

Report on the Delegate Meeting of YES Highland Groups

Saturday 6 August 2016, 10.00am to 12noon, Spectrum Centre, Inverness

Meeting Agenda

1. Introduction and purpose of the meeting
2. Group introductions and background
3. The 2014 local campaign experience: lessons to be drawn and challenges identified
4. The lead-in to Referendum 2 campaign: potential for cooperation and joint initiatives
5. Summing-up and close of meeting

1. Introduction and purpose of the meeting

The meeting was organised by the YES Inverness group who on reflecting upon the 2014 IndyRef campaign identified that little had been known about the activities of similar groups working in other parts of the Highlands and Islands.

Some knowledge of other groups and their contact details existed but it was often limited and coverage was uneven. Building upon these existing contacts it was decided to also seek to identify additional contacts. The aim being to hold a delegate meeting of as many YES groups as could be located that were either still active or were considering becoming active again.

2. Group introductions and background

Some 30 participants (15 females and 15 males) participated in the delegate meeting from fourteen YES groups drawn from Highland and Moray council areas including a representative from Christians for YES and the MSP for Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch. In addition a representative from the National YES Registry attended as an observer.

To provide a coherent structure that aligns to the election/referendum process YES groups participating in the meeting have been listed by council and Westminster constituency areas in the table below.

Location of Participating YES Groups

Council Area	Westminster Constituency Area	YES Group
Highland	Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross	
Highland	Ross, Skye and Lochaber	Skye, Raassy &Lochalsh; Lochaber; Fort William; Dingwall; Black Isle; Munloch; Rosemarkie; Beaully & Kiltarlity
Highland	Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey	Inverness; Nairn; Nairnshire; Badenoch & Strathspey
Moray	Moray	Forres; Elgin

Participants also identified a number of other YES groups that they were aware of: *Durness, Wick, Assynt, Tain; Ullapool, Farr, Grantown, Aviemore, Oban, Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland.*

3. The 2014 local campaign experience: lessons to be drawn and challenges identified

Prior to considering the local campaign experience a short presentation was provided on the Highland and Moray IndyRef results. The table below provides a summary.

2014 IndyRef Results

Counting Area	Electorate	Turnout	YES	%	NO	%	Majority	%
Highland	190,778	87%	78,069	47.08%	87,739	52.92%	9,670	5.84%
Moray	75,170	85.41%	27,232	42.44%	36,935	57.56%	9,703	15.1%

Source: *Scottish Independence Referendum*, Electoral Management Board for Scotland, <http://scotlandreferendum.info/>

There are 32 local authority counting areas in Scotland of which Highland is the seventh largest electorate in the country while Moray is the twenty-second. It is worth noting that a 4% swing (6,493 votes) to YES in Highland would have resulted in a win (51%) while a 8.5% swing (5,493 votes) to YES in Moray would have resulted in a similar win.

Local campaign experiences

Groups listed their campaign experiences and provided examples of the wide range of activities they used to engage with the electorate in their localities during the IndyRef campaign. The table *Campaigning Activities of YES Groups* on the next page attempts to provide a snapshot of these activities from the information provided at the meeting but should not be considered as comprehensive. To make it more comprehensive the table requires to be reviewed by each group and any changes and additions added.

Participants identified a range of lessons and challenges:

Some Lessons

- Overall participants felt that the referendum had been a positive experience because it was rooted in civic education and self-learning, local campaigning and groups empowering themselves.
- Participants expressed the view that YES groups should not be aligned to a particular political party or organisation but be inclusive and reflect the diversity of viewpoints within an open, and outward looking civic national independence movement.
- It was acknowledged that the SNP as the largest political party in the country would continue to play a necessary and important role in leading the national movement for independence but should not seek to crowd-out the voices of other independence supporting political parties and civic organisations.
- The next independence referendum campaign should be planned for on the basis that local pro-independence groupings will undertake the leading role in campaigning among the electorate in their localities. An important role for the national campaign organisation and leadership should be that of facilitating, promoting and encouraging collaborative actions between independence supporting political parties, YES, and other like-minded local groups as a means of creating a better and stronger campaign at the local level - *Women for Independence, Radical*

Campaigning Activities of YES Groups

GROUP	Facebook Page	Shop	Street Stalls	Public Talks & Meetings	News Papers & News letters	Made Leaflets	Made Badges	Made Posters & Signs	Canvassing	Festivals
Ross, Skye and Lochaber										
Skye, Raasay & Lochalsh	X	X Portree	X	X					X	X
Lochaber		X Fort William	X	X	X			X	X	
Dingwall									X	
Black Isle									X	
Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey										
Inverness	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Nairn			X	X	X	X			X	
Nairnshire					X					
Badenoch & Strathspey	X		X		X				X	
Moray										
Forres	X		X	X	X				X	
Elgin			X						X	

- Participants recognised that any future IndyRef could not and would not be a re-run of the 2014 referendum and that the 2016 EU referendum had fundamentally changed the political context and public debate.
- Participants reflected on whether YES and YES2 were relevant campaigning banners. Some viewed YES2 as sending a unhelpful signal to soft NO voters who may now be willing to re-assess their position on independence and who could perceive YES2 as a second try at overturning the 2014 result. Overall it was felt that until a new national campaign emerged that it was useful to continue under the YES banner.

Some Challenges

- Particular concerns were voiced on the of issue of postal votes being used by the owners of holiday homes from outwith Scotland including their family members.
- Given the elite and concentrated pattern of ownership of land in the Highlands and its use as

hunting estates concerns were raised over the manner in which local estate employees and those in employment in businesses dependent on sport hunting were highly likely to have come under both direct and indirect pressure to vote NO. The example of the House of Bruar issuing letters to its employees was mentioned.

- The uncertain status of EU nationals in the region following the EU referendum was discussed. Many of whom voted NO in the 2014 referendum considering this as the best way to safeguard their status in the UK but now find themselves in a position where they must re-assess their position on independence.
- It was noted that localities that were host to UK military bases and installations in both Moray and Highland areas were particularly challenging for YES due to the entrenched UK allegiances engendered in forces personnel. Furthermore many of those serving in these establishments come from outwith Scotland and often when stepping out of military service choose to settle in the locality for quality of life and employment reasons.
- Over half a million people attend Sunday services in Scotland each week a significant proportion of whom are older persons many of whom voted NO and some of whom reside in the Highlands. Christians for YES are conscious that there is work to be done in engaging with this section of the electorate.
- The medium to long-term position of the crofting, farming and fishing industries and communities in the Highlands looks vulnerable once EU subsidies finish in 2020. The UK government is reported as stating that it is unlikely that the same level of subsidies for agriculture and the environment will continue. This will create a significant challenge for many of those working in these industries some of whom may wish to re-assess their position on independence.

4. The lead-in to Referendum 2 campaign: potential for cooperation and joint initiatives

Prior to the meeting a list of *Possible Issues for Discussion and Cooperation* was circulated it contained the following topics:

- Assist local group start-ups where requested
- Support local groups with stalls, leaflets, volunteers and potentially badges where requested
- Joint events and action days
- Effect links with other Independence allies *e.g.* Radical Independence Campaign (RIC); Women for Independence (WfI), etc.
- Share newsletters and leaflet drafts for local production and distribution
- Use of national web-based shops (*e.g.* AyeMail, Indy PosterBoy, etc) for badges, posters, flags, T-shirts, etc
- Use the YES Highland website for publishing articles and publicising individual group and shared events, etc
- Making use of social media Facebook pages, websites and other social platforms
- Letters to local newspapers
- Campaigning skills development on public speaking/chairing events, canvassing (door-to-door)

and phone, use of social media, etc

Participants discussed the range of ideas for collaboration and considered them to be of potential use in organising and developing future local YES campaigns. Many YES groups had and are still making use of a variety of these ideas as indicated in the table *Campaigning Activities of YES Groups* on page 3.

Participants provided a wide range of examples of the various means by which local groups had organised, funded and delivered their activities. Overall the meeting agreed that collaboration and cooperation wherever possible was the way to a better and stronger future independence campaign. It was proposed that future Highland-wide delegate meetings discuss specific areas for cooperation and joint actions.

5. Summing-up and close of meeting

The meeting agreed that a *broad and inclusive national movement* in support of Independence was the way forward and that at this particular point in time the focus should be on *preparation, building organisational capacity and undertaking political and civic education*. Campaigning would be the next phase once an IndyRef 2 date had been set where we would then be in a position to run a better, stronger and more coordinated campaign.

To aid coordination and cooperation between YES groups in Highland and Moray council areas it was proposed that three to four delegate meetings a year should be held. Participants discussed whether to host the meetings in different localities but concluded that Inverness was the preferred meeting place. It was also agreed that Saturday mornings between 10.00am to 1.00pm was the preferred meeting times. Meetings should seek to avoid school holidays and the worst winter months of January and February.

Groups were encouraged to consider holding events in their localities to coincide with the second anniversary of the 2014 IndyRef on 17 or 18 September.

End Note

In the afternoon the **National YES Registry** <http://nationalyesregistry.scot> provided a presentation on its purpose and role within the national independence movement.

The session consisted of: (i) a 20 minute video film that outlined the purpose and proposed structure of the organisation; (ii) a presentation on the development of a be-spoke Indy App² for mobile devices; and (iii) a discussion.

The Indy App is being designed as a means of enabling individuals and groups to network, exchange ideas, locate groups, find resources and stimulate discussion. It is planned to have the App available by 18 September 2016.

Gb/15 August 2016

² . An *App or application* is a self-contained programme or piece of software designed to fulfill a particular purpose, especially as downloaded by a user to a mobile device - smart phone, tablet, etc.