

Waterwatch Scotland – a voice for all customers of Scottish Water

Waterwatch Scotland, the consumers' organisation representing water users, gained a new name and important new powers in April this year.

Our new powers mean:

- We can investigate complaints against Scottish Water.
- We can make statutory recommendations to Scottish Ministers, Scottish Water, the Water Industry Commission for Scotland (WICS), Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), and the Drinking Water Quality Regulator (DWQR).
- We retain the power to report on any matter we consider relevant to customers of Scottish Water.

Previously the Water Customer Consultation Panels (WCCP) the change came about as a result of the Water Services etc (Scotland) Act 2005 and provides a stronger role in the water industry. We are now able to more effectively represent all customers of Scottish Water. We are completely independent of Scottish Water.

Ian Smith, Convener of Waterwatch Scotland, said: "We want to hear people's viewpoints on all water related matters including customer service,

household charging and consultation. Waterwatch Scotland provides an ideal channel for people to make their opinions known."

Ultimately, issues and concerns customers raise with us, will be laid before Parliament, which enables us to influence policy.

Waterwatch Scotland Members also sit on one of four National Committees which currently are:

- Investment
- Charging
- Service Quality
- Customer Engagement

If you would like to express your views or concerns, or if you have made a complaint to Scottish Water in the first instance and are not satisfied with how it has been handled, please contact our dedicated Customer Support Unit:



Ian Smith, Convener of Waterwatch Scotland

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Email: customersupport@waterwatchscotland.org



Many thanks to Waterwatch Scotland for financial assistance towards production of this issue of "Scottish Seniors".

Best wishes to everyone for 2007

Editorial Committee

John Gray, Enoch Humphries, Cathy Leech, Bob McLean, Margaret Murdoch, David Oattes, Eric Souter, Irene Sweeney

Contact the Elderly

Contact the Elderly has been providing a lifeline of friendship for elderly people in Scotland for 35 years now. Each month volunteers collect a couple of elderly people from their homes and take them to a volunteer host's home for afternoon tea, where all enjoy the warmth of friendship for a couple of hours before the drivers see the guests safely home again. There are now 56 local groups in Scotland, providing a break away from the four walls and something to look forward to on a Sunday for people who are over 75 and live alone with little contact from friends or family.

We are a UK wide organisation and our guests range in age from 75 to the grand age of 110. One of our older guests in Scotland is Christina Pettigrew who celebrated her 100th birthday at the end of November in the company of friends. As you can see from the photo, she and her friend Grace who is also in the



Paisley Contact the Elderly group really enjoyed themselves.

If you know someone who might be interested or might like to be a volunteer, please contact

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For further information about Contact the Elderly please contact

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Scottish Pensioners' Forum: Financial position

The Forum is currently experiencing difficulty in sourcing funding for the post of part time Administrator. Applications were made to several grant making trusts with negative results and other avenues have so far proved fruitless. The search for funding goes on and, meanwhile, money from the Forum General Account has been transferred to provide temporary cover. This is obviously a short term solution, but we hope it will keep us working until a longer term answer is found.

We are hopeful, as we have several meetings arranged with politicians and a Scottish Parliament election hustings in the diary for Tuesday 3 April 2007 and will keep members posted.

Central Heating Programme

The next phase of the Scottish Executive Central Heating Programme and Warm Deal, will be managed by British Gas. It had been managed since 1991 by Eaga Partnership and their predecessors.

Single supplements

How many of you get mad at the outrageous charges for single supplements in holiday brochures? Here is a contrast. I was in Italy – the single supplement was 7 euros per night, about £35 per week. Some travel companies are charging £150 or even upwards of £200 per week for a single.

How can they justify this difference? If Italy can do it cheaply, surely the UK can!

Grace McDonald, Inverness

Notes from a meeting with Gordon Brown MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 13 October 2006

Irene Sweeney, Enoch Humphries, Margaret Murdoch, John Gray and Doreen Kean represented the Forum.

Enoch Humphries opened the meeting, at the invitation of the Chancellor, and expressed his concern about the plight of today's pensioners. The Chancellor made no mention of pensioners in his speech to the Labour Party Conference and there is general concern in the labour movement about the link not being restored until 2012 and then, only if affordable.

Enoch said that he is looking forward to this year's pre Budget statement in November and is anxious to hear of something for current pensioners, particularly with ever increasing energy costs. He and others are extremely angry at having to wait six years for the restoration of the link, which by then will have much less value and many current pensioners will no longer be around.

Irene Sweeney quoted the Unison Retired Members Conference and asked how the link will be calculated – earnings or RPI? Gordon Brown said that inflation will never be higher than earnings and believes that any poor pensioner is better off under the present system, the same as others with child credit tax. He knows we want the link restored now, but believes the poorer pensioner would not be better off getting what we want and is better with Pension Credit than restoration of the link. Irene pointed out the problem of people with small occupational pensions missing out on benefits.

Gordon Brown said there had been no allowance for savings until Pension Credit and his priority would always be the poorer pensioner, but with limited resources, we should perhaps concentrate on those who just miss benefits.

Enoch said there are around 2 million pensioners who have not applied for Pension Credit – the



Chancellor said the true number is unknown. When Enoch said account should be taken of pensioners who exist solely on the basic State Pension, the Chancellor said we may be unaware of any other income they may have. When it was suggested that taxation would pick that up, the Chancellor refuted this and stated that raising the State pension tomorrow would not help the pensioners on a small occupational pension.

He then quoted the Child Tax Credit having raised 1 million children out of poverty, with different levels of benefit for different levels of poverty and said Unison would surely agree with that. He then said he would like to help with the State Pension and would, if he could – keeping Pension Credit, which will rise with earnings, is still helping the poorer pensioner.

Enoch said he heard Tony Blair at the GMB conference saying, if we thought Labour were bad, we should look at the other lot – Enoch said it was a disgraceful comment.

At the previous meeting with the Chancellor, we said that money was needed for hospitals etc, not Trident, but Gordon Brown pointed out that Trident

would not be happening for much longer than 2012 and as many other countries have weapons, we must keep ours.

Irene quoted Gordon Brown from 1993, saying he would do away with means testing for pensioners – he argued that he wanted to stop weekly claims and the associated stigma and that it is now easier, quicker and more private to claim. Irene said the stigma is still there and that is why many people are not claiming. The Chancellor asked if we had the choice, would we put the cash into Pension Credit, or raise the State Pension across the board. He agreed that Council Tax costs and energy costs are worrying and how older people should be persuaded to take up central heating and insulation programmes. The government are also trying to persuade energy companies to give a lower tariff to poorer people and are in discussion with companies at the moment.

Enoch said that schemes like Staywarm and the one off £200 for Council Tax assistance were gimmicks and a 2.7% rise for pensioners in the March Budget compared to an annual rise of £1,000 for MPs was a disgrace.

The Chancellor said we had to be realistic about the situation – the government has doubled the

expenditure on the NHS, schools and the police and the tax to cover the NHS costs was not at the expense of older people. He raised the National Insurance, so no effect on the over 60s.

Enoch then brought up the 75p pension rise of some years ago – the Chancellor replied that it was the same year there was an increase in the Winter Fuel Allowance, which is still in place.

Enoch finished off by reiterating that his main concern is what will be done for today's pensioners in the Chancellor's pre Budget statement in November.

The Chancellor said he owed us an apology about the meeting held in May this year – he believed that we had received a response to the points we had raised and had a meeting with a Scottish politician. He will look at a date when the link can be restored.

We have since received a response from the Chancellor detailing what the government has done for the older people of this country; emphasising the positive effects of benefits such as Pension Credit and Council Tax Benefit and pointing out that restoring the link to earnings is not the answer! We think that, if he believes that, then he should find an alternative answer which helps today's pensioners!!

Pensions lobby at Westminster: 25 October 2006

Several members of the Forum Executive Committee attended the lobby, which began with around 30 pensioners dressed as skeletons, to make the point that many of today's pensioners will be dead before the government restore the link between pensions and earnings.

Although the weather was appalling, it was a very impressive sight and the press and television were out in force. Margaret Murdoch, Chairperson of the Forum, was interviewed by the BBC and ITV, the latter being shown on the

Scottish News and an interview for Saga Radio was broadcast on the morning of the lobby. Phyllis Herriot was also interviewed.

As a result of the lobby, Early Day Motion 2582 now has the backing of 93 MPs, from all political parties and the TUC has backed the call for a rise in the State Pension to £114.00 per week.

However, you will see from the report of our meeting with the Chancellor and his pre-Budget statement, that he remains completely unmoved.

Report on Scotland's Long Walk for Peace, 4th–19th September 2006

On Tuesday 14th September nearly 100 peace activists, including trade unionists, socialists, communists, leading church men and women, set out from the Faslane nuclear submarine base on the Clyde to walk 85 miles to Edinburgh, where the marchers called upon the Scottish Parliament and Westminster to scrap Trident and rule out replacing Britain's weapons of mass destruction.

The walk organised by Scotland's for Peace – a broad based joint initiative by Scottish CND, Scottish churches and trade unions had the formal support of 36 members of the Scottish Parliament, including Labour, SNP, Lib Dem, Green, SSP, Solidarity and independent members, many of whom joined the march for part of the way.

The landscape around Faslane is breathtaking, rolling hills of bracken and heather interspersed with trees, and the Clyde, wide, dark, and very beautiful.

Razor wire

Then there is the razor-wire encircled nuclear submarine base at Faslane. A huge sprawling place claimed to be there 'for our security' is the home to Britain's nuclear missiles. The Trident missile system currently consists of approximately 200 nuclear bombs, each of which is eight times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945.

The stark contrast between the beauty of the Clyde estuary and the brutal ugliness of this naval base is truly shocking.



The Government is now considering the future of British nuclear weapons and will publish its plans before the end of 2006. It is likely to propose that four new Trident submarines are built, at a cost in excess of £25 billion, and armed with nuclear weapons and based in Scotland until 2050. Prime Minister, Tony Blair has promised MPs that they will have the final say on whether to order a new generation of nuclear missiles.

However, peace campaigners have warned that Mr Blair and Chancellor Gordon Brown's recently declared support for Trident replacement, means that a decision has already been made 'behind closed doors'.

Anti nuclear group CND said (in summer 2006) that most of the British public oppose the replacement of the Trident nuclear weapons system, fearing that it will spark a new arms race across the world.

A survey of 1,000 adults for CND revealed that two out of three were against a new generation of nuclear missiles – up 5 per cent from a similar poll almost a year ago.

CND chairwoman **Kate Hudson** said 'ordinary people are increasingly seeing the reality of the situation – that replacing

Trident will start a new nuclear arms race. If Britain insists that it needs nuclear weapons to ensure its security, other countries will conclude the same, leading to increased proliferation'

Chilling statistics

At Faslane, before the marchers set off, the Very Reverend **Alan McDonald**, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland said: 'The statistics about Trident are chilling. One Trident submarine can carry the equivalent of 750 Hiroshima atom bombs ...

'The potential for the indiscriminate destruction of countless men, women and children is almost beyond belief.'

Mr McDonald declared: 'For me, the issue of nuclear weapons is close to the heart of what it means to be a Christian today.'

He reminded us that people used to say that the apartheid regime in South Africa would always be in place; but apartheid is history now and I believe with every part of my heart and soul that we can and we will get rid of Britain's Trident nuclear weapons.'

Veteran marcher **Jill Sanderson**, from Fife Women for Peace, said she had first taken to the road in 1959, when she joined the campaign against Polaris nuclear missiles.

Ms Sanderson said 'Trident is immoral. What is the point of upgrading it when morally we can't use it.'

The marchers reached Glasgow on the Saturday for a

demonstration through the city centre where banners could be seen indicating support from many trade unions including RMT, UNISON, EIS, trade union councils in Dundee and Paisley. They were joined by the political parties and faith groups plus many CND and peace groups.

George Square rally

The rally in George Square heard **Nicola Sturgeon** MSP (SNP) call for the nuclear arsenal to be scrapped as there was no rational argument for spending billions on new weapons of mass destruction.

Rose Gentle delivered a message of support from Military Families against the War.

Colin Fox MSP (SSP) accused the Scottish Executive of having reached a decision in favour of Trident replacement.

Elaine Smith MSP (Labour) stated that weapons of mass destruction were immoral and wrong and she went on to say that nuclear weapons are useless against the problems that face the world today, such as poverty and injustice.

Katrina Purcell (STUC) reminded us that under international law we have an obligation to negotiate an end to nuclear weapons. She said 'this is an argument we can win.'

Bruce Kent stressed that the fight against Trident is not only a Scottish issue. He said 'it is an international issue of crucial importance, but, if Scotland starts the movement, we can be sure that others will follow.'

Each day the 'core group' was joined by local supporters. Many motorists also indicated support by tooting car horns and supplying fruit and drinks as we passed by. In addition, others

were involved in the preparation of food and in the provision of overnight accommodation for the marchers. This magnificent show of support for Scotland's for Peace was much appreciated by all those involved in planning and undertaking the march.

Well attended public meetings in Dumbarton, Glasgow, Coatbridge,



Bathgate, and Currie heard speakers put the moral, legal, democratic, environmental and economic arguments for peace. At one such meeting Green Party MSP **Chris Ballance** said, 'Greens, along with the majority of Scots, oppose Trident, oppose the renewal of Trident and deplore the indiscriminate violence and carnage that nuclear weapons are designed to create ...

'Nuclear weapons make us a terrorist target, create nuclear waste, are illegal and give this country a key role in maintaining one of the most immoral and brutal features of 21st century politics.'

£25 billion to replace Trident

At another public meeting, a speaker said 'we have walked across Scotland, through many working class areas where deprivation is rife; I ask you to consider this – to replace Trident will cost at least £25 billion. There are many permutations as to how such a vast sum could be spent. It would deal with any funding shortfall anywhere in the NHS, it would ensure a decent pension for all, it would provide

the housing needs of those in desperation. Which option do you prefer?'

Scotland's Long Walk for Peace culminated in a 1,000 strong rally outside the Holyrood Parliament building, where, Cardinal **Keith O'Brien**, the leader of Scotland's Roman Catholics said 'I hope by our presence here today and by the walk you have completed, we give voice to hope and remind all who will listen that, if nuclear war is illogical, immoral and inconceivable, then investing billions of pounds in more nuclear weapons is iniquitous, irrational and absurd.'

Mass murder

Following the rally a number of marchers and peace activists met with the Cross Party Scottish CND group at which the following points were made – 'Our argument is very straightforward. Nuclear weapons are weapons of mass destruction and thus cannot be used with any precision or any pretence at righting any wrong. It is basically mass murder on a catastrophic scale with the potential for escalation, which could put an end to all life on earth. This does not conform to basic human morality.

'We have walked from Faslane submarine base to the Scottish Parliament. We ask the Parliament to oppose any plan to replace or upgrade Trident. British nuclear weapons were designed for the cold war and with the cold war over, the irrational basis of the pro-nuclear argument has long since disappeared. They are no use against terrorists and they cost £1,500 million each year. It is time to make Trident history.'

Elinor McKenzie, November 2006

Christmas tree, Oh! Christmas tree

I always try to think up a wee Christmas tale about this time of the year.

So I think I'll tell you my Christmas tree story. This is one of mine that always comes to mind when I'm swapping Christmas stories. Are we all settled comfortably? Right! I'll begin!!

It was the night before Christmas. Na! It wizna!!!

I'd moved up to a housing scheme called Fintry and it was our first year in the 'new hoose'.

So my mother decided she was going to push the boat out, since we had the room now, and we'd all go down to the Arcade for a 'really guid Christmas tree, that stood on the flair'.

'We' being my wee brother Johnnie, 6, my wee sister Carol (in the tansad) and me, 10 – and of course, the lady of the house.

So we got off the bus at Shore Terrace and crossed the road to look at the trees that sat outside the door of the Arcade. Well there were big trees, wee trees, skinny trees and fat trees. And then she spots it, nudges me;

'Wull yeh tak a look at that tree, that's a richt dinger!! The 'real dinger' was just that. It was really, really, green. It had a huge trunk. It was enormous. We fell in love with it.



'SAYS WHA!!.'

'The sehze o' the bus says, that's wha, fir it'll no get in the cubbie.

And he was right. Try as he might. It would not go in 'the Cubbie'.

'Right' says my mother to us. 'Then weh'll get the tram car an walk fae Maryfield.'

'How much tae tak it aff yehr hands' says she to the man, preparing for battle.

'Oh! Well' says he. 'It's the same price as a' the rest, but yeh'll hae tae move it now'.

'Done', says my mother as we nabbed the bargain of the year.

We get back out on the street triumphant!

'Tak meh bag tull Eh get this manouvered across the tansad'. And in a couple of minutes my wee sister vanished under a pine forest, with just room for her to peek out on the world.

My mother points at my brother and me.

'Ain o' yeh get the tap, an ain o' yeh get the bottom, tae balance it, tull weh get tae the bus. Right aff weh go! Wagons Ho!'

We arrive at the bus stop. And encounter our first hurdle. The bus conductor.

'Geezo! Mrs. Thir's nae weh that things comin on the bus.'

By this time it's getting dark, and I was beginning to go off this tree BIG TIME!

We're all getting weary, but mission 'get-the-tree-hame' had to be accomplished. We were speaking of my mother here, after all.

We got this giant of a thing on the tramcar right enough. But by the time we got to the terminus at the top of the Forfar Road, it had started to pour down that damp feechy sleet.

My wee brother walked on uncomplaining but getting very downcast. I got thumped for mumping about my cold fingers and got instructed; 'Bla on them, we'll be hame afore yeh kin say Jeck Roabson.' I was too tired to care about any Jeck Roabson as we trudged on.

The only happy one was my wee sister. She was wrapped up like a

Continued on next page

I love to live

Today, Dear Lord, I'm 70 and there's much I haven't done
I hope, Dear Lord, you'll let me live until I'm 71
But then, if I haven't finished all I want to do
Would you let me stay awhile, until I'm 72
So many places I want to go, so very much to see
Do you think that you could manage to make it 73
The world is changing fast, there is so much in store
I'd like it very much to live till I'm 74
And if by then, I'm still alive, I'd like to stay till I'm 75
More plans will be up in the air, so I'd really like to stick
And see what happens to the world when I turn 76
I know, Dear Lord, it's much to ask, and it must be nice in heaven
But I'd really like to stay until I'm 77
I know by then, I won't be fast and sometimes will be late
But it would be really pleasant, to be around at 78
I will have seen so many things and had a wonderful time
So I'm sure that I'll be willing to leave at 79
Just one more thing I'd like to say, Dear Lord, I thank you kindly
But if it is okay with you, I'd love to live to 80.

Aileen Burr, Aberdeen

Christmas tree, Oh! Christmas tree

Continued from previous page

wee bird, nesting in her tree. And she did resemble one, with some of the pinecones stuck in her angora wool bonnet.

Anyway we arrived home, and my father must've been looking out for us because he was at the door when we got there.

'Whit the hells that? Sherwood Forest?'

'Whit the hell diz it look like? An niver mind that, jist help us get it in the hoose.'

'An how dae yeh suggest Eh get a TWELVE fuht tree intae a hoose that's only TEN fuht fae the ceilin tae the flair?'

She stopped dead. I stopped dead. My wee brother burst into tears. My wee sister was oblivious, lucky her. We'd humphed that tree for what seemed the same distance as it took Hannibal to get his elephants over the Alps. AND IT WAS TOO BIG.

So we stood looking out the living room window as my father sawed off the extra feet, and pinned it back onto its crossed wooden slats at the bottom, then dragged it through the door and stood it up in the living room.

'Och looks great now. An it's right fae the flair tae the rife, jist the job!' Says my mother, 'Nae herm done. It widda been worse if it hid been too wee'.

'That wiz well worth the journey hame.'

Merry Christmas everybody.

Mae Stewart, Dundee

WHY NOT JOIN US?

I/we wish to join the Scottish Pensioners' Forum

Annual Membership Fee: (April each year)

- Organisations £30 Individual pensioners £3
 Local groups/forums £10 Other individuals £10

(Please tick as appropriate)

Please make cheques and postal orders payable to "Scottish Pensioners' Forum"

Name _____

Address _____

Organisation/Branch _____

Telephone No _____

■ Please return the completed form to: Scottish Pensioners' Forum,
333 Woodlands Road, Glasgow G3 6NG. (Tel 0141 337 8113)