



inverness
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Manifesto for the Scottish Parliament Election May 2026 for Inverness and the Central Highlands

A Blueprint for Prosperity

April 2026

www.inverness-chamber.co.uk

Committed to **Building a Stronger Business Community Together**



Colin Marr, Chief Executive,
Inverness Chamber of Commerce

Invest properly in our region to ensure that the opportunities of the clean power revolution are not lost to Scotland and the UK.

The 2026 Scottish Parliament Elections are crucial to redressing the long-term lack of investment in Inverness and the Highlands. On behalf of our business community, I am calling on all candidates to make sure the opportunities that the clean power revolution brings to our region are not lost.

Inverness and the Highlands are critical to Scotland's future economic growth – from clean energy to tourism, and from digital to manufacturing. The clean power revolution, and the opportunities it presents for Scotland and the UK – energy security, job creation and prosperity – will not be possible without our region and its unique geography.

However, our businesses feel that successive Scottish Governments have overlooked the region in favour of investment in the Central Belt. Without bold action from the next Scottish Government, our businesses will be constrained by skills shortages, housing pressures, infrastructure gaps and an outdated regulatory environment. As a result, Scotland risks missing its opportunity to become a major player in future global energy markets.

Over the next decade, a thriving Highlands will drive opportunity across Scotland. This manifesto sets out the issues that must be addressed to ensure that happens.

I look forward to hearing how our candidates intend to use their role in the Scottish Parliament to make sure that Scotland meets these challenges.

Our Manifesto Priorities

Inverness Chamber of Commerce represents over 340 businesses. These span multiple sectors and range from sole traders to multinational organisations. Only Chambers of Commerce represent the full breadth of businesses within a region. The priorities of our business community are remarkably consistent – both across sectors and over time...



A shortage of staff and a shortage of skills



A lack of housing for their staff



Poor transport links



Rising business taxation



A welcoming approach to the renewables developments

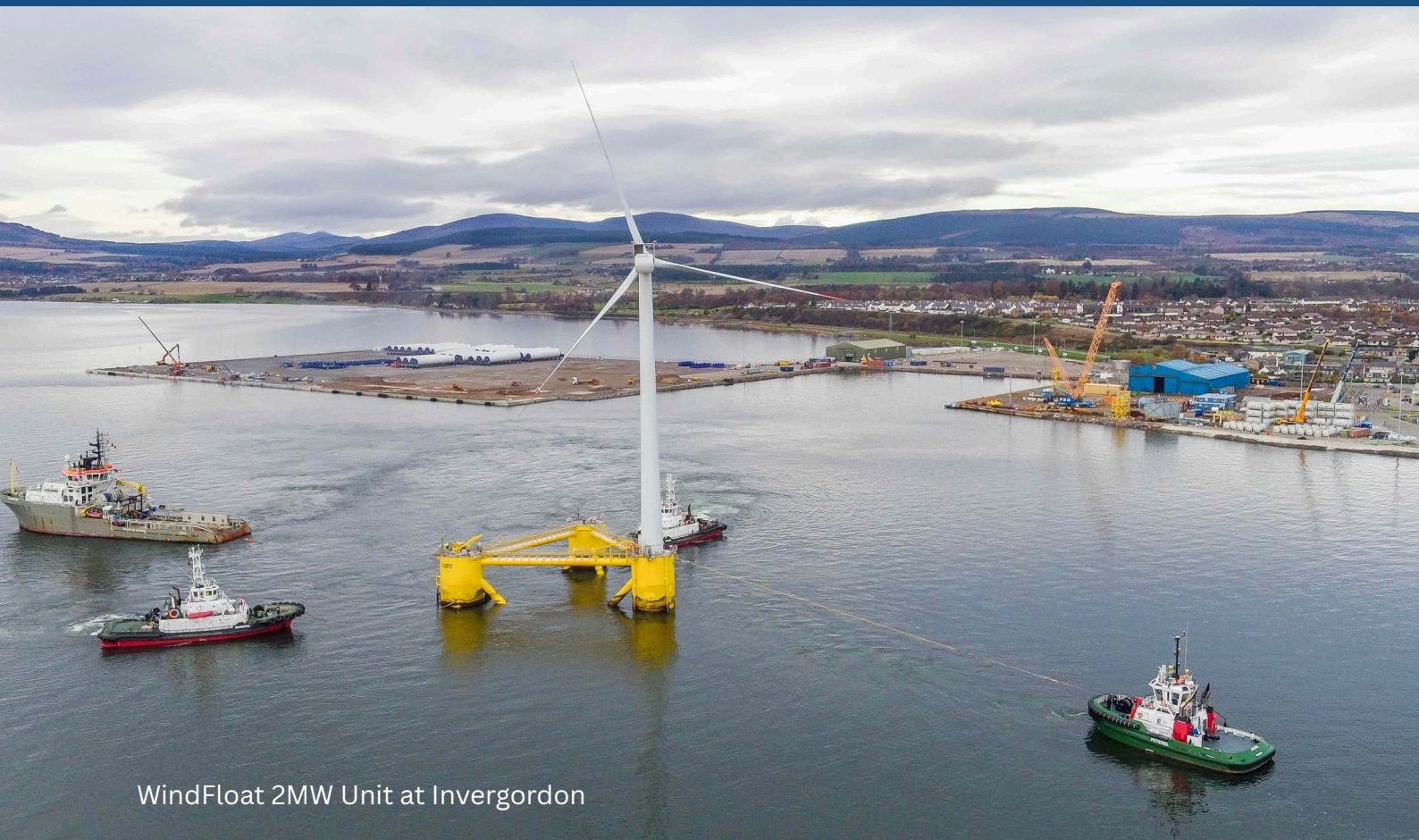


Skills & Workforce Shortages

We call on the next Scottish Government to:

Unlock workforce growth to ensure the Highlands can deliver the estimated 15,000 additional jobs that will be required across the region over the next decade to deliver the clean power revolution.

- **Ease barriers to migration** by simplifying relocation pathways and provide support for workers moving to Inverness and the Central Highlands, including targeted national recruitment campaigns and relocation incentives.
- **Help workers** from other regions to transition, at an appropriate pace, from oil and gas to these new industries and to relocate to the Highlands.
- Ensure UHI and other **training providers receive sufficient funding** to expand vocational courses to the volume that matches employer demand.



WindFloat 2MW Unit at Invergordon



Developing the Young Workforce's Green Careers Expo

- Reduce the excessive and repeated evidence burden required to prove fair-work conditionality for employers accessing small scale grants.
- **Expand childcare capacity and improve affordability** to enable parents to participate fully in the workforce.
- Maintain and enhance **support for Developing the Young Workforce** to promote the opportunities that will be available in our region to our emerging workforce.

“We have the jobs - but not the people to fill them. Unless we tackle workforce attraction and training at scale, business growth will stall.”

- Leading Highland employer

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Housing & Planning

We call on the next Scottish Government to:

Increase housing supply and reform planning to support population growth and economic expansion.

- **Fully recognise the increased workforce** that our area will need to deliver the clean power revolution for the UK.
- To plan for an appropriate number of houses to be built, along with sufficient investment in related infrastructure.
- Ensure that sufficient affordable new housing is built for our growing workforce.



Albyn Housing Association
Social housing in Lairg

MAKAR
net-zero, semi-detached
affordable homes on Lismore



- **Invest in planning** by ensuring that there are enough places in our education system to train the planners that we need for our future housing and commercial development needs.
- **Modify the current planning system** so it is less adversarial and enfranchises entire communities to have their voices heard in planning decisions, rather than just those who understand how the system works and how to be heard. It must encourage those who support developments to be heard as well as those who object.

“The Highlands for too long has been a place that old people retire to and young people leave, like a modern-day Highland clearances,”

- One local chief executive of a large property business warned that the region risked losing another generation of young people if economic growth and housing provision did not keep pace with job creation.

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Transport Connectivity

We call on the next Scottish Government to:

Deliver the infrastructure needed to connect the Highlands with Scotland's major economic centres.



A9

- **Speed up the timetable for full dualling of the A9** from Inverness to Perth and fully commit the required funding for full dualling within the first year of the next parliament.
- Within the first year of the next parliament **publish a timetable for completion of the full dualling of the A96** from Inverness to Aberdeen that includes its commencement by 2029 and its completion by 2040 at the latest and commits the required funding.



Scotrail
Highland Explorer Class 153 trains
have been operating on the West
Highland Line since 2021

“As I get older, and the gulf increases in age between myself and younger members of the team, I find myself increasingly worrying for their wellbeing while driving on the A9”

- Small highland business owner

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- **Publish a timetable for investment in the train line** between Inverness and Glasgow and Edinburgh to achieve a **sub-3-hour journey time**, an increased journey frequency, and better work facilities on every train – tables, Wi-Fi and power sockets.
- **Invest in local transport within the Highland area** so that employees can move easily – whether that’s by bus, rail or road.

Cost Uncertainty and Taxation

We call on the next Scottish Government to:

Provide certainty for businesses by reforming non-domestic rates and ensuring a competitive tax environment.



The Kingsmills Group
Ness Walk Hotel

- **Reform Non-Domestic Rates**

- Stop the huge adjustments to rateable values every three years that can lead to cost increases that threaten the viability of some business.
- Adjust rates thresholds so they stay in line with inflation to lessen the occasions where revaluations take businesses into higher tax bands.
- Rebalance the rates system to create greater parity between businesses that rely on city centre property and online businesses.

- **Reform the Visitor Levy Legislation as promised to allow flat fees and make further reforms so**

- the maximum levy allowed does not risk making our businesses uncompetitive.
- the levy is collected and administered by local authorities and does not add to the turnover (and therefore tax burden) of tourism operators.
- a local authority cannot proceed with a Visitor Levy without publishing a detailed plan for how it will be spent that requires approval by local industry bodies.

Highland Coast Hotels
Lochardil House Hotel



“The draft rateable value assessment is a major issue for us but will have an even more crippling effect for smaller independent hotel operators.”

- Highland based hotel group.

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- **Not introduce the proposed cruise ship levy** – it won't raise meaningful amounts but has the potential to harm our successful cruise business.
- Ensure a **level playing field for our tourism operators** with those in the rest of the UK. Any future rates relief or similar schemes that are implemented in rest of the UK should be implemented in full in Scotland.
- **Not introduce any new business taxes or increase any existing business taxes** by more than the rate of inflation.

Development of Renewables

We call on the next Scottish Government to:

Ensure the region benefits fully from the clean energy transition and that local businesses can access supply chain opportunities.

- Fully recognise that the clean power revolution will change our region and increase our population to such an extent that a plan for housing, health, education and transport must be implemented. That plan should either be driven at a national level or through devolving more powers to our local bodies.
- Help Highland businesses be ready to join the supply chain for tier 1 contractors who are new to the area.
- Co-ordinate efforts with NHS and education to ensure local public services scale at a pace that matches the projected job and population growth.



Port of Inverness

Aurora Energy Services



- Set the example on **local procurement** by adjusting Scottish Government and Local Authorities own procurement procedures to give greater weight to community wealth and short travel miles.
- Re-examine their planning framework to find a **less adversarial way for communities and developers to engage with planning**, and to find a way to include all voices within a community.
- Demonstrate leadership by telling the nation **why the clean power revolution is essential to the future of the UK and Scotland** but also to the Highlands.

“The clean power pipeline coming into the Highlands is one of the most exciting economic opportunities we’ve seen in decades. There is real enthusiasm across the business community to be part of it. The key now is making sure local firms are supported to scale up and fully participate, so that the benefits are retained here in the region for business and the wider community.”

-established Highland based SME

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What We Are Asking the Next Scottish Government to Deliver

Inverness and the Central Highlands will play a decisive role in Scotland's economic future. The growth of renewable energy, the opportunities created by the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, and the strength of our local business community place the region at the heart of the UK's clean power transition.

But opportunity alone is not enough. Without clear and sustained action from the next Scottish Government, the Highlands will not be able to deliver the scale of growth that is now within reach. Businesses across our region are united in calling for a coordinated approach that recognises both the scale of the opportunity and the barriers that must be addressed.

We are asking the next Scottish Government to deliver:

Strategic investment in infrastructure

including transport and energy connectivity, to ensure the Highlands are fully connected to national and international markets.

A stable and competitive environment for business

with policies that provide certainty over costs, support investment and enable companies of all sizes to grow.

Housing and workforce planning that matches economic opportunity

ensuring the region has the homes, skills and public services needed to support an expanding workforce.

A fair share of the benefits from the energy transition

ensuring Highland communities and businesses are fully able to participate in and benefit from the clean power revolution.

The Opportunity for the Highlands

15,000

Additional jobs required in the Highlands over the next decade to deliver the clean power transition and wider economic growth.

24,000

New homes needed across the Highlands to support workforce expansion and population growth.

340+

Businesses represented by Inverness Chamber of Commerce across multiple sectors and sizes.



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Barriers to growth

56%

Businesses ranked skills shortages as their top priority

10,000+

Current housing need already identified across the region

91%

Businesses say dualling the A96 is important

Unlocking Highland Growth

Your Business.
Your Manifesto.
Your Chamber.

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manifesto online

