

Election Manifesto - 2025

Peter Biggs

Candidate for the Stanley Constituency



I am standing for election in the Stanley Constituency. This follows four years' service as an MLA, holding the portfolio for Environment and Public Infrastructure (Environment Department and Public Works Department).

My commitment as a member of the Legislative Assembly is to listen to all points of view, to discuss all aspects of any subject matter with stakeholders, and to hold constructive debate with members of the community. After these discussions have taken place, I will represent the electorate, by making informed decisions, or influencing outcomes, according to what I consider is in the best interests of the Falkland Islands, present and future.

Over the last four years I have given much thought to the long-term future of our Islands. Globally I see an increasing number of western countries having problems reconciling their population density with their natural and other resources. Populations are torn between acquiring and retaining wealth and maintaining a society that allows young people to enjoy a standard of living similar to, or better than, that of those who make the decisions today. Presently the Falklands Islands Government is doing a reasonable job in developing our economy in pace with the sustainable use of our natural resources, which are limited in size and under constant threat. In the Falklands we have a small population and a good standard of living, but this status is something we should not take for granted – we must plan to protect what we have. We still have the power to have an orderly and planned future, but this process will require realistic appraisal of where we are now, and what we want for a sustainable future.

Politics and public diplomacy

In accordance with the agreement between the FI and Argentina on cooperation on some subjects, the FI has facilitated a visit to the FI for Argentine “next of kin”. There has been no response from Argentina on the other subjects that were agreed (Brazil airlink by LATAM, etc).

No surprise!

I had the privilege of speaking as part of the Falklands delegation at the C24 event at the United Nations. It was interesting to see how extensively the Argentine story has been taken by so many of the

C24 committee members. I was pleased to refer to the three volume book series, “the Falklands Saga” by Graham Pascoe, as definitive evidence of both the relevant history of the Falklands and also the right of the people of the Falklands to be recognised as a “people” in a historical context, and their justification in claiming the right to self-determination under the UN charter. Our delegation also enjoyed friendly and constructive meetings in Toronto, Washington and New York with political bodies and institutions. I believe it is essential to attend the C24 on an annual basis – if we leave a vacuum, it will be filled by those who wish us harm.

Members of the Legislative Assembly regularly attend various events overseas. The purpose of the attendance is usually to meet politicians from the main political parties in the UK and encourage them to take an interest in the Falklands and what we are trying to achieve. These include the party conferences, Joint Ministerial Council (Overseas Territories) and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association events. Attendance is expensive and we should do what we can to reduce the cost, but at the same time we must be tireless in our efforts to derail the misinformation that is propagated against us. It will be for the next Assembly to choose priorities for attendance at events overseas.

The Environment

I am pleased that the Falkland Islands Government has agreed to proceed with the installation of new wind turbines to produce electricity at the Sand Bay wind farm. This capital project will greatly enhance the amount of renewable energy that is streamed into the Stanley grid, although replacements will be necessary when some of the existing turbines are withdrawn from service due to aging components.

The addition of a battery bank and eventually solar power, backed up by the new power station, will take the Stanley area into the future with a reliable and sustainable energy system that will greatly reduce the consumption of fossil fuels in the Islands. I look forward to FIG continuing to support and promote the use of renewable energy systems throughout the camp and the islands communities.

It is good to see Falklands Conservation and the South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute going from strength to strength, and the Falkland Islands benefitting from the wide range of science that is generated through these organisations. The FIG Environment Department Environment Studies Budget (ESB) also continues to promote many worthwhile projects. It is also wonderful to see individuals and small organisations take up the challenge of providing environmental services such as producing seed for local vegetation species and reseedling with local species, tussac planting etc., in areas that would otherwise fall to vegetation loss and erosion.

Recent FIG Environment Department projects such as the declaration of the Hill Cove Mountains National Park and what I hope is the penultimate stage of the FI Marine Managed Areas development, will set what I hope is a trend towards the deeper protection of some important aspects of our environment. The department continues to work on a variety of projects, including the protection of wildlife in the Stanley Tourism areas, and has recently completed a grid of weather stations over the Falkland Islands, that will provide data on measuring drying/climate change over the Islands.

Environmental science in the FI continues to receive support from UK initiatives such as the Darwin + funding initiative – we must do whatever we can to promote the continuation of this and similar schemes.

Salmon farming must be mentioned in this section of this manifesto. This was a hot topic at the 2021 election, but I expect most the focus will come during and after the forthcoming consultation on the

subject, which I believe will take place in the first half of 2026. I, and probably most of the other candidates for the forthcoming election, will keep an open mind on the subject and look forward to some lively debate.

Regardless of what portfolio I may hold if re-elected, the health of the Falkland Islands Environment will always be one of my main concerns. The environment - both land and sea - of the Falkland Islands, is the one unique and priceless asset we have that should be endless, providing we can protect it.

Farming and living in camp

I welcome the compromise decision to licence VSAT communications in the Falklands, and the benefits of this freedom of choice will hopefully make life in camp easier and more productive. It will certainly make it feasible to run an online business from camp, which will hopefully increase the population of our rural areas, and over time, will increase the value of property and houses outside of Stanley.

It is great to see the initiatives that have been developed by the Agric Dept for a land set-aside scheme and I hope this becomes a popular vehicle for conserving the land and benefitting the environment and the farmers who take part.

I have said it before and will say it again – people that live and work in the camp are not just farmers: they are custodians of the land and the environment, and we all owe them gratitude for the hard work they do.

The new Assembly must continue to look at ways of making life in camp more profitable and rewarding.

Tourism

Tourism will always be an important part of the Falklands, and it is good to see the steady increase in tourism accommodation that is happening. This “**El Niño**” year has not been easy, and the recent weather has been very challenging for cross country travel. Avian flu has devastated some penguin colonies, one of which is the Yorke Bay Gentoo rookery. The Environment Department have refined their cordon roping method in the Yorke Bay area and continue to work with the tour operators to ensure there is a fair ratio of tour guides to tourists.

It appears that most tour operators are doing their best to ensure that the tourists are advised and controlled in a way that minimizes the stress to wildlife. When the Yorke Bay rookery recovers it will be important to gauge if the current ratio required of one tour guide to 16 tourists is sustainable without causing “migration inducing stress” to the wildlife. 16:1 is generous to the operators, and it is essential that operators are completely conscientious in how it is applied.

Education in the Falkland Islands (and overseas)

I am proud of the opportunities we give our young people to make the most of their intellectual potential, including college and university attendance overseas. I am also very pleased that there are now far greater opportunities for apprenticeships that offer quality training both in the Falklands and elsewhere.

I think the education system is now in good shape for the future, following some rough patches over the previous decade. Our generous educational opportunities are one of the things that I will do everything within my power to protect.

Medical and Social Services

I am also proud of our medical and social services. We are lucky to have such services in the islands, and the freedom to refer to the UK for treatment if necessary. There have been problems, but these are now in the past and we must ensure that the resources are available to learn, develop and grow. The quality of our medical and social services is a very important part of our quality of life, and we must take special care that they remain well supported and provisioned. The cost of medical treatment overseas is increasing yearly: we must carefully study why this is happening and make plans to ensure it remains a feasible option as we plan for the future.

In every community there are individuals and families, who for whatever reason, struggle to maintain a decent standard of living. Our small community Social Services team do a great job of doing what they can to advise and support by referral to the various assistance schemes, and it is the duty of MLAs to provide adequate resources to facilitate the continued development and, if necessary, expansion of this compassionate service.

The Public Services

Before the last general election, I did state that I wanted to reduce the headcount in the public service, however I did not want to have a huge review take place that would cost FIG a fortune. This subject was discussed with the Chief Executive, and an undertaking was made that Directorates would look for opportunities to reduce staff if reasonably possible, probably through “non-recruitment” following contract completion. I am pleased to say that this did happen, on a small scale, combined with some localisation of previously overseas recruitments. This is a modest improvement, and I hope it continues.

I must admit that when I was elected in 2021, I lacked awareness of the length and depth of some of the things that FIG was trying to accomplish, despite having been employed by FIG for the years preceding the election. Some of the current plans, namely for capital projects, are huge and complicated, and I am pleased that some burden will be lifted from PWD and Commercial Services by the ongoing recruitment of a “capital projects management team”.

Immigration

I know there will be a sharp intake of breath from some when they get to this section, however I would like to make it quite clear that what I say is no implied criticism of the current system, or of any immigrants. Our nation has been proudly formed and shaped by immigration since the early to mid 1830s. The current, some would say ‘generous’ system, has been in place for several years and I believe it is time to have a close look to see if it is what the Falklands needs at this time, looking forward. We have a small population, and therefore relatively small numbers of people taking Falklands Status can have a significant impact on economic balance and services. Should residence in the Falklands for seven years with a clean criminal and medical record be the qualification for status, or should there be a more sophisticated system that is focused on encouraging applicants that have skills that are in short supply in the FI? What impact will currently planned levels of immigration have on school capacity and medical services and housing? This subject deserves careful consideration and consultation.

Housing

Housing is an emotive issue, and I would like to see the supply of housing outstrip demand in order to temper the price of new houses on the local market.

It is great to see work beginning on Phase 7 – Sapper Hill housing development infrastructure (the project was initiated part way through the 2021-2025 Assembly). This project will provide serviced plots for 100 new houses. It is also good to see the private sector continuing to build houses. In a country that is increasing its permanent resident population numbers by nearly 3% per annum it is not surprising that we have a housing crisis. There are still opportunities for the private sector to get more involved in building houses, and I hope they continue to rise to the challenge. I want to see the Falkland Islands Government continue to facilitate house building by providing land.

A new version of the FIG housing policy will hopefully soon go out for consultation. The housing policy examines the rules for renting FIG houses, both for social housing and houses provided under contract terms.

Banking

It is disappointing that SCB still do not provide internet banking services, nor a cash machine (ATM). I welcome the presentation recently made by another UK banking service, and I hope that in due course this will relieve pressure on banking services generally for FI residents. Modern banking services are an essential component of a modern society, and it is time for change.

The Economy

I am very aware that some members of the FI community are concerned regarding the decision of the Falkland Islands Government to borrow money to provide liquidity in the execution of the large capital projects that are now in process (port and causeway, power station, waste management facility and new wind turbines). I would rather not have borrowed, however when looking at the situation from the point of view of keeping reserves in fixed investment arrangements, while drawing down the borrowed funds as and when required by the timings dictated by the progress of the various contracts, I agreed it was preferable to make the arrangements that are now in place. To delay any of these projects, especially the port and power station, would be disastrous.

The challenge for the next Government is to ensure that these vital capital projects are completed on schedule and within the agreed budgets. To that end FIG are now recruiting for a Capital Projects Management Board to reinforce the PWD and Commercial Services teams. All capital project contracts are geared to enable and encourage local business involvement.

Government revenue is dependent on taxation and licence and investment income (and the many other smaller income streams such as customs duty, landing fees, electricity and service charges, etc). Without doubt the private sector - fisheries, farming, tourism, retail and the many small companies and organisations and individual sole traders that endeavour to make a good living from their work - is the engine that drives the economy of the Falklands. It is the duty of the Falkland Islands Government to ensure that all tax, duties, fees and charges are fair and reasonable, and that there is an appropriate safety net for those who, through unfortunate circumstances, disability or lack of knowledge, cannot cope financially.

Elements of the **Fishery** have had lower than expected catch returns, and hence this and last year have turned out lower than expected revenue figures. Another contributory factor to lower-than-expected revenue has been the reduction in taxable income by depreciation allowances being claimed against the cost of purchasing new fishing vessels. These factors, together, have put a strain on government revenue.

The **Fishing Industry** is the largest revenue generator in the Falklands, and we must ensure that it has the support of FIG in developing and adapting to new challenges. I have pushed for a timetable for full implementation of Exco paper recommendations 16 of 2021 which deals with the advice contained in a MacAlister and Elliot report on the FI Finfish Fishery, as was recommended in the Exco paper and in the recent review of the 2021 Environment Strategy. It is essential that the Falkland Islands Government continues to press for a regional fisheries management organisation (RFMO) to regulate the “Blue Hole” unregulated zone to the northwest of the FI fisheries zone.

As far as **financial management** is concerned it is fair to say we are out of our comfort zone and the next four or five years will be difficult, especially in attempting to produce balanced budgets at the end of each financial year. The Falkland Islands Government must keep expenditure down and concentrate on the efficient delivery of services and capital projects.

There will be decisions coming up that can be influenced by everyone who considers the Falkland Islands their home – choose wisely!

If you want to talk to me about the points raised in this document or any other subject, then please feel welcome to contact me.

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