



Above, The Scottish Cabinet meets in the Media Centre on Seaforth Road, Stornoway

Left, Calum Mackinnon and Seonag Monk, writers of Dà Là san Dàmhair with the First Minister, Alex Salmond. Dà Là san Dàmhair won the Best Entertainment category at the Celtic Media Festival 2014

Below, Cabinet member during their visit to Stag Bakeries



## Scottish Cabinet Members at Stag Bakeries

**Stag Bakeries welcomed members of the Scottish Cabinet to their Stornoway bakery as part of the Cabinet's visit to the island to meet with local businesses and enterprises.**

Whilst at the bakery, Alastair Allan, MSP; John Swinney, Cabinet Secretary for Finance; and Rachel Mackenzie, Area Manager of Highlands & Islands Enterprise toured the award-winning bakery to find out how Stag was working with other local producers in order to create products with Hebridean and Scottish provenance.

The visitors learnt of the success that Stag has had both in the UK and internationally since launching their seaweed range last year which includes receiving the award for Best Scottish

Speciality Product. The range uses a blend of red, green and brown seaweed that is sustainably sourced from the Isle's sea lochs and also includes a sprinkling of Hebridean Sea Salt. Stag also shared secrets of new products that are due to be launched later in the year which will include a range of speciality Scottish cheese straws.

"We were delighted to welcome the Scottish Cabinet Members and representatives from Highland & Island Enterprise. It is a real privilege for our bakery to be included in their itinerary," said Charlie Macdonald owner of Stag Bakeries. "This visit gave us the opportunity to explain how we are working with other Scottish producers to help us develop a range of products with provenance and really put the Scottish Islands on the map!"



## Public meetings show Yes votes to referendum question

By Katie Macleod

**With only a matter of months until Scotland's referendum, the arguments on either side of the independence debate are heating up in the Hebrides.**

Following a visit to the Western Isles by the Scottish Cabinet, and a debate organised by the Carloway Community Association, it was the turn of Lewis Castle College UHI to get involved on April 28th.

The final vote – which asked the audience the same question that will be put to them at the ballot box in September – was a close one, with 49 people choosing 'Yes', and 40 opting for 'No.' It was a result that came after 90 minutes of engaging, interesting discussion on a range of political points that involved panel members, students, staff, and members of the public.

Both sides of the argument featured three panel members, including MSP Alasdair Allan on the Yes team, and Chair of Better Together in the Western Isles, Alasdair Morrison, at the 'No' table. Two students were also present on opposing sides: Katie Morrison and Caroline Macpherson were arguing against independence, while Jack Duncan and Norman Smith were hoping to persuade the audience to vote 'Yes'.

Principal Iain Macmillan challenged the panel members to raise the level of discussion, saying it was "an intellectual as much as an emotional challenge as to how we should vote" in the coming referendum. Debate Chair and Chief Executive of Acair, Agnes Rennie, admitted that she is still undecided, saying she had "come to the debate this afternoon with a very open mind."

Their challenge was taken up by the audience, who on the whole asked clear, sensible questions which required practical answers – answers sometimes given straight, and at other times offered in a more convoluted manner.

With topics ranging from the status of the Pound and Scotland's relationship with the EU, to concerns over passport and embassy facilities, both the audience and the panel stepped up to the plate with their contribution to the campaign issues.

The status of the relationship between an independent Scotland and the European Union was raised on multiple occasions throughout the debate, feeding into student and staff concerns over business opportunities, tuition fees, and the availability of higher education places for Scottish students.

Regardless of the issue, there were strong back-and-forth exchanges between the two Alasdairs, which led to occasional laughter from the crowd. Prior to the ballot they had a final chance to sway the vote with a brief statement outlining their views.

Alasdair Morrison praised Scotland's ability of being able to "share risks and opportunities"

within the United Kingdom, and how "being part of something bigger means bigger and better opportunities", echoing earlier sentiments of not wishing to walk away from our neighbours. In a repeat of the First Minister's words at the Town Hall earlier in the month, Alasdair Allan said that Scotland "can, should, and must be independent," in part because Scotland has not always had the government it voted for.

Regardless of political posturing, all agreed on the importance of the decision that awaits us in September. In the words of Business Administration and IT student Caroline, it is the most important political decision of our lives.

At the Carloway meeting, almost 70 local residents gathered in the community centre for the debate hosted by Angus MacDonald of BBC Scotland. Speaking for Yes nan Eilean Siar was Alasdair Allan and Back businessman, Gordon "Diesel" MacLennan. Arguing for Better Together was former MP Brian Wilson along with Alasdair Morrison.

As at the college, the public Q&A session, organised by Carloway Community Council, heard from all four panellists before the audience put questions to the panel. The vote at the end of the meeting which showed the results at No: 37%; Undecided: 7%; Yes: 56%.

Meanwhile Yes Na h-Eileanan Iar announced that Blair Jenkins, who heads up the Yes Scotland campaign, will be visiting Lewis on Friday 23rd May to take part in a public Q&A meeting in Stornoway Town Hall at 7pm. Since June 2012, Jenkins has served as the Chief Executive of Yes Scotland and was formerly the Director of Broadcasting at STV and Head of News and Current Affairs at the BBC. He is not a member of any political party.

Speaking ahead of his visit to the islands, Blair Jenkins said: "I'm really looking forward to going to Stornoway and making the case that only independence can put Scotland's future in Scotland's hands. The fundamental point of the Yes campaign is that it is made up of many grassroots groups campaigning all across the country, including the islands. I am very much looking forward to joining Yes Na h-Eileanan an Iar for some campaigning and I am particularly looking forward to taking part in the Stornoway Town Hall meeting with Alasdair Allan. There is clearly strong and growing support in the islands for an independent Scotland, as recent polls and debates have shown."

