

## Independent Scotland's Smart Borders

Independence for Scotland is becoming regarded more and more as a national opportunity. Due to the increasingly noticeable flaws of the Westminster Government, there is a rising confidence among the Scottish people in our ability to govern ourselves. The opportunity lies in what Scotland itself could build once it takes the step to full nation-statehood.

The Scottish Independence Convention (SIC) has commissioned a series of papers examining how to build the institutions required by a new Scotland. The purpose of this is to highlight to voters the merits of independence compared to being ruled by Westminster. We want to show what an independent Scotland must build, and what we can achieve in doing so.

In this first paper, *Independent Scotland's Smart Borders*, authored by internationally recognised expert Bill Austin, examines what opportunities are available when it comes to our borders. It shows how independence supporters can reassure voters, seize the initiative and win further support by discussing the merits of a new customs and borders system.

The last referendum showed that the issue of Borders is a stick pro-union forces will attempt to use to beat down the case for independence. However, the next referendum will be a very different experience. When faced with a risky and uncertain Brexit Britain and with Scotland having no financial or border control of its own during times of pandemic, the border argument is becoming increasingly detoxified for the Scottish electorate.

The key point about modern borders is that beyond demarking and establishing the legal jurisdiction and geographic extent of a country, they have a number of revenue, immigration and safety functions. Crucially, each of these functions can occur at the place where validity needs to be checked and this does not have to occur at a particular point where the goods or people cross a line on a map. This allows a country to create '*Smart Borders*' to check this validity in the most appropriate, cost effective and convenient real or virtual space.

The very notion of a 'hard border' where everything and everyone is stopped and searched is a ridiculous and almost cartoonish fiction, not resembling reality in any other European nation. Indeed, it is not a concept recognised by the World Customs Organisation, an organisation the UK has been a member of since 1952.

A departure from the UK's approach to borders, allowing us to reimagine them for ourselves, is actually one of the key advantages independence will bring. The UK Borders Force focusses disproportionately on illegal immigration at the expense of controlling customs and revenues. This political choice by the UK Government means that an estimated £120 billion per year is lost due to a failure to collect customs revenues. Ineffective smuggling prevention also results in approximately £40 million of fake Scotch whisky entering our country each year. What could NHS Scotland or even the Scottish National Investment Bank do if they were allocated additional spending because of this new revenue?

The impact of the current UK Borders Force and HMRC approach will only become more costly as the UK erects 27 more dysfunctional borders as we fully leave the EU, potentially without a trade deal. An independent Scotland must avoid the economic hit due to poor governance.

So what should we do? The proposed approach set out in the paper, in common with modern best practice, has relevant checks on goods etc, occurring wherever the Scottish Government deems appropriate, meaning the location is not a fixed point on the geographic border. Beyond this, what other principles guiding the operational activities are highlighted in the paper?

#### Internationally integrated:

It is commonly accepted that an independent Scotland will seek to re-join pan European institutions, either as part of EFTA or the EU. The opportunity here is to work towards the EU definition of *integrated borders management* - "national and international coordination among all relevant authorities and agencies involved in border security and trade facilitation to establish effective, efficient and coordinated border management at the external EU borders, in order to reach the objective of open, but well controlled and secure borders." This will facilitate international trade and make Scotland a highly attractive location for organisations seeking to sell their goods and services into Europe and avoiding the barriers erected by Brexit.

#### Smart not hard:

The paper highlights how creating 'smart borders' will mean that 90% of import customs revenue and legislative controls can be collected and legally enforced within our authority – giving Scotland clear evidence of fulfilling EU membership requirements (EU Acquis). This dispels the notion that when independent, Scotland will be forced into accepting a border arrangement that England decides. Scotland can create and manage a border of its own making and it will be up to England to do likewise.

#### Trained, supported and cost-effective.

A Scottish Customs Service will prioritise the training and hiring of custom staff, in contrast to the job losses experienced under the governance of the UK. This paper suggests that whilst the UK has cut customs staff over the last two decades, Scotland can benefit by doing things differently. Currently HMRC costs 1p for every pound collected but as this paper shows, this impressive efficiency is undermined by the small number of dedicated staff. For example, whereas the DWP has approximately 3,000 investigators, the HMRC has only 300 spread across the whole of the UK to deal with massive revenue frauds. An independent Scotland will aim to maintain this collection ratio while increasing the number of staff.

#### Local hubs

Since HM Customs and Excise closed in 2005, there have been no Customs officers at Glasgow or Edinburgh points of import. This is something that Scotland can choose to rectify and ensure there are highly trained staff at our ports, airports and bases across our country. This will bring well-paid jobs to many rural centres.

#### Protecting Scotland's coastline

By managing Scotland's maritime borders properly, Scotland will require ships to protect our coastline - providing much needed work to our shipyards. Scotland's coastline is 5 times longer than that of France and yet Scotland has no revenue vessels patrolling our coast or stationed in our ports. Therefore, this is an opportunity for an independent Scotland to defend our coastline and increase prospective revenues.

Independence brings us the opportunity to build the institutions required by a new country. We have the opportunity to build our customs and borders infrastructure and approach based on modern best practice, fit for our priorities and requirements. The *Independent Scotland's Smart Borders* paper sets out how we can avoid replicating the overly-complex inefficient and inhumane UK system. It shows how letting go of the 'hostile environment policy', implementing an integrated, internationally aligned smart border approach, an independent Scotland has the opportunity to secure our country, claim significant sums in lost revenue and create thousands of high paying, widely distributed, self funding jobs.

The answers set out in this paper will help us set the media agenda, highlight the lack of understanding shown by commentators using the phrase 'hard borders' and explain the concept of a smart border. This helps support the conversations we need to have when persuading our families, friends and neighbours to support independence.

Scottish Independence Convention