

# Inside the convention on Scotland's future

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EDINBURGH SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE POLITICS SCOTLAND



Activists from across the movement, parties and sectors were in the room with several issues to tackle, all driven by the same question: 'If the politicians can't do it - can we?' (Image: NQ)

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**PRIOR to independence-focused days of discussion, there is always a palpable hope something can be done, an answer can be found, a step can be taken.**

That was the energy I found yesterday morning when I walked into Greyfriars Charteris Centre in Edinburgh. Around 100 delegates had gathered to discuss Scotland's land, energy and democracy at a convention organised by the Independence Forum Scotland (IFS).

Activists from across the movement, parties and sectors were in the room with several issues to tackle, all driven by the same question: "If the politicians can't do it - can we?"

That was the question posed by Ian Grant, convener of IFS. He shared that organisers had reached out to civic society as well as the movement, but there had been difficulty engaging with groups such as the church. He had belief, though.

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Belief they and others would join a future convention, with two more being organised during 2025.

"There are people here I actively disagree with, but it has to be done. We have to come together," one delegate told me.

We started with an opening address from writer Alastair McIntosh who focused on the roots and vision of Scotland. He has written a book aptly titled *The Roots And Vision Of A Nation*, and his address did one of the most important things of the day.

His poetic speech quoted nationalistic, philosophical and political giants with wise teachings.

Ailsa Raeburn, chair of Community Land Scotland, and Laurie Macfarlane, co-director of Future Economy Scotland, discussed the upcoming **land reform** bill, the historical nature of land ownership, blockages to reform and community ownership.

Key points raised by delegates in the session included how to salvage the land reform legislation during its amendments process and how the public can create a swell of persuasion which is greater than that of lobbyists.

This was followed by Robin McAlpine, who gave a jam-packed talk on how to work with risk-averse politicians. McAlpine took the group through his own experience working within, alongside and, at times, against the Scottish Government. He highlighted the pros and cons of being part of party politics but his final message was to join a political party, even if you disagree with its direction, as it is easier to create change from within than outwith.

Later, experts from Energy Scotland - who engage with stakeholders to discuss every aspect of the Scottish energy sector - led the session with the team positioned around the hall manning four stations to discuss different strands of the topic.

The stations looked at what can be done with the powers Scotland already has, what is being done, what should be done and how we get there.

The World Café exercise seemed successful and did ensure participation as well as a flow of ideas across the group to form. The method was also employed during the session on Scotland's democratic future.

One key, interesting idea was centred around a second chamber in Scotland.

One station considered the necessity of a second chamber and if so, who should be elected and for how long.

A delegate suggested previous Scottish MPs could be elected to an interim second chamber following independence to get it established and running accordingly.

Short and long limits on term length were also suggested as well as the possibility of having no physical chamber and those elected would instead meet virtually and be spread across Scotland.

Later when the group discussions were summarised, one person asked who we would need permission from for a second chamber. The answer was both **Westminster**, as a constitutional matter it is reserved, but also "the people of Scotland" as sovereign.

To which another replied: "Ask Isobel Lindsay."

Lindsay was key in the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly which was initiated as a pressure group, leading to the 1989 Scottish Constitutional Convention, to explore the basis for the structure of the Parliament.

As key organiser John Brown at the end summarised, these ideas and conventions are all intended to be part of and lead to hopefully a citizen's convention similar to the one in 1989.

Leading Energy Scotland, John Proctor quoted Sir Walter Scott (above) and it stuck in my mind as a good way to describe where pro-independence politicians currently are when it comes to independence.

"To the timid and hesitating everything is impossible because it seems so."

Saturday's discussion was cautious but determined, and everything mentioned was possible because, in the minds of those who were there, it seems so.

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