

26 February 2003

EUROPE GOES CENTRE STAGE AT ALYTH AGM

Ian Hudghton, Member of the European Parliament, will give tonight's keynote address to the Annual General Meeting of Alyth Branch of the Scottish National Party. (Time: 7.30 pm, Venue: Ogilvie Rooms, Commercial Street, Alyth). Mr Hudghton will use his speaking slot to report to members on current developments in the European Parliament. In particular the MEP will comment on the imminent overhaul of the Common Agricultural Policy and its knock-on effects on rural Scotland.

He will ask delegates to reflect on December's sell-out of Scottish fishermen by the UK Fisheries delegation in Brussels and say it's time for Scotland to get a seat at the table of the Council of Ministers where crucial decisions which impact on our country are taken. In his speech the MEP will say:

"What happened to our coastal communities in December serves as a warning shot to our rural communities. We must start lobbying hard for Scotland's interests in the CAP talks now. It's no good waiting to see what emerges from the negotiations when the future viability of Scotland's rural economy is at stake. You can bet your bottom dollar that the wrangling and secret deals such as those brokered during the Fisheries negotiations will be just as dodgy in the CAP talks.

"Rest assured, I will fight hard for Scotland's interests within the European Parliament as I always do. But, we mustn't forget that the ultimate decisions affecting Scotland's agricultural sector will not be taken by MEPs like me - they'll be taken by the Agriculture Minister from London, Margaret Beckett. The Scottish minister might be allowed in as bag carrier but there's no guarantee. Attendance by anyone from Scotland's Parliament is in the gift of the London Minister.

"Can there seriously be anyone left who believes Scotland is better off as part of the so-called "powerful" UK delegation? I can't stress how important it is for us to shout as loudly as we can for Scotland's interests in Europe. An SNP majority in the Scottish Parliament after 1st May would empower our country to take decisions necessary to protect our rural communities through these difficult CAP negotiations."

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