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**BUOYANT MARKET:** Property sales in the north of Scotland are booming, with 16 properties changing hands every day

# North in midst of house sales boom

BY NEIL JOHNSTON

NEW figures have revealed the housing market in the north is booming - with 16 properties changing hands every day.

The statistics show 994 homes in the

Highlands and another 447 in neighbouring Moray were sold between April-June. The figures for the two regions represent 25.3% and 29.9% year-on-year increases compared to the same period in 2013 - well above the Scottish average of 22.4%.

The figures were hailed last night as "encouraging" and an indication of the strength of the economy in the north and the success of the Help to Buy scheme.

During April, May and June last year, 793 houses in the Highlands were sold

and 344 changed hands in Moray. According to the figures released by the Registers of Scotland, property prices have also remained steady.

There was a 0.2% increase in property values in Moray, and prices in the

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Max: 19c

Min: 9c

Weather in full: Page 4

## Tourist dies on A87 two days after student

A German tourist has died after an accident on a notorious north road.

The man's car was in collision with another vehicle on the A87 on Skye.

And police have named the young student killed when the car he was in crashed on the same road's Kyle to Invergarry stretch.

Tributes have been paid to Owain Ramsay, 19, who was an architecture student in Glasgow.

Councillor Hamish Fraser, leader of Skye, Ross and Cromarty area committee, said: "It is difficult to put across a view point on what's recently happened. It could be because of the time of year with increased traffic on the road and more people being unfamiliar with the roads, without suggesting that these crashes are down to drivers coming here from other areas."

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### SPORT

## Foran blow to Caley Thistle

Caley Thistle captain Richie Foran will miss the start of the season after further knee surgery following an initial operation in March. He will miss the season-opener on August 9. **Page 32**



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# Referendum 'casting degree of uncertainty over market'

**Property:** Increase in sales across Highlands 'an encouraging trend'

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Highlands rose by 4.1% per cent increase, although the year on-year average for Scotland was 5.9%.

The cost of a typical home in the Highlands now tops £160,000 - just short of pre-recession values. In Moray, the average price of a house is £141,097.

Both figures remain below the Scottish average, which stands at £162,122, but business leaders in the north believe this reflects the affordability and quality of living in the north.

Stewart Nicol, chief executive of Inverness Chamber of Commerce, described the increase in sales as an "encouraging trend".

He added: "It's good to see an uplift in the figures, and it's good to see a strong

**"It's important to recognise quality of life across the board"**

steady growth in house prices, but I think it's also encouraging that we are below the average.

"In many respects it is reflecting affordability within the region, but I think as well it's important to recognise the quality of life across the board."

Alasdair Fraser, an estate agent in Inverness, said: "I do feel the Help to Buy and various schemes have been of great assistance."

"Without these a lot of young people couldn't have got on the ladder and lending criteria is still very strict."

He also said he felt there would be "a bit more life after the referendum", which had cast a "degree of uncertainty" over the market.

Lisa Miele, property manager at R & R Urquhart estate agents at Forres, said: "We've been really busy for the last 18 months. One negative thing we are noticing is that the referendum is having an effect."

"Forres is historically a place where people come to retire, or come here from down south, and we've not seen that market so far this year.



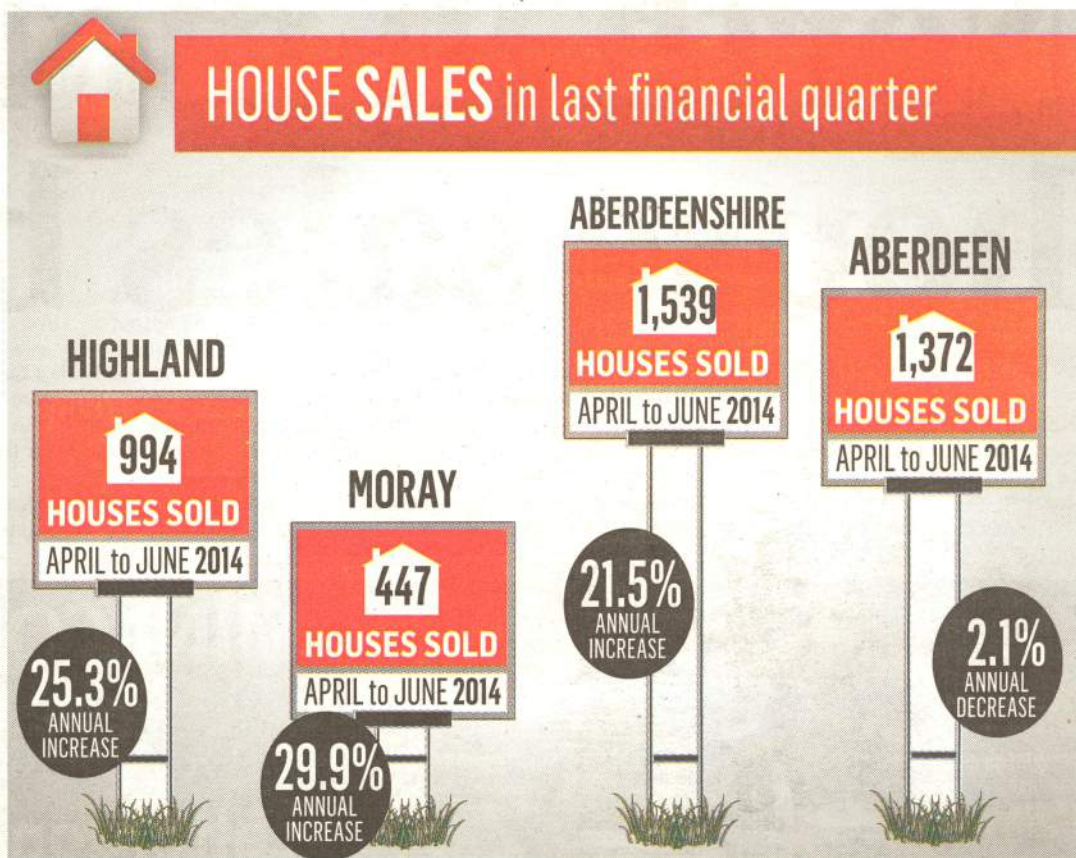
**GROWTH:** The housing market in the Highlands is booming - and prices remain affordable for many

"It's the uncertainty of the referendum putting people off maybe. After we get past September we kind of expect a flurry of activity again."

She added: "Certainly it's been a really good year, prices haven't gone up like elsewhere but there are definitely lots of people looking and things that are sensibly priced and well presented are selling quickly."

Chief executive of industry body Homes for Scotland, Philip Hogg, said the figures were "an encouraging signal of recovery in the housing market".

He added that the Scottish Government's Help to Buy shared equity scheme had "provided a huge boost, not only in terms of stimulating the building of much needed new homes but also in supporting jobs and wider economic recovery".



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