

The rise and possible demise of the SNP

Although the SNP came into being in 1934, it only achieved a modest degree of success until the two 1974 elections, when it grew from one parliamentary seat to seven and then eleven, including several seats in the North East of Scotland. In the next general election that area of Scotland went blue again and remained a Conservative stronghold until the 1987 election when the SNP took the Moray and Banff seats which it held for the next 30 years – often referred to as the Alex Salmond period.

The SNP unquestionably hit a peak in 2015, when it won all but three seats in Scotland. Two years later, however, the party lost two seats in the Moray Firth area while the Tories also took the prize scalp of Alex Salmond in the neighbouring seat of Gordon.

At the start of Salmond's parliamentary career he fully supported the fishing communities, just as those communities supported the SNP, both financially and with their votes.

For instance, here is an extract from Hansard where Alex Salmond brought in a private members Bill on Fisheries Jurisdiction:-

(756HC Deb 02 March 2004 vol 418 cc756-8)

Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)

I beg to move, That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for withdrawal from the Common Fisheries Policy of the European Union; to amend the Fisheries Limits Act 1976; to make provision about the exercise of functions under that Act by Scottish Ministers, the National Assembly for Wales, Northern Ireland Ministers and the Secretary of State; to

provide that that Act shall have effect regardless of the provisions of the European Communities Act 1972; to define Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish waters; and for connected purposes. The Bill is supported by hon. Members of all eight political parties that are represented in the Chamber, which is unusual for a politically controversial measure, and, more important, by every fishing organisation in the country, both offshore and onshore.

And as Scottish First Minister, he later said on 29th. May 2008, when answering a question from Karen Gillan:-

“No one seriously believes that the common fisheries policy has brought benefits to Scottish fishermen or fish stocks. We are committed to withdrawing from that damaging policy.”

However, by 2015, the SNP position had become more ambivalent.

In a Parliamentary debate on 10th September 2015, Sheryll Murray, the MP for Cornwall South East, said:-

“I notice that there are some hon. Members from the Scottish National party present. If one of them makes a speech, perhaps they will clarify their policy, which I am confused about. In 2003 the SNP MEP Ian Hudghton said that equal access to a common resource was fundamental to the common fisheries policy, and that no one could change it. Yet I remember that in the early days of my involvement in fisheries policy Alex Salmond, who was then the Member for Banff and Buchan, promoted a private Member’s Bill to restore national control”.

The confusion continues to this day. The SNP 2017 manifesto expressed a desire to re-join the EU while at the same time saying,

“We will continue, in all circumstances, to demand the scrapping or fundamental reform of the Common Fisheries Policy”

This statement is nonsense. You cannot re-join the EU if you

advocate such a policy. Indeed, you would have thought that the SNP would have learned a lesson from the earlier Conservative demise in Scotland – you must not betray your core supporters. Yet this is exactly what they have done and the fishing communities have taken their vengeance. Salmond appears to think he will be back, but he will have to move well away from the coast. The Scottish Tory leader Ruth Davidson has plenty of evidence to use against him if he tries to make a comeback. Anyone can access the Parliamentary documents of Hansard to read his statements.

On polling day Salmond looked grim and deservedly so. He needs to consider why he lost his seat. For all those years he supported the fishermen, but then power went to his head to such an extent he stopped visiting his fishing supporters. Democracy has worked, but the Conservatives must take note too about what has happened. If they mess up the post-Brexit fishing policy, the Scottish Conservative bandwagon will quickly grind to a halt.

It is ironic that the talk over the past year or so has been about Scottish independence, and separation, but thanks in no small measure to the fishing communities, it is Scotland that has kept Mrs. May in a position to continue as Prime Minister of the UK.