

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**WELCOME TO SCDI HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS**

**ANNUAL DINNER AND BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS**

**BY SCDI HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS CHAIRMAN JOE MOORE**

- **Thank you Isla. On behalf of SCDI, a warm welcome to you all. Let me begin by thanking our principal event partners – Caledonian MacBrayne, Envirowise, Gleaner Oil and Gas, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, Scottish Water, The Crown Estate, and The Royal Bank of Scotland - for their support. Thanks also to our associate event partners – Diageo, FlyBe, Global Energy Group, Highland Spring, LifeScan, Majestic Wine, and the Port Services Group of companies.**
- **I am sure that we are all looking forward to an enjoyable evening. It has been a sobering week for everyone with an interest in the Scottish economy, but tonight we will be showcasing at least nine reasons to be cheerful and optimistic about the Highlands and Islands' economy.**

- **I reflect that in our last event - only three weeks ago - we discussed the potential impact of the credit crunch with David Cairns, former Minister of State at the Scotland Office. The pace of change, in banking and in politics, since then has taken the breath away. I know that the ‘what happens next?’ question will be on many of our minds. At a national level, in the last fortnight SCDI has met with the First Minister, John Swinney and Jim Mather to discuss the economy. We continue to bring members’ concerns to the attention of the highest levels of Government and work with them to identify action. Here in the Highlands and Islands, we are working with our partners in both the private and public sectors, including The Highland Council and Highlands & Islands Enterprise, to assess the scale of the challenges facing the economy and seek to find solutions. Overall this economy is still resilient, but, for example, we know that the credit crunch is preventing the delivery of new housing in the Highlands. Together we want to find ways to ensure that it continues to be developed in order to sustain economic growth in the area.**

- **This approach reflects the strengthened communications and membership engagement on policy issues which our new Chief Executive Dr Lesley Sawers is putting in place. In the last year, with the appointment of Gareth Williams as Highlands and Islands Manager, we have also stepped our policy work in the region. Thank you for your contribution to this work and for your continuing support for SCDI. Over the next year, we will be considering and implementing the actions necessary here for us to go on delivering for you.**
  
- **In these troubling economic times, we must not lose sight of the long-term future. SCDI's Board and Management Team has agreed that over the next couple of years our forward-thinking policy work will have a particular focus on four themes: Energy and Sustainability; Scotland's Future, including the fiscal regime; Productivity, including Skills and ICT; and International. Gareth and I will be working with the Highlands & Islands Committee and you to scope out our programme in this region. A week ago SCDI held a major conference on Scotland's energy future and we will**

**be considering how the renewable energy potential in this region can be unlocked. SCDI has welcomed the progress made this year by UHI, but I think we all share a degree of frustration that faster progress is not being made to full university status and we urge the Scottish Government to really get behind it. We look forward to Ministerial decisions on the Strategic Transport Projects Review and expect that, in addition, to the announcement of improvements to the Highland Line, they will make good on their commitments to dualling the A9, and to the A96 and A82, and on their comments on the Inverness Bypass.**

- Ladies and gentlemen, with the economy and energy at the top of everyone's concerns - and the production and use of oil and gas continuing to play a major role in this region's economy - I do not think we could have a better Principal Speaker here tonight than the Chairman of Shell UK James Smith. I am sure that we are all looking forward to hearing his thoughts. He has been with Shell since 1983 and has worked in all the Group's major businesses. Much of his**

**early career was in upstream oil and gas production, and he has been involved in Shell business in a number of Asian and Middle Eastern countries, and in the US. He has been head of resourcing, which involved ensuring there is a talented and diverse group of leaders for the top 200 jobs in Shell, and he was also previously on the board of Shell Chemicals. He was appointed Chairman of Shell UK in 2004. James has a degree in physics and is a chartered accountant. He is married with one son, and his hobbies include tennis, golf, skiing, hillwalking and gardening.**

- Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome, James Smith...**