

Meeting with Richard Thomson MP

Context

The meeting with Richard Thomson MP was organised as part of TIPA's engagement with politicians to discuss how compostable packaging can play a valuable role in eradicating plastic waste and moving to a circular economy.

Higginson arranged the meeting to try to present the argument for compostables, discuss changes to Scottish infrastructure to accommodate increasing amounts of compostable packaging, and what SNP can do to support TIPA in the context of the Environment Bill.

Logistics

TIPA and a representative from Higginson will meet with Richard Thomson on Tuesday 10th March. The meeting will begin at 12:30pm. It will last for up to 30 minutes.

The meeting will take place at Portcullis House: 1 Parliament St, Westminster, London SW1A 2JR.

TIPA should arrive 15 minutes early to allow for the time needed to get through security. Upon arrival TIPA should contact Thomson on 07968 325634.



Richard Thomson MP

Richard Thomson is a Scottish National Party (SNP) politician who has served as the Member of Parliament (MP) for Gordon since 2019.

Thomson was leader of Aberdeenshire Council from June 2015 until May 2017. Currently, he is vice-chair of the Marine Resources Group and represents the Aberdeenshire Council on the North Sea Commission.

Thomson was unsuccessful in contesting the Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale constituency in an election in 2001, but he was able to bring the SNP to second place in Gordon in 2010. In the general election of 2019, he was elected MP for Gordon and unseated Conservative MP Colin Clark by a 1.4% majority.



Thomson studied politics and history at the University of Stirling. He is currently working to earn his MBA from Edinburgh Business School at Heriot-Watt University.



Compostables in Scotland

Roseanna Cunningham has signed the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's New Plastics Economy global commitment. She is an SNP politician who also serves as the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation works with businesses and government to end plastic production and create a circular economy. Additional goals for the foundation include reducing need for single-use plastic and ensuring that all plastic packaging is completely reusable, recyclable, or compostable in theory and in practice.

Achieving a circular economy is a large part of Scotland's strategy Making Things Last, which was introduced in 2016. In this strategy, a desire for separate collection of organic waste and increasing the quality of compost are expressed. Most importantly, the strategy states that Scotland is actively looking for new technology that creates plastic alternatives.

In 2019, the Scottish government updated its zero-waste plan for Scotland. The plan set a target to reduce 33% of food waste and 70% of all other waste by 2025, being sure not to send more than 5% of this waste to a landfill. They intend to achieve this by further separating types of waste to reduce contamination, supporting the development for facilities that can recycle and compost, and encouraging businesses and households to buy products made from recyclable and compostable materials.

The Environment Bill

The SNP has branded itself as an environmentally-conscious party willing to take action. In particular, the party is strongly concerned about animal welfare and environmental damage being done to marine life.

Several party members during the second reading of the Environment Bill stated their discontent for the current policies of the bill. Deidre Brock MP—the SNP Shadow Spokesperson of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—is worried that the bill does not do enough to combat the key problems facing the environment.

Specifically, Brock has asked why clause 18 states that Ministers are forced to consider the environment in their policies but national security actors and the military are not. Further, Brock has argued that specific goals will be harder to achieve with the current bill because this clause exempts the use of taxation and spending. The party believes this misses the opportunity to hold polluters accountable.

Additionally, the SNP feels as though England is not doing its fair share in fighting the environmental crisis. Many MPs have acknowledged the fact that almost all of the tree-planting in Britain takes place in Scotland. They have called for implementing policies that discourage importing and producing products that have caused deforestation or environmental damage.



Analysis

Richard Thomson is new to the role of MP. In addition to this, Thomson has stated that the Environment Bill is not in his area of policy responsibility for his group. Because of these two factors, it is likely that Thomson is not very familiar with compostables. Therefore, the objectives of this meeting will be to discuss the importance of compostables, necessary changes to accommodate compostables in Scotland, and what role the SNP plays.

Further, Thomson's new role as MP means that he has had relatively few opportunities to participate and speak in the Commons. Most members of the SNP will fall in line with the party's values regarding the environment, plastic, and compostables. Because of this, the best method of appealing to Thomson is likely to appeal to these party interests. It may be beneficial to acknowledge that Scotland is already doing much more for the environment than England is, but that there are still some areas where Scotland can improve. TIPA should also suggest that if Scotland were ever to achieve independence, like the party advocates for, having a circular economy and robust systems for managing compostables will be a huge benefit for the country for their trading capabilities with the EU.

The SNP has also expressed their desire to discourage businesses and individuals from buying products that are made of plastic or are otherwise harmful to the environment. TIPA should explain to Thomson that if the SNP were to introduce more compostable-friendly policies to the Environment Bill, it will give consumers peace of mind and give businesses easier access to plastic alternatives.

Takeaways

1. The SNP has demonstrated that they are a party that is deeply concerned about animal welfare and marine life. Thomson's position as the vice-chair of the Marine Resources Group further suggests that he is knowledgeable about the current state of the world's aquatic system. Therefore, TIPA should frame their discussion around how compostables would prevent destroying the quality of oceans and they would have a positive impact on marine and animal life.
2. The SNP is primarily focused on Scottish independence following Brexit and its implications for their status in the European Union. TIPA should focus on this element by explaining to Thomson that a robust compostables market would give them an edge in the EU's single market as more countries shift away from plastic production.
3. Thomson, while relatively new to the role of MP, likely has connections within SNP and knows who is working in specific environmental roles. TIPA should discuss Thomson what their next steps should be, who they can speak to on the Environment Bill committee, and if Thomson can introduce them to this person.