

**Alex Salmond  
First Minister of Scotland  
First Statement  
AS1 – AS121**

**IN THE MATTER OF THE LEVESON INQUIRY INTO THE CULTURE,  
PRACTICES AND ETHICS OF THE PRESS**

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF ALEXANDER ELLIOT ANDERSON SALMOND**

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- 1. Who are you, including your full name, and brief summary of your career history.**

Rt. Hon Alex Salmond MSP – First Minister of Scotland

Elected as MP for Banff & Buchan in 1987.

National Convener for the Scottish National Party in 1990.

I served as leader of the opposition in the Scottish Parliament when elected MSP for the Banff & Buchan constituency in 1999. I stood down as SNP National Convener in 2000 and from the Scottish Parliament in 2001, but continued as MP for Banff and Buchan until the 2010 General Election.

Re-elected as Leader of the SNP in 2004 and elected as MSP for the Gordon constituency in May 2007.

Elected First Minister of Scotland on 16 May 2007.

Re elected as First Minister following 2011 Scottish election

General Questions about the relationship between politicians and the media

- 2. In your view, what are the specific benefits to the public to be secured from a relationship between senior politicians at a national level and the media? What are the risks to the public interest inherent in such a relationship? In your view, how should the former be maximised, and the latter minimised and managed? Please give examples.**

A: Professional business relationships between senior politicians and the media are a natural, inevitable and important aspect of a democratic system. On 4 August 2011, the Scottish Government, in the interest of transparency, proactively published information about all meetings between Scottish Government Ministers and senior media representatives. I also published my correspondence with News International and News Corporation.

I strongly believe that such transparency is critical to the public interest.

Risks to the public interest occur where there is a lack of transparency, or where particular relationships result in a lack of balance or partial reporting.

**3. Would you distinguish between the position of a senior politician in government and a senior politician in opposition for these purposes? If so, please explain how, and why.**

A: There is a clear difference. Government is responsible for decision making. Opposition is responsible for parliamentary scrutiny. In practice the Scottish Government has no responsibility for decisions regarding media regulation – in particular it has no responsibility for the regulation of broadcasting or for decisions relating to media ownership.

As in the rest of the UK, the press is self-regulated rather than subject to statutory regulation. The PCC code applies equally to Scotland and the rest of the UK.

**4. What are the specific benefits and risks to the public interest of interaction between the media and politicians in the run up to the general elections and other national polls? Do you have any concerns about the nature and effect of such interactions, or the legal, regulatory or transparency framework within which they currently take place, and do you have any recommendations or suggestions for the future in this regard?**

A: Media has an important role in the run up to a General Election in engaging and informing the public about public policy issues being debated as part of the campaign. The media's involvement in election campaigns can help all political parties communicate their message, encourage public debate and help increase turnout.

I believe that the public interest is best served by compliance with the law. In particular those found to have broken the criminal law should be prosecuted. That is key to the public interest. Beyond that any system of voluntary regulation established by the PCC or its successors should allow for people adversely affected by newspapers' actions to receive a proportionate apology and right of reply.

**5. The Inquiry notes in particular in this context that in the 2007 election, the Scottish Sun ran an election-day splash with the headline: "Vote SNP today and you put Scotland's head in the noose". What effect do you consider that to have had on your Party's support, and the overall result, in that election?**

A: The Scottish National Party won the election.

Attached for illustration are copies of the front pages of the two biggest selling newspapers in Scotland on 3 May 2007 neither of whom supported the SNP. (AS 101, 102)

**6. The inquiry also notes that in the 2011 election the SNP had the backing of the Scottish Sun and the Scottish edition of the News of the World. What effect do you consider that to have had on your Party's support, and the overall result, in that election?**

A: The impact of a positive or negative headline on election day is likely to be outweighed by the balance of coverage in the months preceding the election – in other words a single positive or negative headline is likely to have less influence on voter intentions than coverage in the months preceding an election.

The favourable front page in the Scottish Sun on election day 2011 was balanced by unfavourable coverage in the Daily Record that day. The outcome of the election was not determined by newspaper coverage but by the record, team and vision for the future offered to the people of Scotland by the SNP.

Attached for illustration are copies of the front page of the Daily Record and the Scottish Sun on 5 May 2011 (AS 103, 104)

**7. What lessons do you think can be learned from the recent history of relations between the politicians and the media, from the perspective of the public interest? What issues should the Inquiry consider when making recommendations for the future, in relation to the conduct and governance of relationships between politicians and the media, in order that the public interest should be best served?**

A: The public interest has been damaged by illegality and more so by a lack of effective action to stop it. I believe that the public interest is served by the transparency demonstrated by my proactive publication of 4 August 2011.

**8. Would you distinguish between the press and other media for these purposes? If so, please explain how, and why.**

A: Yes. I support the effective regulation of broadcast media to ensure plurality and balance because of the immediacy and visual impact of that medium which far outweighs print media. Regulation of print media should be simple and direct: newspapers should be required to obey the law and prosecuted when they break the law. Beyond that, the regulatory system should comprise a voluntary code, which if breached should ensure offenders apologise and that a proportionate right of reply is provided to those affected.

**9. Please also explain the approach you personally have taken to engaging with media proprietors, senior editorial and executive staff, and political editors within the media. Your answer should cover at least the following, both in relation to your time in office as First Minister of Scotland and in relation to the period of your tenure of the leadership of the Scottish National Party indicating as appropriate whether the information relates to either of those capacities or a private capacity:**

A: Both as First Minister and leader of the SNP I have sought to develop good professional and business like relationships with media proprietors and senior executives.

**a. The nature and frequency of contacts of this nature, whether formal or informal; please provide all available records of meetings and conversations, indicating where possible who initiated them and the purpose and content of these occasions. The Inquiry is aware of the document which was released in summer 2011 setting out meetings with media proprietors, editors and media executives. The Inquiry would be grateful if you could expand on this information as part of your response to this question;**

A: I proactively published information about the nature and frequency of my contacts with the media as First Minister. The nature of these contacts varies between formal business meetings, speaking engagements and business lunches or dinner. **(AS 100)**

**b. details of any relevant hospitality you have given, received or participated in;**

A: Hospitality received or offered by me is very limited and in any case is included in the proactive publication on 4 August 2011.

**c. the value of these interactions to you;**

A: these interactions contribute to developing and maintaining relationships.

**d. the extent to which political support by the media for any individual, party or policy is discussed at such interactions;**

A: Discussion is mainly determined by the primary purpose of the occasion. However it is not unusual for general discussion to also touch on the editorial or reporting stance being adopted by the newspaper.

**e. the extent to which the existence and nature of such interactions are or are not placed within the public domain and the reasons for that.**

A: Full disclosure has been provided.

*Media Influence on Public Policy*

**10. In your experience, what influence do the media have on the content or timing of the formulation of a party's media policies? Please describe, with examples, your party's approach to consultation with, and the handling of representations by, media interests in the formulation of policies directly affecting the media.**

A: In government the main contribution to the formulation of media policy was the recommendations of the independent Scottish Broadcasting Commission established in August 2007. The final report of the Commission (which included representatives

from across the political spectrum) was unanimously endorsed by the Scottish Parliament in September 2008. The Commission's major recommendation – the establishment of a Scottish public service broadcasting organisation to provide sustainable competition to the BBC – has not been implemented due to the fact that broadcasting is reserved.

However the Commission's evidence and report has been highly influential in other areas, such as increasing the share of UK network commissions made in Scotland, improving public sector support for the television and broadcasting sector, and giving Scottish Ministers some additional powers over broadcasting appointments to the BBC Trust and MG ALBA.

**11. In your experience, what influence have the media had on the content and timing of Scottish government decision-making on policy or operational issues directly affecting the media? Please provide some examples.**

A: The Scottish Government has no legislative responsibility for broadcasting or media ownership issues.

**12. From your perspective, what influence have the media had on the formulation and delivery of Scottish government policy more generally? Your answer should cover at least the following, with examples as appropriate.**

A: Media has had little direct influence on the development of Scottish Government policy. Media reporting can of course be one indicator of public opinion generally, or support or otherwise for particular policies.

Media plays an important part in supporting public information campaigns designed to support the implementation of policy. The Scottish Government will also support media campaigns aligned with our objectives. Some examples include:

- ◆ Campaign to increase the numbers of organ donation registrations (Sun, Scotsman, Herald, Courier)
- ◆ The 'No knives Better lives' campaign aimed at reducing the incidence of knife crime (Herald, Evening Times, Glaswegian, Greenock Telegraph)
- ◆ Various 'Ready for Winter' and 'public health' campaigns such as 'winter flu' (Daily Record, Press and Journal, Paisley Daily Express, Evening Times)
- ◆ Long running Great Scot campaign to recognise ordinary Scots doing extraordinary things to the benefit of communities across the country (Daily Record).
- ◆ Campaign to introduce 'Marks Law' a high profile media campaign by Margaret Ann Cummings whose son Mark was killed by a known sex offender in 2004. This campaign led to the introduction of *Keeping Children Safe* a community disclosure scheme which enables parents, carers or guardians of children under 18 years old to make a formal request for information about a named person who may have

contact with their child if they are concerned that he or she might be a registered child sexual offender. (News of the World)

- ◆ The Scottish Government supported the STV Appeal in 2011 which reached 1.7m adults in Scotland and raised over £1.2 m to fund projects to tackle child poverty in Scotland.

**a. the nature of this influence, in particular whether exerted through editorial content, by direct contact with politicians, or in other ways;**

A: In these examples media support in the form of news articles and editorial comment is intended to help shape public opinion and attitudes.

**b. the extent to which this influence is represented as, or is regarded as, representative of public opinion more generally or of the interests of the media themselves; the extent to which that influence has in your view advanced or inhibited the public interest.**

A: Influence in this case is intended to help shape public opinion.

**13. In your experience, what influence have the media had on public and political appointments, including the tenure and termination of those appointments? Please give examples, including of cases in which in your view the public interest was, and was not, well served by such influence.**

A: Appointments by the Scottish Government are made in strict accordance with the Code of Practice on Public Appointments in Scotland. In relation to the media the Scottish Government is responsible for approving the UK Government's proposed appointee as BBC Trust Member for Scotland. The Scottish Government and the UK government are jointly responsible for the appointment of MG ALBA Board members.

The media has no influence on public appointments in Scotland. However media reporting can affect public opinion about the performance of individual Ministers.

One such occasion was the resignation in winter 2010 of the Scottish Government's Minister for Transport, Stewart Stevenson. Sustained negative reporting over a period of days about his handling of the effect of severe weather on the transport system led to his resignation. Despite strong evidence that that the worst winter weather for a generation and inaccurate meteorological forecasts were the most directly relevant factors - media reporting, much of it personally critical, contributed to his view that continued reporting of this nature made his position untenable.

While this example is an inevitable part of political and public life (with many precedents in government across the UK), there was a clear disconnect between views articulated in the media and those of his constituents who returned Mr Stevenson to Holyrood with an increased majority some 5 months later.

Particular Questions about interactions with leading media figures

**14. The Inquiry notes that you arranged in August 2011 for the publication of correspondence between yourself and Mr Rupert Murdoch and Mr James Murdoch. Please explain the circumstances in which you did so. Please provide the Inquiry with all records of correspondence between yourself and Rupert Murdoch, James Murdoch, and any senior executive or editorial staff, whether before or since that date, including private correspondence.**

A: Because of the controversy developing about contacts between senior politicians and the media the Scottish Government proactively published all meetings and engagements between Scottish Ministers with all proprietors, editors and senior executives of media organisations including News International and News Corporation.

I have met Rupert Murdoch on 5 occasions in 5 years since 2007 and met James Murdoch twice during the same period.

I have had no further correspondence with either Rupert or James Murdoch or with any senior executive or editorial staff since the proactive publication of material on 4 August 2011.

Without prejudice to the generality of question 7 above, the Inquiry would also be grateful for your further assistance in relation to the published correspondence, in the following respects:

**a. Your letter of 24 October 2007 to Rupert Murdoch - please set out in full the circumstances in which you attended the formal opening of News International Limited's Eurocentral printing plant on 30 October 2007. Your account should in particular explain whose initiative led to your attendance, and full details of the preceding discussion you had with Mr Murdoch in New York, including the extent to which the support of his titles for any party, policy or person was discussed and if so whether that support was subject, expressly or impliedly, to any conditions or contingencies;**

A. I discussed the opening of the Eurocentral printing plant with Rupert Murdoch when I met with him on 12 October 2007 in New York. We also discussed the Globalscot network, an international network of Scots, and those with an affinity for Scotland, who are committed to advancing Scotland's economic success. My letter of 24 October 2007 reflects this discussion.

I attended the official opening of the Eurocentral plant on 30 October. Also in attendance at the opening was the then leader of the Scottish Labour Party, Wendy Alexander, and the constituency MP John Reid.

**b. your letter of 31 October 2007 to Mr Murdoch – please set out in full the circumstances of your offer to accommodate him and up to four guests at a performance of the play “Black Watch”, the extent to which it was taken up by him personally or through others, and if so who paid for the tickets;**

A: The National Theatre of Scotland was responsible for the hugely successful production of the Black Watch. The Scottish Government had part funded the production and as such had access to complimentary tickets. Given our divergent views on the Iraq war one of my aims was to provide Mr Murdoch with an alternative view of the conflict. I have no knowledge of whether Mr Murdoch attended or not but his evidence to the Inquiry suggested that he had not.

**c. Your letter of September 2008 to Mr Murdoch – please set out in full the circumstances of your invitation to Mr Murdoch to join you as part of the official Scotland delegation to the then forthcoming 37th Ryder Cup Matches in Louisville, Kentucky, the extent to which Mr Murdoch, or anyone on his behalf, accepted your invitation, and if so who paid;**

A: Mr Murdoch was invited to attend the Ryder Cup as a guest of the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government invited a number of prominent Scots, or those with an affinity with Scotland, to build networks as part of the preparations for Scotland's hosting of the Ryder Cup in 2014. As a future host of the competition the Scottish Government had access to complimentary tickets. In the event Mr Murdoch was unable to attend and no one accepted the invitation on his behalf.

**d. Your letter of February 2009 to Mr Murdoch – please set out in full the circumstances in which you came to discuss the possibility of SKY covering the pageant element of The Gathering celebration as an “exclusive programming opportunity”. Your account should in particular explain at whose initiative these discussions took place, who eventually did cover the event, and how that decision was taken;**

A: Homecoming Scotland 2009 was a Scottish Government initiative managed by VisitScotland. The Gathering 2009 was one of the year's signature events. In advance of the event the organisers was trying to secure a broadcaster for the pageant element of the event. I wrote to Rupert Murdoch on 23 February 2009, inviting him to attend The Gathering on 25 July and asked whether Sky might wish to cover the pageant on 25 July. Jeremy Darroch, the Chief Executive of BSKyB responded to the effect that the event was not a natural fit for Sky's entertainment channel but that it would be included in news reporting. A similar approach was to the BBC. In the event the BBC and STV provided news coverage. (AS 15, AS, 45, AS 46, AS 70)

**e. Your letter of 25th January 2011 to Mr James Murdoch - please give a full account of the circumstances in which you met Mr James Murdoch in London in January 2011 and attended lunch as his guest; the inquiry is particularly interested to understand in full the business opportunities for BSKyB in Scotland which you discussed, and the extent to which the support of his titles for any Party, policy or individual were spoken of in that connection; did Mr Murdoch accept your offer of dinner at Bute House?**

A: James Murdoch and I agreed to meet in London. He wanted to elaborate on the company's potential for increasing jobs and investment in Scotland.



My letter of 25 January 2011 to James Murdoch accurately reflects the focus of the discussion. I made the case that as a result of recent transport infrastructure improvements; the excellence of local colleges; and BSkyB's existing presence at Livingston and Dunfermline meant that these sites were attractive locations for further investment. Mr Murdoch confirmed he believed Scotland was the 'gold standard' in business outsourcing. Indeed, on March 11 2011, BSkyB announced 100 new jobs in its Livingston facility.

Mr Murdoch did not accept the offer of dinner at Bute House.

In relation to questions about support from particular titles any such discussion with Rupert or James Murdoch was always met with a request to talk directly to the relevant editorial team.

**15. How does your contact with Mr Murdoch and other senior News International staff during the period between the 2007 and 2011 elections compare with the contact which you had with other media proprietors? The Inquiry is interested not just in the frequency but also the substance of your contacts with other media proprietors.**

A: Senior politicians of all political parties seek to establish good professional relationships with media organisations.

The frequency and nature of my engagement with media proprietors and senior executives is set out in the Scottish Government proactive publication of 4 August 2011. I have released my correspondence with media proprietors and senior editors since 2007. Both the engagements published in August 2011 and this correspondence indicates that contact with News International is broadly proportionate in terms of contact with news organisations as a whole.

**16. Please set out in full the circumstances in which you came to write an article in the first edition of the Scottish Sun on Sunday. The Inquiry would also like to understand your perspective on the circumstances in which your preferred date for the referendum on Scottish independence came to be published in the first edition of the Scottish Sun on Sunday.**

A: I was invited by the editorial team to contribute an article for the first edition of the Scottish Sun on Sunday. I attach the press statement issued in response to reporting of the "preferred date".

**17. The Inquiry notes that you have also published correspondence between yourself and Mr David Dinsmore (Chairman of the Journalists' Charity and Editor of the Scottish Sun) dated 28 April 2009; 4 February 2010; 22 April 2011; 9 May 2011 and 19 May 2011.**

**Please explain the circumstances in which you did so. The Inquiry would be grateful for your further assistance in relation to the published correspondence, in the following respects:**

A: The Journalist Charity was established in 1864 to support journalists and their families in need. This correspondence from David Dinsmore was in his capacity as chair of the Journalist Charity. I understand that the chair of the charity operates on a rota basis. It so happens for the period in question that the position was occupied by an employee of News International.

**a. the Inquiry would be interested to understand more generally your support for the Journalists' Charity, including by attendance at their lunches;**

A: I attended one lunch in support of the charity as First Minister (24 April 2009), and as leader of the SNP on 30 April 1999. I agreed to support a charity four ball being held on 22 June at Loch Lomond Golf course. In the event official business prevented my participation. I also offered to provide a lunch at the Scottish Parliament for auction in support of the charity.

**b. please set out in full the circumstances in which Mr Dinsmore invited you to play golf, and attend a performance at the Scottish Opera with him; your account should explain whether you accepted and if so who paid, and the extent to which such invitations are typical of your relationship with Mr Dinsmore and/or other newspaper editors;**

A: David Dinsmore wrote on 4 February 2010 inviting me to attend Scottish Opera's performance of La Boheme on 25 February. I expect that similar invitations were extended by the company to a large number of other people. I was unable to attend. The golf invitation related to the charity four ball referred to above.

**c. please set out in full the circumstances in which you came to speak at the News International Political Breakfast on 21 April 2011; your account should explain which other politicians spoke or attended, and to which political parties they belonged.**

A: The invitation to address the News International Political breakfast on 21 April 2011 fell during the Scottish General Election campaign period. I accepted the invitation as leader of the Scottish National Party. News reports indicate that no other politicians attended or spoke but News International as organisers of the event were responsible for invitations.

**18. Please give a full chronological account, together with all relevant documentation, of your awareness of allegations of phone hacking and other improper conduct within News International, and any steps you have taken in response. Your account should cover at least the following:**

**a. the extent to which you were briefed in relation to material not within the public domain - for example by the UK Government, the police, any regulatory body, or sources within the industry;**

A: Attached are factual briefings I received from the civil service about various inquiries into phone hacking. (AS 105 – AS 107)

**b. all public statements, whether made by you personally or otherwise on behalf of the Scottish National Party under your leadership, in relation to these issues;**

A: I have consistently condemned phone hacking and supported police investigations into criminality. A summary of my public statements is attached. **(AS 116)**

**c. representations made by you or your representatives;**

A: I wrote to the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport on 17 and 18<sup>th</sup> July 2011 about the draft terms of reference for the Inquiry. **(AS 109, AS 110)**

**d. discussions of these issues with, and representations made by you or on your behalf about them to, anyone within News International.**

A: During our meeting on 29 February 2012, I raised the issue of phone hacking directly with Rupert Murdoch. The press statement that issued after this meeting is provided to the Inquiry **(AS 100a)**.

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed.....



10 May 2012