





## FOREWORD

2020 marked a tumultuous year for all those involved in the tourism industry due to the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic – and in 2021, many of the same challenges endure. Nonetheless, the traditional self-catering industry should be proud of the manner in which it conducted itself, showing perseverance, tenacity and considerable patience in responding to the significant difficulties faced.

Over the past year, the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers (ASSC) worked tirelessly on behalf of our now record +1,200 membership, representing the case of small business to policymakers at the highest level, on a range of issues including access to business support grants to engaging on the vexed issue of short-term let regulation.

Despite these challenges, I remain optimistic about the future of self-catering in Scotland and am pleased that the ASSC has published their first ever manifesto for the 2021 Scottish Parliament Elections. While your vote is your choice, and the ASSC will remain politically neutral during the campaign, we have presented our key policy priorities with the health, vibrancy and sustainability of our industry in mind.

We sincerely hope that what we have set out can form a consensus within Scotland's main political parties. The ASSC stands ready to work together with whoever forms the next Scottish Government, as well as all other MSPs in the Scottish Parliament, to ensure the recovery and renewal of Scottish tourism.

**FIONA CAMPBELL**

**CEO, Association Of Scotland's Self-Caterers**

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## THE ASSC'S KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Short-term lets have always formed a crucial supportive part of Scotland's rich tourism offering, typically generating a £732m boost per annum to the Scottish economy and supporting 15,000 jobs.

However, Covid-19 has compelled our businesses to close temporarily, to adapt to the changed environment, and unleashed a wave of uncertainty and anxiety for self-catering operators the length and breadth of Scotland.

The challenges facing Scottish tourism, of which self-catering forms an integral constituent part, cannot be met alone. Meeting aspirations for recovery and overcoming regulatory challenges will require hard work, collaboration and commitment, as well as genuine partnership and collaboration between government and industry. Our maxim must be to ensure that anything taken forward is not disproportionate and which would threaten the fragile recovery of Scottish tourism in these unprecedented and challenging times.

Given the importance of our industry to our unique Scottish tourism offering, as well as to local economies and communities, we call on the next Scottish Government and Scotland's political parties to back Scottish self-catering by committing to:

1. Introducing proportionate regulations: introduce evidence-based short-term let regulations in partnership with industry that balance the needs of small business and local communities.
2. Opposing a tourist tax: drop plans for a tourist tax to allow the industry to recover and to support families to have an affordable staycation in Scotland.
3. Improving grant funding access: support small businesses by enabling easier access to support funding while Covid-19 restrictions are in place.
4. Pursuing responsible reopening and back Scottish staycations: champion the benefits of holidaying in Scotland through self-catering and provide financial support to all operators who will continue to be impacted by household meeting restrictions.





## INTRODUCTION

2020-21 has been a perfect storm for the Scottish self-catering industry. Thousands of businesses closed in response to the pandemic from March 2020, operators experienced severe difficulties in terms of access and eligibility for sectoral grants throughout the year, and the ratcheting up of Covid restrictions following the reopening in the summer rendered businesses legally open yet closed in all but name, before the second national lockdown after Christmas. All of this was compounded by attempts to introduce an onerous licensing system for short-term lets at a time when businesses could least afford it.

Covid-19 has been truly devastating for Scotland's tourism sector, with a large drop in tourist numbers and cancelled bookings as a result of various coronavirus restrictions. Frontline Consultants estimated that the self-catering sector has lost over £265m due to Covid-19 restrictions since September 2020 alone. This figure does not even consider the footfall generated by self-catering visitors in local businesses, hospitality venues and visitor attractions. Bookings plummeted and travel restrictions effectively wiped out a crucial part of the domestic market for those businesses remained open.

In addition to the difficulties posed by the pandemic, there was the spectre of the introduction of an onerous and disproportionate licensing regime. The ASSC's survey work demonstrated that nearly half (49%) would leave the self-catering sector if the proposed licensing scheme was introduced, thereby reducing Scotland's accommodation offering and jeopardising the recovery of our tourist industry.

We know the immense economic contribution that the traditional self-catering sector provides to Scotland, particularly in our remote and rural communities. Holiday let businesses employ local housekeepers, cleaners, laundry services and local tradespeople. Their guests spend money in local food shops, cafes, gift shops, galleries, restaurants, and tourist attractions – many of which would simply be unviable or unnecessary without visitor spending.

**Now more than ever, as we try and look to a brighter future, Scotland needs to back small business and back our traditional self-catering industry through committing to the ASSC's four key policy recommendations.**





## INTRODUCE PROPORTIONATE REGULATIONS

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Introduce evidence-based short-term let regulations in partnership with industry that balance the needs of small business and local communities.

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- Short-term letting has had a positive impact for locals and visitors alike but it is considered to require regulation and a collaborative approach between providers, government and affected stakeholders to mitigate any issues is necessary. However, the licensing regulations taken forward by the Scottish Government contained numerous unintended consequences and was widely recognised as not being fit for purpose.
- In place of a disproportionate and blanket licensing regime in Scotland, the ASSC propose that the next Scottish Government consider a more targeted and bespoke response – the introduction of a registration scheme, with mandatory health and safety criteria, rather than licensing, as the most proportionate and achievable for local authorities in Scotland. This approach recognises the strong intention to regulate short-term lets but achieves the same policy objectives in a more proportionate and cost-effective manner.
- The ASSC has developed Scotland’s Tourism Accommodation Register (STAR), an innovative industry leading scheme designed to enable robust data capture of the health and safety compliance of accommodation providers in Scotland. It also provides evidence of the scale and regional distribution of the sector.
- STAR will address several of the concerns that have been raised about short-term lets by balancing the rights and interest of local communities with those of the short-term letting industry. We hope that this approach can be adopted after the election when the regulatory discussions will recommence.





## OPPOSE A TOURIST TAX

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Drop plans for a tourist tax to allow the industry to recover and to support families to have an affordable staycation in Scotland.

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- The ASSC welcomed the sensible decision taken by the Scottish Government to halt work on the Transient Visitor Levy, alongside the commitment that any future consideration of the levy “will take account of the changed context the industry is operating in.” Such an approach ought to continue into the next parliament. However, despite the impact of Covid-19 on the tourism industry, there are still calls by some stakeholders to introduce a tourist tax.
- The ASSC believes that the next Scottish Government must clearly and unequivocally rule out a Transient Visitor Levy in order to assist the Scottish tourism industry to recover from the impact of Covid-19. An additional tax would merely reduce the competitiveness of Scotland’s tourism sector in relation to our main competitor destinations and we should not be placing additional barriers in the way of our recovery.
- We also need to be clear about who will pay this tax – it would be an added burden on our domestic tourist market and would hit Scottish families in the pocket for wanting to holiday at home.





## IMPROVE GRANT FUNDING ACCESS

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Support small businesses by enabling easier access to support funding while Covid-19 restrictions are in place.

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- Self-caterers acted responsibly and closed their business in response to Covid-19 at often great financial and personal cost. With no income from bookings, they had to rely on vital business support grants which were administered by local authorities. However, many experienced great difficulty in accessing these grants.
- If businesses cannot generate income due to restrictions, the Scottish Government must step up and provide adequate and timely financial support so that jobs and livelihoods can be protected until the sector is allowed to reopen.
- Ensuring that our sector can recover from the challenge of coronavirus is entirely dependent upon ensuring that businesses can access the support grants they need to survive.
- The next Scottish Government must therefore redouble efforts to get promised cash into operator bank accounts as soon as possible





## PURSUE RESPONSIBLE REOPENING AND BACK SCOTTISH STAYCATIONS

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Champion the benefits of holidaying in Scotland through self-catering and provide financial support to all operators who will continue to be impacted by household meeting restrictions.

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- All tourist accommodation, including self-catering, will reopen in Scotland on 26th April subject to the continued suppression of the virus. The self-catering sector is well-placed to reopen and provide families with memory-making experiences and a safe environment in which to have a well-deserved break. Back in July 2020, self-catering led the way in the safe reopening of the tourist accommodation market with our robust industry-leading and government endorsed cleaning protocols, providing a £20m boost to the economy.
- With foreign travel unlikely to be a viable option for the foreseeable future, there is a real opportunity to revitalise the domestic tourism market in Scotland, offer safe and managed holidays for families, and help people rediscover their country.
- There are few sectors in Scotland that better understand the need to return to near normality as much as ours and we hope that MSPs will champion the benefits of holidaying in Scotland through self-catering. Furthermore, policymakers have a key role in communicating that reopening is safe and evidence-led in order reassure communities.
- The ASSC welcomes the Scottish Government's timetable for sectoral reopening but ongoing financial provision is required as household meeting restrictions will continue to impact the viability of some businesses, particularly larger self-catering accommodation, until we reach Level 0. No business should be left behind and risk being penalised through no fault of their own.







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This manifesto provides a clear and unambiguous message: now is the time to back small business and work in partnership to ensure the recovery and renewal of Scottish tourism.

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**Please support the thousands of dedicated and professional traditional self-caterers by:**

1. **Introducing proportionate regulations:** introduce evidence-based short-term let regulations in partnership with industry that balance the needs of small business and local communities.
2. **Opposing a tourist tax:** drop plans for a tourist tax to allow the industry to recover and to support families to have an affordable staycation in Scotland.
3. **Improving grant funding access:** support small businesses by enabling easier access to support funding while Covid-19 restrictions are in place.
4. **Pursue responsible reopening and back Scottish staycations:** champion the benefits of holidaying in Scotland through self-catering and provide financial support to all operators who will continue to be impacted by household meeting restrictions.





ASSC

Supporting self-catering in Scotland

**Fiona Campbell**  
Chief Executive

Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers

[fiona@assc.co.uk](mailto:fiona@assc.co.uk)  
07958 771106