I am extremely concerned at the wording currently being tabled for the ballot on Scottish independence.

A single question (to be answered ‘yes/no’) will never be able to escape the accusation of being a leading question, and of encouraging one answer over another. Academic papers on electoral behaviour the world over show that a ‘yes/no’ question is inherently biased in favour of the proposition. Thus both ‘Should Scotland be an independent country’ and ‘Should Scotland remain part of the United Kingdom’ are biased, and will cast doubt on the final result. Whether one supports Scottish independence or Scotland remaining part of the Union, doubt is surely the one thing that Scotland cannot afford: the referendum must be final, and the process unimpeachable.

One solution could be to combine the two: ‘Should Scotland be an independent country, and separate from the United Kingdom’. But surely the simplest and clearest would be to follow the pattern used in any normal election, and to provide tick boxes beside two clear alternatives:

- Scotland should be an independent country.
- Scotland should remain part of the United Kingdom.

This works in all normal elections, and would avoid all ambiguity, and any accusation of bias.

3 June 2013