

2021 General Election Manifesto

- Leona Roberts -

Standing for Stanley Constituency



To start with a little about myself: I was born in Punta Arenas to a Chilean father and Falkland Island mother and my family returned to the Islands when I was three years old – essentially my life has been spent here and I am a passionate Falkland Islander. On my Mum’s side, our family arrived with Governor Moody and I am proud that my children – Nick and Deanna – are 7th generation Islanders.

As a very ordinary individual, I have no claim to any particular expertise. Anything I have achieved has been through hard work and with the people that I have been fortunate enough to have around me.

In 2017, I first stood for election and was fortunate enough to be voted into office. Throughout that time, I have dedicated myself completely to serving our community and, while this has proven personally challenging at times, it has genuinely been the honour of my life. I believe I have been true to my conviction to work hard and do the best that I can for our country and that absolutely remains my intent.

I have learned a great deal in four years – about people, policies, politics and the way our systems work. With regret, I admit that I may have been overly optimistic or trusting in the first half of my term, however I believe I am a much stronger individual now and, with a deeper understanding, am confident that I am better equipped to be an MLA – should the electorate give me that opportunity.

Much progress has been made in four years, but a great deal remains to be done – as it always will. It would be a privilege to be allowed to continue the work that I have been involved in and to do all I can to secure a sustainable, happy and prosperous future for our Islands. In this I include Camp – I never thought of myself as a Stanley representative, but as an MLA for our entire community and will always seek to fully consider the implications of decisions upon Camp as well as town.

My vision for our home remains largely unchanged. I believe wholeheartedly in a strong, confident Falklands, where fairness, equality and opportunity are at the heart of all we do. We are a small country, but we are mighty in so many ways and with courage and ambition I believe we can continue to build a financially stable, forward-looking and inclusive future for all our people.

We must ensure our economic position remains strong and that Government Reserves are adequate, but we need to continue to invest in infrastructure, services and social programmes and that *does* mean spending money. As past actions have shown, there is false economy in allowing anything to deteriorate to the point where the only options are complete replacement or critical failure.

The health, wellbeing and living standards of our community should feature strongly in decision-making. Our economic wealth exists to provide for our people, through delivery of services, securing a high standard of living for all and providing the opportunity for business growth which, in turn, generates the country’s wealth. It is a cycle which requires careful balance.

Despite progress in many key areas, there remains an enormous amount of work to be done on a broad range of issues. I would touch on just some of my key priorities (in no particular order):

People, Wellbeing and Services

- Ensuring that income allows for a good standard of living is essential. I do not accept that welfare support is the answer – I would rather “fix the holes in the bridge” which are causing problems, than fish people out of the water. Social welfare is important and I hope the new Single Income Supplement will help people access the support they need, but this should be a safety net and not an alternative to suitable wages and pensions. The income inequality highlighted in our first State of the Economy report must be addressed.
- I have been vocal about my concerns over the Cost of Living. I am worried by the increasing cost of goods and services, which most significantly impact lower-earners and pensioners, and fear prices may continue to rise due to global issues. If this is the case, the next Assembly needs to react. Increasing wages and allowances has implications, but the consequences of allowing people to fall behind must be recognised.
- The Retail Price Index (RPI) “basket of goods” needs to be reviewed.
- There are a number of significant issues with pensions and I have raised these many times. I hope that the Actuarial Review will provide answers, but solutions will still require strong decisions. I do not accept that directing people to welfare is the answer, nor do I hold with the view that everyone should already have several pension plans in place – that has been, and remains, unrealistic for many.
- Employment rights are long overdue updating – it is now being looked at but should be fully addressed.
- Health services must be maintained and developed. The investment in the KEMH – both in terms of infrastructure and staffing – should continue. Provision of orthodontics is progressing but should be completed and the importance of mental health, whilst finally recognised, must become embedded.
- Tussac House has experienced frustrating delays but will provide an important facility for our elderly and vulnerable. The conversion of the Hillside unit provides a good interim measure, but the permanent high-quality solution to the care of our elderly remains essential.
- We must provide a high standard of education to our children and the improvements made, including in the nursery sector, removing the cap on apprenticeships and revising the CDS, will all pay dividends in the future. I will be glad to see the Camp Education review progressed and policies finally agreed.
- Lifelong learning is critical to upskilling/reskilling our community. I would also like to see programmes which allow individuals who may have left school without qualifications to access education later in life.
- Young people are benefitting from greater careers advice and FE/HE support. We must provide an environment that encourages students to return home and the opportunities they need to progress and to stay. Mentorship should be strengthened and the Management Trainee roles continued.
- The workforce development strategy needs to be reinvigorated and completed. Several Assemblies have struggled to achieve this but it remains a critical piece.
- I have many times questioned FIG’s recruitment, job evaluation and other processes and am pleased that this has now been taken on board, but this work should be progressed.
- Provision of building plots was accelerated but more is required to allow access to reasonably priced housing/plots. Work should continue to encourage and facilitate private development, alongside proportionate tenant/landlord protection and the aims set out in the strategy (such as the selling of old FIG properties) must be actioned.
- I have supported investments in our cultural heritage and sports facilities, and look forward to the cultural strategy being completed, alongside work underway to strengthen protection of heritage assets.

Natural Environment:

- Our natural environment is vital to our wellbeing and our economy. There are dozens of workstreams to be progressed – including waste, renewable energy, reducing emissions and setting Net Zero targets, sewerage, invasive species, habitat restoration and management, water security, protection of wildlife and nature, carbon capture, marine management, pressing for a Regional Fisheries Management agreement to tackle unregulated fishing on the high seas... and the list goes on...

- Establishing the Environment Department was a good (if long overdue) step, but only as a directorate will the environment get its full voice in decision-making. The Environment Strategy can only succeed with substantial funding and full commitment from MLAs, FIG and the community.
- Our national wealth remains largely reliant on the exploitation of natural resources and the steps taken to ensure sustainability must continue. This requires close working with industry and partners to achieve solutions that protect the environment and in turn provide long-term economic security.
- A decision on salmon farming will soon be required. I have supported the work to fully understand how aquaculture is handled in the Islands (currently and in future terms), so that any decision can be well informed. I personally have very grave concerns about the environmental risks posed by this industry.
- Carbon credits could bring substantial benefit to the rural economy and this must be explored as a priority.
- We cannot exempt ourselves from our responsibility and must play our part in tackling the climate crisis.

Economy:

We are in a strong economic position which provides us with an enviable quality of life. This must continue to be strengthened to ensure that services, social programmes and opportunities are maintained and developed.

- The wealth of the nation remains heavily reliant upon our fishing industry. There have been significant challenges for the sector and difficult decisions made, but the extension of ITQ, the agreement of the Fisheries Accord and the work to mitigate the effects of Brexit have all been important positives. By continuing to work closely with businesses and partners we must seek to maintain a successful sector, with strengthened local control, which provides appropriate returns to the community.
- A healthy agricultural sector is essential and, despite some good years, farmers continue to face challenges with both meat and wool production. Enabling our farming community's success should remain a priority and the work that has begun on stabilising FIMCO must continue, along with other facilitators such as the building of the wool warehouse.
- We will face many challenges beyond our control due to the changing global situation – including supply and logistical issues. Food security should be addressed and I would like to see more investment in and support for those looking to strengthen our internal supplies.
- Connectivity is essential to any island nation and key to our future opportunities.
- o The long-awaited commitment to the port is an investment in our future and, although I have expressed serious concerns about increasing costs, this is a critical piece of infrastructure and economic enabler which the Falklands needs. The project will, however, require extremely careful management and scrutiny.
- o The suspension of our Latam flights has further highlighted the importance of the airbridge – truly a lifeline and a service for which we are always grateful. There are ongoing issues and work to try to bring improvements should continue with British Government and MoD.
- o Re-opening South American airlinks will need very careful handling, but these flights are important to many aspects of our lives, including healthcare to business and tourism.
- o As well as the big players, tourism directly provides income to many small businesses and individuals who have suffered because of Covid impacts. Close working with the industry will be needed to build confidence and find the right way forward, allowing for the changes the pandemic has brought about.
- o The need for reliable, high-speed internet will only continue to increase. Speed and costs remain issues and restrict opportunities for innovation. We must continue exploring all the options around future systems such as Starlink – but also ensure that basic services remain viable – so a great deal of work is required in this area. I don't believe that the Regulator role was designed to deal sufficiently with the issues experienced by consumers or to drive the continuous improvement needed. This needs attention.
- o Internal connectivity is vital to Camp. The major investment in FIGAS was urgently needed and a good step in strengthening this essential service. Increased funding for Camp roads has helped, but maintaining the

network will always pose challenges. Workboat Services provides another lifeline to Camp and work being completed should provide information on which to base future options and investment.

- The capital programme should remain ambitious and continue working towards catching up on years of underinvestment. Prioritising will always be challenging but we need more accurate costings and timescales at the outset to allow for realistic planning. Local content is essential and giving businesses time to prepare for contracts and projects is key.

Covid-19

- The pandemic brought a new level of challenge for the Falklands but the Assembly, Government, the private sector, partners (such as BFSAI) and individuals worked extremely hard to protect and provide for us all at a time when we were tested as never before – and generally people pulled together in a way which I will never forget.
- We are in an enviable position compared to much of the world but the challenges are not over and we need to carefully manage the ongoing risks while beginning to move into the next phase of this crisis. Moving towards “opening up” again will require great care and thought, but we must learn to live in this new world, while always protecting our people and health services.
- We must learn the lessons from the pandemic. The Recovery work highlighted areas that need attention and provides us with an opportunity to improve our systems, policies and prepare for future crises.

International Diplomacy & Governance

- Our problems with Argentina have not diminished and are unlikely to in the near future. We must always stand strong in the face of their attempts to bully and undermine the Falklands, politically and economically. It is vital that the world understands the truth about our Islands rather than Argentina’s ridiculous myths and the work to inform other governments and populations must continue. My MLA work overseas has confirmed my belief that the misconceptions about the Falklands are huge – including amongst the younger generations in the UK. We must not allow Argentine propaganda to go unchallenged or for them to set the narrative. It is vital that Falkland Islanders deliver the message and seek support for our right to self-determination whenever possible.
- The Constitutional Review is an important piece of work. We are a proud member of the British family and that will not change, but we must continue to press for the greatest level of self-governance that we can achieve as an Overseas Territory. The voice of the people, expressed through our democratically elected representatives, must always be fully heard.
- There must be separation between corporate government (FIG) and the Legislative Assembly, and I see the role of MLAs as working in partnership with FIG, but *absolutely* to challenge, press for action and set direction. MLAs are not Ministers and do not directly manage the civil service, and I don’t believe we are ready for that form of government yet. However, I would like to see even greater direct involvement and MLA responsibility considered in the Constitutional Review.
- I will always support moves towards greater transparency and openness in decision making.

I appreciate that this is a very long manifesto and yet there is much more I could have said... I would finish by reaffirming my commitment to working relentlessly and with integrity for the good of the Falklands and all our people and, if elected, will always strive to be approachable and open to all, willing to try to help with the ‘small’ personal issues as well as the larger policy matters – as I have tried to be these past four years.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss anything further, please feel free to contact me either by e-mail (leonabob72@gmail.com), on mobile 54753 or via Facebook Messenger.