

Catherine Stihler MEP

Member of the European Parliament for Scotland

April 2008 e-newsletter

Welcome to the latest edition of my e-newsletter. Please feel free to forward this to friends, family and colleagues. Should you wish to stop receiving email updates please reply directly to this email with "unsubscribe" in the subject header.

Thank you,

Catherine

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The Future Faces of Scottish Labour in the European Parliament

The Scottish Labour list of European candidates for the next European election has been announced and is as follows:

- 1 David Martin MEP
- 2 Catherine Stihler MEP
- 3 Mary Lockhart
- 4 Paul McAleavey
- 5 Kirsty Connell
- 6 Nasim Khan

Further info on Labour's UK candidates can be found at:
http://www.labour.org.uk/european_candidates_list

Having represented Scotland in the European Parliament since 1999, I look forward to working alongside all of the candidates to achieve a success for Scottish Labour in 2009, and would like to thank all of our supporters so far.

This election is likely to be as challenging as ever, but we will remain focused on our key priorities, such as public health and social justice and equality, issues that affect everyone in their day-to-day lives.

Labour has already made a significant difference in Europe, from banned tobacco advertising and clearer warnings on cigarette packets, to tighter environmental controls and making the EU the largest donor of development aid in the world. There is so much potential for Labour in Europe and we will work to realise that in the 2009 elections.

When up for reselection I laid out my campaign plans to include the following five key areas:

- Representing Scotland
- Campaigning on public health issues
- Promoting Scotland's internationalism
- Fighting for social justice and equality
- Challenging the nationalists on their inconsistencies

With political interests in health, transport, education, environment and fishing, I feel my knowledge, experience and accessibility will be a positive contribution towards the race for Labour seats at the European elections in June 2009.

Reform of the MEP expenses system is long overdue:

Recently MEP expenses have been under intense public scrutiny, due to the content of a report being leaked to the press which uncovered possible abuse of the allowance system.

MEPs have been allowed a wide discretion over their annual assistance allowance of €185,952, and the Budget Control Committee was recently informed that an internal auditor had detailed various scams used by some MEPs, sometimes without technically breaking the rules, to line their own pockets. For example, a MEP paid a Christmas bonus to an assistant worth 19 times his salary, several others set up arms-length companies to pay expenses to bogus staff and others seemed to funnel money to their political parties while claiming to be paying assistants.

Therefore, instead of the European Parliament taking the lead in combating internal fraud and abuse of public money, we appeared shifty and on the side of those who abused the system because we decided against publishing the report. Sadly, when there is a whiff of abuse we are all tarred with the same brush. Over the past few weeks I have read articles about MEPs which go as far as to accuse us all as being fraudsters. Let us be clear that where public money has been abused there should be a zero tolerance approach. Those who defraud the system should have no immunity from prosecution and face criminal proceedings.

Firstly, all MEPs should be subjected to a yearly audit of their staffing and office allowances. Some MEPs have been doing this for some time but for the new Parliamentary session it should be compulsory with the penalty of losing not only MEP expenses allowances but salary as well.

Secondly, in terms of staffing, there is a register of assistants for those based mainly in Brussels but there should be a similar register for constituency-based staff. For this first time this would create a formal register of all those people who work for MEPs.

Thirdly, the Parliament will have to provide more resources for the internal finance office so that they will be able cope with the extra work which being transparent will cost.

The European Parliament could offer a model of transparency which other Parliaments could follow. Are we up for the challenge? We have less than fourteen months to show that we are up for the job. We have the opportunity to clear this mess up if we have the courage of our convictions.

Taking the hump with whaling:

I am outraged at Japan's increasing "quota" for scientific whaling, and will continue to call for UK and European governments to present a united front in ensuring the cessation of the barbaric annual whale hunt.

Whilst I am doubtful that the compromise efforts by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) will amount to a resolution between anti- and pro-whaling countries, and remain disappointed that efforts by individual countries, the IWC, and activists have been tarred with scepticism, corruption and

collusion. I remain resolute that the European Commission has to co-ordinate a united action against Japan's whale hunting in order to protect humpbacked and fin whales in view of their critical survival status.

The species within the Japanese allocation include migratory species under threat, and although Japan claims that it is catching the animals for solely scientific species, there are valid alternatives available for scientific research. The meat is being sold on the market while surplus is piling up in freezer containers. Whilst we are waiting on the Japanese to reveal their actual catch figures from this seasons whaling, I will be neither relieved nor disappointed if reports that the catch is estimated to be half their quota due to protests by environmentalists, turn out to be accurate.

However, now we must address future quotas. At a UK and European level we need to ensure that we are major players in international whaling policy, and an EU common strategic approach to whaling will ensure that.

The European Commission has assured my colleagues and I that it will address concerns related to scientific whaling, and has adopted and submitted a Communication on whaling issues to the Parliament and the Council, which endorses the view that developing a Community position and a common EU strategic approach to whaling would make the EU a major player in international whaling policy.

Dates for your diary:

My next European forum is taking place in Glasgow at John Smith House on Saturday 28th June, from 10am – 12noon. Please visit my website for updates www.cstihlermep.com.

There are still places available on the annual constituency trip to Brussels – please contact Kirsty on 01383 417 799 or kirstyleiper@live.co.uk for further information.

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