through actions such as the Land Reform Act. By continuing to work with a wide range of stakeholders and communities, we will ensure that these assets are protected and continue to work for the benefit of all.

### **2. Support sustainable economic development for mountain communities.**

The SNP Government has invested significantly to support, develop and empower rural communities across Scotland. Funding of £200,000 has been allocated to help deliver the Scottish Rural Parliament Action Plan – which sets out priority issues and solutions that communities have identified themselves. A new £25 million fund will provide an estimated 500 new affordable homes specifically to rural areas.

To ensure better connectivity in rural areas, the Scottish Government has invested £7.5 million in broadband.

The SNP has supported 52 communities to purchase the land they live and work on through the £9m Scottish Land Fund. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, approved by the Scottish Parliament on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2015 gives communities more power to take on land and buildings and to have a say on how their services are delivered.

The SNP Government also set up a taskforce to find ways for people in rural and remote areas to heat their homes affordably.

Scotland's £1.3 billion Rural Development Programme, over the 2014-20 period, will support actions that benefit Scotland's natural heritage – and in doing so, provide a basis for the growth in areas such as tourism and hospitality. The SRDP will also foster networking and innovation in land-based businesses, promote growth of the Food and Drink sector and strengthen local economies.

### **3. Enforce existing legal powers and safeguard Scotland's access rights.**

The SNP are committed to protecting access rights in Scotland, and our National Parks are precious and valuable. They are home to some of our most outstanding natural beauty and resources, so we must take action to protect and conserve their assets to allow enjoyment of them both now, and in the future. That is why we have taken action to ban windfarms in National Parks and National Scenic Areas. We are also strongly supportive of our network of national walking trails and will continue to support and promote them.

The Scottish Government is committed to fair and sustainable access to, and use of land, and the proposals set out in the Land Reform Bill seek to further enhance access rights across Scotland.

#### **4. Guarantee planning protection for Wild Land Areas.**

The Scottish Government's third National Planning Framework, published in June 2014, recognises wild land as a nationally important asset, and indicates Scotland's wildest landscapes merit strong protection. If re-elected, we will continue to work with Scottish Natural Heritage to implement this, and ensure that the planning system provides protection for Wild Land Areas. Our manifesto has committed to continuing our ban on wind farms in national parks and national scenic areas, and increased protection for wild land.

#### **5. Capitalise on health and wellbeing benefits of outdoor recreation.**

In November 2014, the Scottish Government launched its long term vision for active travel in Scotland to 2030. The vision aims to encourage more people to walk and cycle for everyday shorter journeys. It focuses on areas such as infrastructure, transport integration, cultural and behaviour change, community ownership and planning. The vision was developed jointly by active travel stakeholders, and Ministers.

The Scottish Government is committed to encouraging healthier and greener travel and is investing more than £1 billion per annum to encourage people out of their cars.

In our manifesto we have also committed to support and promote the Scottish National Trail which links up Scotland's great trails network, to encourage outdoor tourism and benefit the communities along the trails.

#### **6. Commitment to improving safety in mountains.**

We are committed to improving safety in our mountains, and have taken action to improve this. The Scottish Government provides an annual grant of £312,000 to Scottish Mountain Rescue, the national body, which is distributed to the 27 affiliated local search and rescue (SAR) teams in Scotland, including Lochaber. The Scottish Government also provides £179,000 to the Scottish Avalanche Information Service.

Mountain rescue teams are charities, individually, and rely on donations, like any other organisation of charitable status. In March 2016, after a meeting between Michael Matheson and the Scottish Mountain Rescue, the Scottish Government announced that a new radio system is to be introduced among mountain rescue teams to improve communications in remote areas which will be funded with £24,000 from the Scottish Government.

Michael Matheson said the radio system "will enable teams to continue the voluntary life-saving mountain rescue service".

Rescue teams provide an outstanding service to communities and those venturing into Scotland's mountains, hills and rural areas, and we will continue to support them.

We are also providing support to the sportscotland Avalanche Information Service, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and Scotland's national outdoor training centre Glenmore Lodge.