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At the SNP concerence in Perth today, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, Richard Lochhead MSP, warned David Cameron, about threatening to close air bases in the north of Scotland whilst keeping Trident.

Addressing conference Mr Lochhead said:

**\* Introduction**

"Morning Conference – it is good to see so many of you here first thing on a Sunday morning.

"And it is great to be back in Perth again. Just think it's already four years since we met here, on the eve of our historic victory.

"We have achieved so much and changed the face of Scottish politics forever.

"Remember how they told us we'd be lucky to last four months?

"Well friends, here we are approaching the last lap of our four year term!

"And it has been a privilege to have been a part of an SNP Government that has delivered so much for rural Scotland – an SNP Government that listens to Scotland, and acts for Scotland at home, in Europe and on the international stage.

"And we have great teams in the Scottish, Westminster and European Parliaments and in council chambers across the land.

"Working hard for Scotland and working hard for their communities.

"Winning Scotland's trust and promoting our cause.

"And, most of all, I want to pay tribute to all of you for knocking the doors and delivering our message to millions across the nation, and especially to absent friends who kept our Party's flame burning down the generations.

"I also continue to have the privilege of working alongside our Environment Minister Roseanna Cunningham who has been taking forward policies that support our rural communities.

"People in Perth are well aware of Roseanna's skills as a local advocate and a fantastic MP and MSP. She brings those qualities in spades to our work and is a tremendous champion for Rural Scotland.

"I also ask you to join me in paying tribute to our excellent team of Parliamentary Liaison Officers, Aileen Campbell MSP and Rob Gibson MSP.

"Conference, I have been fortunate enough to be part of Scotland's first SNP Cabinet.

"And I have been lucky enough to meet many outstanding people who help make rural communities such great places.

\* Delivering for Rural Scotland

"And that brings home to me that we are a truly national party – and that we are firmly established as Scotland's Rural Party.

"We have built up a track record of delivering for our rural communities, right across government.

"A record of protecting rural schools, addressing our affordable housing crisis, helping rejuvenate village and town high streets, increasing rural policing, piloting the road equivalent tariff for island communities.

"And so the list goes on.

"This is in sharp contrast to Westminster Governments of every colour – threatening rural services and jobs.

"And Conference, my own constituents in Moray face a very anxious 72 hours as they await the announcement on defence jobs.

"If the decision goes the wrong way, in one fell swoop, the Tories and Lib Dems will deliver a hammer blow to the Moray economy.

"If either RAF Lossiemouth or RAF Kinloss, were to close, a large part of Moray's economic backbone would be shattered.

"The closure of RAF Lossiemouth alone would be equivalent to the loss of 413,000 jobs in Greater London!

"So I say to David Cameron, would you ever think about delivering such a blow to the south?

"No, of course, you wouldn't – so don't even contemplate it in the north of Scotland!

"And the MoD number-crunchers should realise that next week's decisions are not just about the numbers of tanks, troops, ships or in Moray's case, aircraft,

"They are about the impact on rural communities – I spoke to a rural pub landlord who told me 40% of his customers are from the bases, I spoke to a mother whose children go to football training organised by the local RAF.

"And Service personnel raise money for local charities – and their spouses work in local schools, GP surgeries, and the hospital in Elgin - where, for instance, a quarter of the staff in the maternity ward have partners working at the bases.

"The bases don't just support the local community – they are part of the local community!

"And community leaders like Cllr Dave Stewart from Lossiemouth - in the hall this morning - will tell you how devastating it would be for his community if the local base closed.

"And Conference, how dare UK Ministers imply that the role fulfilled by the Moray bases is not what is required in the 21st century.

"Conference, that insults the brave men and women from RAF Lossiemouth who are currently serving in Afghanistan.

"Delegates, the MoD should concentrate their fire elsewhere.

"Our message is clear.

"Cut Trident which we don't want, need or use.

"And save our conventional forces – which we do want, need and are using!

### **\* Rural Jobs**

"Conference, in Moray and across rural Scotland, your SNP Government is defending jobs.

"Whether you are a forester in Argyll, farmer in the Borders, crofter in Sutherland, fishermen in Buchan or Shetland salmon farmer – you have enjoyed the support of the SNP in Government.

"Thanks to the mess left behind by Labour compounded by Tories and Lib Dems, our nation now faces massive challenges.

"Yet, despite the daunting challenges facing Scottish society, there are plenty of grounds for optimism.

"Our rural industries have emerged from the recession in good heart.

"And looking to the future, we can see that rural Scotland has the assets and the people to help all Scotland recover and bring prosperity.

"Our abundance of natural resources will catapult Scotland to economic success in the 21st Century, especially when it comes to security of supply in many of our basic needs.

"Just think, as the world's energy resources deplete, Scotland is energy rich with about a quarter of Europe's wind and tidal power and 10% of its wave energy.

"And as water scarcity becomes a real issue elsewhere, it is not exactly something we are short of in Scotland.

"And as the world contemplates its population increasing by nearly half by 2050, food security is now back on the agenda.

"Thankfully, we excel at growing food on our fertile land.

"Scotland's Food & Drink Success

"Delegates, the SNP Government launched Scotland's first ever National Food and Drink policy last year.

"Our nation has a reputation for quality produce and consumers at home, and abroad, look for the Saltire as a mark of provenance and quality.

"And did you know that since the election of an SNP Government, the sales of Scottish food and drink brands across these islands alone has rocketed by 30%, yes 30%, which is worth hundreds of millions to our economy. That's huge progress in a few short years!

"But it gets better.

"Today, I can announce new evidence of this great industry's outstanding performance.

"We are publishing new figures showing that Food and Drink sales amounted to £11.2 billion in 2008, a billion pounds, yes a billion pounds, more than 2007!

"So Conference, let's pay tribute to one of Scotland's biggest economic successes in recent years!

"But we can't rest on our laurels and we need to add more value to our fantastic raw materials.

"So, today, I can tell you that in the second term of an SNP Government we will launch a Million Pound Great Scottish Food Challenge to encourage communities and rural businesses to develop the next generation of famous Scottish food products.

"The best proposal will receive investment to develop.

"Conference, your SNP Government is determined to make our food and drink industry the best in the world.

#### **\* Farmers & Crofters**

"And all this is good news for our farmers and crofters who supply the raw materials that underpins our successful food and drink industry.

"And that's why the SNP is delivering support for Scottish agriculture.

"That's why we are investing in this sector with £330 million in 4,500 projects through the Scottish Rural Development Programme since 2008 on top of the £500 million of EU support payments.

"And why we are investing in keeping our livestock sector disease free and why we are providing additional support for our hill farmers in our more remote areas.

"And that's why we have an inquiry underway chaired by industry stalwart Brian Pack to ensure we are best placed to influence the Common Agricultural Policy that will be renewed in 2013 and why we want to ensure that in future support is only delivered to genuinely active farmers.

"And to ensure our crofters continue to play their special role in producing food and maintaining our landscapes, earlier this year, Roseanna Cunningham took through Parliament our Crofting Reform Act to protect the backbone of many of our most remote and fragile rural communities. The Act will take the action necessary to tackle absenteeism, neglect and speculation to protect future generations of crofting.

### **\* Marine Act**

"It's not just our land that is a rich resource – our seas need to be sustainably managed to ensure they continue to deliver for Scotland as well.

"We laid the foundations for doing this by passing Scotland's first Marine Act that introduced a planning regime for our seas to manage competing uses and to allow additional protection for nature conservation given our precious marine habitats and features.

### **\* Sea Fisheries**

"Of course, another resource beneath our waves are our rich fish stocks that sustain tens of thousands of jobs in our catching and processing sectors.

"We have worked hard with our fishermen to get through the challenges presented by Brussels mismanagement and Westminster indifference.

"And for some sectors, the recession has compounded their difficulties.

"But we are determined to give this vital industry a bright future.

"That's why, for example, we have invested £36 million - so far - in the industry from the European Fisheries Fund. A Fund that is also supporting our increasingly successful aquaculture sector worth hundreds of millions to the economy.

"Ultimately, we need to safeguard our fish stocks.

"You know Conference, when the outlook for many of the world's fish stocks is very bleak indeed, we can be proud of the international reputation our fishermen have gained for fisheries conservation in the three years.

"Three quarters of our fish stocks are being fished sustainably and the proportion of Scottish fisheries with Marine Stewardship Council certification now exceeds 50%.

"Nonetheless challenges do remain.

"The scandal of discarded fish continues to haunt Europe's waters.

"Fishermen are being forced to throw perfectly good fish dead back into the sea - a waste of a major food and economic resource. More cod in the North Sea is discarded throughout than the entire quota given to the Scots fleet – that is a disgrace and it has to stop.

"We are leading the efforts to stop this waste. Just recently, we hosted a meeting of North Sea fishing ministers in Aberdeen to develop new ground breaking policies.

"And we have been piloting catch quotas where the fishermen are allowed to land more of what they catch, in return for taking less fish out of the sea in the first place, and importantly ending discards.

"Just as we piloted our innovative Conservation Credits Scheme, which has won plaudits throughout Europe, where we reward fishermen with additional time at sea for avoiding fragile cod stocks.

"Conference, we can't put our fishermen through the misery of destroying the fruits of their labour.

"We must and we will make discards history.

### **\* The Common Fisheries Policy**

"The level of discards in our seas is just one reason why the CFP remains a millstone around Scotland's neck.

"It's now up for negotiation and our guiding principle remains returning decision making to Scotland – where it belongs.

"Micro-management from Brussels has been a disaster for our fishing communities many of which have been decimated by the Common Fisheries Policy.

"So it's vital the Scottish Government speaks up for our fishermen.

"That's why I was pleased last month to be the first ever Scottish fisheries minister to travel to Brussels with the green light to sit at the top table – even if the lights were stuck at red until the First Minister intervened!

"The experience raised Scotland's profile, helped our credibility and meant our fishermen had a Minister on their side.

"Although Conference, I have to confess, all the while, I was fantasising about placing a Saltire on my desk!

"The UK's decision to let Scotland speak was progress – and certainly an improvement on Labour who preferred to send the UK Minister for Bees rather than the Scottish Fishing Minister to vital fishing talks.

"However, my message to the UK is clear.

"Two thirds of the fishing industry is based in Scotland.

"So Conference, Scotland should have a seat at the top table,

"Not as a one-off gesture - but at each and every Fisheries Council!

### **\* Mackerel Dispute**

"At that meeting, I spoke up for our fishermen over the unjustified and unsustainable setting of unilateral quotas by Iceland and the Faroe Islands.

"Conference, I respect these two small nations.

"However, the setting of massive unilateral mackerel quotas is irresponsible and threatens our most valuable Scottish fishery – and a stock that is only in such good shape because it has been well managed by Scotland and Norway and others for the past decade.

"For any country to fish out a stock that has been managed by others is morally wrong.

"If we all did that, there would be no fish left in the sea.

"In reaching a new agreement, Scotland will be tough, but reasonable – and we will not reward irresponsible behaviour on the high seas.

"I welcome the fact that the international negotiations are back on track and I appeal to Iceland and the Faroes to help us reach a sensible and fair deal to protect this valuable stock and thousands of jobs in our respective countries.

#### **\* Crown Estate**

"And Conference, just as our seas provide us with food, they are now set to power our nation with clean energy.

"It is reckoned that offshore wind alone could help provide 28,000 jobs by 2020.

"And this Party wants to see the people of Scotland enjoy all the benefits of the renewable revolution – and that means the revenues as well as the energy.

"The Scottish Government is working well with the Crown Estate Commissioners to develop offshore renewable.

"Right now however, the Crown Estate is the only public body that accrues direct benefit from the development of renewables in our waters.

"Did you know that, since devolution, it is estimated that around £100m raised by the Crown Estate Commissioners in Scotland has been posted to the UK Treasury by-passing Scotland?

"Conference, the UK Government has taken £269 billion in oil and gas revenues since 1976 and has squandered that wealth.

"Conference, we say, never again!

"We now have a Scottish Parliament and the Crown Estate Commissioner should be answerable to Scotland – not the UK Treasury.

"And we now have the Lib Dems in power in London.

"The same Lib Dems whose MSPs and MPs are still issuing press releases calling for the Crown Estate's powers to be devolved.

"So, today, I am laying down the challenge to them to deliver on their promises and, if they do, they will have the full cooperation of the Scottish Government.

"And I can reveal that I am writing to the Crown Estate Commissioners calling on them to consult with Scottish Ministers before selling off any more assets.

"Recently, it has been revealed that they have sold off commercial and other properties. As a sign of goodwill, I hope that there will not be any further sales without consulting the Scottish Government until the future of the Crown Estate is settled.

"But my challenge to the Scottish Secretary is clear – don't be feart, be bold and keep your promise - devolve the Crown Estate to Scotland!

### **\* Tackling Climate Change**

"Even in the absence of Crown Estate revenues, we have been busy providing our communities with the resources to tackle climate change at a local level.

"Over the past three years, the Scottish Government has awarded £27.4 million to hundreds of communities across Scotland to help reduce their carbon footprint and make their contribution to the low carbon challenge.

"The Climate Challenge Fund has captured the imagination of communities across the country.

### **\* Nurturing Scotland's Environment**

"And Conference, tackling climate change is one way we can protect our spectacular natural environment – an environment that delivers a wealth of resources to help us prosper as a nation.

"And in this, the International Year of Biodiversity, we are reminded that we share our land with a wide variety of plants and wildlife.

"We take our stewardship of our land seriously. We are currently working on the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill that will deliver a package of measures to protect wildlife and make sure that regulations to manage our resources are fit for purpose.

"We will also be careful with the resources that we have.

"As WWF Scotland's Living Planet Report stated this week – Scotland's ecological footprint is too deep and by 2030 we will need three planets to survive!

"That's why the Scottish Government launched its Zero Waste Plan in June to achieve 70% recycling by 2025. And we want to reduce landfill to 5% by the same date.

"Our environment, economy and quality of life depend on protecting our natural resources and you can be confident that the SNP is determined that Scotland should live within its means.

### **\* Conclusion – SNP's Vision for Government**



"Conference, the SNP in Government is making a real and positive difference to people's lives, Scotland's environment and to rural Scotland.

"We have done more for Scotland in less than four years than Labour and Lib Dems achieved in double the time.

"We can go into May's elections with our heads held high.

"And we can take into the campaign:

"A track record of achievements in Government,

"The best leader.

"The best team.

"The best policies.

"Scotland faces a choice next May.

"Labour is offering doom and gloom, and negativity.

"Tories and Lib Dems are offering deep and damaging cuts

"But our party, the SNP, is offering hope and aspiration.

"And an alternative road for Scotland to travel.

"So let's work together to harness Scotland's natural resources,

"let's combine that with the skills and talents of our people.

"Conference, let's win independence and build a better nation."