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Wednesday 7 December 2016

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Scottish Parliament

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[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:00]

Portfolio Question Time

Communities, Social Security and Equalities

Disability Awareness

1. **Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to support a national campaign to raise awareness of disability and reduce stigma, in light of the recent report by Disability Agenda Scotland. (S5O-00429)

The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman): I welcome the publication of Disability Agenda Scotland's report. Last week, we published "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Our Delivery Plan to 2021 for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities", in which we commit to delivering a one Scotland campaign in 2017 to reduce stigma. The focus of the awareness campaign will be on employment, which is also a key theme in Disability Agenda Scotland's report.

Jeremy Balfour: In Scotland, only 43.8 per cent of individuals with disabilities are employed, compared with 72.3 per cent of the wider population. In recent years, employment rates have actually fallen among some disabled groups. The DAS report acknowledges that disabled people still do not feel equal, and although there are nice words and documents, the aim of improving matters further is simply not being achieved. That is not good enough. Will the minister confirm what the Scottish Government will do to get employers to treat disabled people as they treat the wider population?

Jeane Freeman: In the disability delivery plan that I mentioned, we make a commitment to reduce the employment gap in Scotland by half and to consult public agencies and local authorities on setting a target for public sector employment. I fully intend that we will do a great deal better than the United Kingdom Government. A recent report by the all-party parliamentary group for disability highlights that it will take the UK Government until 2065 to meet its target of halving the employment gap for disabled people if it goes at its current slow pace—a bit like for welfare benefits.

In addition, we will work specifically with employers in Scotland to ensure that they take advantage of the UK access to work fund and that disabled people seeking employment are aware of the fund and are assisted and advised on how to apply to it.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): Does the Scottish Government agree with me that one way to reduce the stigma experienced by those with disabilities is for the Tory Westminster Government to treat people with dignity and respect, rather than threaten to reduce their incomes by slashing disability benefits, and to stop imposing draconian benefit sanctions on some of the most vulnerable in our society?

Jeane Freeman: I do, of course, agree. I find it very disappointing that our Conservative colleagues to my left—although clearly not politically—insist on groaning every time we mention exactly that damage that the UK Government is doing. Indeed, let me quote another report: the National Audit Office points out that the sanctions regime is costing £285 million while producing a saving of still only £132 million. It also points out that there is very weak evidence to support the DWP's sanctions approach. Any notion that sanctions and reducing benefits encourage people into employment—as opposed to what we know for a fact, which is that they increase poverty among those individuals—is of course false. Our colleagues in the Scottish Tory party can continue to try to support and promote the UK Government's policy, but it is being dismantled by the minute and the public is becoming very well aware of that.

Local Government Finance

2. **Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the Audit Scotland report, "Local government in Scotland: Financial overview 2015/16". (S5O-00430)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): The Scottish Government considers the Audit Scotland report to be a fair assessment of the financial position of local authorities in Scotland. The report highlights the pressures that councils, like other parts of the public sector, face, but also identifies that, despite those pressures, councils are continuing to deliver improvements to services and that the pressures are approximately the same as the reduction in the Scottish Government's total budget over the period 2010-11 to 2016-17. The report makes a number of recommendations aimed at helping councils to meet future pressures. We welcome the report and would expect all local authorities and

councillors to consider and take any necessary action to implement its recommendations.

Maurice Corry: The crucial detail in the report is that councils are starting to use their reserves to fund services: thirteen did so in 2015-16 and more will do so in the next few years. That cannot continue.

Audit Scotland says that it is

“concerned about councils’ slow progress in delivering services differently, rather than relying on incremental savings to existing models of service delivery.”

Does the minister agree that the current situation is unsustainable? What specific actions will the Scottish Government take to help councils to have the sense of ambition that Audit Scotland says is necessary for them to adapt?

Angela Constance: Audit Scotland came to the view that the overall financial health of local government was generally good. It reflected that there was a slight increase in the overall reserve that is in the gift of local authorities, with a reduction in overall debt. Nonetheless, the report identifies significant challenges that lie ahead and the need for local authorities to consider how they work to deal with them.

That underlines the importance of public sector reform. It is no secret that this Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities are of the shared view that how we do business will have to be different and that we will have to continue on the journey towards reform of public services, in order to make the public pound go further, improve outcomes for communities and, crucially, ensure that communities are more involved in decision making and the allocation of resources.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the reduction in real-terms funding of councils since 2010-11, which is proportionally the same as the cut to the Scottish Government’s total budget over the same period, is due to the continuation of the United Kingdom Tory Government’s failed austerity agenda?

Angela Constance: Yes, of course I agree with that. It is clear that local government has been treated fairly, despite the cuts to the Scottish budget from the United Kingdom. Local government finance settlements were maintained in Scotland on a like-for-like basis over the period 2012-16, with extra money for new responsibilities. Taking into account the additional £250 million to support the integration of health and social care, the overall reduction in 2016-17 funding equates to less than 1 per cent of local government’s total estimated expenditure.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): We are right to point out where failed Tory

austerity is damaging Scotland but, regardless of who is to blame, the Government has disproportionately cut the local government budget.

Regardless of that, the big question that local government workers and people across Scotland are asking is: what is this Parliament going to do about it? This week, the president of COSLA, David O’Neill, warned that up to 7,000 jobs could go as a result of a cut of £500 million. Given that the cabinet secretary’s brief covers inequality, poverty and all the work that senior ministers are trying to do, has she had or will she agree to have carried out an impact assessment of the cuts that will take place across local government?

Angela Constance: Of course an equality impact assessment is done of the Government’s budget as a whole. The crucial thing that we must recognise is that local government has had the same reduction in its funding as has been imposed on the Scottish Government by Westminster. I am glad that, unlike our Conservative colleagues to my left, Alex Rowley recognises the impact of Westminster austerity. The impact is not just in the reduction of financial resources for this place and, therefore, for our partners in local government; there are other impacts. I am conscious that, as a result of austerity, local government will have increased demand on its services. This Government is having to continue, where possible, to mitigate against the very worst aspects of austerity, such as welfare reform.

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (Meetings)

3. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. (S5O-00431)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): Ministers regularly meet COSLA to discuss a wide range of issues as part of our commitment to working in partnership with local government to improve outcomes for the people of Scotland. I last met Councillor David O’Neill on 1 December and my colleague, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution, met COSLA group leaders on Tuesday 6 December as part of the series of meetings to discuss the spending review and the forthcoming 2017-18 local government finance settlement.

Edward Mountain: Two weeks ago, it was reported that COSLA had withdrawn from negotiations over the increase of local taxes used for central policy aims. That followed COSLA’s view that

“There is a clear and honourable link between taxes raised from local householders being spent on local services and this has been a Scottish tradition for generations. The Scottish Government will destroy that link”.

Does the minister agree with COSLA, or does she believe that it is wrong?

Angela Constance: I certainly do not agree with Mr Mountain’s characterisation of the situation. As I said in my original answer, my colleague Derek Mackay met the COSLA group leaders only this week to discuss the forthcoming financial settlement; Mr Mackay has repeatedly put on record, as have other ministers, that all council tax collected by each local authority will remain with each local authority, and that any additional revenues that local authorities raise from the unfreezing of the council tax will also remain with local authorities.

Gypsy Traveller Sites (Minimum Standards)

4. Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it last received an update from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities or the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers regarding the enforcement of minimum standards for Gypsy Traveller sites. (S5O-00432)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): There is no requirement for COSLA or the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers to update the Government on progress towards meeting the minimum standards for Gypsy Traveller sites. However, the Scottish Government has met COSLA and ALACHO officials to discuss issues around sites, including site quality, and it will continue to do so.

Mary Fee: Across Scotland there are numerous examples of minimum standards still not being enforced at Gypsy Traveller sites since the Scottish Government published its guidance in May 2015. For example, Duncholgan Gypsy Traveller site near Lochgilphead is one that I have visited. Despite residents raising numerous concerns over lack of basic provisions for years, no action has been taken and no progress has been made in improving the very poor living conditions there. The Duncholgan site lacks adequate lighting, the road is still in an extremely poor condition, and the site has no bus stop.

It is clear that the current enforcement strategy is failing, as the concerns of residents are being ignored and the improvements at many sites have been minimal at best. Will the minister take responsibility for, and control of, the situation and implement an inspection programme for all Gypsy Traveller sites in Scotland, to ensure that Gypsy Travellers do not have to continue to live in substandard conditions on sites that are failing to

offer basic provisions or to meet minimum standards?

Angela Constance: I can reassure Mary Fee by saying that Kevin Stewart, the Minister for Local Government and Housing, has written to Argyll and Bute Council with reference to the site that she mentioned.

On the broader work that the Government is doing, we will review progress towards implementing the standards with site tenants, site providers and other key stakeholders during 2017. We have said that we expect sites to meet the standards by 30 June 2018, and we are also considering linking the guidance to the Scottish social housing charter, which we consulted on recently and which appears to have been well received. The purpose of the Scottish social housing charter is obviously to improve the quality of services received by all members of the community, and that will give opportunities for clearer statements about what the Gypsy Traveller community is entitled to expect. I hope that including the site standards in the charter indicates the seriousness with which the Government takes the issue of poor standards on Gypsy Traveller sites.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I thank Mary Fee for raising this question. The issue was always high on the agenda of the Equal Opportunities Committee when I was a member, and we were particularly concerned about the relationship between local authorities, local communities and Gypsy Traveller sites.

What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure on-going cohesion with local communities, local communities and Gypsy Traveller sites?

Angela Constance: The Scottish Government works closely with COSLA on this issue. It is a joint aim of the Government and COSLA to ensure cohesion between Gypsy Travellers and the settled community. There are a number of aspects to the issue, including the revised guidance on unauthorised sites, which will set out responsibilities for the Gypsy Traveller community and local authorities.

It is important that we also emphasise the contribution that Scotland’s Gypsy Traveller communities have made to our national life, and we will include that in the strategic programme of work, which will be published during 2017.

We are working to better identify better practice in community cohesion work, using the results to inform better collaborative approaches with our partners across the public sector and the third sector. We will also explore ways to support public bodies in implementing the element of the public sector equality duty that is concerned with

fostering good relations, with regard to race equality and community cohesion.

Personal Independence Payments (Descriptors)

5. Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it has given to amending the descriptors for the activity “Moving around” that are used to assess personal independence payments. (S5O-00433)

The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman): As the member knows, we have carried out an extensive consultation exercise to help to inform our approach to social security in Scotland, and we will publish our report on the consultation responses early in the new year. Those consultation responses will help to inform the work of the disability and carers benefits expert advisory group that will be established to provide recommendations and guidance on eligibility criteria, assessments, and disabilities and conditions that should be given an automatic or lifetime award.

Richard Lyle: Is the minister aware that, presently, the descriptor requires people to stand and then move more than 1m but not more than 20m, either aided or unaided, if they are to be considered for the mobility scheme and other support? That descriptor is causing loss of provision to many people in my constituency. What further changes does the Scottish Government intend to make in order to deliver a fairer, people-centred social security system—rather than what the Tories are doing—in our communities, when we have the power to do so?

Jeane Freeman: I assure the member that I am aware of the changes that have been made in that descriptor, not only from my work as a minister but as a constituency MSP. Many constituents have explained to me in detail the significant distress and subsequent hardship that have been caused to them.

We have been clear from the outset that our social security system will be an investment that we collectively make in ourselves and in each other, that the system will have embedded throughout its operation the key principles of dignity, fairness and respect, and that, in order to get that right, we need to build the system from the ground up. To continue our commitment in that regard and ensure that the system is built on the foundation of real, lived experience and expertise, in January we will launch the recruitment exercise for 2,000 volunteers to join our experience panels. Those volunteers will be drawn from individuals who currently receive one or more of the 11 benefits that will be devolved to the Scottish Government, and will work with us in the long term

to help us to make the right improvements and the changes that are needed to every aspect and detail of how our system will work, including where assessments are done.

The approach that we will take will ensure that there are fewer assessments, improved decision making and greater use of lifetime and long-term awards, and that all of that will be based on evidence, as opposed to what too often appears to be subjective opinion.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Is the minister considering the removal of the private sector from a new Scottish disability assessment process? Will the assessments be run purely by a public sector agency?

Jeane Freeman: The question of how assessments will be done—where we think that they are necessary—is part of the consultation exercise. It would be contradictory of me to argue that we should build the system from the ground up and listen to what people tell us and then to make a decision now about how we would conduct assessments, in advance of that consultation exercise and in advance of the 500 responses being properly analysed and our being able to see what they say.

We have in Scotland a public sector provider that has some input into the assessment process, but we will make the decisions about what the assessments should be, how many we think we will need and how they will be conducted, based primarily on the evidence that we receive and on that building-from-the-ground-up exercise that I mentioned. We will, of course, inform Parliament in due course of the approach that we intend to take.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): As of next year, the Scottish Government will have legislative power over a number of benefits, including those associated with the extra costs of living with a disability. What consideration has the Scottish Government given to further devolving disability benefits at local level, to health boards, local authorities or new partnerships, to allow for personalised care packages?

Jeane Freeman: As Ms Well knows, the next key step that we have to take is to bring a draft bill to Parliament before next summer to create the legislative platform that we need in order to deliver benefits. Work on how and in what manner those benefits will then be delivered, and on who might do that—I have answered on that previously—is part of the current options appraisal work to bring options to ministers about the exact shape and nature of the new social security agency for Scotland. As that exercise reaches its conclusions in the early part of next year, we will take

decisions on that basis and, of course, inform Parliament.

However, I do not accept that personalisation of care and an approach that is based on the principles of dignity, fairness and respect is either a localised system or a nationalised system; I do not have that binary approach to the matter. I look forward to receiving the options that come to me from the stage 2 options appraisal and considering what is the best mix that we can take forward, in a way that is efficient for our public finances and which ensures that a maximum amount of our expenditure goes on the benefits themselves.

Hostel Accommodation (Glasgow)

6. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with Glasgow City Council regarding the hostel for homeless men, the Bellgrove hotel. (S5O-00434)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): Homelessness services are the responsibility of local authorities, and addressing the needs of the residents of the Bellgrove hotel is therefore a matter for Glasgow City Council. However, we are aware of the concerns around the Bellgrove hotel and my predecessor met the leadership of Glasgow City Council to discuss the issue.

Since being appointed as minister, I have taken an interest in the issues associated with the Bellgrove and I have asked officials to continue to engage with the council on the Scottish Government's behalf; discussions have focused particularly on strategically reviewing Glasgow's homelessness services.

I know that Mr Mason has taken a close interest in the issue, and I think that he will agree with me that the best interests of the Bellgrove's residents can only be met as part of a wider approach that helps to address issues such as rough sleeping and the provision of homelessness services for those with the most complex needs in Glasgow.

John Mason: As I expect that the minister will be aware, the BBC screened a documentary on the Bellgrove hotel in 2000. Nothing of any real substance has happened since then, and there is no real inspection regime for the Bellgrove. Will the minister consider strengthening the Care Inspectorate's powers to require it to inspect such establishments?

Kevin Stewart: I am willing to consider whether there is a future role for the Care Inspectorate in the regulation of institutions such as the Bellgrove. However, the hotel is licensed as a house in multiple occupation and Glasgow City Council has used the HMO licensing framework to require some improvement in its condition. The priority is

to ensure the wellbeing of the Bellgrove hotel's residents and to see to it that their needs and wishes are considered. The hotel is not typical of homeless accommodation in Scotland, and the case involves very complex issues. I assure Mr Mason that I will continue to keep a close eye on the matter. This morning, I met representatives of Glasgow homelessness network, and Mr Mason can be assured that I will continue to look at all aspects of homelessness and rough sleeping in Glasgow.

Fuel Poverty

7. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it will set a new target to eradicate fuel poverty. (S5O-00435)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): We will consult on a new fuel poverty strategy, including a new fuel poverty target, next year. That will involve the commissioning of an independent review of the definition of fuel poverty, as recommended by the fuel poverty strategic working group, so that we ensure that we set the correct policy objectives and have the correct basis for targeting resources and measuring progress. We remain committed to our ambition of eradicating fuel poverty

Jackie Baillie: The cabinet secretary will be aware of a small but welcome drop in fuel poverty, but 748,000 people—one in five of Scotland's population—are having to choose between heating and eating, so setting a target to eradicate fuel poverty remains essential. I press her on when she will bring forward the strategy that will contain that target. Can she also tell me whether she will review the winter fuel payment and winter fuel allowance as part of that process?

Angela Constance: We must ensure that there is a synergy between our work on social security and our work on fuel poverty. There were some important recommendations—there were more than 100 recommendations—in the reports from the two independent working groups on the overall strategy and on rural fuel poverty.

Although the latest statistics show a welcome decrease, with nearly 100,000 fewer households in fuel poverty, nonetheless—as Jackie Baillie said—748,000 households continue to be fuel poor and 203,000 households are in extreme fuel poverty. We need to progress the work apace, and it must be done properly.

In my initial answer, I outlined the work that must be done over the course of next year. Next week, Kevin Stewart will meet the Scottish fuel poverty forum to discuss the work that has been done by the working groups. We will give our response at the beginning of next year.

In the first half of next year, the work to look at the definition of fuel poverty will commence and be completed. The next stage, later in the year, is to introduce the strategy for consultation prior to the introduction of the warm homes bill in year 2 of this session. If Ms Baillie would appreciate more detail, I am happy to meet her.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Scottish Government publishes its budget next week, which will give it the opportunity to allocate some of the very generous allocation of £800 million extra in capital that the United Kingdom Government has passed on in the autumn statement to be spent on energy efficiency measures to help tackle fuel poverty. Will it do so?

Angela Constance: Addressing fuel poverty and investing in measures to tackle it has always been a priority for this Government. It is a shame that that approach has not always been replicated by the UK Government, which in June 2015—as members may remember—ceased the green deal scheme without any warning, thereby removing £15 million in consequentials.

As a Government, we have not demurred from investment and we recognise its importance. From 2009 onwards, we have invested £650 million and, in our programme for government, we have the additional commitment of a further £0.5 billion over this session of Parliament. However, we have to remember that the biggest driver of increases or decreases in fuel poverty is the price of domestic fuel. Fuel poverty in Scotland would be around 8 per cent rather than 30 per cent if it was not for the inflation-busting increases in domestic fuel costs. It is a pity that the UK Government has not done more to tackle the rising costs of fuel.

Local Government Funding

8. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether the money raised by local authorities should be kept in their areas. (S5O-00436)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): All the money that is raised by local authorities through the council tax, non-domestic rates or locally set fees and charges is kept in their communities, unless they choose to spend it elsewhere.

Finlay Carson: Since the Scottish National Party came to power, local authorities have been strangled by a Government that is intent on centralisation. The current council tax grab is a further example of that. The Government is happy to talk the talk about community empowerment, and for years the SNP has bleated on about the democratic deficit in the UK, so perhaps it should look at its erosion of, and the increasing deficit in,

local democracy and accountability. Does the Government intend to centralise any more local authority spending?

Kevin Stewart: Mr Carson obviously did not listen to the first answer that I gave him. He talks of a “council tax grab”. The Scottish Government has been clear that all the money that is raised through the council tax will remain in the local authority area in which it is collected, just as from 2011 we have allowed all local authorities to keep their non-domestic rates. Of course, locally raised fees and charges are also kept by local authorities. Mr Carson should pay due attention to the initial answer that he is given before coming up with a supplementary that is way off the mark.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does the minister agree with the Resolution Foundation that

“The SNP’s tax increase would raise revenue in a progressive manner, with the tax rise falling harder on higher income households”?

Will the minister expand on how all local authorities receive their fair share of funding through a needs-based formula?

Kevin Stewart: On the first question, I agree with the Resolution Foundation that our reforms to the council tax will protect household incomes, make local taxation fairer and ensure that local authorities continue to be properly funded while being more accountable.

On the second question, the needs-based formula takes into account population bandings, levels of deprivation, remoteness—including the extra cost of providing services to our island communities—and road links. The formula is kept under constant joint review with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to ensure that it is as fair as possible.

Employment and Support Allowance

9. Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how many people in Scotland it estimates would be impacted by the United Kingdom Government reducing employment and support allowance to claimants placed in the work-related activity group. (S5O-00437)

The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman): The Scottish Government is very disappointed that the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not take the opportunity to reverse his proposals to cut employment and support allowance in his recent autumn statement. That was despite the House of Commons passing a motion calling for a pause in the proposed cut, and despite the Department for Work and Pensions’s estimate that the cut will affect around 500,000

families across the UK. Those who are affected will see their support reduced from £102.15 to £73.10 per week when the cut is introduced in April 2017 for new claimants. Unfortunately, employment and support allowance is, and will remain, fully reserved to the UK Government.

Ben Macpherson: Does the minister agree, first, that the cut of £30 a week for people who are unable to work lacks any evidence base suggesting that it will move disabled people into work; secondly, that it will act as a real disincentive to disabled people who are trying to get back into work; and, last, that it will produce only further hardship for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions?

Jeane Freeman: The cut that Ben Macpherson refers to is, of course, a 28 per cent reduction in support for disabled people. That cut is from a Government that tells us that it wants to help disabled people to move into employment and, indeed, to halve that employment gap. It is hardly surprising that the report that I referred to earlier pointed out just how long it will take the UK Government to meet the target that it claims it wants to meet when it is doing so much to prevent itself from even getting there.

There is no evidence whatsoever that cutting benefits or imposing sanctions assists people or incentivises them into employment. Indeed, evidence from Sheffield Hallam University that the Social Security Committee has recently read, and other evidence, including the National Audit Office's report, all indicate the contrary: that cutting benefits and imposing sanctions further drive people into poverty and, in themselves, make it very difficult for individuals to have the means by which to seek employment and sustain it. Further cuts to what limited benefits there are to support people in that exercise seem to me to be utterly contradictory to the UK Government's claimed approach—although it is really not surprising when one thinks about the ideology based on which the Government operates.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Now that the Scottish Government has top-up powers in benefits, will it tell us precisely how and when it will use those powers?

Jeane Freeman: I have to say that that was nothing if not predictable. As we have—*[Interruption.]* If the chaps over there will just pause for a moment, I will reply.

We have made very clear the steps that we have to go through in order to deliver the benefits that will be devolved to us. We have also made clear, both in the manifesto on which we were elected and now, as the Government in Scotland, where we will use the top-up powers and where we will introduce new benefits. To do anything in

addition is, of course, a matter of political choice, in the circumstance that the Scottish budget has been significantly reduced—by just under 10 per cent—over a number of years.

I also make the point that what my Conservative colleagues on my left are arguing for is, of course, that people in Scotland should pay twice: first, because the UK Government is choosing to make political choices that attack the most vulnerable people, and secondly, to mitigate that choice. We are already spending £100 million a year just to stand still and to mitigate the worst effects of what that Government is doing, which the Conservatives continue to defend. It ill behoves them to argue that we should do more than we are doing when their sights should be trained on getting their party's Government to stop the policies that it is pursuing.

Independent Review of the Scottish Planning System

10. **Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what action it is taking in response to the findings of the independent review of the Scottish planning system. (S5O-00438)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): Since the independent panel's report was published, the Scottish Government has undertaken a rigorous programme of work, including extensive stakeholder discussions and research. We are using that work to develop a package of reform, including legislative change, as well as wider actions that can be taken forward ahead of a planning bill.

Alison Harris: Does the Scottish Government accept that there should be a focus on reusing brownfield sites as one way of boosting house building in Scotland?

Kevin Stewart: The Scottish Government will look at a number of things over the piece in the planning review. We have invited more than 100 people to participate in six themed working groups. We have commissioned research into infrastructure charging mechanisms, enforcement, 3D visualisations and barriers to engagement. We have also launched a consultation on raising planning fees. We will look at all aspects of planning and I hope that many folk will engage during the course of the consultation, which will begin in early January. I am sure that, during the course of that consultation, there will be discussions about use of brownfield sites.

Disabled People (Benefits Cap)

11. **James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact the

Westminster reduction in the benefit cap will have on disabled people and households in Scotland. (S5O-00439)

The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman): The Scottish Government has voiced to the United Kingdom Government its serious concerns about the impact of the new lower benefit cap. The benefit cap is, and will remain, reserved to the UK Government.

The Department for Work and Pensions estimates that the benefit cap reduction will affect around 5,000 households in Scotland. However, a recent Chartered Institute of Housing report estimates that the number that will be affected in Scotland is higher, at around 6,700 households, which include more than 20,000 children.

Although claimants of personal independence payment and disability living allowance and claimants in the employment and support allowance support group are excluded from the cap, people who are placed in the work-related activity group for ESA might be subject to the cap.

James Dornan: I visited Shelter on the day when the reduction in the welfare cap took effect, and that morning I witnessed staff dealing with a 7 per cent increase in calls. Does the minister think that the imposition of welfare cuts by the UK Government will put people at further risk of homelessness?

Jeane Freeman: Yes, I do. Even over the short time for questions this afternoon we have heard a catalogue of cut after cut by the UK Government. Those cuts affect the people who are least responsible for the current state of the UK economy and who are least able to meet the demands that are placed on them.

There is clearly a risk of homelessness as households struggle to make ends meet. Rent arrears are increasing as a result of cuts to funding for temporary housing and as universal credit is rolled out, which puts many households at a heightened risk of homelessness. We are working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and others to consider how temporary accommodation is provided and to address the issues, and we will continue to raise with the UK Government our concerns about the impact of welfare cuts.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): That concludes portfolio questions.

Sea Fisheries and End-year Negotiations

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-02922, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on sea fisheries and end-year negotiations.

14:42

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing): It is a great privilege to have the opportunity to speak up for the Scottish fishing industry in this debate. In doing so, I am cognisant that I succeed Richard Lochhead, who was a champion of that industry for a great many years. I am pleased that we are joined in the public gallery by distinguished leaders of the Scottish fishing sector Michael Bates of the Scottish Seafood Association and Bertie Armstrong of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation.

Scotland's fishermen are held in great regard throughout our country and members of all parties look to our proud fishing industry as an embodiment of the best of our country. That is why I was honoured to be asked by the First Minister to become the cabinet secretary with responsibility for fishing. In that role, I will do everything that I can to help the rural economy to grow and create prosperity. Naturally, that includes the fishing industry, which is an integral component of the weft and weave of many of our rural communities, including the great port of Peterhead, where I was pleased to visit the fish market early on Monday this week and I was delighted to see that the catch by tonnage was at record levels—that is a tribute to all who are involved.

It is therefore important that we in the Parliament take the time to acknowledge the importance of the autumn quota negotiations to the Scottish industry's fortunes. I will summarise where we have got to in this year's negotiations. We now have a full set of scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea. Overall, it paints a reasonably positive picture for 2017, with increases advised for a range of stocks, such as saithe, hake, monkfish, North Sea Norway lobster, Rockall haddock, mackerel, blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian herring.

However, as usual, there are other stocks for which the advice is more difficult. In the west, the fortunes of cod, whiting and herring remain stubbornly intractable, and cuts are advised for haddock, herring, cod and whiting in the North Sea.

For the latter two—cod and whiting—the cuts are particularly challenging, given that those

stocks are being phased into the landing obligation in 2017, when reductions in quota will increase the risk of choking the mixed fishery. I underline that the Scottish Government remains committed to the ambition of eliminating discards but, in implementing the discard ban, we must also tackle the challenge of choke species.

We must protect the livelihoods of our fishermen and prevent our fleet from being unnecessarily tied to the quayside when there is still quota available to fish. We are working hard to address those challenges and we are playing an active role in the regional groups in which we have an interest in order to drive forward the development of innovative policy solutions to choke risks. We should not be afraid to be radical when the situation calls for it. I raised this very issue with other fisheries ministers at the November agriculture and fisheries council meeting in Brussels.

In addition, following the effective end of the cod recovery plan—over which I shed no tears—I welcome the fact that cod days at sea will be a thing of the past. That should help the fleet to adapt to the landing obligation by providing the scope to move to different grounds to control catches of certain stocks.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary agree that one way of catching the unused quota for the market would be to take a more collaborative approach that involves our fishermen working in real time with the data that is available to them and with the available quotas? That might also be worth pursuing in order to reduce discards.

Fergus Ewing: I agree with Mr Scott that there are a great many measures by which the choke problem can be ameliorated. Quota swaps are one method of doing that, interarea swaps are another, and flexibility and measures of flexibility are additional ways of doing that. A combination of measures is required, including measures that control effort or are designed to limit effort and measures that enable smaller fish to escape.

I am pleased that Mr Scott has raised the issue, as it has given me the opportunity to agree with him and others who have—rightly—raised what is possibly the most serious issue that the industry faces in relation to the common fisheries policy. I am grateful to Mr Scott for that and, if I can find my place, I will revert to the script.

The autumn negotiations will play a critical role by making available in 2017 additional quota top-ups to cover catches of fish that were previously discarded but which will now have to be landed. What stands between the scientific advice and the final quota for next year is the negotiations, where balances and compromises sometimes need to be

found. This year's talks are well under way and have already delivered some strong results.

The coastal states talks for mackerel took place in October and delivered an excellent 14 per cent increase for 2017. At current prices, that equates to a value of around £218 million for Scotland, which is an increase of around £28 million on 2016. However, the coastal states talks on blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian herring have been less satisfactory. Although total catches for 2017 were agreed, the parties failed to agree each party's share, so unco-ordinated and unilateral quotas are inevitable and there is a risk of continued overfishing of that important and valuable stock.

Last week's negotiations between the European Union and Norway delivered a pair of important agreements. On the one hand, an agreement was signed that ring fenced shares and access arrangements for blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian herring in 2017. Although I am pleased that that will prevent a repeat of the inexcusably opaque events of last year's December council meeting, the agreement also—disappointingly—increased the level of Norwegian access to our waters next year, which Scotland has to bear the burden of policing.

The conclusion of the parallel white-fish agreement followed late last Friday evening. That brings certainty on quota levels for some of our key North Sea stocks and allows fishing to begin on 1 January. I am pleased that the Government's involvement in the negotiations successfully turned around proposed cuts in North Sea cod and whiting to deliver increases of around 17 per cent for each. That respects the scientific advice and continues to move those stocks towards maximum sustainable yield fishing levels. Importantly, it provides a bit more time for the industry to adjust to the phasing of those stocks into the landing obligation next year. In addition, we secured a significant overall 53 per cent increase in North Sea saithe, which will provide the best possible platform from which that stock will be phased into the North Sea landing obligation in 2018.

However, alongside those positives, the new agreement contains some disappointments. In particular, the cost of the deal was excessive. The European Commission chose to give away to Norway some 110,000 tonnes of blue whiting—primarily a Scottish stock—with little direct tangible benefit being returned to the Scottish fishing industry. As a result, I took the decision—fully supported by the United Kingdom Government—to oppose the overall package that was on the table. However, the Commission chose to ignore the views of the second largest contributor to the package and signed the agreement anyway.

To move on, the EU-Faroes talks are under way as I speak. In return for the essential quota and access opportunities to Faroese waters that the agreement provides for our white-fish fleet, Faroese vessels may fish a number of their quotas in our waters, including mackerel. Although I accept that as part of the agreement, I cannot accept how the level of Faroese access was fixed in 2014 via a private deal that was done by the Commission without any consultation with member states. Tavish Scott in particular may be interested to know that I heard today from my officials at the on-going EU-Faroes talks in Brussels that, helpfully, the level of Faroese access for mackerel is now back on the negotiating table rather than being fixed. Although it will be challenging to deliver a reduction from the existing 30 per cent, the issue is again being discussed in the negotiations, which is a significant step forward.

This year's negotiations will reach their conclusion at next week's December council, which I will attend and which will negotiate the remaining stocks that are fished solely by EU fleets. My focus at the council will be on ensuring that good scientific advice is converted into actual quota; on resisting cuts when there are scientifically justifiable reasons for doing so; and on continuing to secure other outcomes that are linked to tackling future choke risks.

I cannot talk about fisheries without referring to the result of the now not-so-recent European referendum. I acknowledge that many people in the fishing industry voted to leave the EU and I understand why that was the case. The common fisheries policy has not been a success for Scottish fisheries, and I recognise that there are opportunities for our industry outside the EU. I am pleased that we have worked closely with Bertie Armstrong and his colleagues on all those matters over the past months, and I fully intend to press the UK Government to make the most of those opportunities.

A few weeks ago, I wrote to Andrea Leadsom to urge her to confirm that she will not give away permanent access to Scottish waters to European fishing vessels in any exit deal. We must not give up control over our waters and give away access—our most valuable asset—permanently; rather, we should negotiate access to our waters annually, as do Norway, the Faroes and Iceland. It would be totally unacceptable for the UK Government to use access to our waters to solve problems with quota in English waters, which is what it seems to hint that it wants to do.

We must also acknowledge the risks that Brexit will bring and the damage that it could do to the industry. In 2015, Scotland exported £438 million of seafood to the EU and benefited from 50 EU trade deals. That is why we must avoid a hard

Brexit and why the UK should remain a full member of the single market. It is also why it is important that we get our fishing industry on the most sustainable footing now, so that it is in the best place possible to cope with whatever the future brings.

It is clear that the autumn negotiations are a complex process. This year, they are taking place in an increasingly complex political landscape. What is simple, however, is my pledge to explore and to seek to activate all options that are open to us to secure the best outcomes for our industry. I will work tirelessly to ensure that this year's talks deliver the best possible deals and have Scotland's best interests at their heart.

I look forward to hearing from the members of the three other main parties on their amendments and I will listen with great care. I will also have in mind the clear desire in our fishing communities for the Parliament to speak with one voice. I hope that the Opposition spokesmen are able to persuade me of their cause so that that unity can emerge this afternoon.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the conclusion of negotiations with Norway on shared stocks in the North Sea and the forthcoming annual fisheries negotiations in Brussels; notes that 2017 will see the continued phased implementation of the landing obligation for whitefish to include North Sea cod and whiting; further notes that the outcome of the negotiations will be pivotal in helping the fleet to continue implementing the landing obligation while maintaining its approach to sustainable fishing and remaining economically viable, and supports the Scottish Government in its efforts to achieve the best possible outcome for Scotland's fishermen, coastal communities and wider seafood sectors.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Peter Chapman to speak to and move amendment S5M-02922.1. Mr Chapman, you have eight minutes or thereabouts. We have a little bit of time in hand, so I can be a bit relaxed, for a while.

14:55

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I am always pleased when you say that you are relaxed.

I am particularly glad to be leading today's debate for the Conservatives, as the impact of year-end negotiations is of huge importance to my constituents in the north-east region. It is fair to say that the towns of Peterhead and Fraserburgh are the two towns in Britain most reliant on fishing and fish processing for their prosperity and that, over the years, they have suffered as our fishing industry has declined. However, before anyone accuses a Buchan loon like me of being parochial, it is not just my corner of Scotland that will be

watching these developments closely as they have an impact across Scotland.

A key factor behind the Scottish fishing industry's recent success is our fishermen's willingness to move to more sustainable fishing methods. They have, time and again, taken the tough decisions that have replenished our fish stocks. However, those decisions have come at a huge cost to those communities over the years as boats have been scrapped and fishermen have had to find other jobs.

There was a time when there was a great deal of fear over the future of cod stocks. It was the determination of our industry to keep fishing sustainably that brought the cod stocks back up to the healthy level that we see them at today.

Our fishermen have pioneered new technology, such as nets designed to allow younger fish to escape and the targeting of species. They have proved that they are innovative, forward looking and are leading the world in those new nets and techniques. It is that ability to innovate, which comes from an understanding of the need to protect a long-term resource, that makes our fishing fleet the envy of the rest of Europe.

Of course, there are still a great many challenges facing our fishing industry. The extension of the discard ban to cod and whiting—if mishandled—could have a serious, detrimental impact on a success story of Scottish fishing. This Scottish National Party Government has a responsibility to make sure that Scottish fishermen are not unfairly penalised as the industry comes to grips with the landing obligation.

Last week, just when all looked well and many of us were ready to celebrate a successful year-end negotiation, a last-minute intervention from Norway threw into sharp relief the disservice that the EU does to Scottish fishing. The EU traded away 110,000 tonnes of blue whiting to Norway, up from 75,000 tonnes last year. Those fish will be caught in UK waters and will have a direct negative impact on boats working out of Scotland. The fish were traded in exchange for Arctic cod. The UK delegation voted against the deal, but it was outvoted. The cod will be of great interest to Portuguese, French and Dutch fishing crews, but totally useless for our industry, because our fishermen do not fish there.

Post-Brexit, the UK will have far greater control over who fishes in our waters and the rules governing them. We will trade away fish only for other tonnage that our fishermen can catch and have a market for. That is the sea of opportunity that Bertie Armstrong and his colleagues throughout the industry are so keen to see.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Peter Chapman and I were both at

the North East Scotland Fisheries Development Partnership meeting, and I think that there was broad agreement in the room that the red line in all negotiations should be that no decisions about foreign access to new fishing opportunities should precede our getting control of them. Does the member agree with that position?

Peter Chapman: That is exactly what I am saying. Post-Brexit, we will have such control. I have emphasised that.

I read with interest Fergus Ewing's comments in yesterday's *Press and Journal*, in which he quite rightly blamed the CFP for the last-minute Norway deal. I do not understand how he squares that stance with his desire to remain in the EU and thus keep the fishing industry subject to the CFP. He says that he is worried about the UK Government selling out the fishing industry in the Brexit negotiations, but I would argue that it is the SNP Government's policy that ignores and disrespects the desires of Scotland's fishermen. If the SNP Government's position is that we should give away our quota for the benefit of other EU nations, one must wonder how it defines standing up for Scotland.

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): On the subject of definitions, can the member explain the meaning of "expendable"—which is what the Tories said that our fishing industry was in the 1970s?

Peter Chapman: Ms Ross could well be right about that quote; it might be correct. That was long before any of us were involved. Now we are looking forward to the opportunities that are coming down the road; we are not looking back at what happened 40 years ago.

Scottish fishermen see their future lying outside the EU, and they see the SNP's position of staying tied to the EU, even at the cost of a second independence referendum, as a complete betrayal. There was a time when the First Minister's predecessor, Alex Salmond, understood the anger and frustration that the CFP provoked. His commitment resulted in the laying before Parliament—back in 2004—of a bill that proposed that the UK should leave the CFP.

Nicola Sturgeon now runs the SNP and what she said on the CFP was equally clear. She said:

"The reality is that it is essential to get rid of the CFP, which is disastrous for Scottish fishing."—[*Official Report*, 29 April 2004; c 7850.]

I cannot be the only one who is curious to know what has changed. Those mixed messages on support for a vital Scottish industry betray the true objective of the SNP. Its primary concern is separation. It does not matter how pressing an issue is or how important it is to stand up for Scotland's key sectors; the only thing that matters

is creating more grievance, which allows the SNP to push for a second independence referendum.

I must admit that I was shocked and angered when I heard Alex Salmond gleefully saying on national television at the weekend that a constitutional crisis would be welcome. He was referring to the court case regarding the triggering of article 50. The fact that he would welcome a constitutional crisis shows just how dangerous Salmond has become. He will sink to any levels to further his dream. That just goes to show that the SNP will say anything and do anything to achieve its dream of separation, regardless of the cost to Scotland.

We have a great UK team fighting our corner in the year-end negotiations. The problem with those negotiations is that the EU has to work on behalf of 28 countries under majority voting, so it is inevitable that the UK will not always win every fight around that table. That is why, when industry leaders talk about the sea of opportunity that Brexit presents, I take them seriously. We will be a sovereign nation controlling some of the best fishing waters in the world. Our decisions and our trade-offs will be made with the UK's best interests, not those of EU nations, at heart.

At the moment, nearly 60 per cent of the fish that is caught in our waters is caught by non-UK EU fishing boats. We have a great opportunity to put our fishing industry first. Great strides have been made by our industry, but there is more that can be done once we have left the EU and the CFP. If only the SNP could see the opportunity that Brexit presents for our fishermen and embrace it.

I move amendment S5M-02922.1, to leave out from "notes that 2017" to end and insert:

"understands that fishermen in Scotland have expressed disappointment regarding their blue whiting catch allocation, which ran contrary to the vote of the UK negotiating team; notes that 2017 will see the continued phased implementation of the landing obligation for whitefish to include North Sea cod and whiting; considers that the outcome of the negotiations will be pivotal in helping the fleet to continue implementing the landing obligation while maintaining its approach to sustainable fishing and remaining economically viable; supports the Scottish Government in its efforts to achieve the best possible outcome for Scotland's fishermen, coastal communities and wider seafood sectors, and acknowledges the opportunities, as well as the challenges, for Scotland's fishing sector in the coming years."

15:04

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

This debate is as much an annual event as the negotiations that we are debating. If we were setting up such a negotiation afresh, we would not do it this way, and one hopes that, if Brexit has one upside, it is that annual negotiations on

quotas and total allowable catches will not happen like this in future—although historical negotiations with Norway and the Faroes do not fill me with high expectations in that respect. Our fishing communities have made it clear that they want rights to UK waters, but they will also need access to European markets, and those two issues will require negotiation. Such matters, though, are for another day. As we are still part of the EU, these negotiations are just as important as they have been in the past.

I turn to our amendment. Marine Scotland operates marine protection vessels, which were formerly known as the Scottish fisheries protection fleet. The crews of these vessels ensure adherence to the outcome of the negotiations that we are talking about; they are specialists, and they need to understand the fishing industry. Some years ago, Marine Scotland was finding it difficult to recruit and retain crew, so it paid the crews a retention bonus of £5,000 to keep them in the service. However, even with that bonus, their salaries were lower than those of other publicly paid seafarers. For instance, a chief steward for Marine Scotland earns up to £29,579 a year, while at Caledonian MacBrayne, the pay for the same post is £37,675 a year. A seaman working for Marine Scotland earns up to £25,543, but they would earn £32,998 with CalMac.

However, with the downturn in the oil industry, Marine Scotland now appears to think that crew are ten a penny and is removing the bonus. It has already been halved, and it could disappear altogether next year, which would mean a £5,000 pay cut in total. However, there are still huge issues with recruiting staff, and I am concerned that we will get back to the situation that we had a number of years ago of vessels having to tie up because they did not have the required staffing levels to sail safely.

The Government simply has no reasonable excuse for paying those who work for Marine Scotland less than the going rate for the job. It is bad for seafarers; it is bad for their families and communities; and it is bad for Scotland's fisheries. A Marine Scotland employee told me:

"I feel that the skill set that we have is being ignored compared to the job we do and I don't see why CalMac and Marine Scotland are on two different scales of pay."

These are tough jobs, and those who do them have to spend weeks at sea away from their families. They need experience and expertise, but Marine Scotland still cuts their salaries without negotiation. Moreover, as we put more pressure on these crews, we treat them abysmally, preferring to pay agency staff to fill the gaps instead of rewarding loyal, skilled crew members.

If we are to ensure the industry's future as well as the conservation of fish stocks, we need crews

working with fishermen, rather than inexperienced crews working on short-term contracts. The permanent crew are not there for the money; indeed, if that was what they were after, they would not be there at all, because they could be paid much more elsewhere. They have built up expertise, working with the fishing fleet, and they are invested in the industry. That is what we are asking for: a fair pay settlement, not a pay cut, for these crews to show them that we value the role that they play and the work that they do on our behalf.

With regard to the larger issue of the discard ban, we have frequently debated the incredible waste of throwing dead fish back into the sea because boats do not have enough quota left to land them. Surely such waste is immoral when so many go without enough food to feed themselves, and it does nothing to conserve stocks, because the fish are already dead when they are returned. At best, discards provide an easy meal for seabirds and other predators, but they do nothing for the species or, indeed, the environment.

As a result, we, like many others, have advocated a discard ban. By that, we mean not a ban that would stop fishermen working and would therefore cause hardship both to those at sea and to processors on land, but a ban that would allow bycatch to be landed and used and which would neither punish nor reward the boats that had inadvertently caught the fish. My understanding is that the current ban, which is to be extended to white fish this year, falls short of that aim. Albeit that it is being phased in, we need to deal with any potential issues before they arise.

Discarding at sea is to be banned, and anyone who does that will be open to sanction and, indeed, charges. Ultimately, a boat could be stripped of its licence. To legally land bycatch, people must be able to access quota for the species that make up that bycatch. It could be argued that, if that quota was readily available, the species would never have been dumped as bycatch in the first place. It must be recognised that bycatch is made up of fish that have no easily available quota that would allow them to be landed. Those fish are regarded as choke species.

Trading quotas are sometimes available, but there is concern that they will be hoarded by countries for their own use and will not be traded widely enough to allow everyone to continue to fish. If trading does not happen, bycatches of choke species will become illegal to land and will attract severe penalties. Therefore, crews may discard them in order to keep on working, and that is also illegal.

The fishing industry is investing in new technology and gear to enable it to fish in a more targeted way. Technology is developing, and we

must invest more in the science to get the best possible solutions. Avoiding choke species altogether is always the best outcome, and it is in all our interests that we have healthy fish stocks, but we need a system to be in place that allows everything that is caught to be landed.

Where there is no quota for bycatch, there must be a way to land it. That could be by flexible fines. The fine could be equivalent to the sale price of the choke species with an allowance for the time and fuel that were spent on landing it. That way, crews would be able to land the fish without penalty, but also without reward, which would make it unattractive for them to target the species. A careful balance would need to be struck, but a solution must be found to allow fishers to land bycatch without being unjustifiably punished for abiding by the discard ban.

These debates happen every year, but they are as important as ever, despite Brexit. Suffice to say, we all want the best deal for our fishing industry. We all want a deal that ensures that stocks are protected for future generations, the current generation can make a living and we can all have fish to eat. Our coastal communities are vulnerable and need a stable industry for their survival. It is not just the crews and boats that depend on the fishing industry; the processors and workers onshore do so, too.

I move amendment S5M-02922.2 , to insert at end:

“, and believes that Marine Scotland staff who crew marine protection vessels should receive a fair pay settlement that recognises their experience and skills.”

15:12

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I am very pleased to see the cabinet secretary here. I must confess that I was quite worried when, like Peter Chapman, I read *The Press and Journal* on Tuesday morning, as there was a very fetching photograph in it of Mr Ewing in Mr Stevenson's constituency with his foot at a jaunty angle on the edge of the pier. It looked like he was just about to jump in. I am sure that fisheries policy can do that to any minister. However, we are very grateful that Fergus Ewing is with us today.

I want to start at the other end of the debate. There is no doubt that the great majority of fishermen voted in June to leave the EU—and no wonder. The common fisheries policy that is run by Brussels is top down, ineffective and woeful. It is not common, does nothing for fish stocks and is rarely even a policy.

One decision that the European fisheries commissioner took encapsulates why the industry literally hates the CFP and Brussels. Some years back, the Faroe Islands and Iceland decided to

prosecute mackerel fishing without quota. The EU did nothing other than wring its hands. Years of negotiations went nowhere and, in that time, the Faroese industry built up a catching track record for mackerel, which is a high-volume, high-price species that is, of course, caught in a clean fishery. What happened then? The EU rewarded the Faroe Islands for years of illegal fishing with an international quota that meant a cut in the mackerel caught by Shetland and Scottish pelagic vessels. Fisheries managers and politicians all expected the industry to accept that, but it did not. I suspect that the huge leave vote against the EU in fisheries has been building for decades, but that sell-out of our industry's interests over Faroese mackerel quota was the final straw for many.

There is no way that I as a constituency member or, indeed, Mr Ewing at his most persuasive will convince the catching sector that the EU acts in the industry's interests. That is without even mentioning days at sea and all that went with that. That is why my amendment asks the Scottish Government to begin work on a Scottish fisheries policy, which will be needed irrespective of what happens with Brexit. I have made many a speech condemning the CFP for all its manifest failures, but I am not going to add to that today. What I want and, more important, what the industry wants is a policy that is better: local fisheries management; proper, accountable and understood science; and a flexibility—other members, including the minister, referred to this—as to the reality of the fishing grounds, using such techniques as real-time closed areas.

My amendment makes two further points that I ask the cabinet secretary to consider, although I recognise that he has already touched on these points in the debate. The first point is on the EU-Faroese talks that are under way in Brussels. We need our Government to resist any further access to EU waters for the Faroese to catch mackerel. The Government needs to keep the pressure up on that, and I am grateful to the minister for his remarks on the matter earlier. He will understand the argument that Shetland and, indeed, Scottish fishermen are sick of watching Faroese boats catch mackerel in EU waters and then export it to Russia. He knows, I know and Parliament knows why there are trade embargoes on exporting fish to Russia: it is because of what happened in the Crimea two years ago. However, the Faroese mackerel product is not covered by the EU trade sanctions. The Faroese can therefore use a mackerel quota that has been obtained illegally to sell fish that our boats could catch to Russia—you could not make it up. Who is responsible for that? I ask the cabinet secretary to ensure that there are no further proceedings in that area and that the EU-Faroe Islands talks end up in the right area for our industry.

The second point is on the reality of the discard ban. The landing obligation—we all know it as the discard ban—cannot work in its current form. The North Sea is a mixed white-fish fishery and boats catch more than one species at one time—the Government knows that and the cabinet secretary certainly knows it. The RSPB briefing makes that point too, albeit in a different way. As other members have said, there is not enough quota for certain species, which from 2017 will include cod. The reality is that boats will be forced to stop fishing next year as the quota for one stock will be exhausted long before that for others. That is why, in Shetland waters in the northern North Sea, cod, haddock and whiting quotas matter that bit more, given the catch of the local boats in the islands.

The Government knows, as does the European Commission, that there is still much to be done on the choke species issue to resolve the problem, but we are pressing on as if there is no problem. The cabinet secretary will be familiar with article 2.1 of the CFP basic regulation, which says:

“The CFP shall ensure that fishing and aquaculture activities ... are managed in a way that is consistent with the objectives of achieving economic, social, and employment benefits”.

What is happening is cherry picking. There is no basis in law for favouring one article over another, so why does the reformed discard ban keep rolling out? I say to my environmental colleagues that that policy is the worst of all worlds for all of us because it is a discard ban that does not work, which produces limited information on what is being discarded and which leads to questionable stock assessments—poor science helps none of us, particularly the industry. I think that I am correct in saying that the cabinet secretary has declared that no Scottish boat will be tied up as result of choke species. I agree with him on that, but can he clarify how the regime during 2017 will ensure that that happens?

We need to ensure that the discard ban operates. I suggest that it needs to be modelled on the more sensible and workable arrangements in Norway. We need to get our industry out of a bind that, if we care to remember, was a knee-jerk reaction to a celebrity chef grandstanding on television. It is bad enough politicians grandstanding, but we should draw the line at celebrity chefs doing it.

I have two final points. First, Scottish fishermen have expressed their extreme disappointment at the blue whiting catch arrangements for 2017 that were finalised at last week's EU-Norway talks. I accept that the Scottish negotiating team voted against the arrangements, and the minister was right to make that clear today. However, the deal will see an increased access arrangement for Norway that will enable Norwegian fishermen to

catch 68 per cent of their blue whiting catch allocation to the west of the UK, compared to the 61 per cent allowed previously. On top of that, there will be the transfer of an additional 110,000 tonnes of blue whiting to Norway, whereas the previous figure was 75,000 tonnes. That answers, to an extent, Peter Chapman's question about Norway. My experience of these debates over the years tells me that, if there is one thing about the Norwegians, it is that they certainly know how to negotiate.

John Scott: Will the member take an intervention?

Tavish Scott: I am just finishing.

Finally, the cabinet secretary has my party's support for extracting an agreement from next week's EU council that helps fishing businesses at sea and on land. Occasionally, some of us hark back to the days of the somewhat more confrontational debates that used to take place on fishing matters but, frankly, we do not do so that much. That is because the industry needs stability and an ability to plan for the future. It is the cabinet secretary's task to ensure that, and we support him in that task.

I move amendment S5M-02922.3, to insert at end:

“; further notes the ongoing EU negotiations with the Faroe Islands over access to EU waters for mackerel and urges the Scottish Government to resist any increase in Faroese access; notes that the Faroe Islands export fish to Russia despite the international sanctions that Scottish processing companies comply with; recognises the challenges of the EU landing obligation; notes that the proposed cod quota for 2017 will create further choke species problems therefore making the discard ban policy counterproductive, and requests that the Scottish Government begins preparations on a Scottish fisheries policy in consultation with fishing communities, irrespective of the outcome of Brexit.”

15:20

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I have great hopes for today's debate, and in that spirit I start by congratulating colleagues on the Conservative benches on their candour in their amendment. Not everyone is prepared to acknowledge failures in negotiation. They are shared between the UK Government and perhaps the Scottish Government, but if we acknowledge where we are not succeeding, we have hope of going forward.

Fishermen in Scotland have indeed expressed their disappointment about the blue whiting catch allocation. Seven percentage points have been given away today, just as control over our waters was in 1983, at the end of the 10-year derogation. That leads me to say that we might usefully look at a little of the history that got us to where we are

today, so that we do not repeat some of that history.

The original commitment to surrender our fishing rights out to 200 miles came in 1971. In effect, it was entrenched into law when Ted Heath signed the treaty of accession on 22 January 1972. This is the important point: only after that was the treaty published and subject to democratic scrutiny. The most objectionable part of the treaty was that fishing decisions could be made by majority, and sometimes by qualified majority. The issue of opening up the result of negotiations before we get committed to it, so that parliamentarians can look at it, is perhaps one that we will return to in another context at a later point.

The fisheries negotiations that we are talking about today are so unsatisfactory that even landlocked countries in the EU can essentially block our interests. The SNP has recognised all that from the very outset, and that is why we have opposed the common fisheries policy in all its forms from the beginning.

Hopefully, we are going to get to a position of a reasonable consensus in the chamber. In my very first speech here, in June 2001—strictly speaking, it was up the road from here—I quoted words from this Parliament's European Committee, and they are equally relevant today. I said that we should try to get everyone

“to speak with one voice ... There are tensions that should be buried for the common good.”—[*Official Report, European Committee*, 30 January 2001; c 946.]

That was the advice from the Parliament's European Committee in 2001. It is still good advice today and I hope that we are able to do that.

It is worth saying that my colleague Donald Stewart, who was the leader of the SNP in 1982, said of fisherman, on the record, in the Westminster debate that preceded the formation of the common fisheries policy in the current form:

“They have been betrayed. The result will be catastrophe.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 15 July 1982; Vol 27, c 1195.]

We see that that view was shared. Austin Mitchell, another great champion of fishing communities—I should perhaps have said that it was a Labour motion that was being debated—also spoke up in similar terms, as indeed did some but not a majority of Conservatives. Certainly, when the vote came at 7 o'clock at night, the Conservatives voted down a motion that would have given a proper sense of where we were at that point.

We have to grab hold of the fact that fisheries negotiations are not just a matter for those who catch fish. They are also a matter for our processors. In my constituency, processing is a

major source of employment for many thousands of people, and people in that industry wait equally anxiously for the outcome of each year's negotiation. It is no small matter for Peterhead and Fraserburgh, where the contribution from landings was more than £150 million last year. That is nearly £4,000 per head of population—a very substantial sum. However, it equally matters to constituents in the south of Scotland in Eyemouth, and of course to Tavish Scott's constituents in the furthest north.

In 1997, my political colleague Dr Allan Macartney MEP published a considered proposal for reform of the CFP. We might take notice of a couple of things in it that throw some light on how we got to where we are. One thing that Allan Macartney, who was a linguist, highlighted was that the Spanish act of secession of 1985, which in essence eliminated the UK's ability to veto results, arose in part because of a difference between the Spanish language and English language versions of the treaty. The Spanish language version missed out the word "solely", and it was the one that was used when the decisions were made. Tavish Scott is nodding, so I see that he is familiar with that. Sometimes very simple little things can get us into difficulties.

The 1997 paper that Allan Macartney produced could form a useful basis for policy that we might adopt now, although others might take a different view. He said that we needed

"a new framework whereby coastal states with the greatest historical interests in specific fisheries would be able to take the key control and management decisions relating to the fisheries in the waters off their coasts".

Of course, he was writing to get change in the CFP. It is quite clear that the dynamic in politics and practical affairs is somewhat different today, and therefore a particular opportunity may arise.

I know that other members will talk about choke species, which will continue to be a matter of importance to our communities. Another issue in the current arrangements is that not enough of the fish that are caught in our sector are landed for the benefit of our communities and the processors in our communities. It is not irrational for fishermen to get the highest price that they can—be that in Norway or elsewhere—but we must bear in mind that our quotas were given out at no cost, and if we get new quotas because of new opportunities, we must look at a new way of doing things.

Ultimately, fish is a delicious, healthy thing to eat. Across these islands there is a vast network of fish and chip shops that give us all access to fish. That is what I most enjoy about fishing. This debate is a key opportunity for us to join together and I hope that at 5 o'clock we can agree a common position to the benefit of fishing

communities, fishermen, Scotland and the UK as a whole.

15:27

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): So, here we are again at the annual series of summits that will determine next year's fishing quotas for EU, Norwegian, Faroese and Icelandic fishing fleets. We await the lobbyists, politicians, commissioners, council officials, European Parliament staffers and journalists who will emerge exhausted from the annual two-day, all-night bun fight at the Berlaymont, waving the various deals and agreements that they have wrestled over. It is, of course, in the main, all a front. The summit, for the British fleet at least, is a rubber-stamping exercise, with the major deals having already been agreed with little fanfare.

For our west coast fleet, the major decisions were taken in Ireland last month at the meeting between Norway, the Faroes and the EU, where the catch limits for key North Atlantic stocks of mackerel and herring were decided. For our North Sea fleets, the big decisions were taken in Norway at the EU-Norway summit, with deals being struck over cod, haddock, whiting, coley, plaice, North Sea mackerel and herring—and blue whiting.

That does not mean that there are no surprises to be sprung in Brussels. Who can forget last year's summit, where the fishing world, expecting a quick and easy meeting, was caught on the hop by the Norwegian Government's last-minute demands, against all scientific advice, for a much greater share of blue whiting? The situation was only partly resolved at 2 in the morning by a European Commission fait accompli behind closed doors that left the stock with no overall TAC or percentage shares and made the EU's claim that we were all moving towards maximum sustainable yield for all stocks somewhat laughable.

That placed British fishermen, who were bound to collective bargaining by the EU, at a disadvantage to their non-EU cousins. Only last week, in Bergen, Norway secured another increase in its blue whiting share, off the west coast of the British Isles, in return for an increase in the EU's share of Arctic cod. However, British boats do not fish for Arctic cod—they fish for blue whiting. The Portuguese, French and Dutch fish for Arctic cod—equal access to a common resource, indeed.

One thing that the Brussels summit does is to put the fishing industry at the centre of our national discourse. It is one of Scotland's oldest and most iconic and vital sectors, which is unfairly targeted for perceived overfishing, as Tavish Scott said, and subject to ever-more stringent regulations, such as the pending deep sea fishing regulation

and the discard ban. It has been ignored by the Scottish Government when asking for help to prepare for the discard ban, and abandoned in Europe by the SNP, which missed key votes affecting our industry.

Who can forget last year, when the European fisheries committee, with the support of the SNP's free green alliance, in conjunction with UKIP—yes, that was UKIP—voted to give the European Commission delegated power status over the landing obligations, meaning that the discard ban for all demersal stocks would be introduced a whole year early? UKIP at least was in the room, although its representative later claimed that he did not really know what he was voting for, but the SNP was absent.

Stewart Stevenson calls for one voice, and I commend the motion and the amendments where they call for support for our innovative, pioneering and hard-working fishing industry. The industry's representative bodies—the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, the producer organisations, Kathryn Stack in Brussels, and their predecessors—and the hundreds of individuals around the country, working with Government, the European Union, scientists and innovators, have made the Scottish fishing fleet and associated shoreside operations the most innovative, forward-thinking and sustainable fishing industry in Europe.

The industry has made many sacrifices over the past decade to secure the return of a sustainable cod fishery. Many fishing vessels were decommissioned and many fishing careers ended because of the cod fishing restrictions of the early 2000s, but that painful sacrifice and the subsequent voluntary adoption of new fishing practices has secured a regrowth in the cod stock—so much so that it is now within a hair's breadth of being reclassified as a sustainable stock by the Marine Stewardship Council.

The industry pioneered new nets to reduce discarding practices in the North Sea, not because it was forced to but because fishermen know that an industry's wealth is judged not only by its income, but by the health of its resource. It also pioneered the voluntary use of closed-circuit television monitoring on boats, because fishermen had to be seen to be working in a lawful and sustainable way. It has worked with Marine Scotland on the Scottish Fishermen's Federation on-board observer scheme, ensuring that fisheries management decisions are based on informed advice and not on guesswork or estimates, and the industry has also created the most professional and well-equipped support network of scientific, policy, non-executive and voluntary bodies in the world to promote dialogue between regulators, legislators and fishermen.

We are therefore pleased to back much of the motion, calling for the best possible deal from the fishing negotiations, which I have every confidence will be delivered by George Eustice and his team, and we very much support the Scottish Government in its efforts to achieve the best possible outcome for Scotland's fishermen, coastal communities and wider seafood sectors. Our amendment notes the blue whiting issue and seeks to recognise the real opportunity of sustained economic benefit for our coastal communities and for every seafood sector presented by Brexit, but such benefits can happen only if parliamentarians from all parts of the political spectrum join together and throw their support behind our fishing communities to ensure the best possible deal for fishing.

As we give that support, let us in this chamber never forget that tonight, and every night, those who are out on the boats are willing to risk all weathers and to risk life and limb to put food on our tables—I am sure that we are all eternally grateful for that.

15:33

Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I grew up in a village that was quite literally built by fishing. Ullapool, on the shores of Loch Broom, was founded as a herring port in 1788 by the British Fisheries Society. There is a lot less herring landed there today, but it is still one of the 10 major fishing ports in the UK.

In Scotland, we are fortunate to have such a vast and rich sea to fish in, and we must value it. We must use good-quality scientific research to inform our stewardship so that we can realise the industry's full potential. Scotland's seafood sector is one of our great strengths and one of our most successful exporters, and Scottish seafood has achieved much in building its reputation as a product renowned the world over for its pristine quality. In 2014, seafood made up 60 per cent of all food exports to the EU.

Fishing is at the heart of coastal communities all over Scotland. As a member for the Highlands and Islands, I represent many of those communities. The industry has provided much-needed jobs in my region. Take Shetland for example. In Shetland, fishing is a bigger contributor to the economy than the oil industry, and unemployment there is low. I have stated before in the chamber that Shetland lands more than a fifth of the UK's fish—more than England, Wales and Northern Ireland added together. That is why the Scottish Government will always stand up for fishing. The industry might be only a small part of the UK economy, but it is vital to Scotland.

It is important to address Brexit in this debate, because it has been argued that Brexit is an opportunity for the fishing industry, and that prospect caused many people in fishing communities to vote for it. I do not doubt that there should be opportunities for fishing post-Brexit but, like many in my community, I fear that the UK Government will once again consider the industry to be expendable and barter away our interests. Are we expected to believe that fishing rights in Scottish waters will take precedence over passporting arrangements for London's financial sector?

As well as bringing opportunities, Brexit might bring some risks. It is clear that the EU is a valuable market—the shellfish that is landed in Ullapool goes straight to markets in Spain and France. I hear concerns about losing investment in harbour infrastructure and the viability of fish processing if EU nationals cannot work here. EU funding also supports the science data and compliance cost that is necessary to manage and support the industry.

However, it would be hard for me to have grown up in Ullapool and not share some of the fishing community's concerns about the common fisheries policy. At the moment, fishermen in my constituency are finding the landing obligation challenging. Everyone agrees that the discard ban is a laudable aspiration but it is really hard to achieve in a mixed fishery and, as new fish species are added to the provisions, the chance of choke species developing is high, and the unintended consequence of having boats tied up is hard to take. As we can imagine, the people in my community want to ensure that boats keep fishing if possible. When a boat is tied up, it is like a business closing down. It is important that we strike the right balance between the urge to fish as much as possible and the need to plan for the sustainable management of our fisheries, which we cannot afford to deplete.

It is my understanding that, at any time during his tenure, the UK fisheries minister, Mr Eustice, could have started discussions on changing shares and negotiated better quotas for choke species. Had he done so, many, if not all, of the challenges facing our industry in relation to the discard ban would already have been alleviated. I was pleased to hear that Mr Ewing is working on a solution to that vexing problem.

I urge Marine Scotland to ensure that the final allocations of the quota are conducted as speedily as possible after the quota negotiations are completed. The earlier that our boats have certainty about the final allocations, the more effectively they will be able to plan for the coming year. I ask the cabinet secretary to ensure that

that happens more swiftly than has been the case in previous years.

I offer my support to the cabinet secretary in the negotiations. We are well aware in the Highlands that Fergus Ewing has a strong record of getting into the nuts and bolts of industries and listening to everyone involved. He has a strong record of standing up for Scottish industries. He stood up for Scottish steel as Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism and, more recently, he stood up and protected the workers at Fort William aluminium smelter during the sale by Rio Tinto. I have no doubt that he will ensure that our fishing industry gets the best possible deal from any negotiation.

15:38

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I, too, wish the cabinet secretary well on his negotiating trip with the UK delegation.

Reaching an agreement on our shared stocks is a challenge that is made more complex by competing demands and, as the cabinet secretary said earlier, balance sometimes needs to be found and compromise is sometimes essential. I encourage the Scottish Government to seek the best arrangement for our coastal communities with respect to the pillars of science and sustainability.

The protection and enhancement of our natural marine environment go hand in hand with a strong and resilient fishing industry. Furthermore, the context of global food security and food carbon emissions shows the value of the fishing industry as a more carbon-friendly source of nutrition than other forms of protein. It is an important one, too, as fish accounts for 15 to 20 per cent of global protein intake.

Changes to our climate can alter delicate habitats and balanced ecosystems, and I seek assurance from the cabinet secretary that Marine Scotland will be secure in funding to monitor that, protecting the industry and the marine environment from adverse climate effects. I look forward to the upcoming climate action plan and expect it to offer greater commitment to blue carbon and the opportunities there.

In this debate last year, I argued strongly that strong partnerships at all levels, and a determination to work together, would move us towards a future positive. Brexit means that we face a very different position today, and I am listening carefully to the comments on that from across the chamber. We face much uncertainty, but that sentiment about regionalisation still stands. At the risk of repeating myself and colleagues, I say: fish know no borders. Whatever the outcome of the EU referendum result, Scotland must uphold the values of collaboration and ensure a future of high-quality sustainable

regulation and, consequently, a thriving fishing industry.

Perhaps thankfully, those negotiations are for another day; this December, the focus should be on implementing current regulation and setting up our fishing stocks and industry for a bountiful and sustainable year ahead. I, too, recognise the work of the fishermen represented in the gallery here and those who are not able to be here today because they are working for the industry.

North-east cod, again this year, provides a good news story in many ways. The stock shows signs of continued recovery, thanks to the transition and actions of our fishermen, and it could be certified as sustainable next year—that is welcome news for the fishermen, the environment and, of course, the hungry. When our fishing policy is anchored in biological, social and economic data, we give our environment and industry the best possible footing.

Congratulations must go to the Scottish Fishermen's Federation for its recent success at the Scottish green energy awards. In conjunction with Skills Development Scotland and Moray Offshore Renewables Limited, the federation has enabled fishermen to upskill and shift into the offshore wind sector in the Moray Firth. I applaud those outstanding efforts. Scotland's fishing fleets have unique skills and knowledge that can add value to many other sectors, if and when a transition is needed in the future—I stress the word "if".

The fact remains that the fishing industry has faced a number of limitations and requirements to enable a durable industry. In that context, it is vital that the paths to diversification are cleared for businesses and communities. I want to focus for a few moments on the European maritime and fisheries fund, which is instrumental in this aim, protecting sustainable growth, financing projects for job creation and offering significant support in economic diversification. Reinforcing a community-led approach to the sustainable development of fishing areas is hugely important. The EMFF can empower young people by aiding start-ups or by providing training for the unemployed, and it can progress family businesses by training family members and spouses of those in the fishing industry. Smaller-scale fleets can be advised on additional routes of income within other maritime sectors. Support such as that can gel coastal communities together and fortify them for the future. It is essential that the EMFF support continues beyond article 50.

Our fishing stocks are a sustainable source only with proper management. The EMFF is a valuable resource to ensure that the industry understands and is supported in the complex challenges that it faces. The fund has made an impact across the

country and, if I can be regional for a few moments, the Scottish Borders and Forth fisheries local action group has delivered £1.05 million funding to support the diversification of catching and—importantly—processing, the development of tourism and food and drink, and expansion into opportunities in offshore wind and renewables. I encourage any small and medium-sized enterprise, community group or harbour trust across Scotland to consider applying for funding.

The landing obligation is a quandary for both fishermen and implementers, but it is another important step in the future proofing of our marine environment and industries. In 2007, 47 per cent of all white fish catches in the North Sea were discarded; I understand that last year that figure was brought down to 16 per cent. That is an inspiring turnaround, thanks to measures taken by the fishermen themselves.

As we heard from Rhoda Grant and other members, throwing fish back overboard is a wasteful and truly shocking practice in a world—indeed, in our own country—in which people go hungry and turn to food banks. We must make sure that it is avoided and that ways are found to deal with the situation.

I support Rhoda Grant's amendment, which calls for

"a fair pay settlement that recognises"

the

"experience and skills"

of Marine Scotland staff and the risks that they, and fishermen, take. I hope that the cabinet secretary will support Scottish Labour's amendment. I wish all the fishermen around the coasts of Scotland very good luck for the winter season, given the dangers and the challenges that they will face to put a range of fish—some of it very new, interesting and exciting—on our plates. I also wish the cabinet secretary good luck in the negotiations.

15:45

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Our national marine plan outlines a vision for

"Clean, healthy, safe, productive and diverse seas; managed to meet the long term needs of nature and people."

I hope that we all support that position.

My colleague Gail Ross highlighted the use of the term "expendable", which I too wanted to mention. Our "proud fishing industry"—as the cabinet secretary referred to it—was never, and should never be, expendable. It was not right previously and it is not right for the future.

I have gained the impression from the discussion, not in the chamber today but in the press and elsewhere, that some people will view it as payback time if Scotland leaves the EU. The leave campaign talked about escaping the “disastrous” CFP to “claim back our fish”, which is a highly simplistic approach. Devising any new management regime will be much more complicated than that, for a number of reasons that have already been highlighted, such as the mobility of the commercial species that are fished, which travel through the waters of several countries during their lifetime. It is crucial that, in everything that we do, we determine the actual distribution and abundance of fish stocks from independent research, not just from landings. That would include research on the key spawning and nursery areas and migration pathways.

The North Sea, which has been mentioned frequently in the debate, is bounded by seven countries, so the EU, the UK, Scotland and our coastal communities have a shared responsibility to manage stocks. The Scottish Green Party wants to protect those vital stocks, and we would seek to have the CFP extend powers to regional management bodies that would help stakeholders to work together to prevent unsustainable exploitation of fish stocks and to actively recover the habitats that make up our marine environment. We support the prioritisation of high-value, low-impact fishing methods that support coastal communities. It is important that we mention communities, as fishing is not some abstract industry but one that supports land-based communities.

Although it is not hugely relevant to today’s debate, we want a moratorium on new—

John Scott: Will the member take an intervention?

John Finnie: Certainly.

John Scott: Without wishing to reincarnate Jamie McGrigor, I am concerned that no one has yet mentioned the depletion of stocks in the west coast fisheries, which seems to be an abiding problem on which the minister touched. Do the Greens have any answers to that problem? It appears to have been intractable for as long as I can remember, and no one has yet managed to resolve it. Does John Finnie have any ideas for how the depletion of stocks might be reversed in the west coast fisheries and the Firth of Clyde?

John Finnie: I do not personally, but I commend to Mr Scott and to all members the approach that says that everything should have a scientific basis rather than being based simply on commercial exploitation. The cabinet secretary spoke about the need to respect scientific evidence, which is very important. The role that

Scotland’s marine protected areas play involves planning that is based on scientific evidence, and it is important that communities are engaged in that work so that protected areas are implemented with those communities rather than—as is often perceived—being something that is done to them.

I know that there are conflicts between groups. The Scottish Green Party supports sustainable fishing, and if there is no fishing industry where there historically was one, that fishery has clearly not been sustainable.

We are very concerned about the destructive method of dredging, which damages the environment, and we also refute the nonsense about ploughing the sea bed to restore it. Anyone can see the damage that has been done. There is ample video evidence out there about how marine areas can recover, as has happened in some of the restricted areas around Wester Ross. We want our maritime resources to be viewed as an entire community resource.

On representative bodies, there have been many references to the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation, but of course it does not speak for the whole industry. I commend the Scottish Creel Fishermen’s Federation and the various other fishermen’s federations. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will engage with all bodies and not just that single one.

Over the weekend, we have had talk of efforts to evade the scrutiny that is absolutely vital to ensure that our marine stocks are maintained. Marine monitoring is vital, which is why the Green Party will support the Labour Party amendment. Marine monitoring staff play an important role in preserving our fishing stocks. As has been said, there should be no loss of remuneration for those important public employees—they are public servants who work in very hazardous circumstances.

Some positives come out of the common fisheries policy. I know that many have derided it, but there have undoubtedly been some benefits—not everything can be transferred into pounds, shillings and pence on the quayside. The situation with discards is often referred to. The discard ban will benefit a sustainable fishery and has the potential to increase overall fishing revenue and resilience. It is about selectivity. Much has been made of the innovations that have been put in place with gear, which we certainly support. There are clear economic arguments for that.

I commend the briefings that we have received from WWF and the RSPB, which others have mentioned.

Catch limits are in accordance with scientific advice. We may all wish to see maximised catches but, as John Scott alluded to, where historically

there has been a fishery and there is no longer one, that shows that the method used did not work. Certainly, some of the tactics that were employed in the 1970s and 1980s contributed to such situations. The issue is important, because we need to retain a reputation as a supplier of high-quality and sustainable food.

15:52

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): As an MSP who represents fishing communities on the east and west coasts, I believe passionately in their future. The technical international discussions with experts that we have been discussing have far-reaching ripples that affect homes and communities in Skye, Lochaber and Ross-shire. It has been a privilege to meet and chat to fishermen working with different gear in Mallaig, Kyle, Kyleakin, Portree and Avoch and their families over the past few months. My speech is largely based on conversations with representatives of the industry in those communities.

I have also spoken to those who transport the stock and the processors and suppliers of our finest and world-renowned seafood, such as scallops, langoustines and lobsters, to name just a few. Sadly, most of it is exported. The produce of our seas is held in high regard globally, but it is delivered despite a legislative system that hamstringing our fishing industry. Arguably, the economic consequences are not half as grave as the social impact on communities. The loss of a few boats in a coastal village such as Mallaig impacts on everyone. It affects the harbour and the ice factory and has a knock-on effect on transport operators. We do not wish young families to leave or decide not to relocate to rural areas because there are no jobs, which could also adversely impact on schools.

John Scott asked about depletion. Personally, I think that we need to involve fishermen more rather than impose legislation on them. We need more effective monitoring at sea. I recognise that remote electronic monitoring will be effective only if it applies to every boat in a particular area, but I would like it to be used more. In terms of boosting the figures, we need to make better use of existing resources and technology to monitor the situation and to involve fishermen in understanding how we reverse that depletion.

It is vital that the Scottish Government and the cabinet secretary fight to ensure that the negotiated settlement promotes sustainable fisheries and has the best interests of Scotland's fishermen, coastal communities and wider seafood sectors at its heart.

In this period of uncertainty about our future in the EU, we all need to do all that we can to make fishing easier, simpler and more profitable for our fishermen and to support strong trade and high consumer confidence in Scottish seafood. Without a market—and the EU is a significant one—there is no fishing industry. However, without fishing boats, whether there is a market is irrelevant. I recognise that many—although not all—fishermen voted for Brexit in the hope that that would result in a fairer deal and more control, which are legitimate ambitions. However, it will be the same UK Government negotiating the Brexit deal that has negotiated for Scottish fishermen for decades. Only a few months ago, the current Secretary of State for Scotland, David Mundell, said, in relation to the outcome of Brexit:

“there is no way we would just go back to Scotland or Britain controlling British waters”.

I humbly and honestly confess that I have found the history of and current legislation for the fishing industry in Scotland to be a baffling concoction of rules and regulations. A system is of little use if it is impossible to comply with, so I am pleased that the cabinet secretary is working hard to develop solutions to the issue of choke species so that our fleet is not placed in impossible positions. On landing obligations, fishermen need time and support to make the necessary adjustments to the new requirements.

Scotland has huge potential to market high-quality sustainable seafood—we must continue to work hard to provide confidence that that is the case. I welcome the Scottish Government's pledge that, in next week's negotiations with the EU agriculture and fisheries council, it will support catch limits in accordance with sound scientific advice. That takes me back to my earlier point—it is a point that John Finnie made well—that all of this must depend on sound science.

Although we must take a long-term view and implement sound measures for sustainable fishing while recognising the importance of fishing to our economy, I will finish where I started by saying that we cannot lose sight of what we are really talking about here: protecting livelihoods, families, communities, schools and shops—in other words, protecting a sustainable population.

The task before the Government now is to champion our fishermen in the wake of the Brexit vote and uncertainty—and my personal and total lack of confidence in the UK Government to negotiate a deal that benefits our Scottish fishermen. I would like to see the cabinet secretary—and I am pleased that he has said that he will do this—keep the UK Government's feet to the fire, to make sure that it does not treat our Scottish fisheries as dispensable and non-essential in Brexit negotiations.

I agree that there is a sea of opportunity here, and I urge Opposition members to get behind Fergus Ewing's motion today and to work together to make Scotland a European leader in fishing.

15:58

Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con):

As has always been the case since the EU common fisheries policy came into existence, the position of UK fishermen is negotiated on their behalf by the EU, while Norway, as a sovereign nation, negotiates in the interests of its own fishermen and coastal communities.

In the latest round of EU-Norway fisheries negotiations, we again have the same old tiresome story of the EU failing to stand up for the interests of UK and, in particular, Scottish fishermen. Instead, the EU buckled to Norway's demands over access to North Sea fisheries.

The negotiations gave rise to an increase in the Norwegian quota for blue whiting next year, but there is no reciprocal uplift for UK fishermen. The European Commission, in its wisdom, has signed a deal that gives 110,000 tonnes of blue whiting to Norway and increases its access to Scottish waters. That is entirely unfair on hard-working Scottish fishermen.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Ross Thomson: I want to make some progress, but I will take interventions later.

It is no wonder that our fishing communities voted overwhelmingly to leave the European Union. In so doing, they voted to take back control of our waters, so that UK fishing interests can be directly represented at the negotiating table and we can take a leaf out of the Norwegian playbook in making fair deals that benefit our fishermen.

Gail Ross: Maybe we should take a leaf out of Norway's book and become an independent country. Then we would be able to sit at the table ourselves. Does the member agree?

Ross Thomson: We can sit at the table ourselves with the powers that will return to this Parliament. I hope that that was an endorsement from the SNP of powers coming to this Parliament and MSPs making the decisions and representing our fishermen.

In the current landscape, we are shackled by the EU's labyrinth of rules and red tape, and 70 per cent of UK fisheries resources—worth a total of £1.6 billion—is in the hands of the EU. That has been devastating to the fishing industry. Sixty per cent of the UK fleet has been scrapped due to the loss of resources. Employment has halved, and

there is no major fishing port between Peterhead and Plymouth.

At the same time, other European countries have built boats with EU grants so that they can fish in our waters, which has resulted in more than 1 billion fish being caught in our waters by foreign boats. More than 60 per cent of fish quotas in British waters are in foreign hands. That is, quite simply, madness. To put it another way, the UK owns 70 per cent of the EU's fishing grounds but only 15 per cent of the quota.

I am sure that if Alex Neil were in the chamber today he would agree with me—as no doubt other members on the SNP benches do—that the decision to leave the EU gives us a golden opportunity to be a major player in the fisheries sector, as Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands are. We will have the ability to introduce an environmentally friendly and economically beneficial fisheries policy, determined by members of this Parliament, who understand, appreciate and support our local fishing communities.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention now?

Ross Thomson: Happily.

Stewart Stevenson: One of the big differences, of course, is that Norwegian fishermen actually sit in on the negotiations. It is a matter not just for parliamentarians but for the experts, who are generally the fishermen.

Ross Thomson: I am glad that Mr Stevenson did not dispute, as the First Minister has done, that powers over the area will come to this Parliament and that MSPs in this Parliament will decide Scottish fisheries policy—instead of having the incoherent, ineffective and democratically deficient policies that are currently devised by unelected commissioners in Brussels.

Our fishermen want us to seize the opportunities that are presented by a post-Brexit landscape. Bertie Armstrong, the chief executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, said that leaving the EU would give our fishing fleets

“the ability to recover proper, sustainable and rational stewardship through our own Exclusive Economic Zone for fisheries”.

He went on to say:

“For Scotland's economically important fishing industry, we believe the new opportunities presented by the referendum result are overwhelmingly for the better”.

The fishing industry is speaking with one voice across the UK in calling for politicians north and south of the border to support the common cause, which is that Brexit offers an opportunity of a sustained economic benefit for our coastal communities and every seafood sector. There is

an opportunity to work together to deliver the opportunities of Brexit, rather than squabble about the process or, in the case of the SNP Government, do everything possible to keep Scotland in the EU and sell out our fishermen to Brussels.

The SNP keeps telling us that Scotland should be independent and should govern its own affairs—we heard that in a recent intervention. However, on fishing, not only is it happy to forfeit to unelected European commissioners the power to decide policy in Scotland through elected MSPs, but it is actively working to achieve that. The SNP is completely out of touch with this most crucial Scottish industry. Its current policy stance will short-change our hard-working fishermen.

Perhaps SNP members—such as Stewart Stevenson, or even Richard Lochhead—should use this opportunity to clarify their positions. Are they part of Alex Neil's magic circle of nationalist Brexiteers?

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Ross Thomson: Yes, absolutely.

Stewart Stevenson: Has the member signed my motion, which will be the subject of a members' business debate in about a month's time and which supports the Scottish Fishermen's Federation's sea of opportunities initiative, which addresses precisely the points that he is making?

Ross Thomson: That was not an answer to my point about whether Stewart Stevenson voted to leave, so clearly his answer is that he still wants fishermen to receive their orders from Jean-Claude Juncker, and to sacrifice their industry on the altar of ever-closer EU integration.

We all know that Alex Neil did not want to "rock the boat" by coming out in favour of leaving the EU before the referendum vote. Now that that has passed, where are the rest of the SNP leave voters? Today's *Herald* reports on the National Centre for Social Research report, which says:

"More than one third of SNP supporters voted ... to leave".

Therefore, statistically, some SNP leave voters are sitting in the chamber now. They cannot possibly leave Alex out on his own at sea—or are they going to abandon him in the same way that they are abandoning Scotland's fishing communities? SNP members campaign on the premise that they are "stronger for Scotland", but it seems that they are just stronger for Brussels when it comes to fisheries.

Members of this Parliament can show their support for our fishing communities by working

together to seize the sea of opportunity that lies ahead.

16:05

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I might just sit back down again.

Tavish Scott did not want to talk about the common fisheries policy in depth. However, when I saw that there was to be a debate about fishing, I was reminded of an essay in *The Scottish Review* in 2004 that was written by the Shetlander Robert Lowes. He likened the EU common fisheries policy of the time to a birthday cake. With your indulgence, Presiding Officer, I am going to do something a little bit different. The essay said:

"Imagine a large plump fruitcake, a grand birthday cake, candles, icing, everything. A cake anyone would want to taste. Who gets this birthday cake?"

Well, to be fair, everyone round the table who has come to the party should get a slice. So, who divides it up? Not the host, who might have favourites amongst the guests.

A Cake Commission will need to be created and they will divide it up. Fine.

However, one of the guests demands a slightly bigger slice, because in the past he always got a slightly bigger slice.

'This will have to be proven', says the Cake Commission, 'from past cake records. And, if we are actually getting around to measuring slices, how big is the actual cake itself? To avoid squabbling, scientific evidence of the exact size of the cake will be required, at each and every birthday in the future.'

Another guest is watching his waistline.

He decides his slice is just too much for his reduced appetite, so he will eat only part of it and sells the rest to his neighbour who, it seems, has an insatiable appetite for cake.

Ah, yes, but when we come to divide up next year's cake, how is that slice reckoned? Did it belong to the full man or the hungry man? Could it be used as an argument for the hungry man to get a larger slice and the thin man to get less the next time round?

The guests are getting greedy, so it is agreed to make tea plates smaller and even remove a few altogether, to try and cut the demand for cake.

Then, a real dilemma. Someone else is knocking on the door, someone known to be incredibly hungry, who has travelled some way to come to the party.

The guests can't exclude him from the party, that would be very rude, but if this hungry person comes to the table, there will be less cake than ever to go around.

New sharing rules must be devised, the new arrival stalled as long as possible. Questions are asked about the new guest's entitlement to come to the party. Who invited him? While this goes on, he starts quietly buying up all the surplus cake crumbs he can get his hands on so that when he does get through the door he can knead it into a sizeable lump and insist that this is his historic slice, ready for when next year's cake appears."

Historically, fishing has been one of the most important industries in Scotland. My constituency—indeed, my home town of Wick—saw one of the most remarkable periods in Scottish fishing history, which was the boom in the herring industry. It would be remiss of me not to mention it today. During the 18th century, 19th century and the early part of the 20th century, Wick was the largest herring port in Europe. Records show that, by 1865, 1,100 vessels from Wick and the surrounding areas were engaged during the herring fishing season. Herring lived in vast quantities in the waters around Scotland and were a relatively easy catch. The final years of Wick's association with the herring industry were during a short period following world war two, but by 1953 it was all over—overfished—and almost 200 years of the herring industry were consigned to the history books.

Back to the present day, and Scotland is still placed to have the best fishing industry in Europe. We export more than £400 million-worth of seafood to the EU every year to a market of 500 million people. No matter what happens, we need continued access to that market.

There is still cake in the form of the EU common fisheries policy, which was reformed in 2013. In 1973, we were sold a haddie by the UK Government when Ted Heath said that fishing was “expendable”. I commend Fergus Ewing's efforts to ensure that fishing continues to be a key priority for Scotland, and I echo Claudia Beamish's thanks to our fishermen and her call for them to stay safe.

16:10

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): I am sorry, Presiding Officer, but there are going to be no stories about cake from me. It would just make me hungry and might shorten what I have to say.

No one is going to stand in this chamber and downgrade the importance of the fishing industry not only to Scotland but to the whole UK. It is not just its value to the economy that is important; it also has great value in terms of our social and cultural heritage, to say nothing of the jobs that it provides in fragile areas of rural Scotland. As the cabinet secretary said, the fact that Scotland makes up about 8.6 per cent of the UK's population but, in 2015, landed 78 per cent of the UK's total catch illustrates the importance of that catch to Scotland.

Before I go any further, I reiterate that it is important that we consider management of that wild resource across the human boundaries that we have imposed, and that we look at the big picture. Fish that are in the UK's territorial waters today may be in Norway's territorial waters

tomorrow. Fish do not need passports and do not respect national—or nationalist—aspirations.

As I make this speech, EU officials have already made agreements with non-EU countries including Norway—the most recent EU-Norway talks ended last Friday—on their catch limits and quotas for fish, including cod. That means that all—I do not really mean “all”—that is left for the EU to do is decide who will get to catch what within the waters over which the European Union has jurisdiction.

Before I discuss the negotiations, I want to mention how important fisheries are to the Highlands. As Gail Ross and Maree Todd pointed out, important onshore industries rely on fishing. Scrabster harbour is one of the top landing ports in the UK. It is the most northerly mainland port and is ideal for fishermen who work off the north and west of Scotland. White fish and shellfish including lobsters, scallops and prawns are landed there. A multitude of vessels go in and out and utilise the port annually, and the value of its landings is estimated to be in excess of £20 million. The port is important not just to fishermen but to the businesses that support them—for example, D Steven & Son, which runs a fleet of 30 lorries and employs 55 people. The lorries deliver fish and produce across the whole UK and into Europe. It is a leading business that is vital not only to Scotland but to the UK economy and the wellbeing of Caithness. It is not alone: other firms in the north include Bannerman Company Ltd of Tain, and Ferguson Transport, which are two excellent hauliers for whom fish and fisheries are important.

As has been pointed out, Scrabster is not the only port in the Highlands—many others play their part in its fragile areas. The negotiations that will be undertaken in council between the sovereign states are therefore critical. It is important that the UK stands together in order to get the best deal from Europe, so that Scotland's predetermined share of the UK quota can be as high as possible. There seems to be little point in what has happened in the past, with people fruitlessly posturing from the sidelines over catches.

EU law says that the negotiations are for the sovereign states to conclude. Therefore, the team must pull together in one direction. Travelling together in one direction will be a winning formula, but to try to pull in two different directions would be a recipe for disaster. Therefore, I welcome Fergus Ewing's points and the approach that he appears to be taking, which is to work within the UK.

I will briefly mention the discard ban. I could never and will never see the point of throwing dead edible fish back into the sea. I am pleased that discards are being phased out and that that phasing out will extend to all TAC species by the end of 2019. However, I am seriously concerned about how landing of fish that would have been

discarded is being addressed. I want to see considerably more work and effort being put into resolving the matter.

In looking to the future, it is important that we are mindful of 2020 and Brexit. Let me be clear—I will be clear, unlike other people in Parliament, who are not—that I did not vote for Brexit. I voted to remain, but I accept the democratic decision by the UK. I will not, like Private James Frazer of “Dad’s Army”—and like some people in this chamber—run around saying, “We’re doomed!” Unlike him, and unlike some members, I do not crave more power and cave in when I am challenged.

We have a future. As the Scottish Fisherman’s Federation does, I believe that we present ourselves—as does Brexit—with “a sea of opportunities”. We should grasp those opportunities. As I have said before in Parliament, we should take a can-do attitude and look for the positives, not the negatives. I believe that Bertie Armstrong said that there were “encouraging results on TACs” that were agreed last year. We need to take those opportunities and build on them.

I point out—and remind George Eustice—that, in moving forward, we have to ensure that we are not outflanked by the EU, which wants to secure its position and compliance post 2020. Our fishing industry is too important to be used as a pawn in a chess game. I will always stand up for our fishermen in ensuring that it is not.

John Finnie: Are the EU citizens in our region “too important” to be used as a bargaining tool in the Brexit debate?

Edward Mountain: In response to John Finnie’s point I say that the decision was taken by the whole UK. I agree to abide by democratic decisions. I am afraid that if the member is not prepared to abide by democratic decisions, he must be asked why, at the end of the day, he is a politician.

I will briefly mention inshore fisheries, in which a lot is going on; a lot will go on on the issue in Parliament and the Scottish Government is going to introduce legislation on it. I urge the Government to do as it suggests Europe should do and base its policy decisions on scientific grounds and make sure that the science supports what we are suggesting our inshore fisheries can do.

We have opportunities to reverse the decline in landings that we saw 2015. We can also reverse the decline of fishing vessels, whose number has dropped in the same period. We need to accelerate the small increase in employment that has occurred in the same period. We need a successful outcome, which will only be achieved

by a united front at the negotiations. That will mean that communities across Scotland and the UK can look to a better future in terms of jobs, economic activity and sustainable production.

16:18

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I remind members that I am parliamentary liaison officer for the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity.

Gail Ross might have had cake, but I have pie. The pie chart that I am holding up is by the marine socioeconomics project, and includes statistics, percentages and facts about fishing and the economic impact of bringing our product to market.

Scottish fishing contributes 0.2 per cent of the UK’s gross domestic product, which equals £770 million. We might see that figure as being quite small, but that piece of my pie represents jobs, homes and people’s livelihoods in coastal communities. That is really important.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, which marks the importance of recent and on-going negotiations for Scotland’s fishing industry. As the cabinet secretary remarked, the Scottish Government remains committed to eliminating discards through the reformed common fisheries policy. I was equally pleased to hear him highlight the importance of protecting the livelihoods of our fishermen by safeguarding their right to fish when there is still quota available.

Striking the difficult balance between sustainable economic growth and environmental conservation has always been a challenge associated with the rural economy, and we are fortunate to have a cabinet secretary who understands that. The negotiated settlement must aim to eliminate discards and to tackle the challenges that are presented by choke species, but we must be mindful of the difficulties that the fleet has in complying with the legislation and must support it to make the necessary adjustments.

Being a member of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee has served me well in recent months as a rural MSP, because so much of what has occupied us since June’s referendum result has serious implications for the industries that are at the centre of our economy. As I have demonstrated with my pie chart, fishing is an example of that.

I voted to remain in the EU, which I put on the record for the benefit of Edward Mountain, who has left the chamber. It is important to acknowledge why some members of the industry voted to leave the EU and to explore the opportunities that exist outwith that union, but the

not-insignificant task that faces us is to ensure that Westminster does not, in an exit deal, negotiate away to European vessels access to Scottish waters. Historically, Scotland's fishermen have been shamefully treated by successive Westminster Governments during the annual fisheries negotiations, and that cannot be allowed to be replicated in deals that are struck as we are taken out of the European Union.

Stewart Stevenson: We heard from Ross Thomson about his objection to what he described as "unelected commissioners" making decisions. Their appointments are, of course, approved by the European Parliament.

Does Emma Harper think that it would be even more regrettable if unelected members of the House of Lords, whose appointment as ministers is not approved by Parliament, were to have any role whatever in fisheries negotiations?

Emma Harper: I would prefer it if we could, in any negotiations, sit round the table and negotiate on behalf of our fishermen so that the Scottish voice is heard.

Historically, Scotland's fishermen have been treated badly. Despite the fact that they land almost 80 per cent of the fish that are caught in UK waters, Scotland receives only 40 per cent of the UK share of the EU fisheries fund. Despite being strategically placed to have the best fishing industry in Europe, we have never been allowed to lead for the UK in European fishing negotiations when that would have been appropriate.

The Scottish fishing fleet was betrayed by the Tories in the 1970s, when the UK signed up to the common fisheries policy. Papers from the Scotland Office show that our industry was treated as "expendable", as Peter Chapman agreed.

Edward Mountain: I invite Emma Harper to explain what the European law is regarding council negotiations. Do they have to be undertaken by the member state, or can they be undertaken by anyone?

Emma Harper: I am not a member of the European Parliament, nor am I taking part in any of the negotiations. I am a new member of the Scottish Parliament. At present, I am unaware of how the negotiations take place, but I will be happy to provide Mr Mountain with that information as we proceed.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention that might be helpful?

Emma Harper: Yes, I will.

Stewart Stevenson: Emma Harper might not be aware that, although the member state negotiates, there are examples of Scottish ministers leading as UK ministers and

representing the whole UK. Mike Russell has led for the UK on education matters. It is entirely proper and, indeed, established practice for Scottish ministers to lead UK delegations in European negotiations.

Emma Harper: I thank Stewart Stevenson for helping me. I will be happy to rely on his expertise in the future. I think that having him in the chamber is great.

Members: Hear, hear. *[Laughter.]*

Emma Harper: I will buy him a beer later.

It is vital that we reject any attempts to undermine the sector in Scotland over the next few years of important negotiations with the EU, so I am pleased to hear that the cabinet secretary is pressing Ms Leadsom on the issue. However, I am less heartened to see that, in recent correspondence, George Eustice MP, the Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, reaffirmed his intention to work with the Scottish Government throughout the negotiations only on the condition that we

"strive for a fair deal that benefits the UK as a whole".

I think that he could have said "a deal that benefits the UK and Scotland as a whole." His language does not give me hope that Westminster is any closer to acknowledging Scottish fishermen's disproportionate contribution to the UK-wide sector.

The EU represents the largest food export market for Scottish fish and seafood, with Scotland having exported fish and seafood worth more than £438 million to EU countries last year. That represents nearly two thirds of our food exports, which shows that the fishing industry and ease of market access are of huge importance to Scotland.

As with the farming sector, one of the crucial issues in relation to our exit from the EU is protection of the right of EU nationals to continue to live and work here. Those individuals make up a large proportion of the workforce in the processing sector; if we were to lose part of our processing capacity in Scotland because of labour shortages, we would lose landings, exports and revenue and jeopardise hundreds of jobs.

Of course, a raw deal for Scotland's fishermen will have a domino effect across all sectors that are key to the rural economy. For example, in my region, where the food and drink sector is so important to the livelihood of many people, we have renowned seafood restaurants. Scotland's seafood sector is one of our greatest strengths, and it has built its reputation on a product that is renowned the world over for its pristine quality.

Scotland is strategically placed to have the best fishing industry in Europe—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): Please come to a close.

Emma Harper: I encourage the Scottish Government to do all that it can to make that a reality. I hope that all parties in the Scottish Parliament will support the Scottish Government's efforts to achieve the best possible outcome for Scotland's fishermen.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches. I call Tavish Scott. You have around six minutes, Mr Scott.

16:28

Tavish Scott: At least we now know what Stewart Stevenson is here for: he provides back-up for colleagues across the chamber who are trying to work out the intricacies of member state representation at European level.

I am also very grateful to Gail Ross for giving us the birthday cake analogy, which is probably the best illustration of the reality of the situation. Indeed, things have not changed much in the years since that essay was written.

However, that gives me a chance to say a couple of things about my own part of the world: Shetland. We tend to play around with questions such as who has the most fisheries-dependent community or who has the top port, but I say to those who represent Peterhead in one capacity or other that Lerwick describes itself as a top port as far as fishing landings are concerned because it is top, at least, on a map. I cannot remember which chairman of the port authority thought of that many years ago, but heaven knows we have dined out on it ever since.

On a more serious matter, I want to say a couple of things about two boats. First, just this week, Laurie Irvine, his crew and shareholders launched the new Antares, a magnificent new vessel for the Scottish pelagic industry, and certainly for Whalsay, that will ply the seas in the coming years. It is quite an addition to the fleet. Secondly, earlier this year, a young white-fish crew took the Resilient to sea in the islands' coastal waters. That is a very strong sign of how we might encourage investment in future.

I want to briefly reflect on the point that the cabinet secretary made in his opening remarks about Peterhead and the grant assistance that the Government has applied to the port there. He might want to clarify in his winding-up speech that not only Peterhead port, but many other ports have benefited in the past from that particular EU funding stream. Many hope to do so in the future, even in the period that is left until whatever is to

happen with Brexit happens. Lerwick certainly has very strong aspirations for a new fish market. The irony of ironies, of course, is that it was to be built to EU standards, but we do not even know what that will mean in a few years' time. The more important point is that those grants, which have helped shore-side facilities—many members have rightly mentioned the processing industry—are important investments for businesses. It would be helpful if the cabinet secretary could provide clarification on that.

I want to mention the North Atlantic Fisheries College in Scalloway because of the science work that has gone on there for many years. Just a month or so ago, Dr Ian Napier published a report, which received national and international attention, on the scale of landings from EU waters that are taken by foreign fishing boats. In this context, those waters are Scottish waters and waters further to the south and the definition of "foreign" is other EU nationals. It is important that such analysis is going on. It happens because of the scientific weight of places such as the NAFC marine centre in Scalloway, and I wanted to recognise that.

I will pick up on a few points that have been made. On the processing industry, John Finnie made a fair intervention on the importance of EU citizens, which Emma Harper also rightly mentioned. It is not, of course, just our boats that rely on people from different nations, by which I mean not just EU nations, but nations further afield; the processing industry relies on them, too. Emma Harper and John Finnie, by inference, were quite right to point out that our processing industry would really struggle if those people were not in it. It is really important that that is clarified as a matter of urgency.

I hope—gosh, it probably is only a hope—that in the House of Commons tonight, MPs will vote in favour of an amendment to a Labour motion that will mean that the UK Government will have to publish a plan on Brexit. That would be a good thing. I hope that when that plan is published, it will deal with not only fishing, but with the point about EU nationals.

I know that Ross Thomson was in full rhetorical mode, as he always is, but he and his colleagues need to recognise that the fishing industry needs access to the single market. Maybe the Conservatives will cover that in winding up, but they need to make it clear that they want that, as well, because the single market is essential for the Scottish fishing industry's processing sector. The great majority of our white fish goes to Boulogne and other fisheries markets across France and in other European nations. Members who represent constituencies in the north of Scotland have been eloquent on that point. The single market is

therefore intensely important to the industry, no matter how the shake-up of Brexit happens.

Liam Kerr made some good points about what the industry has done on mesh sizes and square-mesh panels. Some of us who have been around the Parliament for a long time remember debates on square-mesh panels that lasted whole afternoons—I kid you not—and on things such as real-time closures. Mr Kerr properly made the point that the industry has done a lot, and that needs to be reflected in what happens in the future and in the demands that are placed on the industry.

I will make a final point on Brexit. In the *Fishing News* just the other day, Andrew Oliver, who is a Hull-based solicitor, wrote an informative version of what will need to happen in respect of the member state and our Government in Scotland having fisheries law and, more to the point, enshrining it in new law in Scotland. Mr Oliver suggested that that could take 20 years. All those who try to say—in fairness, few do—that doing that will be instant, easy and incredibly straightforward should read that article about the reality of transposing fishing legislation that has been built up over many years into Scots law and our domestic legislation. The process will not be straightforward.

That is why I again ask the cabinet secretary to take forward fisheries plans for the future. That work must be got on with.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I now call David Stewart—for around six minutes, please.

16:34

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): This is an important debate that has mostly been constructive, with well-informed and insightful contributions from members across the chamber. As a sign that we concur with cross-party working on this important issue, Labour will support the Government motion and the other two amendments at decision time.

As we have heard, 12 December is the date for the annual EU quota negotiations in Brussels. The livelihoods of our fishermen are, of course, dependent on the outcomes of the talks. The 28 fishing ministers of the EU states will be involved in frenetic talks, compromises and amendments, in late-night, bleary-eyed sessions in Brussels. Whether that imperfect system is the best way of managing and sustaining our fisheries is debatable—that was a point made by Bertie Armstrong, chief executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, in Tuesday's *Scotsman*; and like other members, I welcome Mr Armstrong and his colleagues to the public gallery this afternoon—but no one can argue that there is an

easy path to balancing technical and scientific advice with the socioeconomic impact on our fishing communities.

Dr Steven Mackinson, the chief scientific officer of the Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association, is teaming up with scientists and fishermen to work out the size of fish stocks, using among other tools fishing vessels' echo sounders to measure fish abundance. He said that that approach

"helps foster mutual respect between fishermen and scientists, which can only bode well for the future management of our precious fisheries in the 21st century."

This is a very important debate, given that, as we have heard, Scotland is a key player among Europe's fishing nations and accounts for around two thirds of the total fish caught in the UK. Given the fact, too, that nearly 5,000 fishermen are employed on Scottish-based vessels, fishing is a key economic resource for Scotland generally and for the Highlands and Islands and the north-east specifically.

The big picture is of a world with a global food shortage, while on our own doorstep we have a fresh, affordable and varied food stock for both domestic and—what is crucial—European markets. Richard Lochhead, who is in the chamber, said in February this year that enough fish were dumped in the North Sea last year to feed Macedonia, Slovenia or Botswana, and we all know that thousands—indeed, millions—are starving in the developing world.

At the local level, it is local communities and hardworking fishermen who provide the backbone of the fishing industry. As a long-time representative of the Highlands and Islands, I am well aware of the distinctive traditions, customs and close-knit communities that the pursuit of fishing has created along the coasts of Scotland. Although the majority of the fishing industry now operates from major harbours with large, efficient fleets, we should not forget about the small coastal communities whose residents have lived with the salt of the sea in their blood for generations.

As I said, this has been a good debate. My colleague Fergus Ewing made a very insightful speech but, to my shock, said that he was being a radical. I have known Mr Ewing for many years and I could describe him in lots of ways, but the word "radical" would not jump into my mind as one to describe him. However, I believe that he will be radical tonight and support Labour's amendment at decision time—I can only live in hope. Mr Ewing made some very useful points in his speech, in particular about the key issue of having to turn good scientific advice into quotas.

Peter Chapman spoke very well in a thoughtful speech and highlighted the fact that Peterhead and Fraserburgh are crucial harbours. He also

made a very interesting point about fishermen moving to more sustainable fishing methods. Irrespective of our views on Brexit, for the future, innovation is king—I totally agree with Mr Chapman on that point.

My colleague Rhoda Grant made the interesting point that we should not forget that we are still in the EU and have not yet implemented article 50, and that we will be debating fishing for many years to come, although perhaps under different models. She mentioned the key issue, which is summed up in our amendment, of marine protection vessels and the halving of the Marine Scotland £5,000 retention bonus for crews. As a good trade unionist and supporter of labour—I use that term in its widest sense—I believe that we should support those crews. I ask colleagues across the chamber to consider supporting them too.

Tavish Scott is a member with tremendous experience in the area of fishing over many years. He made strong criticisms in relation to discards, which I agree with. However, I think that his key point was about the fishing sector having stability and the ability to plan for the future.

I apologise to other members whose speeches I am unable to mention, but I am conscious of the time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse my interrupting, but you can have a little more time if you would like to, Mr Stewart.

David Stewart: Thank you, Presiding Officer. In that case, I will use the 40-minute speech that I have ready for this occasion. [*Laughter.*]

We could argue that Brexit is the ghost at the feast in this debate, although, alas, I do not have time to discuss it in detail. One of the founding principles of the common fisheries policy was equal access to waters. As the lawyer Andrew Oliver—whom I think Tavish Scott quoted—explained in *Fishing News* in July this year,

“As a result”

of Brexit,

“the UK will fall back upon its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea”.

As members will be aware, that international convention, which is unrelated to EU membership, defines nations’ responsibilities in their use of the world’s oceans and gives us guidelines for the management of marine resources.

It is absolutely crucial for the Scottish fishing industry to have full access to the European maritime and fisheries fund. As the cabinet secretary will be aware, the total budget was around €107 million. The chancellor said on 13 August:

“I am confirming that Structural and Investment Fund projects signed before the Autumn Statement and Horizon Research funding granted before we leave the EU will be guaranteed by the Treasury after we leave.”

However, Marine Scotland, which is Scotland’s lead agency for fisheries has set an early “final spend” date for EMFF projects. I ask the cabinet secretary to confirm when he winds up whether that is still in place, whether it has been conveyed to fishermen and whether he is confident that we will be able to spend the entire budget, which in my view is vital for the industry.

In Scotland, our fishing communities often exist in a fragile balance, and both onshore and offshore livelihoods are at stake. That requires that any significant changes be viewed with a careful and critical eye. In considering the future of the industry, we know that sustainable development of fisheries is beneficial environmentally, socially and economically, but we must still proceed with caution.

Our fishermen are some of the most resilient workers in Scotland. Whether the adversity that they face stems from the high seas or from EU regulations, Scottish fishermen will rise to the challenge.

16:42

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I am pleased to close for the Scottish Conservatives. I thank members from all parts of the chamber for their contributions this afternoon. Generally, the debate has been consensual and, as my colleague Liam Kerr said, has put Scotland’s fishing industry at the centre of our national discourse.

Although the industry accounts for only a small percentage of GDP in the Scottish economy, it is the life-blood of many local communities. Last year, more than 4,800 fishermen were employed on Scottish registered vessels, and there was a welcome increase in the number of active fishing vessels registered in Scotland.

Since taking up my role, I have met many fishermen, industry leaders and processors and I have visited the leading scallop port and businesses in Kirkcudbright and the Peterhead fish market to witness the slick market operation and see some of Scotland’s finest catch. On that note, I and—I am sure—all my colleagues on this side of the chamber welcome the cabinet secretary’s announcement, albeit that it was long awaited, of the £5 million to modernise and enhance the Peterhead port, which is Europe’s largest fishing port.

As many colleagues have done, I pay tribute to those who work in our fishing industry. It has played a huge part in Scotland’s culture, yet there

has often been a lack of recognition of its not only economic but social impact on the fabric of our rural coastal communities. Sadly, the importance of fishing communities is often seen only when tragedy strikes, and I have personal experience of the devastation that is felt by fishing communities when a boat fails to return to port, such as the Mhairi L and the Solway Harvester in my home town of Kirkcudbright.

Fishermen work in the most treacherous conditions but have never been afraid to rise to a challenge, be it in stock management or in getting their heads round the often complicated regulations that flow from Brussels.

It seems likely that the final agreement at next week's meeting will be a mixed bag for Scottish fishermen. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation has already voiced concerns about the proposed whiting catch arrangement. As has already been alluded to, the agreement will see increased access for Norway to Scottish fishing waters, enabling it to catch 68 per cent of its blue whiting allocation to the west of the British isles at the same time as benefiting from an additional transfer of 110,000 tonnes of EU blue whiting.

That is disappointing news for the Scottish fleet, which last year landed more than 30,000 tonnes of blue whiting, with a value of more than £6 million. That is not simply because the arrangements mean that the fleet will not be able to catch the same amount next year; the bargaining of blue whiting is merely a symptom of the uneasy compromise that defines the annual negotiations. Under the arrangements, Norway will benefit hugely from Scotland's fishing waters, while countries such as France and Portugal will benefit from the EU's sign-off on the trade-off. It is a prime example of the EU selling Scottish fishing waters down the river.

According to a report by University of the Highlands and Islands, more than half of the fish and shellfish that are caught in the UK's exclusive economic zone are caught by fishermen from other EU countries. What other country would give away half its natural resource? It is not normal and, quite frankly, it needs to be rebalanced. With Brexit, we have a perfect opportunity to do just that.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): If leaving the CFP is seen as being the silver lining in the Brexit cloud, do the Conservatives recognise that, for the wider seafood sector, on-going membership of the single market is essential, and that the UK Government should, therefore, back Scotland's call to ensure that membership is delivered for Scotland's industries, in particular our seafood sector, which exports two thirds of its products to Europe?

Finlay Carson: Everyone on this side of the chamber will agree that we need to do everything that we possibly can to ensure that the markets that we have in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world are protected. We will do everything that we can to ensure that the negotiations reach that outcome.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's comment that he wishes to see the end of the days when boats are tied up while quota is still available. The discard regulations need to be looked at at the same time as advances in net technology, which are led by our own Scottish fishermen.

We will support Rhoda Grant's amendment, because Marine Scotland has a critical and crucial role to play in enforcing the regulations. The Government needs to ensure that Marine Scotland is fit for purpose, to protect and ensure the sustainability of our fish and shellfish stock.

Tavish Scott talked a lot of sense and I share many of his concerns. However, we will not be supporting his amendment, which includes a call for Scottish fisheries policies, irrespective of the breakfast outcome—I mean Brexit. I beg your pardon; it must be teatime.

Tavish Scott: Give the man a fish supper!

Finlay Carson: Talking of fish suppers, Stewart Stevenson treated us, as ever, with his speech about the dog's dinner that the CFP has been. I welcome his echoing the call for one voice. Indeed, we need to look at history and the mistakes that we have made in the past to ensure that they are not repeated in the future.

Maree Todd and I agree on how important fishing is to our coastal rural constituencies, and I agree with her call for balanced fisheries management, which Claudia Beamish echoed.

John Finnie played the Green card, and I agree that good science must continue to be used. John Scott's helpful intervention highlighted the difficulties of the relationship between the commercial and environmental bodies in our MPA-designated waters. We need to find a sustainable fisheries solution. Kate Forbes also touched on the importance of research and technology.

Gail Ross was rather flummoxed by Ross Thomson's speech. A cake—although not a fishcake—was the basis of her speech. In this great British bake-off, Ross Thomson definitely came out as the winner.

Emma Harper unfortunately could not resist Westminster bashing and rather forgot that the EU is currently the problem with our fisheries. I was glad to see Stewart Stevenson come to her rescue, as she appeared to be a fish out of water.

Dave Stewart gave a very balanced speech that looked at not only the economic but the socioeconomic importance of fishing in our small coastal communities.

Ross Thomson spoke about the possibilities and opportunities that Brexit presents for our fishing industry. As he said, the biggest prize will be control of our waters, which will mean that UK fishing interests can be directly represented at the negotiation table by the UK, not the EU, which, as next week's agreements will demonstrate, appears to buckle to the demands of countries such as Norway at the expense of our hardworking Scottish fishermen.

At such an important juncture for our fishing industry, the Scottish Government has a choice to make. So far, in this series of Brexit debates, the SNP has chosen to advance an agenda of gripe and grievance at every opportunity, but we have urged them to get round the table with the UK Government and to work to secure the best deal for Scotland. Today, I make that plea to the cabinet secretary again. I was delighted that, in his contribution, he acknowledged that we need to look at Brexit as an opportunity and not as an excuse to bash Westminster. The prizes on offer for Scotland's fishing industry are huge. Securing them would reaffirm Scotland's reputation as a supplier of high-quality, sustainable seafood. The interests of Scottish and UK fishermen should always be at the forefront in future negotiations.

On behalf of the Scottish Conservatives, I wish George Eustice, our cabinet secretary and the Scottish fishing industry representatives every success in next week's negotiations in Brussels.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Carson, and I hope you enjoy your tea when you finally get it. I now call Fergus Ewing to close the debate.

16:51

Fergus Ewing: During the debate, I learned the sad news that Alex Johnstone MSP has passed away. If he had been here, he would have been a very jovial and reasoned presence, and he was a doughty fighter for North East Scotland. We will miss him. [*Applause.*] That is especially true of us old lags who have been around since the class of 1999. We pass on our thoughts to Linda and his family.

I will start addressing the substance of the debate on a positive note, which is that, after listening to the arguments presented by Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberals, and despite some efforts being made from time to time to prevent me from agreeing to support their amendments, I am happy to say that the Scottish Government, with some reservations as to the

wording and technical aspects of each of the three amendments, will support them all. Our reason for that is that it is important to demonstrate to the fishing communities that, apart from some different views and perspectives, we are essentially all behind them in our aim of securing the best deal in the negotiations.

That has been the way of it in such debates over the years. We all respect the science and the importance of stock sustainability, as John Finnie pointed out; we support the protection of the economic wellbeing of our industry and of the contribution that it makes to rural communities, as Kate Forbes said in respect of Mallaig; and we pursue our commitment to achieving discard-free fisheries, as John Scott said in a telling intervention right at the start of the debate. After separating out some of the points in the political mist that descended upon us from time to time during the debate, I thought that I would start off on what I hope is a consensual note.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): I am very glad that the minister is accepting the Liberal Democrat amendment, which calls for a plan for fisheries. When does he think that he will be able to outline to Parliament his views on how fisheries in Scotland should operate once we leave the European Union?

Fergus Ewing: I am happy to set out right now the principles that I think would apply, and I do not think that there would be much to divide us in setting out the principles that would underlie our approach. That is not a particular challenge and I am happy to do it but, with respect, I say that although I support the sentiment of that part of Mr Scott's amendment, while we are still in the EU the real purpose of the debate is to look at the particular task that faces us: getting the best possible deal for Scotland in the circumstances. That is the task to which most members have applied themselves.

Of course, there are many important areas in which the EU makes a positive contribution and reference was made by Mr Stewart to the EMFF. Claudia Beamish, Edward Mountain and other members mentioned that too. I was pleased to formally announce the £5 million contribution to a £49 million project for major upgrades to Peterhead. That is a very practical contribution. On Monday, I saw for myself that the existing market in Peterhead is packed and full, which means that the boxes are stacked three high, so the buyers have to take on trust what lies in the bottom box—with auctions taking place every 30 seconds it is impossible to do more than have a cursory glance at the top two boxes. More space is needed, and the money that has been given will be well used.

The EMFF has provided £77 million to more than 1,200 projects, which has safeguarded 8,000 jobs. That is not a minor provision. That has been part of strategic support for the fishing industry that has been funded from the EU. Moreover, as Mr Stewart pointed out, between 2014 and 2020, the seafood and marine sectors will receive €107 million in direct assistance, supporting research, development and structural reform. I confirm that, of course, we are applying ourselves to using that money to the maximum—in my experience, at any rate, it is not often that Governments underspend their budgets. The point is that the fund makes a massive contribution to the fishing sector. It would be unreasonable of me to expect an answer today, but it is reasonable of me to ask what will replace it. What has the UK Government said about the support—not at a nugatory but at a substantial level—for food and fisheries if there were to be Brexit?

In that regard, I was pleased to spend Sunday evening in the company of, among others, Jimmy Buchan, the television skipper. He is great company, and I consumed some of his fish from the Amity as part of an excellent meal at the Buchan Braes hotel, which I commend to everybody, incidentally. I mention him because he has devised a separator net, which allows juvenile fish to escape. It is one of the innovations that were mentioned by Mr Kerr as being important. It is fishermen themselves who are coming up with these innovative ideas. Members can have a look at Jimmy Buchan's separator net on YouTube, if they wish. I point out that those efforts are assisted by EU money.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): If I may take Mr Ewing from the east coast to the west coast, where there have also been efforts in terms of technical measures, I will point out to him that the bycatch rules are causing real problems there, particularly in the targeted monkfish and saithe fisheries, because of the cod bycatch. As the minister reasonably said to the Tories, I do not expect an immediate response to my question, but will he undertake to look specifically at that issue in order to find a way in which it might be resolved?

Fergus Ewing: I am aware of that issue, and am happy to confirm that we will continue to consider the matter.

As was pointed out by my predecessor, Richard Lochhead, in a most telling intervention, the EU is also important in that it is the largest export market for Scottish fish, amounting to a value of £438 million, which is nearly two thirds of the total value of our food exports to the European Union. As a member of the EU, we have access to a common market of more than 500 million people. I was pleased to hear Mr Carson give what seemed to

be unqualified support to the idea of the importance of continued access to that market on an unqualified basis. If that is the Conservative policy, we have seen some progress made in this debate. I am happy to hear from Mr Carson if I have misstated his position in any way. If I have not, that clarification from the Conservatives—that they are unequivocally in favour of continuing membership of that market—is most welcome. I see that Mr Carson is not intervening.

We did not get clarification in response to the question that was raised by Mr Finnie in relation to the fact that people from other parts of Europe who come to Scotland to work, and who are most welcome to do so, as far as we are concerned, are an essential part of the capacity of the fish processing sector—as they are in the farming, tourism and forestry sectors and in every other part of the rural economy.

That point was made by a great many members. I do not think that it was made by any Conservative members; perhaps that was just an omission. It is the truth. Sooner or later, we need absolute clarity from the UK Government so that we can put this unfortunate issue to rest. I know that that is causing huge concern. After a constituency surgery in a hotel, I met a lady who hailed from a European country who said that if there was no clarity soon, she would have to consider marriage as a final option. I do not think that point was directed to me in particular; it was more of a general proposition.

In conclusion, I return to the subject of fish. I am delighted that we will all unite behind the efforts that will be made next week by those who are arguing at length in Brussels for the best possible deal for the Scottish fishing industry and am very pleased that all members will unite behind that cause this evening.

Business Motion

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):

Before we take the next item of parliamentary business, I am afraid that I bring some very sad news. I inform the chamber that our parliamentary colleague Alex Johnstone has died. I know that all of us who have had the good fortune to know Alex over many years will be very saddened and touched to hear of his death. There will an opportunity for the Parliament and MSPs to express our sympathy and condolences. On behalf of us all, I say to his family that we are thinking of them at this difficult time.

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-02953, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 13 December 2016

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Debate: Welcoming International Migrants in Scotland
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 14 December 2016

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions Finance and the Constitution; Economy, Jobs and Fair Work
followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 15 December 2016

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
 12.45 pm Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Ministerial Statement: Draft Budget 2017-18

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Delivering Scotland's Food Waste Target

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 20 December 2016

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 21 December 2016

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform; Rural Economy and Connectivity

followed by Members' Business

followed by Members' Business

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Thursday 22 December 2016

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions—[Joe Fitzpatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move en bloc motions S5M-02954 and S5M-02955, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Aberdeen Harbour Revision Order 2016 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Asset Transfer Request (Designation of Relevant Authority) (Scotland) Order 2017 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe Fitzpatrick*]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on the motions will be put at decision time, to which we now come.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-02922.1, in the name of Peter Chapman, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02922, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on sea fisheries and end-year negotiations, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-02922.2, in the name of Rhoda Grant, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02922, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on sea fisheries and end-year negotiations, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-02922.3, in the name of Tavish Scott, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02922, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on sea fisheries and end-year negotiations, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)

Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)

Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 85, Against 0, Abstentions 30.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-02922, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on sea fisheries and end-year negotiations, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 83, Against 30, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament acknowledges the conclusion of negotiations with Norway on shared stocks in the North Sea and the forthcoming annual fisheries negotiations in Brussels; understands that fishermen in Scotland have expressed disappointment regarding their blue whiting catch allocation, which ran contrary to the vote of the UK negotiating team; notes that 2017 will see the continued phased implementation of the landing obligation for whitefish to include North Sea cod and whiting; considers that the outcome of the negotiations will be pivotal in helping the fleet to continue implementing the landing obligation while maintaining its approach to sustainable fishing and remaining economically viable; supports the Scottish Government in its efforts to achieve the best possible outcome for Scotland's fishermen, coastal communities and wider seafood sectors; acknowledges the opportunities, as well as the challenges, for Scotland's fishing sector in the coming years; believes that Marine Scotland staff who crew marine protection vessels should receive a fair pay settlement that recognises their experience and skills; further notes the ongoing EU negotiations with the Faroe Islands over access to EU waters for mackerel and urges the Scottish Government to resist any increase in Faroese access; notes that the Faroe Islands export fish to Russia despite the international sanctions that Scottish processing companies comply with; recognises the challenges of the EU landing obligation; notes that the proposed cod quota for 2017 will create further choke species problems therefore making the discard ban policy counterproductive, and requests that the Scottish Government begins preparations on a Scottish fisheries policy in consultation with fishing communities, irrespective of the outcome of Brexit.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-02954, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Aberdeen Harbour Revision Order 2016 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-02955, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Asset Transfer Request (Designation of Relevant Authority) (Scotland) Order 2017 [draft] be approved.

Paisley for City of Culture 2021

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Time is tight, so I move straight to the next item of business, which is a members' business debate on motion S5M-02149, in the name of George Adam, on Paisley for city of culture 2021. I ask members to leave quietly—your names are being taken. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises Paisley's positioning to be City of Culture in 2021; understands that Paisley town centre has over 100 listed buildings, which is second only to Edinburgh; acknowledges the 850-year-old abbey, which lies in the heart of the town and is the final resting place of six High Stewards of Scotland, Princess Marjory Bruce and the wives of kings Robert II and III; appreciates its cathedral and that it has what it believes is the largest Baptist church in Europe; notes its museum and art gallery and recognises the artists and sportspeople across many fields who originate from the town, including John Byrne, Paulo Nutini, Robert Tannahill, Gerry Rafferty, Gerard Butler and Archie Gemmill, and considers that Paisley's rich and diverse history makes the town a fitting candidate for the City of Culture 2021 title.

17:06

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Let me talk of a town called Paisley. I am not one for talking about it much, and I have not often mentioned that it is the place where I was born and bred, brought up and educated. Members probably believe that this is the easiest speech that I will make in the Parliament, but that could not be further from the truth. There is the sheer emotion of the speech. My town and the people I represent mean so much to me, and I want everyone to understand the positive Paisley vision that my fellow buddies and I have for our town. To be frank, I do not want to mess it up.

When I was first elected as Paisley's MSP, I spoke of taking a team Paisley approach to everything that I do. That is why this place has been bombarded with all things Paisley, but it has also become part of the local parlance in Paisley: the whole town now talks of a team Paisley approach.

The bid to be city of culture can make a difference in our town. We need only look to our neighbours in Glasgow to see how a cultural festival can change people's views of a town or city. When Glasgow's bold bid to be European city of culture was announced, there was much scepticism. The city was in post-industrial decline and was trying to redefine itself. However, Glasgow's time as European city of culture, and its many other festivals and events, have shown that it is indeed one of Europe's greatest cities. We now need everyone to get behind Paisley in its

new, bold bid to gain United Kingdom city of culture status in 2021, because the cultural regeneration on the back of the bid can change the world's view of our home town.

The story of Paisley is an incredible one, and what we have achieved is inspiring. Paisley, like many other towns in Scotland, has its challenges, but it also has an extremely big heart. One of those many challenges is the fact that we have more listed buildings than any other town or city in Scotland bar our nation's capital. That provides us with an opportunity to use such great venues as Thomas Coats Memorial church, Paisley town hall and—of course—Paisley abbey, which is the last great resting place of Marjory Bruce. She was the mother of the Stewart dynasty in Scotland and the daughter of one of our country's greatest heroes, Robert the Bruce.

Paisley is where the cottage weavers of the 19th century became very radical in their political ideals. The Paisley weavers were at the forefront of the Scottish insurrection of 1820, although that is slightly inaccurate, because the weavers in Paisley decided to do it in 1819. After the Peterloo massacre in August of that year, a mass rally was organised in Paisley on Saturday 11 September. Radicals came from all over the west of Scotland and a crowd of 18,000 gathered at the meeting place outside the town, as a local band from Neilston played "Scots Wha Hae". There were many speakers that day and, when the crowd dispersed, some of them decided to march down the High Street. By 10 pm the Riot Act was read and the cavalry were charging down the streets of Paisley in pursuit of peaceful protesters. But this is Paisley: the crowds were not deterred, and pitched battles occurred for several days. It was not until a week later, on September 18, that an uneasy quiet returned to the town. One year later, in the Scottish insurrection of 1820, they would march under the banner of "Scotland free or a desert".

Later in the same century, the weavers were once again in dispute, this time with the corks, who were the merchants who bought the famous Paisley-patterned shawls. The corks would not pay the weavers for the sma' shot, which is the small weave that holds the shawl together, because it was not seen. The weavers fought on and eventually withheld their labour. Eventually, in 1856, they had an opportunity and the corks relented. The first weekend of July became a celebration of that success and a local holiday, which is still celebrated today in our annual sma' shot day summer festival.

We are not only a town of political radicals; we have also given the world much culturally, particularly from places such as Ferguslie Park. If members google "Ferguslie Park", they will see all the stats on deprivation, but deprivation has never

defined Paisley or Ferguslie Park. It is a part of Paisley that has given us singer-songwriter Gerry Rafferty and playwright and artist John Byrne. Mr Byrne recently told *The Herald*:

“Paisley is a remarkable place. I hope to be involved and I support the bid. I support it wholeheartedly. I thank Ferguslie Park every day of my life for providing me all the information I ever needed about life, it was the best place I have ever been. It was happy circumstance we ended up there ... the language, the life, everything. I couldn't have got a better education.”

In the same interview, John Byrne also said:

“I could not care less about politics. Politics is a guise adopted by crooks, criminals, bum-bags—but they are not all like that.”

I can only hope that I am one of the ones who is not like that—but I cannot vouch for the rest of you. That is another example of Paisley being a radical and opinionated town that is steeped in culture.

Paisley is the town that brought us Paolo Nutini, whose dad Alfredo still owns and works in Castelveccchi chip shop in New Street, which has been in the family since 1914. Of course, Paolo will headline Edinburgh's hogmanay party this year. There is also A-list Hollywood actor Gerard Butler, and let us not forget Doctor Who—David Tennant, another Paisley buddie who, along with Steven Moffat, producer, showrunner and writer, brought the longest-running science fiction television series in the world to a whole new generation of fans.

There is the disco diva from Hunterhill, Jacqueline McKinnon, who members may know better as Kelly Marie. Her disco anthem “Feels Like I'm in Love” will no doubt be played quite often as we head towards the festive season. There is also Robert Tannahill, the poet and contemporary of Robert Burns.

Can we talk about the weather, Presiding Officer? We invented it. Not only have we given Scotland's broadcasters weather people such as Heather Reid and Seán Batty, the forecasting of weather was built on the mathematical equations of Lewis Fry Richardson, a Quaker who was born in Newcastle in 1881. His research work on predicting the weather took him to the Met Office but, in 1920, when the Met Office became part of the Ministry of Defence, he promptly resigned because of his pacifist beliefs. As he had been a conscientious objector during the first world war, it was difficult for him to find a university position to continue his research. Luckily, he found a home at the Paisley College of Technology, which in its modern guise is the University of the West of Scotland. He was able to continue his work and became the college principal before retiring in 1940. The mathematical equations that are involved in weather prediction came from Paisley.

It is not our fault that the weather is not good, but no doubt somebody at UWS is working on that machine as we speak.

Ironically, the college was originally called Paisley Technical College and School of Art, which brings us back to what the Paisley 2021 bid is all about. It is about telling the world the fantastic story of our town. It is about its history and achievements and, most important, its people—Paisley buddies. Our local newspaper, the *Paisley Daily Express*, which has been published since 1874, has supported the bid and asked buddies to say why they love Paisley. I love Paisley because it is my town and my place in the world. Presiding Officer, I have a bit in my notes here that says, “Don't greet.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Does it also say, “Conclude”?

George Adam: It is the place where my family have been since 1759. It is where I met my wife, Stacey, and where my daughter, Jessica, was born. It is where my grandparents worked in Ferguslie mill and brought up their family in Ferguslie Park.

This bid is about us telling the world our story—who we are and what we have achieved as Paisley buddies. As we are proud of our place in the world and, considering what we have achieved so far, in all honesty, there is no need for members to thank us. However, we are asking you to back this bid. Back our bid to be the UK city of culture in 2021. Join us and ensure that this great town gets its moment in the spotlight.

17:14

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. I am afraid that, with your permission, I have to leave shortly after my speech, as I have another appointment to go to.

I would like to congratulate George Adam on securing this debate on Paisley for city of culture 2021. I am delighted to speak in support of the bid, having been born and brought up just down the river from Paisley, in Gourock, and having had the chance to enjoy many of its fantastic cultural offerings over the years.

I think that Paisley abbey is one of the greatest medieval buildings in Scotland—not least because it is still the living heart of the community. I have fond memories of attending my daughter's school concerts in the abbey and will never forget hearing Fauré's “Requiem”—the most wonderful choral piece—echoing round the cloisters in 2011. It is a truly magnificent setting for music and I imagine that there will be a great deal of it in 2021.

I can also highly recommend the Paisley museum and its textile collection, which I have visited with the family several times over the years. I was unaware of the “Paisley Pearls” exhibition, currently reimagining the Paisley pattern for the digital age, but, having read about it in the “12 fascinating facts about Paisley” presented by George Adam, I hope to get the chance to see it during the holidays.

I recently learned that my grandmother, Mary McCarn, was a teenage worker in Coats’ mill, travelling there from Greenock, and I am delighted that the unsung labour of so many women like her will have a legacy in the £56 million plan to create a national museum of textiles in Paisley.

The purpose of the UK city of culture programme is to encourage the use of culture and creativity as a catalyst for change. Paisley is very well placed to achieve that and I welcome the bid’s commitment to use the title to address inequality and poverty and create new jobs for local people. It will, of course, enrich the lives of thousands of Paisley buddies by giving them access to unique cultural experiences and bringing a sense of pride to the town—something whose benefits are unquantifiable but known to touch on improved wellbeing and educational attainment.

I am old enough to remember when Glasgow was European city of culture back in 1990. That was different, of course, from this UK title, but the effect is similar and the 1990 accolade was one of the first of its kind in Scotland. It was an exciting and transformative event. As a young person in Glasgow at the time, I have wonderful memories of that year in the cultural experiences that I can say really changed me.

I particularly remember the collaboration of Liz Lochhead and Gerry Mulgrew on the experimental piece of theatre “Jock Tamson’s Bairns” at the Tramway. Anyone who saw it looked at Scotland and our national bard in a completely different way, and it is surely ripe for revival. Perhaps, if Paisley 2021 goes ahead, that could be considered.

As George Adam has said, one of our greatest playwrights, John Byrne, is from Paisley. His play “The Slab Boys”, which I saw on the BBC “Play for Today” series even earlier in my life, is one of the most inspirational things that I have ever seen. I had never seen a portrayal of urban Scotland quite like it and, of course, it was hilarious as well as touching. Byrne’s particular genius—he comes from Ferguslie Park, as George Adam said—was the richness of the Scots language in that play. I have been a fan of his work ever since, once attending an all-day staging of the trilogy at Glasgow’s King’s theatre. I could not imagine anything better than the city of culture title coming

to Paisley and getting the opportunity to see more of Byrne’s work in his home town.

17:18

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): I thank George Adam for securing this members’ business debate, and I congratulate Paisley on launching its bid to be UK city of culture 2021. I am supporting Paisley’s bid for three reasons: first, Paisley deserves it; secondly, Paisley needs it; and, finally, Scotland stands to benefit from it.

First, Paisley deserves the award because it is already a city that is rich in culture. From the world-renowned textile design that is known as the Paisley pattern to some of the UK’s finest architecture, Paisley has a unique artistic expression. Producing household names such as Paolo Nutini, Gerard Butler and David Tennant, Paisley has nurtured some of Scotland’s greatest theatrical talent and represents the best of Scottish culture to the rest of the world.

Paisley is also the setting for the famous court case of *Donoghue v Stevenson*, which sets out the basic criteria under Scots law for determining whether a duty of care exists. The case involves Mrs Donoghue, the Wellmeadow cafe in Paisley, an opaque coloured bottle of ginger beer, some ice cream and a decomposed snail. It is well worth a look on LexisNexis, if members are interested.

Paisley also deserves the award because of its proven drive to invest in the local community and think long term. In taking the opportunity to create a long-term fund for investment in local cultural organisations, artists and community partners, Paisley has laid the foundations for continued success and cultural enrichment.

I support the bid because Paisley not only deserves the award but needs it. The UK city of culture award is designed to reward somewhere that is committed to cultural enrichment but is in need of a boost, which perfectly describes Paisley. According to the 2016 Scottish index of multiple deprivation, 25 per cent of Paisley’s population is income deprived and 30 per cent of children in the area live in severe deprivation—in areas that suffer some of the highest deprivation rates in Scotland. In previous years, UK city of culture designation has increased tourism by up to 50 per cent, which translates into a multimillion-pound boost to the local economy. That is an opportunity that cannot be ignored.

Finally, I support Paisley’s bid because Scotland stands to benefit. The award would attract global attention, and increased tourism in Paisley, which is next door to Glasgow international airport, would be a welcome economic boost. Measures such as the transformation of Paisley museum into an international destination will not only bring benefits

locally but increase the town's international appeal. That is another great opportunity for Scotland.

I offer my full support for the motion and wish Paisley the best of luck in its bid to be UK city of culture 2021. The title is in Paisley's best interests and in Scotland's. In the wise words of former Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, I plan to keep an eye on Paisley. I hope to see the town win the 2021 award.

17:21

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I thank my fellow buddie George Adam for securing today's debate on Paisley's bid to become UK city of culture 2021.

It has been scientifically proven that Paisley is the centre of the universe. Even MSPs such as me, who do missionary work elsewhere in the west of Scotland, think fondly of our home town and its suburbs, such as Joan McAlpine's Gourrock.

My near-identical twin, Gerard Butler, is one of many famous buddies; others include Gavin Newlands MP and a host of industrialists, scientists and entrepreneurs. However, given the short time that is available in this debate and its subject, we should consider those who have contributed in a direct cultural sense, such as actors David Tennant, Tom Conti, Phyllis Logan and Fulton Mackay, musicians Paulo Nutini, Gerry Rafferty, David Sneddon and Kenneth McKellar, painter Alexander Goudie, architects Thomas Graham Abercrombie and John Hutchison, playwright John Byrne, sculptor Sandy Stoddart, and cinematographer Michael McDonough, among many, many others.

Paisley is not a suburb of Glasgow but a town in its own right, at the heart of Renfrewshire. The town's patron saint is Mirin, who founded a church on the site of Paisley abbey. There is a street in Paisley called St Mirren Street, and in 1922 Paisley's renowned football team, St Mirren Football Club, won the Barcelona cup—the commemorative poster is on my wall upstairs. The fortunes of the two towns' clubs have diverged in the decades since, but I am confident that if St Mirren continues to play as it has done so far this season, we will be hot favourites to win the Scottish league one championship in 2018.

Paisley pattern was made famous the world over by the Coats family and represents the legacy of Paisley's one-time place at the centre of the world's textile industry. The pattern, which resembles a fig or a twisted teardrop, is of Iranian origin. Some design scholars think that it is the convergence of a stylised floral spray and a cypress tree, which is a Zoroastrian symbol of life

and eternity. It is a bent cedar—the cedar is the tree that Zarathustra planted in paradise—and it is a sign of strength, resistance and modesty, which are traits for which Paisley buddies are rightly famous. Paisley's mills have long closed, but the impact of the Paisley pattern can still be seen throughout the world.

Paisley's history is fascinating but often forgotten outside the town. Ian Jack, writing in *The Guardian*, said:

"There is probably no more unjustly neglected town in these islands; there is nowhere of comparable size—77,000 people—that has such a rich architectural, industrial and social history and that once mattered so much to the world."

It is for that reason that I want to use this opportunity to touch on the town's positive future if—or rather, when—it is named as the UK city of culture in 2021.

Paisley's rich architectural culture runs through the town from Paisley Abbey and the town hall, down the High Street to the museum, Coats observatory and Coats memorial church, which is often described as the Baptist cathedral of Europe. Paisley has the highest concentration of listed buildings anywhere in Scotland outside Edinburgh, and it is fortunate to have two great education institutions in the shape of West College Scotland and the University of the West of Scotland.

The guidance that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport issued in 2014 states that a

"UK City of Culture should be expected to deliver a high quality cultural programme that builds and expands on local strengths and reaches a wide variety of audiences, creating a demonstrable economic impact and catalyst for regeneration as well as contributing to community cohesion and health and wellbeing."

Securing the title will bring hundreds of thousands of visitors to Renfrewshire. It will generate an economic gain of £50 million, create hundreds of new jobs for local people and instil confidence in the town, helping to transform Paisley's image nationally and cementing a deeper sense of civic pride. Importantly, being awarded city of culture will have a lasting legacy of helping to tackle poverty in an innovative way by making it easier for every local family to access cultural activities.

Paisley has much to offer. If anyone researches its proud history, they will come across countless examples of times when the people of Paisley rose and overcame obstacles. Winning the city of culture bid will serve as another example of Paisley seizing an opportunity to shape a new, positive future.

17:26

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): As we have heard, Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli is quoted as saying

“keep your eye on Paisley”,

and I am glad that the Scottish Parliament is doing that today.

I thank George Adam for lodging the motion and helping to promote the Paisley bid for 2021 UK city of culture. I am proud to support Paisley, which is a town that I have represented for nearly 10 years as a councillor and as an MSP.

Renfrewshire as a whole has a long history, from the 6th and 7th centuries, when St Mirren was said to have established the Paisley settlement, through to the time of the house of Stuart in the 14th and 15th centuries, and on to the industrial revolution in the 1800s, which made Paisley known as a centre for textiles across the world. That rich history is the basis of the bid for 2021 city of culture.

People take great pride in Paisley, and they have continued the legacy of Sir Thomas Coats to make the town great. I congratulate Councillor Mark Macmillan—he is in the public gallery today—on his leadership of Renfrewshire Council and on his initiative to rally the town behind the grand idea of the bid. Councillor Macmillan has already announced his retirement from local politics as of May next year, but I am sure that he will continue to play a strong role in ensuring that Paisley wins the bid.

There are many famous and celebrated people from music, art and literature who have placed the town on the cultural map and, in his motion, George Adam referenced a few of them.

We also have a hidden set of Paisley champions: the women who helped to shape our history and the women who are spearheading the campaign for city of culture status. Paisley’s strong threadmaking traditions were supported by one of the largest female workforces in Europe, and the Govan rent strike hero, Mary Barbour, was originally from nearby Kilbarchan. Paisley has a heritage of strong women, and a noted rebellious side.

Today’s strong Paisley women include Jean Cameron, the director of the 2021 bid, who is leading the charge to change Paisley for the better; Amanda McMillan, one of only two female managing directors of European airports, who is helping to shape and boost our local economy; and strong political women who have represented the area, such as Trish Godman, Wendy Alexander and Mhairi Black.

A love of and pride in Paisley’s culture and heritage are woven into the fabric of the people of the town. I cannot think of any other town or city that is more deserving of the status of UK city of culture. I finish with the Benjamin Disraeli quotation that I started with:

“keep your eye on Paisley.”

17:29

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): In breaking news, I confirm to members that Santa loves Paisley, too. Today’s *Paisley Daily Express* reported on a meeting between Provost Anne Hall and the great man himself, who told her that he had come from Lapland to tell her how much he loves Paisley.

I congratulate George Adam on securing the debate and I congratulate the team behind the bid, who have put so much hard work into it.

The UK city of culture competition offers a unique opportunity for any city in the UK to demonstrate, promote and celebrate its culture. Cities far and wide, from Plymouth to Dundee, have put their names forward over the years. Even though we are only a few terms into the competition, we have seen some fantastic cities win the prize and reap the benefits. Northern Ireland’s Londonderry/Derry became the first and Kingston upon Hull was victorious the last time. So far, however, Scottish cities have fallen short, with only Dundee having managed to make the shortlist. It is time that Scotland took home the prize.

If Hull was once the winning city because it was “a city coming out of the shadows”,

surely Paisley must be considered a city of spirit and courage. Paisley’s mills once wove silk, fabric, shawls and textiles for the world. Nearly 10,000 people, most of them women, once filled the town to work in those mills. However, like many other great industrial towns, Paisley suffered from the decline of its factories. That did not prevent Paisley from resurging, with iconic crooners such as Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin wearing the Paisley pattern on silk smoking jackets at their Las Vegas shows.

Paisley has seen some tough and turbulent times, as has been mentioned, but its inhabitants have always shown spirit and courage—as when Paisley was bombed by the Luftwaffe during the second world war and when its weavers took to the streets in the radical war in 1819, which George Adam recounted. Paisley’s indefatigable courage to recover, rebuild and inspire is one of its most defining characteristics. In my view, it should become the UK city of culture because of that

resilience and its ability to reinvent itself in good times and in bad.

Paisley has long influenced popular culture. For a town of just 77,000 people, it has punched way above its weight, from Phyllis Logan in “Downton Abbey” to Gerry Rafferty in “Baker Street”; and from David Tennant crossing space and time to Paolo Nutini crossing musical styles and tastes. Indeed, the doyen of political satire and news, Andrew Neil, is from Paisley—even if his tan says otherwise. Culture is synonymous with Paisley. The Spree festival sold more than 4,000 tickets last year and was widely hailed as a great success—it was almost the west of Scotland’s own fringe festival. Sma’ shot day, in July, celebrates Paisley’s unique textile legacy and is one of the oldest workers festivals in the world. We also look forward to hosting the Scots trad music awards in December next year.

The benefits of becoming the UK city of culture are significant. The first winner saw a 50 per cent increase in visitors. However, it is about so much more than just winning a title; it is about a collective endeavour to make Paisley a better place in which to live. There is some work to be done. The all-important Glasgow airport link via Paisley is still to be built and parts of Paisley are still deprived, but I welcome the fact that Renfrewshire Council is doing so much to tackle some of the issues.

Of all the cities that are bidding for the award, surely Paisley epitomises the spirit, courage, cultural heritage and ambition for the future that are worthy of the honour. I will also be keeping my eye on Paisley, and I hope that the judges will, too.

17:33

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): As colleagues have done, I thank George Adam for giving us the opportunity for the debate today. Paisley is a wonderful town with a rich cultural history. It has very much been shaped by its industrial history and could not be more deserving of being the city of culture in 2021.

The weaving industry in Paisley has given rise to world recognition, not just through the quality of the designs—most obviously the Paisley pattern—but through the radical movements that emerged during its history. The early 19th century artisan weavers played a key role in the “radical war” of the 1820s; in fact, as George Adam highlighted, they were so up for it that they started it before the 1820s. They went out on strike to secure a more representative Government that would be responsive to their needs and not just to the needs of the ruling class. Although it was brutally suppressed, the radical uprising led to lasting

changes, and electoral reforms were eventually attained—most obviously in the Reform Act 1832, although they were not limited to that act.

Even Karl Marx, in “Das Kapital”—a tome that I am sure every member has read from front to back—

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): Hear, hear. [*Laughter.*]

Ross Greer: —drew on the example of weavers in Paisley, and referred to

“the brave Scots of Paisley”

and the labour that they poured into their production of textiles. He highlighted Carlile, Sons & Co as one of the oldest and most respected companies producing cotton and linen in the west of Scotland, having been in operation as far back as 1752. However, as one would expect, Marx took a dim view of the Carlile family and a much more positive view of the workers in their mills. Unfortunately, Carlile, Sons & Co does not produce textiles in Paisley any longer—indeed, textile production essentially stopped in the 1990s.

The weaving industry may be gone, but the rich cultural heritage is still visible in the town hall that was paid for by one old mill owner, in the museum that was paid for by another and in the multitude of streets that are named after the industry, of which Dyer’s Wynd, Cotton Street and Thread Street are the most obvious examples.

The decline of the weaving industry, along with the decline of the shipbuilding industry and the broader process of deindustrialisation in recent decades has left Paisley with huge challenges. Ferguslie Park, which has been highlighted, has one of the highest levels of deprivation in Scotland. Paisley jobcentre has the highest number of sanctions in West Scotland—a figure that we hope will drop with the changes that are coming as this Parliament takes control of the work programme. In the north-west of the town almost one in three children lives in poverty.

We know that Paisley is a brilliant town that has fantastic communities and individuals who are constantly working to improve their area. Indeed, Paisley is already a city of culture, so the bid is about more than that: it is about ensuring that Paisley’s rich cultural heritage can be put to good use to promote the town throughout the country and further afield, and to address the problems that face everyone in that community.

Irrespective of whether Paisley wins the city of culture 2021, the bid process itself will help it—although I would feel sorry for any judge who votes against it, when George Adam catches up with them.

Renfrewshire Council has set out to invest millions in supporting local arts and culture initiatives, as well as in upgrading the Paisley museum. If it were to win the award, much more could be done to raise the profile of the historic town to encourage the tourism and investment that it needs, and to give the community better access to better cultural experiences than they have had.

The city of culture bid should also be used to revive Paisley's bid to become recognised as a city. Paisley has all the attributes of a city. The legacy of the bid should look beyond 2021 and to the status of Paisley itself for the decades and the centuries to come.

17:37

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank George Adam for securing the debate to help the Paisley bid, and I thank all the members who signed the motion and who have spoken in the debate to acknowledge that Paisley is a fitting candidate to be the UK city of culture 2021.

I congratulate all those who have made Paisley's 2021 city of culture bid a reality and I pay tribute to the sterling work of the local partnership that has been driving the bid forward. We would not be debating a bid were it not for the vision and leadership of Renfrewshire Council leader, Mark Macmillan, other elected members, bid director Jean Cameron, and every single member of staff at the council. I also pay tribute to the enthusiasm of all the people and organisations across the community that have been right behind the bid. Many of them will join us in the garden lobby this evening. I sense in the area a real momentum behind the bid.

As someone who was born and lives in Paisley and who, like George Adam, represents the town, I am proud to speak in support of our bid to be the UK's city of culture. We know that Paisley has, as we have heard, a proud past. A small market town that was transformed by the industrial revolution, Paisley became a world-leading producer of textiles. The weavers, the thread mills, the world-renowned Paisley pattern, the way in which the industry shaped our economic history and the culture of our community are all part of the town's social tapestry.

As members have mentioned, Paisley has given the world great actors, poets, musicians and sports people—Gerard Butler, Robert Tannahill, Gerry Rafferty and Archie Gemmill, to name but a few. Mary Fee was quite right to acknowledge the work and contributions of many Paisley women to Paisley's culture.

Paisley's built heritage represents one of the most impressive townscapes in Scotland. As the motion states:

"Paisley town centre has over 100 listed buildings, which is second only to Edinburgh".

The 850-year-old abbey that stands in the centre of Paisley to this day links us to our pre-industrial past. It is not just a monument; it is a living, active building with tours, concerts and services all year round.

There is a great deal to commend in respect of Paisley's bid and there is much to celebrate, but the bid is more than a celebration of our heritage and creativity: it is about the future—a positive future. The accolade, the recognition and the investment that city of culture status would bring to Paisley would be catalysts for change. We all know that Paisley faces its fair share of challenges as a community, but we can overcome them. Paisley has many great opportunities ahead of it.

As we have heard, winning the title of city of culture 2021 would be a huge economic boost for the town. It is projected that it would bring about 1 million visitors to Renfrewshire in 2021, and the expected economic impact would be in the region of £50 million. Every penny that visitors spent on Paisley's High Street would support our local economy and boost our town centre, thereby helping us to create and sustain hundreds of new jobs for people in the area. A successful bid would help every child and every family in Renfrewshire to access cultural activities, thereby breaking down barriers to social inclusion.

The bid has the potential to transform Paisley. It is a platform on which we can promote the town across Britain and around the world. We are already seeing it as an opportunity to build a new sense of pride in Paisley—not just civic pride, but a real appreciation of where our town has come from and where it is going. As city of culture, we could host more and more highlights from Britain's cultural calendar, which would mean bringing more arts and music festivals and more great performances, concerts and awards shows to Renfrewshire.

I am proud of Paisley and I am proud of its bid. I wish the bid team every success, and I hope that it wins this very special distinction for the town. For now, I want to call on all the people of Paisley and, indeed, all the people of Renfrewshire, as well as fellow MSPs, to back the bid. Together, let us put Paisley on the map as UK city of culture in 2021.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Bibby.

We are very pressed for time, so I thank Tom Arthur and Stuart McMillan for cutting their speeches to two minutes. It can be done—I have done it myself.

17:41

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I am delighted to have the opportunity to participate in the debate, which recognises Paisley's positioning to be city of culture in 2021, and I congratulate Paisley's MSP, George Adam, on securing it.

Kenneth Gibson said that Paisley is not a suburb of Glasgow. I could not agree more. I was sorely tempted to refer to it as a suburb of greater Barrhead, but I would be pushing my luck if I did that. As someone from Barrhead—"Mine Ain Grey Toon"—Paisley has played a big part in my life. Trips to Paisley are among my most vivid childhood memories—from the happy ones, including seeing the lights on Christmas eve or performing in Paisley town hall, to the less enjoyable ones, including nerve-wracking piano exams in the abbey and getting hauled around the Paisley centre in August to buy a new school uniform, which marked the end of yet another summer holiday.

Just as Paisley was an ever-present feature of my childhood, having the honour to now represent the diverse communities of Renfrewshire South, which mark the southern and western boundaries of Paisley, means that Paisley is still a big part of my life, because what happens in Paisley can have a significant impact on my constituents.

The reality is that Paisley's being 2021 city of culture would not just be a tremendous achievement for that proud and ancient town; it could also be a boon to the surrounding communities of Renfrewshire and beyond. From increased economic activity to civic renewal, the positive effects of Paisley 2021 have the potential to be felt far and wide. The predicted 1 million visitors to Paisley 2021 would, for example, have the opportunity to take in many attractions in my constituency of Renfrewshire South—for example, the weaver's cottage in Kilbarchan and the Castle Semple visitor centre and country park in Lochwinnoch, which is the gateway to the Clyde Muirshiel regional park.

Paisley 2021 is an opportunity to put a town whose name is known around the globe firmly back on the map. In addition to presenting an opportunity to celebrate the rich cultural history of Paisley, it would show that as well as a proud past, Paisley has a promising future.

Paisley would making a fitting and well-deserved city of culture in 2021. Although Paisley would, of course, be the epicentre of activity as city of culture, the effects would be felt across the region. A successful bid would be a huge opportunity for not just Renfrewshire but the whole of the west of Scotland. I am therefore very pleased to join my colleagues from across the

chamber in wishing Paisley's bid to be 2021 city of culture the very best of luck.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Not quite down to two minutes, Mr Arthur. I have done it, though.

I thank Tom Arthur and Stuart McMillan again for cutting their speeches.

17:44

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague George Adam on securing the debate. As we all know, he is not shy about highlighting Paisley in the Parliament.

I am happy to support the Paisley 2021 bid. As members will know, there is a friendly rivalry between Paisley and Greenock, much of which emanates from our footballing clubs, St Mirren and Greenock Morton respectively. As George Adam supports St Mirren and I support Greenock Morton, we always have a bit of fun, which I am particularly enjoying at the moment, given that Morton are 16 points and six places ahead of St Mirren in the league. Notwithstanding that, this bid is something that all of us in the west of Scotland can get behind. I know that Inverclyde Council has backed it, and I encourage as many people as possible in Inverclyde to do the same, as there will be benefits for my constituency, too.

I want to highlight a couple of reasons why I believe Paisley should win. First, Paisley abbey is a fabulous building with a special characteristic; its elegance and charm make it one of Scotland's iconic buildings. I have attended a few services in the abbey, and I have never failed to be impressed by its atmosphere.

The second reason is the people. I worked in Paisley for four years and had my old regional office in the town for six, and I found the people to be similar to those in Inverclyde: friendly, warm, ambitious for their town and, indeed, funny. Working-class communities have a special characteristic that opens up a vibrancy in the arts and culture. Paisley's history—and its patter—is a story that buddies need to tell time and again; nobody else is going to tell it for them. Historical events can become cultural and economic drivers in communities, and Paisley has an abundant amount of such history.

As I have said, Inverclyde will benefit if Paisley's bid is successful. After all, we are just down the road, and there will be benefits from the main tourism element, whether it be people visiting our scenic golf courses or the outdoor pool in Gourrock, to name just a few things.

I wish the bid team and Paisley good luck. On this issue, Greenock and Paisley can unite for the benefit of both communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Well done, Mr McMillan. You beat Mr Arthur.

17:46

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I thank members for their contributions. Clearly, there is a lot of support across the chamber for Paisley's bid to become 2021 UK city of culture, and I welcome Renfrewshire Council's clear ambitions to use culture and creativity as a catalyst for promoting regeneration. I met Renfrewshire Council early in its campaign to hear about its ambitions for Paisley, and my officials have met the council since then, too.

That said, the process itself has not yet been launched, and I am mindful that other Scottish cities and areas have indicated or might still yet indicate an interest in bidding to become 2021 UK city of culture. The Scottish Government and our agencies have recent valuable experience to help advise bidding cities through the process and to look at opportunities relating to their plans, and my officials have also been in contact with the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which runs the competition, to ensure that details of the bidding process are finalised as soon as possible to help Scottish cities and areas develop their plans.

However, let us focus on Paisley. It is a proud and confident town that is rooted in culture and heritage, and it is a town that not only cherishes its diverse heritage and traditions but continually seeks to create further opportunities to share and to celebrate. Indeed, I was delighted to announce earlier today that Paisley's international festival of weaving in July 2017 will be one of the funded signature events for the Scottish year of history, heritage and archaeology.

In its exciting bid to be UK city of culture, Paisley seeks to transform its future by using its unique cultural heritage as the home of the world-renowned Paisley pattern and one-time centre of the global textile industry to attract tourism investment as well as to promote further job growth and economic stability across all of Renfrewshire. The bid will show the breadth and depth of Paisley's cultural assets, the value of its heritage and its potential for economic social and cultural regeneration as it celebrates its rich textiles heritage while looking forward to a future that is built on innovation, enterprise, talent and community. The Paisley 2021 bid team are doing a fantastic job of highlighting the strength of their bid and the town's drive to be UK city of culture in 2021.

On a national level, our national performing companies are already active in Paisley, as demonstrated through the Royal Scottish National

Orchestra's five-year collaboration with Paisley's spree festival and Scottish Ballet's continued partnership with the Kibble Education and Care Centre in the town. That latter project in particular has introduced creative dance and ballet to many young people who have been excluded from mainstream education because of their additional social and behavioural needs. In addition, Scottish Ballet has had 13 children from the Paisley area join its associate programme, which provides vocational, classically based training for boys and girls from primary 6 to secondary 5 as a means of developing confident, dedicated and motivated dancers. If the bid is successful, people should think about reviving the ballet based on Archie Gemmill's fantastic movements when he scored that amazing goal in the world cup.

I am delighted that, as a result of the bid, our national performing companies are in discussions with the 2021 bid team in Paisley about looking at opportunities to work closely with the community in order to deliver programmes that enrich people's lives and enhance Scotland's cultural heritage.

I recognise the ambition of Renfrewshire Council and the people of Paisley, who are to be praised for looking to secure a prosperous and successful future that is firmly rooted in Paisley's cultural heritage, which is both extraordinarily rich and historically deep. The 10-year Paisley town centre heritage strategy was a major step forward in bringing that ambition into reality. The work around the abbey has already been developing, and it is good to see progress in that area.

Paisley has much to be proud of, and it deserves a future that is every bit as great as its past. We all want Paisley to succeed. Paisley is different. It is special and unique—perhaps as much as George Adam, who lodged the motion. I expect everyone to congratulate him on bringing the debate to the chamber.

I wish everyone well for tonight's event in Parliament. I am very sorry that I cannot join them, but I am speaking at the 40th anniversary of the Federation of Scottish Theatre at the Roxburghe hotel in approximately 10 minutes. I wish everybody well in their celebrations and activities.

The process of putting the bid together is a great achievement. It unleashes the spirit of Paisley. I hope that everybody who is involved can take the best from what they have achieved to date, and I wish everyone the best for the future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members will now understand why we could not extend the debate. There is a prize, which George Adam will be in charge of, for counting the number of times that Paisley was mentioned.

Meeting closed at 17:51.

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