

Scotland is going to get its own version of Sleazeports

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I have long been an opponent of so-called freeports, which are the onshore version of tax havens that the [Westminster government wants to introduce into the UK](#). To summarise, they undermine fair competition, produce deliberate unfair competition, and are seen as aggressive international tax policy. They may well also undermine EU level playing field rules. Many studies show that freeports are widely associated with crime, tax evasion, money laundering and smuggling. There's very little evidence that they do actually create new jobs, but they do fit into the Singapore-on-Thames agenda.

I was hoping that the devolved administration would hold against what will become epicentres for potential corruption. The attitude of SNP conference, [reported last December](#), was good. They passed a resolution in conference last November saying:

Conference acknowledges that freeports cannot and will not offset the damage caused by Brexit, which is taking Scotland and the UK out of the world's biggest free trade area and single market, and is concerned that the Tories' focus on freeports may be positioned to compete on low-cost, low-wage, low-value opportunities with which they are often associated globally.

Conference reaffirms that is entirely at odds with the SNP's ambition for Scotland's economy to continue to build a high-productivity, high-wage, innovative economy built on the strength of our world-leading technology, businesses and academic clusters.

And now they have backtracked, which shows how in much esteem the SNP leadership holds its membership.

As [they announced yesterday](#):

Proposals have been unveiled for a new model of green ports focused on inclusive growth, fair work practices and delivering a net zero economy.

The Scottish Government is developing plans to establish fair, sustainable, green ports. These would adapt the UK government's freeport proposals, offering streamlined planning processes and a package of tax and customs reliefs.

The Scottish Government's green ports would make it necessary for operators and businesses benefitting from the package of incentives to:

pay the real Living Wage

adopt the Scottish Business Pledge

commit to supporting sustainable and inclusive growth in local communities

contribute to Scotland's just transition to net zero

So, freeports under a green banner. But with all the tax abuses and distortions to the economy thrown in.

What's the conclusion? It is to be that the race to the bottom in tax, regulation and abuse works. And Scotland has fallen for it. The Sleazeports (for what is what these are likely to be, with even aspects of the administration of the law within them effectively outsourced to commercial operators) will now appear in Scotland too. And that's a capitulation that it should not have offered to Westminster.