



A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR NIGG?

While some of our learned Highland Councillors, MSPs and MPs were huffing and puffing and blowing off a hell of a lot of 'hot air' with their threats, and in some cases demands, for the compulsory purchase of the partially idle Nigg Ferry Site, the First Minister, Alex Salmond stated categorically that there would be no CPO on the site.

Just imagine if the Highland Council did apply for a CPO and were successful, just who would they, the council, sell it to? Or would they retain ownership? Or would the HC reflect the Aberdeenshire Council (as in the Donald Trump scenario) and have a one only 'preferred buyer'.

Now there is hope for a multi-million pound breakthrough on the stalemate surrounding the site as news of the Houston based KBR, who owns the 'lion's share' of the Nigg site, has expressed renewed interest in the yard as a possible location for the manufacture of offshore turbines.

At one time the yard employed some 5,000 workers, but then that was when the drilling for offshore oil was in its infancy and apparently money 'was no problem'. Wind energy is a different kettle of fish and despite the incentives the British Government throws at operators, margin are limited.

MSP Jamie Stone, a former employee at Nigg said, "It is right and proper that the potential of Nigg is recog-

nised. However a mere potential it will remain if we can't break the present logjam that blocks the full use of the yard".

MP John Thurso says that the site is fantastic and



that it must be used for economic benefit. Renewable energy is a major opportunity that is right on our doorstep. So putting two and two together it has to be the right thing to do. The MP went on to say that he is doing everything he can to assist at Westminster.

Whilst clean manufacturing at Nigg will be welcome let's not forget the local businessmen and others

who at one time tried to slip nuclear decommissioning into Nigg as a possible use for the site!

TOO MUCH POLITICAL POWER

In the hands of unelected groups, so says Reform Scotland. The Independent Highlander has been saying the same thing for years and years.

Two of the 'first' quangos to go must be the Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish Enterprise. Jointly these quangos handle many millions of £s of European cash and as already proven they act outwith their remit and are not adverse to cronyism. So start the ball rolling Alex.

WINTER LINGERS ON

In the winter of 1946/47, when I was a lad of thirteen years or so, living in the tiny village of Inver, on the south shore of the Dornoch Firth, cottars in the village experienced a winter then that knew no bounds.

Many of the men from the village earned their living as professional rabbit trappers so frost and snow was a disaster, not only because trappers could not 'get a trap in the ground' but the conies rapidly lost condition making them less valuable as a meat product when their carcasses reached the markets in the south.

Father Willie had been a trapper since leaving school at fourteen and apart from his army war service, knew no other occupation. He was not alone in this situation as most of the able-bodied men from Inver saw action with the Seaforth Highlanders in France and elsewhere, then when demobbed returned to try pick up their livelihoods again.

Such was the severity of the frost and snow that wildfowl were unable to fly due to weakness and kids quite easily 'knocked them on the head with a stick. Not that there was much to eat on the wild ducks which were caught but at least they flavoured the concocted stews and soups.

Unemployment benefit in those bygone days was known as 'the dole' and if my memory serves me correctly it amounted to 10/6 per week. In addition it was quite difficult for self-employed trappers prove their need for the weekly supplement.

Now-a-days when we get a flurry of snow, as we have had over the past number of weeks, we all tend to bemoan, what at one time used to be the seasonal norm. Consolation comes with the belief that a really cold spell kills off lots of garden pests, and snow on the Ben when melted, provides plenty of water in the rivers for the salmon run. In addition the Government

puts a ban on the culling of wildfowl when conditions are really severe over a period, thus protecting our wildlife to a degree.

Then of course we have in Scotland various ski runs which attract tourists with money to spend, so in one way loads of snow is welcome by operators while cursed by motorists. What we do know this weather can't last forever and spring is just around the corner.

But for many wild animals and birds the 'thaw' will come too late and as already reported in the National Press beasts on the hill, (red deer) will succumb to starvation.

Estates who lease out the shooting of Red Deer Stags and Hinds should be made to care for the livestock on their hills and not allow them to starve to death.

Just think what the Scottish SPCA inspectors would do to me, or others, if we allowed our horses to go without food and water, even for a week. Or the crofters

down the road who let their sheep go hungry on the bare turnip field. Different rules for different societies, apparently. Ed.



GOOD COUNSEL

Community Councils in Scotland were born out of the 1973 Local Government Act. Since then government in Scotland has undergone massive changes without much alteration to the way Community Councils work and without any real development of them as a tool for improving democracy at a local level.

Highland Council is now a third of the way through the process of consulting about changes to their scheme for Community Councils and the only thing that seems to be filtering through from this consultation is that there are concerns about existing Community Council boundaries.

However well founded these concerns may be (and I can see where many of these concerns are coming from what with changes in housing, work and life in the Highlands since the 1970s) perhaps the approach being adopted by Highland Council needs to be more radical. Having discrete bodies for each locality misses the point that local democracy should be all inclusive.

Rather than tinkering at the edges with this consultation – a wee bit more on this boundary, a wee bit less there – why not take the stance that every community should be able to take an active role in their local Community Councils by having a Highland wide series of Community Council wards that fit inside the unwieldy and ultimately distant Highland Council “Super” Wards?

For example at present people in the Easter Ross village of Barbaraville are represented by the Kilmuir and Logie Easter Community Council. However there are no elected members of that community council who live in the village of Barbaraville, even though it is home to about 200 households.

Clear financial constraints on local government suggest that the chance of there being an increase in the number of Community Councils in Highland is unlikely. However there is no reason why the current Councils can't be engorged to be more inclusive and to ensure a fair spread of representation across our communities (something that is clearly not evident at Highland Council level).

Subsidiarity is an organizing principle that matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority. The Oxford English Dictionary defines subsidiarity as the idea that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed

effectively at a more immediate or local level. If Highland Council were to adopt the sentiment behind subsidiarity in approaching the issue of Community Councils I feel we could achieve a greater community involvement in community affairs.

Highland Council states that the key roles of Community Councils are: *“to represent the views of the community to The Highland Council and other public bodies operating in their area, to act to further the interests of their communities, to be consulted on planning applications within their area and to consider exercising their powers with reference to liquor licences.”* Why not take it further?

Local Councillors can, at best, be seen as distant, concentrating their efforts in those areas where they feel most comfortable and avoiding less palatable issues elsewhere. Community involvement in democracy tends to be a reaction to decisions taken centrally – a withdrawal of a service or a failure to provide an adequate service.

Ward forums are centrally led and can't hope to engage with a cross section of the community given their limitations of timing, location and content. (In fact the more contentious items in ward forums tend to be those off the Administration's agreed agenda).

Imagine a situation where each Highland Council Ward was sub divided into a series of Community Councils, each feeding into discrete Community Councils appropriate to a particular area but with every community ward being given the chance to provide a representative.

Community Councils could also be brought together at Highland Council Ward level to provide a Super Community Council providing local democracy with a much better focussed view of people's needs and aspirations than at present.

The effective use of postal voting would, at a cost but, as has been proven, increase electoral involvement and ultimately improve democracy.

Given the current scenario vis a vis local democracy, it must be possible for Highland Council to come up with something more relevant than a jiggling about with Community Council boundaries when it comes to democracy. What about a bit more Subsidiarity as a starting point? **John Boocock**

Letters

Ms Carol Rottenburg,
Environmental Health Officer,
Dingwall.
11/01/10

Dear Ms Rottenburg,

I am particularly disappointed that you have not appeared to have made any progress in your investigation of the 'Morrisons' store in Alness selling inferior cuts of meat (mock brisket) as Brisket and at inflated prices.

If your department is unwilling or unable to investigate my justified complaint, please advise me by return.

I am attaching a copy of a letter from the Chairman of Wm Morrison Supermarkets plc. for your perusal. You will see from its content that the Chairman's admission is in itself a damning statement.

Rest assured that this matter will not be allowed to rest unless there is a proper conclusion to my claim.

This letter and all responses subject to publication.

Yours sincerely. Euilleam Ross.



Mr E Ross
Seacrest
Barbaraville West
Delny
IV18 0NA

Please ask for: Carol Rottenbury
Direct Dial: (01349) 868489
E-mail: env.health@highland.gov.uk
Your ref: .
Our ref: REH/64307
Date: 19 January 2010

Dear Mr Ross

FOOD SAFETY ACT 1990
FOOD LABELLING REGULATIONS 1996
COMPLAINT: Mislabelling of meat
PREMISES: Morrisons, Alness, Ross-shire

Thank you for your correspondence of 11/01/10 and copies of the correspondence you've had with Morrisons plc. I would keep you informed of the situation. For large national companies, one local authority accepts a leading role. This Home Authority has the best knowledge of that company and their working practices; for Morrisons this is Bradford Council.

I have contacted the Officer in Bradford with the responsibility for Morrisons and am at present awaiting a response.

Yours sincerely

CAROL RATTENBURY
Environmental Health Officer
Transport, Environment and Community Services – Environmental Health



Date: 3rd December 2009

Ref: IG/jdr

Mr E Ross
"Seacrest"
Barbaraville West
Delny
IV18 0NA

Dear Mr Ross

Further to my letter of 23rd November I am now in a position to respond more fully to the allegations you make regarding our brisket of beef meat.

I am informed that a brisket of beef roll is made up of muscles from the brisket, along with the brisket 'plate' which consists of the meat covering the breast and rib bones. This is a large flat piece of beef which is traditionally rolled and strung to hold it together. Brisket is amongst the cheapest cut taken from the carcass and if it is slowly steam roasted, it cooks and eats very well.

Our Meat Specialist has assured me that the beef pictured in your Independent Highlander publication is indeed from the brisket, taken from the top of the ribs. We have sold this cut of beef as brisket across the UK for many years without challenge from any official or unofficial quarter. That being the case I must ask you to please refrain from publishing potentially libelous content in your publication with immediate effect.

I hope I have been able to persuade you that the brisket of beef is exactly what it claims to be.

Yours sincerely

SIR IAN GIBSON, CBE
Chairman

Sir Ian Gibson CBE,
Chairman,
Wm Morrison Supermarkets plc.

Dear Chairman, Ref IG/jdr

Many thanks for your reply to my accusations relating to 'Morrisons' selling inferior cuts of red meat (labelled as 'Brisket of Beef') on their pre-packed counters at the Alness and Inverness stores.

Your admission that 'Morrisons' have sold cuts of beef, shown by my digital imaging to your good self, as brisket taken from the 'top ribs' across the UK for many years without challenge from any official or unofficial quarter, beggars belief. Your admission reminds me of a report on a motorist who when travelling on the M1 at 100 MPH said, 'Officer, I have been doing this for years and no one complained up to now'.

Just to further your education and that of your 'Meat Specialist' the Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines 'Brisket' as being meat from the 'Breast of a cow', no mention of 'top ribs'! I ask myself, will Morrisons rewrite that tome?

I have no intention of refraining from publishing the truth in future issues of the 'Highlander' and your implied threat carries no weight, as one cannot be libellous when publishing the truth. (At least not in Scotland, I can't say for your part of the UK.) To date I have not had a response from the Highland Council's Environmental Officer, Carol Rottenburg, but I will be contacting her shortly.

To ensure that red meat retailers in Scotland confirm to a set standard, I intend to petition all Highland MPs and MSPs to try to ensure that retailers such as 'Morrisons' and other supermarkets comply. Personally I feel that the best way forward would be for all red meat retailers to become members of the Scottish Federation of Meat Traders, so that the meat buying public, get a fair deal.

Euilleam Ross.

Scottfab-Osprey Publishing 'Seacrest', Barbaraville West, Delny, Ross & Cromarty, Scotland. IV18 0NA.

Editor:- Euilleam Ross © waived unless stated otherwise. Copying encouraged

Scottfab-Osprey Publications is a Voluntary Non Money Making Scottish Organisation.