



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 22 November 2022

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 22 November 2022

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Monsignor John A Hughes, parish priest at St Joseph's, Helensburgh and former rector of the Pontifical Scots College in Rome.

Monsignor John A Hughes (Parish Priest, St Joseph's, Helensburgh): First, thank you for allowing me to share this moment with you and special thanks to Jackie Baillie for nominating me to have this moment of reflection.

We might be forgiven for thinking that the business of the fourth estate is somewhat dominated by discord. The media seem to make much of disharmony and to give perhaps disproportionate airspace and volume to any jarring notes. Holding differing opinions, diverging on points of view and perhaps even being in sharp contrast on deeply held principles will frequently characterise general discourse. However, with mutual respect and a genuine willingness to listen, dissonance need not be the inevitable outcome.

Tragically, discord is not limited to debate. Our brows are almost permanently furrowed as we flinch when learning of continued strife in Ukraine and in other troubled countries. Nearer home, disharmony can seem to be the stamp punctuating much political and social intercourse. The fourth estate might vindicate its claim that much is indeed out of joint.

On this day, 22 November, the Christian community celebrates the feast of St Cecilia. She has, for some centuries, been associated with harmony, concord and music, however strangely that association came about—probably due to a mistranslation or to carelessness in manuscript copying. The earliest English reference to Cecilia, in the work of Chaucer, associates her with blindness, the Latin word for which is “caecitas” and gives us the name Cecilia. That paradigm shift from a connection with blindness to the patronage of harmony might not be such a huge leap of faith. Having a place for insight and a sense of vision might do a lot to avert disharmony and discord.

Interestingly, the oldest purpose-built concert hall in Scotland, and the second-oldest in the United Kingdom, was named for Cecilia here in Edinburgh's Niddry Street. Her day was marked

here in Edinburgh as far back as 1696. I would like to think that in our commonsense Scottish psyche—which I think is reflected in the layout of this place—there is an instinct and desire to look for concord, to work for harmony and to be in tune with the most cherished desires of our people.

There is no shortage of poetry and musical compositions for this day, including works by Pope, Dryden, Purcell, Jeremiah Clarke and Handel. More recently, W H Auden's “Anthem for St. Cecilia's Day”, dedicated to Benjamin Britten, prays:

“Cecilia, appear in visions ... appear and inspire ... come down and startle ... mortals with immortal fire”

I pray that the energy and efforts of all who labour here may be inspirational for our country and will fire individuals and groups to live and work in harmony in our great country.

Thank you.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Monsignor Hughes.

Topical Question Time

14:05

Teachers (Industrial Action)

1. Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to avoid industrial action by teachers. (S6T-00982)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): I am absolutely committed to supporting a fair pay offer for teachers through the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers, and to preventing unnecessary industrial action. Strikes in our schools are in no one's interests, least of all those of pupils, parents and carers, who have already faced significant disruption over the past three years.

Members will be aware that only the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, as the representative body of the employers, can make a formal pay offer to the teacher unions. I and my officials are in regular dialogue with COSLA to identify options to support an increased pay offer. I have also been in regular contact with the unions to establish whether there is any scope for a shift in their negotiating position. I last spoke with union representatives as recently as Friday 18 November.

We continue to work closely with COSLA to deliver a fair, affordable and sustainable settlement for teachers and one that can avert unnecessary strike action.

Stephen Kerr: I was hoping that we would hear something more positive than the answer that I have just received. I remind the cabinet secretary that she is a party to the negotiations. As much as she might like to try to distance herself from them, she has a seat at the table.

However, let us not forget that it should never have come to this. The negotiations should have concluded weeks and months ago. They should not still be taking place less than 36 hours before a strike is due to take place. Teachers have been let down by an SNP Government that has been too slow to come to the table and take decisive action to resolve the pay disputes. Pupils and parents have been let down by an SNP Government that says that education is its top priority but cannot even keep the schools open.

Even if the strikes are called off, parents have had to scramble around for childcare and pupils have had the additional stress of possible loss of days of learning. If the worst comes to pass and strike action goes ahead on Thursday, what plans

are in place? What is the cabinet secretary going to do to help pupils to catch up on lost learning? Will she take the opportunity now to apologise to parents and pupils for this stramash of her making?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I was very clear in my original answer that the Scottish Government has a role in the pay negotiations but the offer must come from COSLA as the employers. Four offers have been made so far.

Of course we want to do all that we can to ensure that there is a fair and affordable resolution to the current pay dispute. However, I have to be frank with Mr Kerr. The United Kingdom Government made clear in the autumn statement that there is no additional support for public sector pay—not one penny—so I am afraid that the 10 per cent pay claim from the teacher unions is unaffordable to the Scottish Government.

Any extra money for pay deals will have to be found elsewhere within an already constrained Scottish Government budget, so the fault for the place that we are in lies absolutely with the UK Government and the mess that it has driven the UK economy and inflation into. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Thank you, members.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: That is the reality of the situation that we are in.

We will absolutely continue to work with COSLA to deliver a fair and affordable settlement for teachers, but the context that we are working in is exceptionally important and, quite frankly, it does a disservice to everybody who is involved in this for Mr Kerr not to take cognisance of that.

Stephen Kerr: What an embarrassment to Scotland, to have a cabinet secretary in an area such as education, which is fully devolved, blame the UK Government. It is beyond pathetic.

It is no wonder that teachers are leaving the profession. Who can blame them? Teachers are striking over violence in classrooms and the lack of permanent contracts when teachers have finished their probation. Their voices are ignored in SNP education reforms.

By that answer alone, the cabinet secretary is letting down teachers. We can add to that the fact that they have been waiting for seven months for a pay deal. Teachers are already at least £2,000 out of pocket because of that delay. What was stopping the cabinet secretary from negotiating a deal in April? It is absolutely negligent on her part to have allowed things to get to such a sorry pass.

The cabinet secretary has been missing in action for months. Why? Why does the SNP Scottish Government hold teachers in such

contempt? The cabinet secretary must do better. Will she now apologise to the teaching profession for letting it down and ignoring it?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I have already said to Stephen Kerr, four offers have been made to the teaching unions by COSLA, during the current dispute, and it is important to recognise what the Scottish Government has done. For example, we have already committed £50 million towards the offer that is currently on the table for teachers. If the current offer had been accepted by teachers—I accept that it was not—that would have allowed teachers to get a cumulative increase of 21.8 per cent since 2018. It would also have ensured that the starting salary for a newly qualified teacher would have been more than £35,000—which is significantly more than England’s £28,000. We will continue to do our best for teachers, as we have done with our contributions this year and in the past.

Again, however, the context is key. As a Scottish Government, we have already had to make hard choices. The emergency budget review made that very clear. The funding must come from elsewhere within the Scottish Government budget. Stephen Kerr can come to the chamber and bluster all he likes, but in none of his challenge to me did I hear a suggestion of how we could improve the offer, where that money would come from, and what he would want the savings to be made from. Unfortunately, the position that we are in is that those savings would have to be found elsewhere. That is the context and the reality of the situation.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I welcome the update from the Scottish Government on the action that it is taking to avert industrial action—which would be in no one’s best interests. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, if the Scottish Tories are looking to place the blame, they should look more closely at their colleagues down in Westminster, whose policies of austerity have, in effect, tied the Scottish Government’s hands when it comes to public sector pay rises?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I agree that there is a responsibility on the UK Government. It could have acted in the UK autumn settlement to provide additional funding, but it did not do so.

I refer members to a recent letter to the teaching unions in Wales from the Welsh education minister, Jeremy Miles, who said:

“it is simply not possible for the Welsh Government to fund such a rise without a substantial increase in our own budget to pay for it ... It is a disgrace the UK Government has left us in such an impossible position.”

Unfortunately, that is also the reality of the Scottish Government’s position.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Presiding Officer, I apologise to you and all members that I will have to depart during topical question time, due to a prior appointment.

In her contribution, Jackie Dunbar talked about public sector workers. Why does it seem that public sector workers in Scotland need to get to the stage of being balloted for strike action, and be on the very eve of a strike, before, suddenly—well, only if the correct cabinet secretary turns up—we seem to get settlements?

During time for reflection, we heard that we should avoid discord, look for concord and be in tune with the desires of our people. In the case of the teachers, would it not have been better to carry out the negotiations back in April, in a more honest and open fashion, so that we did not end up, as always, with such a challenge as we approach Christmas?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I have said on numerous occasions, four offers have been made, including at the start of the process. As the year has gone on, the Scottish Government has attempted to react to the reality of the situation when it comes to the UK economic context, and to try to assist, as far as possible, with public sector pay.

As I have already said, the Scottish Government has already contributed £50 million towards assisting local government with the teachers’ pay dispute. Of course, I would very much like to see the dispute resolved, which is in the best interests of everyone involved, particularly our children and young people. The reflection that we must all make in these difficult times is that, if further pay offers need to be made, money will need to be found within the education budget, and that is exceptionally difficult to do and will not be without its implications. The blame for that lies squarely with the UK Government. We will take responsibility for where we will make decisions.

Stephen Kerr: Dear me—what an embarrassment.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Mr Kerr—speaking from a sedentary position—might not like it, but he needs to take some responsibility for the context that we are in.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The cabinet secretary must accept that there is a lot of anger in the teaching profession. This is the first time in 40 years that teachers have engaged in this kind of action, and 96 per cent voted in favour of industrial action. The cabinet secretary and others have been accused of dither and delay by Andrea Bradley.

The clock is ticking. By 4.30 today, we could end the strike if a new offer was to be made and

accepted by the unions. Will the Government make a new offer through the negotiating system so that we can end the strike on Thursday?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I said in my original answer, it is COSLA that will make a new offer to teachers. We are all cognisant of the timings of the EIS committee meetings that are being held today. However, I repeat the position that I have already set out: we as the Scottish Government are determined to do everything that we can to support teachers for a fair and affordable offer. We have already committed £50 million to the offer that was already on the table. We are, of course, are working with local government to see where further savings could be made and to see how an improved offer can be made. Unfortunately, if such a deal happens, that will have implications for the rest of the education budget.

National Health Service

2. Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that a discussion of a “two-tier” health service is recorded in draft minutes of a meeting of national health service board chief executives in September. (S6T-00981)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): The meeting that the member references was an informal meeting of a small number of NHS directors, not a meeting of NHS chief executives, and the draft note of the discussion does not represent the view of NHS chief executives.

The founding principles of our national health service as a universal service, free at the point of use, publicly funded and publicly delivered for all, are not up for debate or discussion. From abolishing prescription charges to removing dental charges for young people, the Government has a laudable track record in dismantling any financial barriers that continue to exist in our national health service. Let me repeat: although reform is undoubtedly necessary in the face of a global pandemic, that reform will never ever be in contradiction of the founding principles of our NHS.

Alex Rowley: Back in February, I raised with the Deputy First Minister the concern that we were heading towards a two-tier health service. Since then, I have repeatedly raised the issue, both in and out of Parliament. I heard Humza Yousaf say yesterday—and confirm today—that it will never happen, and Nicola Sturgeon has stated that the Scottish Government will not “rip up” the founding principles of the NHS.

It is happening, however, and it is happening right now. Someone who needs a knee or hip

operation and can afford it will get it. If they have savings and can pay for it, they will get an operation. If they are able to borrow the money to pay for it, they will get an operation. Those who can do none of those things suffer in pain on long waiting lists. I reiterate: we are already falling into a two-tier health system.

Does the cabinet secretary understand the enormity of the situation and of the crisis that our NHS is in here in Scotland? We have had the Covid recovery plan, a winter plan, a workforce plan and a delayed discharge plan. Despite all of them, things are getting worse. No wonder NHS chiefs are thinking the way that I have referred to—the plans are not working. What is next? What is the challenge, and what is the answer?

Humza Yousaf: Alex Rowley touches on some important points, but we cannot underestimate the impact not only of the global pandemic and Brexit on our social care workforce—which I know he recognises—but of high inflation and energy costs on our health service. Any one of those factors would be enough to cause significant challenges for our health and social care systems. The fact that we have not just been hit by all three in quick succession but been hit concurrently by some of them is having huge impacts on our health service not just in Scotland but throughout the United Kingdom.

The simple answer to Alex Rowley’s question is that we are working on—and investing in—measures, such as reducing the long waits for elective care. In fact, Public Health Scotland’s most recent published data shows that we are making progress for in-patients and out-patients who are waiting the longest—that is, two years or longer. There is still a way to go, however.

We are also making progress in our investment in social care, which is what lies at the heart of the matter. Having capacity is really important if we are to improve accident and emergency performance and waiting times for elective care, so we are investing in improving the flow within our hospitals. That is our focus—indeed, my unrelenting focus.

Our focus will be on investing in social care so that we get people out the back door and prevent them from coming in the front door. Reform is necessary, but I repeat to Alex Rowley that that reform will always take place within the parameters of the founding principles of our national health service.

The Presiding Officer: I must ask members for concise questions and answers. That way, more members will have an opportunity to take part.

Alex Rowley: We are already slipping into a two-tier health service. If someone can afford to pay or can borrow the money, they will get the

care that they need, but if they cannot afford to pay, they will suffer in pain for years upon years on a waiting list. I suggest to the cabinet secretary that we need to prioritise getting a fair pay agreement for the workforce, pause the introduction of the ill-considered so-called national care service and focus on tackling the immediate underlying causes of the workforce crisis in social care, which he is failing to do. I also suggest that the Government be more open with the public about the current use of—and the cost of using—the private sector in Scotland's NHS.

Does the cabinet secretary not see that, in truth, we need a non-partisan approach to reviewing all aspects of the NHS in Scotland—both hospitals and community provision—so that we can build a sustainable NHS that is free at the point of need? Does he agree that, if he fails to do that, he is in danger of running Scotland's NHS into the ground?

Humza Yousaf: On fair pay, in about 38 minutes' time, I will be sitting round the table with trade unions to try to hammer out a deal. It is to their credit and, I hope, the credit of all the parties involved that we continue to be prepared to sit down and get a deal to avert strike action. None of us wants to see industrial action at any time, let alone during the winter. I look forward to those discussions. I will not give any details here, because it is important that we do that work in a confidential negotiating space, but if there are any breakthroughs, I will, of course, ensure that members are updated.

I am more than happy to sit down with Alex Rowley or any of his colleagues to discuss the national care service. Nobody is waiting for its establishment to make improvements to social care. Indeed, that is why we have invested in interim care, in step-down care and in increasing the pay of adult social care workers.

As for taking a non-partisan approach, I am happy to have discussions with the Opposition, as I do regularly. Like Alex Rowley, I do not want people to have to think that the only option for them is to go private. However, according to the data that has been published by the Private Healthcare Information Network, our rates in Scotland are lower than those in other parts of the UK. The way in which we tackle the matter is to ensure that we get our social care and healthcare systems working across the piece so that we have capacity within our hospitals to bring down waiting times.

The Presiding Officer: I must ask members again for brief questions and responses.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I commend the BBC for reporting the meeting,

despite the online abuse that its reporters have been receiving for daring to be free journalists.

In addition to the proposal for a two-tier health service, the minutes of that meeting of NHS bosses describe concerns about a lack of clinical input into political decision making, a disconnect between the messaging from the Scottish Government and the reality that the boards are facing, and siloed discussions within the Scottish Government itself. Will the cabinet secretary commit to asking Audit Scotland to investigate the controversy and the details surrounding the meeting?

Humza Yousaf: I find it genuinely laughable that Dr Gulhane thinks it a really good use of Audit Scotland's time to investigate an informal meeting that included one NHS chief executive and in which the view that was expressed does not, as I have said, represent the view of the NHS's chief executives, its chairs or its chief operating officer—and most important, might I say, anyone in the Government. After all, we are the ones who decide the policy of the national health service. Therefore, I will not ask Audit Scotland to carry out such an investigation. Dr Gulhane can ask Audit Scotland himself whether it thinks that would be a good use of its time.

I say to Dr Gulhane that we in the Scottish Government should be judged on our deeds. We abolished prescription charges, removed dental charges for young people, continue to fund free eye tests and have scrapped charges in our hospital car parks. When the Conservatives at Westminster were presented with a Lords amendment to take the NHS off future trade deals, they were whipped to vote against it. Of course, one of those individuals, who is not present in the chamber today, was one Douglas Ross MP. The threat of privatisation, therefore, comes not from the SNP Government but from the Conservatives refusing to rule the NHS out in any future trade deal.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for his unequivocal statement that, under a Scottish National Party Government, the NHS in Scotland will always be a public service that is free at the point of need. Ensuring that the NHS has the right staff is vital. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, as well as investing in training and recruitment, we must seek to attract staff from overseas to make Scotland and the NHS their home? Does he share my disappointment that Sir Keir Starmer seems content to use anti-immigration rhetoric that is on a par with that of Nigel Farage?

The Presiding Officer: I regret that that question is largely not relevant to the substantive question. I call Alex Cole-Hamilton.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I make a commitment to the cabinet secretary that, every time he seeks to deflect his Government's role in the NHS crisis by referencing the pandemic, I will remind him of the words of the former chief executive of NHS Scotland, Paul Gray, who said that this crisis was always coming because of the SNP's mismanagement "regardless of Covid".

Today, a new Public Health Scotland report says that the burden of disease in this country and, by extension, on our NHS is set to rise by 21 per cent over the next 20 years. The pressure on our NHS is nowhere near its peak yet. I suggest to the cabinet secretary that that is a damning verdict on the SNP's handling of the health service. Indeed, the fact that senior bosses are even discussing such extreme proposals is a reflection of how bad things have got on his watch.

Humza Yousaf: For someone who, in the past couple of weeks, has made a lot of ensuring the accuracy of the parliamentary record, Mr Cole-Hamilton might want to reflect on what he has said about directly quoting Paul Gray. I am sure that people will be poring over that quote to ensure that Mr Gray has not been misquoted.

I say to Mr Cole-Hamilton once again that if he thinks that he can put his head in the sand and deny the impact of Brexit, the global pandemic, the high rate of inflation and the cost crisis inflicted upon us by the Conservative Government, I genuinely do not know what planet he is living on. No one is arguing with him that reform of the NHS is necessary. We have regular discussions about such reform, but always within the parameters of the founding principles of the national health service.

As for where the public are on this issue and who can best judge the performance of the NHS, the public have their say at every election about who they believe should be trusted with the stewardship of the NHS. I ask Mr Cole-Hamilton to reflect on why he is leading a party that has four MSPs in the Parliament while, time and time again, the people of Scotland trust the SNP with that stewardship.

COP27

3. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what its assessment is of the outcome of the 27th United Nations climate change conference of the parties. (S6T-00978)

The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): COP27 has delivered a very mixed outcome. On the one hand, in a true breakthrough, it finally saw the acknowledgement by developed countries of our responsibility to

support those experiencing the impacts of climate change first and worst. In the final throes of COP27, agreement on a loss and damage fund was reached after 30 years of perseverance and campaigning by many dedicated individuals. Scotland was very pleased to play its small part in that, being the first country to make a financial contribution for loss and damage for last year. On the other hand, COP27 was deeply disappointing: we did not make the progress that was needed on actions to limit warming to 1.5°, the transition away from fossil fuels, adaptation and other things. Countries must recommit themselves urgently to progress on those areas.

Mark Ruskell: I thank the minister for attending the COP in Egypt. Although there was one step forwards, to address loss and damage, there were two steps backwards on fossil fuels. There was a clear failure to commit to any phasing out of oil and gas. Arguably, COP27 has left the goal of 1.5° dead.

Right now, fossil fuel companies are using the energy charter treaty to sue Governments for hundreds of millions of pounds if they introduce policies or laws that limit the use of coal, oil and gas. However, at COP27, Germany joined the call for the collective withdrawal of countries from the treaty. Does the minister agree that the energy charter treaty is now beyond reform, and will ministers raise the issue with the United Kingdom secretary of state?

Màiri McAllan: I am aware of criticisms of the energy charter treaty and concerns that it poses a barrier to policies combating climate change. I am also aware of the risks in relation to the topic that were recently set out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The Scottish Government is already in contact with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy about the current ECT renegotiations, with a view to identifying and mitigating any impacts on Scotland. We are very clear that no part of a trade or investment agreement should limit the ability of the Scottish Parliament to regulate in devolved areas, or constrain much-needed action to achieve our net zero goal.

Mark Ruskell: I thank the minister for that very clear response. The issuing of more than 100 oil and gas licences by the UK Government is reckless and hampers the just transition at the point when investment urgently needs to switch to renewables. The First Minister has previously said that the Cambo oilfield should not be given the go ahead. Does the minister agree that the Rosebank licence should also not be granted?

Màiri McAllan: The Scottish Government has previously made it very clear that we do not agree with the UK Government issuing new oil and gas licences. That is not a viable answer to either the

energy cost crisis or the climate crisis—the answer to both of those is rapid investment in and deployment of renewable energy and energy efficiency.

We have also made clear our view that the proposed climate compatibility test from the UK Government is not fit for purpose and that, before any development takes place, a robust, stringent climate compatibility test, including both domestic and international compatibility with the Paris agreement, should be introduced.

On that, I ask members to consider our actions as well as our words. The Scottish Government's approach is best seen in such a way because while the UK Government looks to license oil and gas, Scotland looks to the expansion of offshore wind, as reflected in the lease options awarded to ScotWind earlier this year.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): It is undeniable that the leadership role of the Scottish Government at COP26 on pushing the momentum of the loss and damage fund was pivotal. Does the minister agree that the thanks should go to all those countries that have campaigned for it for years? Does she agree that the global north cannot and must not think that 1.5° on life support is some kind of result for COP27, for those countries or for anyone else?

Màiri McAllan: I agree with Fiona Hyslop. I was very pleased to communicate that with global south communities and the media when I attended COP27. As I said, Scotland is very proud of the small part that we played—as a global north country, we stood up to say that we accept that we have been enriched by the processes that are now causing climate change and that we have a responsibility to those who are being impacted. That has come about after 30 years of campaigning by activists, and by those in the global south and low-lying nations, who, in the face of continuing inaction have shown perseverance—the examples of the flooding in Pakistan and the drought across the Horn of Africa remind us all why those groups have remained so committed. However, we need continued action on 1.5°, because loss and damage will only get worse should the world fail to take the action needed to keep global warming below that temperature.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): At COP27, the First Minister announced £5 million to “address loss and damage”, as she put it. Can the minister tell us precisely what the eligibility criteria, application process and defined outcomes for that £5 million are?

Màiri McAllan: We are still designing the criteria for that £5 million, and I will be more than happy to update Liam Kerr in the chamber when we have done that. However, we have already set

out that it will address the underfunded areas of non-economic loss and damage, slow onset loss and damage and the extent to which loss and damage disproportionately impact women. As I said, I will be more than happy to set out those details when they have been agreed.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Despite some modest steps on support for climate-vulnerable countries, on the crucial issue of keeping warming to 1.5°C, COP27 has failed, and we are heading for a disastrous 2.8°C. We need to demonstrate to the world that climate leadership at home does not just mean setting targets but meeting them, which we are failing to do. How can cutting the energy efficiency budget by £133 million instead of tackling why it is not being utilised show leadership, given the shameful level of fuel poverty in Scotland and knowing that properly insulating our homes not only cuts fuel bills but cuts fuel use and therefore emissions?

Màiri McAllan: Energy efficiency is absolutely at the core of the Scottish Government's plan not only to combat climate change but to rise to the challenges of the cost of living crisis. I note that energy efficiency was very absent from the requisite UK Government plans.

Scotland has, and is internationally recognised for having, some of the most stringent climate targets in the world, which are set by the Parliament as a whole. We are making good progress against them—we are already more than halfway to net zero—but we are never complacent, and we will continue to plan stringently right across our economy and society for how we meet our emissions reduction envelopes, not least through Scotland's enormous renewable energy, but also through nature-based solutions, which I am pleased to have oversight of.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes topical questions.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Further to my exchange with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, I would like to clarify my remarks. I have reviewed the quote from Paul Gray, and I want to make it explicitly clear that, in writing for Reform Scotland on 4 October 2021, he said:

“The current system was going to be overwhelmed regardless of Covid.”

He made no explicit reference to the competence or otherwise of the Government; that was my inference, and I want to make it absolutely clear that I am not putting words into the former chief executive's mouth. However, it is clear that he believed that this crisis was always coming.

The Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order, Mr Cole-Hamilton, but it is now on the record. Before we move on to the next item of business, I will give members a moment to assume their seats.

Fisheries Negotiations

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-06889, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on Scotland's approach to the 2022 coastal state negotiations: securing principled sustainable outcomes.

14:39

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): Today's debate is a welcome opportunity to set out Scotland's approach to this year's fisheries negotiations. This is my second year of leading Scotland through the annual negotiations. It is a task that I do not take lightly, and one in which my key priority is always to protect Scotland's interests. I want to continue to build on the achievements that have been gained in 2022. There have been negotiated outcomes across a range of forums that have provided Scotland with over £400 million of fishing opportunities.

Fishing is a vital sector to Scotland and to our coastal communities. The industry supplies us with a healthy and nutritious source of protein, and the positions that we take need to reflect what we are currently living through: a time when people across Scotland are being affected by the most severe economic crisis in a generation. The decisions that we make should recognise the cultural importance of fishing, through maintaining and, where possible, strengthening coastal communities and livelihoods, alongside the requirement for fish stocks to reach and be maintained at sustainable levels. It is vital that we set appropriate fishing opportunities, using the best scientific advice available, that balance environmental, economic and social considerations.

The on-going cost of living crisis is just one of the many challenges that have impacted on the Scottish fishing industry and the wider seafood sector in recent years. We cannot forget the on-going impacts of leaving the European Union and, of course, the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. In these uncertain times, it is important that we deliver appropriate and timely negotiated outcomes to give the fleets and the processing industries assurance about their fishing opportunities for the start of 2023.

Before I move on to speak about the annual negotiations in more detail, I acknowledge the on-going and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. I know that I will be joined by all members in the chamber in condemning the actions of Russia. Scotland stands with Ukraine and for democracy, human rights and the rule of law at home and abroad. We

enter negotiations this year against the backdrop of great uncertainty and global change. The majority of our fish stocks are managed not in isolation but in partnership with our coastal state neighbours. Scotland has taken a strong stance on engagement with Russia in fisheries negotiations during 2022. We have advocated for its exclusion from discussions where mechanisms allow for that to happen and, in consultations in which the Russian Federation is also present, we are actively working to ensure that it sees no benefit from those negotiations.

We have supported the United Kingdom in making clear statements and not co-signing fisheries agreements to which the Russian Federation is also a signatory. That is an important principle that Scotland will carry forward throughout this negotiating season and until Russia's atrocious actions have ceased.

To move back to our approach this year, it is important that we continue to be a reasonable and positive partner, within the UK and with like-minded coastal states, that aims to achieve agreements of mutual benefit to all. With the exception of two stocks, every quota is shared with partners and negotiated on to reach agreed positions. It is not a simple Scotland-only choice. That is the nature of fish stocks in our wide-ranging marine environment.

The Scottish Government's overarching approach to the annual negotiations will not come as a surprise, and it remains consistent and in line with our already well-established principles. My hope and expectation is that those will continue to be supported by members across the chamber today.

As ever, our management approach will be informed by the best available scientific advice, socioeconomic considerations and choke risk, as well as underpinned by national and international commitments. I assure members that that commitment to responsible fisheries management—while we remain alive to the socioeconomic impact on coastal communities—will apply where there is reduced advice as well as increased advice. In some cases, there will need to be a cut in catches to allow the stocks to recover, and a meaningful package of spatial, temporal and technical management measures to complement any cut and ensure a rapid recovery.

During last year's debate, I highlighted the principle of using total allowable catch constraints as a management tool. Our intention is to use them again this year as one of our broad principles, where that is appropriate.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I take on board the importance of fisheries, the environment, coastal communities and

socioeconomic considerations, but does the cabinet secretary agree that the Bute house agreement damaged the relationship between Scottish fisheries and the Scottish Government, and that was played out in the Clyde cod box debacle?

Mairi Gougeon: As Finlay Carson has highlighted and as I have outlined, fisheries is a very complex area, and we need to take a number of considerations into account. I have said when I have appeared in front of the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee and in the chamber that we identified that that could have been handled better, and we have worked to try to improve relationships since that time. I recognise that, as I have done previously.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): I am most grateful to the cabinet secretary for giving way, and I commend her for the work that she is doing in leading these negotiations, as I did for several years. Does she agree that one of the aspects that is causing major damage to fisheries in Scotland is the tough, hard, uncompromising attitude that the UK is taking towards immigration? Crew often come from other parts of the world—those people are essential to the inshore fleet, not only in the Clyde but around the coast, and the immigration problem is what is causing the damage to our industry.

Mairi Gougeon: I agree with the member that that is indeed a critical issue. I see it across the fishing industry and the processing sector, and it is due to the hard Brexit that was imposed on us.

I come back to the use of total allowable catch constraints. The reason why we adopt those is that, in most situations, a large year-to-year fluctuation in TAC undermines the sustainability and stability of the fishing industry, and such constraints seek to mitigate those fluctuations. However, where stocks have taken consistent cuts across a number of years, and where the advice allows for it, larger changes in TAC may be desirable.

Moving to the negotiations themselves, I note that this year has already been a busy time. Talks have been held throughout the year on management measures for some key stocks, and those talks are now coupled with the annual negotiations cycle, which commenced last month. As I speak, my negotiators are in Brussels for bilateral and trilateral consultations with the EU and Norway, which are two of our closest fishing neighbours. Consultations have already been held for coastal state pelagic stocks and the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission, with the UK-Faroe bilateral scheduled for December. I know that stakeholders from both the fishing and environmental sectors have been engaging with my teams throughout, and I thank them for their

on-going input. As always, their advice is critical in helping us to make decisions as we seek balanced agreements to protect Scottish interests.

I am encouraged by the positive scientific advice this year for some of our key demersal stocks. That is evidence that our management actions are having the desired impact, and I hope and expect that it will help to facilitate agreements with other coastal states across the fora in which we negotiate those stocks.

To try to bring that to life, I will highlight some of Scotland's priorities, covering the suite of negotiations in which we are involved. On our trilateral negotiations with the EU and Norway, I am pleased by the positive advice this year for North Sea cod and saithe, which are two important stocks for the Scottish fleet. The advice for North Sea cod in particular follows a challenging few years. In 2020, the fisheries management and conservation group agreed to a range of management measures that were packaged together as the national cod avoidance plan, which was developed by Marine Scotland in partnership with the industry. I pay tribute to those fishers and environmental groups that worked with Marine Scotland on the recovery of that iconic stock. That is testament to what can be achieved through strong co-management.

While the picture for cod and saithe is looking positive, I am concerned about the immediate outlook for northern shelf monkfish, which is a stock that we manage bilaterally with the EU. The advice for that stock is for a 30 per cent decrease on the 2022 TAC, based on a data-limited assessment. Mitigating that cut is a top priority for Scotland in the EU bilateral negotiations, and we are looking at a number of negotiating strategies in that regard. A decrease of that size when abundance—at least in some areas—suggests that the stock may not be in need of such action will have significant impacts on some of our key ports, in particular in the Highlands and Islands. For some vessels, it equates to a 20 per cent loss in revenue and, given the cost crisis, that is a significant concern. A further priority will be to work in partnership to resolve the assessment challenges that everyone faces with that stock.

A wide range of other stocks will be discussed during the EU bilateral. As always, the scientific advice shows a mixed picture. I am really pleased to hear that the north-east Atlantic spurdog stock is beginning to recover from its status as a prohibited species. When I meet with fishers, in particular those in the Clyde, I hear their concerns about the high levels of unavoidable bycatch of that stock. We now have scientific advice that mirrors what is happening on the fishing grounds. That stock has been a prohibited species for five years, and its transition to a directed fishery will

need to follow a robust process. It is vital that we take responsible and precautionary steps to ensure that the recovery of the stock is not short-lived.

I am pleased that we were able to reach bilateral agreements with Norway and the Faroe Islands for 2022, both of which provide important opportunities for Scottish vessels. In particular, the exchange of opportunities with the Faroe Islands provides an important release valve for our vessels away from the North Sea.

I am aware that some technical challenges impacted on the fishery in Faroese waters at the start of the year. However, that is not unexpected in the first year of a new arrangement and I am pleased that the Scottish industry has now been able to utilise those quotas.

I see significant benefit in maintaining and building on the long-established relationships with our neighbouring fishing nations. For 2023, I have instructed officials to seek to agree bilateral arrangements that are balanced, fair and bring in stocks of most need for our industry. That applies not only between the parties but within the UK.

Last but not least are the coastal state consultations on shared, highly migratory pelagic stocks: mackerel, blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian herring—ASH. Those are of key importance to Scotland and we are the majority quota holder in the UK.

Unfortunately, there are currently no agreed sharing arrangements for those stocks, which means that unilateral quotas bring the total catch limit above agreed limits. I cannot condone that situation and it is imperative that everything is done to ensure that there is appropriate management, to protect the long-term sustainability of the fisheries.

However, I am happy to report that 2022 has seen positive strides forward for north-east Atlantic mackerel. During the year, officials from all coastal states have been engaging. They have met a number of times and are working towards agreeing a comprehensive sharing arrangement. As Scotland's single most valuable stock, that is a top priority for us. I am pleased by the progress that has been made, but further work is still to be done.

I have instructed my officials to continue to put their full energy behind those talks and every effort will be made to reach agreement as soon as possible.

Finlay Carson: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Mairi Gougeon: Not at the moment.

Scotland will continue to strive for agreement on shares that are fair, based on robust evidence and reflect the distribution of the stocks, with as many parties signed up as possible. In turn, that will provide the long-term stability and management that we all wish to see for those stocks.

In addition, parties have also agreed to continue discussions on agreeing sharing arrangements for blue whiting and ASH in early 2023.

While discussions are on-going, it is more important than ever that appropriate catch limits for all three stocks are set for 2023. Scotland is fully committed to promoting sustainable fishing and will continue to act responsibly in that regard. That will align with the future fisheries management strategy, and the quotas that we have set in the absence of sharing arrangements will continue to respect historic levels.

As we move through the annual negotiations cycle, those commitments and objectives will be at the forefront of our decision making. We will continue to seek the best outcome for Scotland's environment, fishing interests and our coastal communities. We will take robust, principled decisions that are based on the best available scientific information.

Finlay Carson: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Mairi Gougeon: I am drawing to a close so, no, I will not take an intervention.

In addition, we will work closely and collaboratively with stakeholders and coastal state partners, to ensure the sustainable utilisation of those important stocks in the long term.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the ongoing negotiations with international partners to agree fishing opportunities for 2023, including coastal state and regional fisheries management organisation negotiations, and bi- and tri-lateral negotiations with the EU, Norway and the Faroe Islands; notes that the outcome of these negotiations will be pivotal in providing fishing opportunities to the Scottish industry, and in ensuring the sustainable management of fish stocks in the long term, and supports the Scottish Government's efforts to achieve the best possible outcome for Scotland's fishers, the wider seafood sector, coastal communities and the environment through a collaborative and co-management approach with stakeholders.

14:53

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): In my South Scotland region in the past few days, a fisherman tragically died in hospital after being rescued from his capsized trawler in Luce Bay just off Port William. I know that all our thoughts will be with his family and friends. The tragedy is a reminder to us all of the dangers that are faced by

our fishing fleet and of the courage of those who work in the industry.

Every day, Scotland's fishers go to sea to put healthy, quality and low-carbon food on our tables. They do so in the most challenging conditions in the most dangerous of occupations. For that, we owe each and every one of them a great debt of gratitude.

At a time when families are facing a cost of living crisis and the world is facing a climate and nature catastrophe, putting high-quality affordable food on our tables in a sustainable way has never been more important. As such, fishers deserve not only our gratitude but our support.

I wish the Scottish Government well in securing the best possible agreement for the fishing sector and our environment in the array of annual negotiations that are taking place and when it comes to the distribution of quotas secured at those negotiations.

The Scottish Government may have chosen not to deliver a Scottish fisheries act and instead to rely on the framework that is set out in the UK Fisheries Act 2020, even in relation to devolved areas. However, crucial decisions on quota distribution and fisheries management in Scotland still rest with the Scottish Government, as they did before Brexit, and it is the Scottish ministers who decide how our seas are used.

In the debate last year at the time of the 2021 coastal state negotiations, I set out five tests on which Labour would judge the Government in relation to the establishment and distribution of sustainable fishing quotas and the management of our seas. The first test is whether the fishing quotas, once negotiated and subsequently distributed, are within maximum sustainable yield. I accept that it is difficult to deliver against fixed MSY targets in mixed fisheries, where individual stocks are subject to fluctuating scientific advice, and I know that advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea is often challenged, despite it being based on the best data and fisheries science available.

As the cabinet secretary said, this year, some of that advice is positive, including an 82 per cent increase in the catch advice for North Sea cod, which will be welcomed, albeit that it is an increase on a low tonnage. However, when that advice is not positive, although it is important to seek to mitigate the impact as best we can in setting the TACs—that will certainly be the case with regards to monkfish, as the cabinet secretary stated—we cannot afford to continually exceed maximum yields. That is not sustainable, it does not meet sustainable development goal 14 and it is against the Scottish Government's national marine plan.

Some progress has been made on delivering quotas that are in line with maximum yields. However, when Government scientists at the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science analysed 2022 quota against scientific advice, it found that, of the 11 stocks that the Scottish Government used in its Scottish marine assessment in 2020, only two—haddock in some areas of the North Sea and West of Scotland—actually pass that test. Hake, mackerel, herring, cod and whiting in various stocks all failed.

Finlay Carson: Does Mr Smyth agree that the people who know where the fish are are the fishermen themselves, and that we need to build trust in the relationship between fishermen, scientists and the Government to ensure that total allowable catches are based on the best evidence available?

Colin Smyth: Finlay Carson makes an important point. We need to listen to our fishers, but we also need to listen to and work with the scientists, who set out the basis for the advice that is given. Although we all want the highest quotas possible for our fishers, overfishing means lower not higher quotas in the future. It depletes our public fish assets and reduces the amount available in the long term. Ultimately, that is damaging to the fishers whom we want to support.

Labour's second test is whether the actions of ministers are delivering a fairer and more diverse distribution of quota allocation in Scotland. Quota continues to be handed out based on fixed quota allocations that were historically given to those who previously caught fish, but subsequent trading has meant that ownership is now highly consolidated. For example, four companies control 55 per cent of the North Sea mackerel quota. We need a more diverse allocation of quota and we need more focus on who will deliver for our environment, for jobs and for local economies.

When my colleague Anas Sarwar wrote to the First Minister about Labour's five tests, in her reply, she acknowledged the concentration of quota ownership and stated:

"In recent years we have acted to allocate a greater share of mackerel quota to our inshore vessels to be caught by handline."

However, the 2021 landings data shows that that represents just 1 per cent of the total mackerel landings by Scottish boats and that the majority—96 per cent—continues to be made by the big pelagic trawlers. Therefore, on the second test—whether the Scottish Government is serious about a fairer and more diverse distribution of quota—it is another fail.

Labour's third test is the principle that Scottish seafood should be landed in Scotland. I realise

that price or processing capacity can often be a driver in decisions about where catch is landed, but the fact is that far too much of Scotland's seafood is landed abroad, which means that Scotland's economy, food system, jobs and coastal communities are being bypassed. Since the 1980s, we have seen a consistent decline in the volume of fish that is landed by Scottish ships into Scottish ports. In 2021, just 46 per cent of the mackerel and just 63 per cent of the herring caught by Scottish boats were actually landed in Scotland. For less well-known species such as blue whiting, the numbers are even worse—just 29 per cent of those that were caught by Scottish boats using Scottish quota was actually landed in Scotland. The rest went directly to foreign ports, mostly to be processed into fishmeal.

Scottish ministers claim to be addressing the issue through a clause in the fishing licence, but the clause is so weak that it requires that boats land only 55 per cent of their catch in Scotland, and the requirement drops to 30 per cent if the species is mackerel or herring. That is much weaker than the clause that is being implemented by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in England, which requires that 70 per cent of catch is landed in UK ports. Therefore, on the test of whether Scottish catch is landed in Scottish ports, it is another fail for the Scottish Government. That is letting down Scotland's coastal communities.

Labour's crucial fourth test is whether quotas are being used to incentivise a change towards forms of fishing that have a lower impact and that result in less bycatch. We know that some fishing methods cause serious environmental harms. Scotland's marine assessment in 2020 found that fishing was the most significant and widespread pressure on Scotland's seas. In particular, bottom trawling and other mobile bottom-contacting fishing methods have led to widespread changes to the marine ecosystem.

The UK Fisheries Act 2020 established a duty on the Scottish ministers to

"incentivise ... the use of selective fishing gear, and ... the use of fishing techniques that have a reduced impact on the environment"

when distributing quotas and effort limits, but that is simply not happening. No conditions regarding low-impact methods or selective fishing gears are being applied to quota distribution. In fact, the Government's future catching policy appears to involve deregulation, discarding and the removal of any disincentive to throwing away dead fish.

Therefore, on the test of whether quotas are being used to incentivise a change towards forms of fishing that have a lower impact and that result in less bycatch, it is another fail. Even if the cabinet secretary is not inclined to support

Labour's amendment and, therefore, the sustainability that we want to see, will she, at the very least, agree to Labour's call for the Government to produce an annual report on the action that it is taking to meet that test and legal requirement under section 25 of the 2020 act?

Labour's fifth and final test is whether the Government's actions lead to a fairer share of catching opportunities being secured for Scottish fishers. Fishing provides thousands of jobs in Scotland, which is home to 70 per cent of the UK fishing sector. Those jobs are often in our most fragile rural communities. The industry in Scotland generates almost £300 million a year in gross value added, with the fish processing sector contributing another £400 million a year. However, neither figure has increased markedly in the past four or five years, and neither is likely to increase, not least because of the poor trade and co-operation agreement with the EU, which means that there will be little change before 2026, and who knows what will happen beyond then?

The sector faces many challenges, including increasing energy costs, higher interest payments on loans for the purchase of vessels, the rising cost of supplies as inflation continues to spiral out of control, difficulties in accessing the workforce and understandable growing wage demands.

I know from the recent meeting that Anas Sarwar and I had with the Scottish Fishermen's Federation in Aberdeen that there is a particular concern about spatial squeeze, not least as a result of the growth in offshore wind. Although I do not agree with the way in which the Scottish National Party and Green Government is leasing sea beds for offshore wind on the cheap to mainly foreign-owned multinationals, with no meaningful conditionality on supply chain jobs, offshore wind is vital if we are to meet our net zero ambitions. However, when we are offshoring wind, we should not be offshoring the profits and the jobs.

We should be working with fishers to mitigate their concerns. In 2000, fishing boats were excluded from less than 1 per cent of UK waters, but the Scottish Fishermen's Association's concern is that, by 2050, fishing effort could be excluded from no less than 49 per cent of the exclusive economic zone around the UK, and from up to 56 per cent around Scotland. Given the plan for more marine protected areas and offshore wind farms, the Scottish Government needs to be clearer in how it will mitigate—and, indeed, compensate for—the impact on our fisheries. Marine Scotland's failure to deliver on the 2015 national marine plan means that there is no proper spatial planning for fishing. I hope that, in closing the debate, the cabinet secretary will tell us what assessment has been made in relation to the displacement of fishing areas as more marine

protected areas and offshore wind projects are developed, and when we will see a proper spatial plan for fishing.

There is little in the Government's motion with which I disagree, so Labour will support it. However, I will move the amendment in my name in an effort to ensure that we see more action from Government to support our fishing industry. We will continue to assess and hold to account ministers on our five tests and whether negotiations and quota distributions deliver a better deal for smaller boats and low-impact fishing, lead to more catch being landed in Scottish ports and, ultimately, genuinely deliver a sustainable fishing industry for the benefit of our environment and all of our coastal communities.

I move amendment S6M-06889.1, to insert at end:

“; believes that distribution of fish quotas secured at these negotiations must follow key tests, including catch limits that meet scientific advice for maximum sustainable yield, as well as socially, economically and environmentally beneficial fisheries being given preferable access to quota, Scottish seafood being landed in Scotland, and securing the maximum share of sustainable fishing opportunities for Scottish fishers; recognises the importance of the transition to low-impact fishing; calls on the Scottish Government to report yearly on how it incentivises the use of selective fishing gear and the use of techniques that have a reduced impact on the environment, when distributing catch quotas and effort quotas to fishing boats, in line with Section 25 of the Fisheries Act 2020; notes the value of the fishing sector and the jobs that it provides, often in rural communities; further notes the need to support and develop Scotland's fish processing industry; commends those working in the sector, and recognises the resilience and bravery of Scotland's fishermen.”

15:05

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I thank all people who work in our fisheries sector—the thousands of fishers who are employed on Scotland-registered vessels, the people who work in our processing firms and the people who work to promote our fantastic fish and shellfish.

In my constituency, Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire, a statue on the seafront in Eyemouth commemorates the lost lives of 189 fishermen from Eyemouth, Burnmouth, Cove and Coldingham, who were snatched in bleak conditions on 14 October 1881—a day known as black Friday. The statue reminds us that our fishermen risk their lives in all weathers so that we can have food on our plates. We must never forget that.

We must make sure that Scotland's fishing industry gets the support that it deserves. Every year, a high bar is set for the expectations of the annual fisheries negotiations. Without a doubt, it is key that we secure the best possible fishing

opportunities for our Scottish fleets, while committing to fishing sustainably, in line with our national and international commitments.

To help all parties to achieve their total allowable catch for the year ahead, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea provides data and science. Although the science is generally accepted, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation says that what is provided makes assumptions and contains uncertainties, which result in inaccuracies. For example, cod quotas were cut dramatically in previous years, but ICES has now recognised that cod is more abundant in the northern part of the North Sea and, in its catch advice, has recommended an increase of 82 per cent.

Another key commercial stock for the Scottish white-fish fleet is monkfish and, according to the SFF, a priority for the Scottish fleet for 2023 will be to mitigate the 30 per cent cut that ICES has recommended in its catch advice. The SFF says that the cut is based on an inadequate assessment categorisation, which has resulted in an overly precautionary approach that does not reflect stock fluctuations.

Although we should pay attention to the data and science from international bodies, it is vital that we listen carefully to the people who know the most about the seas. We should put the most stock in what Scotland's fishing sector tells us. In a discussion of Scotland's total allowable catch with Shetland fishermen, it was agreed that listening to and accepting help from the fishing sector helps with the overall picture, ultimately supporting what the scientific model predicts as well as accounting for changes that are happening right now in our seas. The Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment heard exactly that point from representatives at a round-table discussion just a few weeks ago.

We should not forget pelagic stocks. Talks are going on between coastal states on mackerel sharing, and the UK and Scottish Governments are both working hard to secure a good outcome for Scotland. It is important that the UK and people who fish those stocks sustainably are not undermined by the actions of other coastal states that perhaps do not fish as sustainably.

The Scottish industry has been actively improving sustainability, for example by improving the selectivity of fishing gear, making a commitment to and significant investment in gathering data, and establishing an industry-led fisheries observer scheme, which provides enhanced data for stock assessment as well as practical advice and support for science projects that require direct observation at sea on commercial vessels.

In 2020, an estimated 69 per cent of commercial fish stocks were fished at sustainable levels in Scottish water, which represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 2019 and 35 percentage points from 2000; it is the highest percentage recorded since that data collection began and demonstrates the on-going recovery of commercial fish stocks.

I think that the joint fisheries statement will be published tomorrow—it is imminent. The statement will set out how the fisheries administrations across the UK will seek to achieve the objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020, based on the three key pillars of environmental, social and economic sustainability.

The Scottish industry is committed to fishing sustainably, as I said, as is evidenced in the national performance indicators. The Scottish Government must demonstrate that the Scottish fishing industry has a sustainable future through the protection of space for fishing in Scotland's seas.

Colin Smyth raised the issue of crowded seas, and we know that Scotland's seas are becoming increasingly crowded. Future demand for space in our seas for offshore renewables and marine conservation areas will create challenges. A couple of weeks ago, the cabinet secretary and I attended the launch of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation's report on spatial squeeze. Analysis shows that, over the next 30 years, in the worst-case scenario, trawling could be restricted in more than half of Scotland's share of the UK's exclusive economic zone and, by 2050, fishing activity could be excluded from 45 per cent of the EEZ. There are major issues with our crowded seas that are affecting the entire industry from fisheries to ports and harbours to fishermen. We must ensure that both of Scotland's Governments appreciate and tackle the issues.

The industry faces a major challenge in the medium to longer term due to increased spatial pressures on fishing. The hugely increased competition for space in the marine environment is a serious concern. There is a risk that the spatial squeeze increasingly displaces Scotland's fishing fleet, and politicians from all parties must ensure that the industry is supported at this challenging time. There is a lot of work to be done to reduce the impact as much as possible.

Food security is every bit as important as energy security. We are agreed that our collective ambition to reach net zero must not mean zero fishing. As Sheila Keith of Shetland Fishermen's Association has said, the SNP Government needs to be more transparent and follow the science, not only to tackle climate change but to tackle the challenges in our seas. However, I challenge members of every party: we can do both; we can

tackle climate change and help Scottish fisheries to survive and thrive.

The Bute house agreement between the Greens and SNP to secure a mandate for an independence referendum agreed a designation of at least 10 per cent of Scotland's seas as highly protected marine areas, where, in essence, nothing will be permitted. Although I understand that the goal of that is to help our environment, it must be practical. If we are forced to turn abroad to source food, particularly to import more fish, that will have a detrimental effect on our efforts to reach climate change goals. It will not help us to reach our climate change ambitions if we end up relying on food that is flown in from thousands of miles away, which might be food that is not sourced as sustainably as the food that the Scottish fishing industry produces. As well as increasing the cost to consumers, we could end up hurting our efforts to reduce carbon emissions if we end up leaving a larger carbon footprint by buying fish from overseas instead of using the brilliant catch that is sitting on our doorsteps. Tackling climate change and supporting our fishing industry must go hand in hand, and it is essential that the objectives of the SNP-Green coalition are based on evidence and give a clear direction that does not come at the expense of producing healthy, climate-smart food with a low carbon footprint right here on our doorstep.

There are clearly tensions around the Bute house agreement, as demonstrated by the catastrophic Clyde closure, about which Elaine Whyte acknowledged that the Government's approach had fallen short of what was expected. Mairi Gougeon accepts that she has learned lessons and that the co-management principles and practice should perhaps have been done better. She has apologised for and acknowledged that, but we must continue to learn those lessons and remember them every time we think about the inflictions and bureaucracy that we put on Scottish fishermen. In response to a freedom of information request, Mairi Gougeon acknowledged that she felt uncomfortable reviewing the ban due to the arrangement with the Scottish Greens. Another email showed Lorna Slater's involvement in signing off the ban.

We must be very careful when we make decisions that are for ideological rather than practical reasons. In looking at the way in which political decisions are made, it is perhaps best to do what is good for Scotland's climate change goals and our fishing industry. I sincerely hope that, in its decision making, the Government will reflect on the fact that the unintended consequences of putting politics first could be catastrophic for our fishing fleet. What matters most is a good deal for Scottish fishing and not a good deal for the Greens.

In conclusion, we wish the Scottish Government well in the 2023 negotiations for fishing opportunities. We hope that the Government will work in the national interest, rather than in the interest of the new coalition. We all want to secure the best outcome for Scotland. We also want to hear that the Scottish Government will not sell the fisheries out because of that coalition. It must listen to the voices of fishermen in coastal communities and must recognise the need for sensible coexistence that will ensure a vibrant fishing sector and will protect key, low-carbon, high-protein food, as well as the climate goals that the fishing industry contributes to. We must protect food and energy security, which are not conflicting goals but should be pursued in union.

The Conservatives will not support Labour's amendment. We agree with the Government motion. Unfortunately, although most of the Labour amendment is acceptable, it does not acknowledge the need to involve the voices of Scottish fishermen or to engage with them in the process of building on improvements in sustainable fishing and the meeting of climate change goals. Sadly, we will not support the Labour amendment.

15:16

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all our fishermen for the dangerous job that they do and for all the work that the fishing industry does both offshore and onshore to put food on our tables. I also acknowledge the impact on the industry of ever-increasing energy costs

Last year, I highlighted that an increasing number of fisheries scientists were growing uneasy over the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas stock assessments. ICES stated that it was willing to engage with the fishing industry to improve data collection and the way in which the data is interpreted. The fishing sector expressed concern about the time that might take and the potential impact, such as bankruptcies, for some fishers.

There are still concerns about the accuracy and certainty of the data and about the assumptions that are made in it. I am pleased, though, that there has now been a reversal in North Sea cod catches, reflecting the observations of the fishing sector, and that catch recommendations have been increased by 82 per cent.

New official assessments from ICES show key commercial stocks of cod and haddock to be at their highest levels for decades. If the reality of observations by the fishing sector is not recognised, the industry will continue feeling that policy makers are distant and lack understanding.

The cabinet secretary has already referred to the 30 per cent cut in the monkfish quota. Mitigating that will be a priority, because there are concerns that the cut is overly precautionary. On north-east Atlantic mackerel, the Scottish Government's efforts to reduce unilateral total allowable catch are welcome in ensuring that the UK fleet is not undermined for fishing that stock sustainably.

In future, as we head towards our net zero targets, we will build more at-sea infrastructure, such as offshore wind farms. Those will need cables to the shore and floating wind turbines will need cables to anchor them in place. Designating subsea cable corridors will allow certain routes for cables, allowing vessels to manoeuvre safely and to fish without danger to the crew or damage to cables. Those designated routes must be created with all voices heard, including those of our at-sea renewables sector and our fishing fleet. I will say a little more about subsea cable corridors later.

Those in the fishing sector have often raised with me their concern that policy makers do not understand their concerns about spatial squeeze. Scotland's seas are big, but they are also finite. The fishing sector will continue helping us on our route to net zero by providing quality, healthy and protein-rich food, as it has done for centuries, but it can do so only if there is space in the seas to achieve that. It is not as simple as moving a boat to a different part of the sea to catch the same fish, nor can one space be a guaranteed spawning spot for ever. The unintended consequences of displacement could include more gear conflict, the movement of fishing into pristine grounds and inshore vessels being forced further offshore. It is not a just transition if one sector is encouraged and enabled to the significant detriment of others.

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation's June 2022 report on spatial squeeze contains different scenarios. As other members have highlighted, one of them forecasts that, by 2050, over 50 per cent of Scotland's seas could be restricted for fishing. That would be catastrophic for the fishing crew who are involved in the industry and for their families.

Some 80 per cent of respondents to a recent poll that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation commissioned said that energy and food security are both important, with three quarters agreeing that the Government should not squeeze out fishing. Climate-smart energy and a sector that provides healthy, sustainable, low-carbon food can co-exist.

Fergus Ewing: Does Beatrice Wishart agree that, when any new cable is proposed to be laid underground in connection with energy or the other requirements that she mentioned, it is essential that fishermen and their representatives are fully engaged and represented from the very

start? Does she agree that their complete engagement should continue unabated throughout the negotiations, with all relevant information being shared with them? The absence of such engagement has in some instances, according to my understanding, led to unnecessary difficulties arising that could perhaps have been avoided if there had been full engagement in the first place and throughout.

Beatrice Wishart: I fully agree. It should never be just a tick-box exercise.

After Shetland suffered a telecommunications outage last month, a response letter that I received from the Scottish Government stated:

"The incident was then caused by the primary cable being hit by a fishing trawler."

That incident had serious consequences across Shetland, with digital phone lines down, internet down, mobile signals down, cash machines down and businesses being forced to close. Those effects all demonstrate just how much we rely on technology. The incident also raised serious concerns about the safety implications for the crew aboard that vessel. However, the risks will only increase unless we act now to establish cable corridors around Shetland—as the Shetland Fishermen's Association advocates—and our other coastal communities as we build more infrastructure at sea.

Once again, I put on the record my concerns about the resourcing of Marine Scotland. We are increasingly asking more of this Scottish Government body, which will grow in importance as a consequence. We need to make sure that we have the right amount and balance of staff, equipment and technology. We are relying on the body to ensure the biodiversity and sustainable fishing of our seas and to manage all the resources that they offer in helping us to reach our net zero targets. I hope that the Scottish Government can give us some reassurance today about Marine Scotland's future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): We move to the open debate. It is disappointing to note that not every member who is seeking to speak in the open debate had the courtesy to listen to all the opening speeches.

I ask for speeches of six minutes. We have now used up all the time that we had in hand.

15:23

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I have probably mentioned a few times in the chamber that my constituency contains many fishing communities. Integrity is embedded in those communities, which have a real pride in their fishing culture and heritage. The set of principles

that the Scottish Government brings to the table in the negotiations is aligned with that long-established good faith and integrity, and Scotland is regarded as a good global citizen.

This debate on fishing negotiations comes at a time when leaders and citizens from around the globe have just gathered in Egypt to take stock of efforts to preserve our planet for future generations. Sustainability is on all of us, and it is our responsibility to take the stewardship of the seas seriously. Creating sustainability and preserving biodiversity are huge tasks, and they flow through our negotiations and discussions. In Banffshire and Buchan Coast, the oceans and seas are an important part of our daily lives, but we are coming ever closer to the real and obvious challenges of climate change.

At the forefront of our negotiations is our understanding that fishers and processors in my constituency and others are fearful about the future of an industry that is reeling from the Westminster perfect storm of Brexit, the cost of living crisis, economic chaos and spiralling energy costs, as well as an immigration policy that is failing the industry, particularly in the labour constraints that it upholds. The chief executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, Elspeth Macdonald, spoke for many when she said:

"the Brexit deal on fisheries fell far short of what the industry had sought and what the UK Government had promised."

The Scottish White Fish Producers Association's chief executive officer, Mike Park, said:

"It is clear, for the offshore catching sector, Brexit failed to deliver any benefits of being a coastal state."

Meanwhile, the Scottish Seafood Association CEO, Jimmy Buchan, said that fishers had been "badly let down". The Tory rhetoric of a "sea of opportunity" has indeed been exposed as entirely false.

I have spoken about the culture and heritage of the industry in Scotland, but we must also recognise the significant contribution that the industry makes to the economy. In 2021, fish and seafood exports were valued at £1 billion, which is almost 60 per cent of total Scottish food exports, and the industry itself employs some 15,000 people across Scotland.

Marine Scotland has acknowledged that valued contribution and reinvests in supporting it. For example, in 2021-22, around £14 million was awarded to a range of projects, including support for young fishers to enter the industry; the enhancement of sustainable aquaculture; protection of the marine environment; and support for Scotland's coastal communities through improved infrastructure and facilities.

The strategy for the seafood sector, which was announced in October, highlighted on-going work to monitor and manage the marine space, so that consumers can have confidence in the sustainability of Scottish seafood. It detailed how the fishing and aquaculture sectors are being supported to remain internationally competitive and to attract skills and talent to some of Scotland's most rural and coastal areas, despite the challenges of the post-Brexit trading environment.

Finlay Carson: There have been some issues around the new fisheries negotiation, but does Karen Adam recognise that landings increased by 15 per cent between 2020 and 2021?

Karen Adam: An increase in landings is fantastic, but we have to ensure that onshore processors have the labour to cope with them. The industry is feeling a lot of pressure in that respect. That said, I agree with my colleague Finlay Carson that it is good news.

The commitment to sustainable fisheries management is locked into our overarching fisheries management strategy, and the negotiations will drive many of the new policies and management improvements that are planned over the period to 2030. The latest fisheries statistics show that Scotland's sea fish and shellfish industry recovered in 2021 from the Covid-19 pandemic, but had not yet returned to pre-Brexit levels. Last month, I said:

"This comprehensive and long-term plan has been put together with the voice of the local fishing industry at its heart."

The same is true of the coastal state negotiations, and that gives security to Scotland's world-class, sustainable fishing industry as well as the prospect of a bright future.

In our current programme for government, we committed to publishing our approach to the blue economy through an action plan. That is a recognition of the importance of Scotland's marine space and marine sectors as national assets and as critical to meeting our ambitions for the sustainable stewardship of the marine environment. The action plan will be underpinned by a vision and will provide a framing and ambition for Scotland's marine management policies, strategies and plans, including the fisheries management strategy and coastal negotiations.

Our vision for Scotland's blue economy is clear that the actions required to steward our marine environment sustainably cannot be delivered in isolation. I am confident that, by working in partnership through our co-management groups, we can deliver the best outcomes for Scotland's marine environment, our seafood sector and our coastal communities. Although we might be facing

challenges, we will do what the Government does best: stand up for and always promote and protect Scotland's interests.

Until Scotland regains its independence and EU membership, I am sure that the Scottish Government will continue to be actively involved in the coastal state negotiations, in which it will play a key and active role in ensuring the protection of Scotland's interests. The outcomes that we seek at the annual fisheries negotiations are aligned with that vision. We are not looking for outcomes that will benefit a few or which will betray a whole industry, as the Brexit deal has done. We are committed to delivering the right deal for Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Rhoda Grant joins us remotely.

15:29

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): This debate is an annual occurrence in which the Scottish Government sets out its approach to the annual negotiations. It must have key principles in mind when it approaches the negotiations, principles that are highlighted in the Scottish Labour amendment. Fish are a finite resource, but they are not confined by borders. As a result, all states must approach negotiations in the clear knowledge that they must nurture and manage this finite resource for ourselves and for future generations. We must make that a key principle for those fishing in Scottish waters and use our influence to extend that principle as far as we can internationally. To do that, we must fish at sustainable levels and be guided by the science.

To have buy-in to such decisions, fishers must be involved in gathering the information that is required to inform the science, and they must have their knowledge and experience recognised. Too often, our approach has been top down, rather than collaborative. How often have we heard fishers say that there is a lot of a certain species available while the scientists are saying the opposite? Both cannot be right. Therefore, there needs to be much more collaborative work. Scientists need to see what fishers see—and vice versa. Only then can we build the trust and collaboration that are required to build a sustainable fishery. Indeed, it is in everyone's interests to have such a fishery—for the industry, for our coastal communities and for us all.

We must invest in the research and development of selective gear. As most of our fisheries are mixed, we need to find ways of allowing the fishing of plentiful stocks while avoiding bycatch of scarce species. Every time I have spoken in this annual debate, I have talked about bycatch and how we must ensure that it is landed and used under a regime that does not

encourage its pursuit. Such a regime does not need to be complicated, but it needs to ensure that there is no waste.

Economically, fishing is crucial to our coastal communities. There is an opportunity to increase the jobs that the sector currently provides by adding value at the quayside. Too often, we see lorries lined up at the quay to whisk fish straight to markets abroad, and we miss that opportunity to add value locally. There are conflicting issues to address here, because in many coastal communities we lack the workforce to do that sort of work. Boat owners tell us about challenges in recruiting crew locally, and they struggle to recruit from abroad due to immigration restrictions. The fact is that many ports are in some of the most picturesque areas of Scotland—in other words, areas where young people are being forced out, because they cannot get housing.

The fishing industry does not pay its workforce in a way that fits with the requirements of banks and building societies. It can be very lucrative, but it does not pay weekly or monthly salaries, and the pay itself depends on weather and catch. People can make a good living at sea, but we need to ensure that they can use their earnings to buy themselves a home; otherwise, we will lose them. Lack of housing for young people leads to depopulation and a dependence on foreign crew, and it means that communities miss out on the economic benefit that processing work can bring to their area. Small communities that have a degree of fish processing can support more jobs on land, as they do at sea.

In its briefing for the debate, the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust makes the point that inshore fishing must never be overlooked. The trust asks how the Scottish Government will integrate inshore fisheries into regional marine planning, which is something that we are still waiting for. Inshore fisheries are the linchpin of the economy in many small coastal communities. They land locally, and they process locally, and that part of the industry must be recognised, assisted and developed.

In order to capitalise on fishing, we must ensure that all Scottish boats land at Scottish ports. Tony Mackay's report on fisheries states:

"Scottish vessels landed £393 million (70%) of their fish in Scotland in 2021. The other landings were in Norway ... (20%), Denmark ... (4%), Rest of UK ... (4%), Ireland ... (1%) and in other countries ... (1%)."

What that highlights is that Scotland lost out on almost a third of Scottish boat landings. While non-Scottish boats also land here, they make up only about 3 per cent of total landings when we remove the rest of the UK.

Fisheries management is the responsibility of Scottish ministers; it is their responsibility to ensure that Scotland reaps the full benefits of the industry. In the fisheries debates in which I have spoken over the past decade, I have continued to raise and press the same points over and over again—investment in gear, listening to fishers and scientists and putting sustainability at the heart of negotiations—but the Government seems incapable of fulfilling those core purposes. I hope that it will listen now and make progress. If it does, our young people will find careers in a successful industry and our coastal communities will flourish.

15:35

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The on-going coastal state negotiations are of the utmost importance to Scotland's fishing industry. As others have pointed out, the results of those negotiations will dictate the industry's short-term opportunities as well as fishing's future in the longer term and they aim to secure sustainable management of fish stocks in the seas that surround us.

In a country with as rich a coastline as Scotland, it is little wonder that fishing remains a key part of our economy, not least in constituencies such as mine. During the on-going negotiations with neighbouring coastal nations over the strategic management objectives and approaches for shared fish stocks, the Scottish Government is rightly working to achieve the best possible outcome for Scotland's fishers, coastal communities, the seafood sector as a whole and for our environment.

It is vital that the Scottish Government continues to respond to the key challenges facing Scotland's fishing industry. There are many of them but I will name a couple of recent ones: the leap in fuel prices over the past year and the impact of labour shortages, which other members have pointed out. It is also important to recognise that the needs of the west coast, such as in my constituency, can differ radically from the needs that are specific to the east coast or northern isles fishing industries.

Inshore fisheries in particular, and the produce that they export, play a vital part in the local economy of the islands. There remains a strong demand for the export of high-quality Scottish fish and seafood, which accounted for an impressive 63 per cent of the UK's total seafood exports last year.

However, all the available evidence shows us that, in fishing, as in many other areas of our lives, most Scots see Brexit as an extraordinary act of national self-harm to the UK's economy, hampering our ability to trade efficiently with our closest neighbours. A number of small seafood

businesses in my constituency have expressed grave doubts about whether it is now practical to export to the EU at all due to the increase in paperwork, delays and costs that they have experienced since Brexit.

Brexit has, of course, created myriad other issues. Almost every industry is having to contend with the shortage of labour across the country and fishing is no exception. The UK Home Office continues to refuse to engage its common sense on that matter as it clings to its damaging anti-immigration rhetoric at all costs while jobs across countless sectors go unfilled. That affects the long-term viability of many businesses, not least in the fishing industry, and crushes the potential growth that the UK Government insists that it is working to create.

For example, the requirement for overseas labour on many types of fishing vessel is now the norm. Much as we want to recruit from within Scotland, overseas labour is increasingly needed. Following amendments to immigration regulation after Brexit, transit visas have begun to be used regularly to employ fishers, mostly from Ghana and the Philippines, on boats around Scotland. The Home Office is now closing the loophole—as it sees it—that allows those visas to be used in that way and, more significantly, in response to allegations of human rights abuse aboard a handful of UK fishing vessels where transit visas have been in use.

Fergus Ewing: I whole-heartedly agree with Dr Allan's detailed description of the Home Office's failings in that regard. Is he aware of the speech that was made recently by the leader of the Labour Party in England, Keir Starmer, who appeared to cast doubt on whether immigration was a good thing and make it clear that his party is opposed to it? That is particularly damaging and unhelpful to the fishing industry that Dr Allan has championed in his part of Scotland.

Alasdair Allan: It remains a mystery to me—as it clearly does to Fergus Ewing and to many others, I am sure—what the Labour Party's position is on labour coming from other countries or, indeed, what it might be on Brexit more broadly.

In the time that I have left, I underline my hope that the Scottish Government will continue to engage proactively with the UK Government on such issues. However, the labour force issue is just one example of the avalanche of challenges that Scotland's fishing industry currently faces. They provide a context for the negotiations that we are discussing in the debate. Such pressures affect all sizes of fishing enterprise and mean that the outcome of this year's coastal states negotiations has never been more important.

When it comes to protecting our marine environment and ensuring the continued viability of the fishing sector in Scotland's coastal communities, it is not a question of either/or; we must work to find the correct balance for both the fishing industry and the environment. The key role of fishing in Scotland's rural and coastal economies must be preserved and encouraged and our marine environment protected. It is my hope that this year's coastal states negotiations will be an opportunity to be proactive in ensuring the long-term sustainability of our seas' fish stocks and of our fishing industry.

15:41

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Scotland's relationship with the sea has, for centuries, been an important one. We are a maritime nation and have depended on the sea for trade, food and defence throughout our history.

The fishing sector is disproportionately significant in my own region and in the north of our country. Fishing is valued not only for its economic benefits and its continuing role in providing fresh, sustainable food but for the cultural position that it holds in many of our coastal communities. My region of the Highlands and islands is host to the many and varied forms that the wider fishing sector takes here in Scotland. I was pleased to see that the new Scotland minister John Lamont's recent visit to Shetland involved engaging with local fishing interests.

As we are all aware, the United Kingdom is now an independent coastal state. That has been a positive marker for our fishing industry. After so long, we have finally emerged from the common fisheries policy and we are still in the early days of adapting to that renewed status. However, that is not to say that we should allow current opportunities to create a more sustainable and workable sector to go unharnessed.

Part of that independent coastal state status involves being responsible for our relationship with other international actors. Most notably, the UK Government has concluded agreements with Norway and the Faroe Islands and also with the EU, through the trade and co-operation agreement process. On this side of the chamber, Conservatives have urged co-operative working between Scotland's two Governments in standing up for Scotland's interests internationally. Although I do not expect an end to the sort of knockabout politicking that such issues can raise, I think that, whether they are in the Parliament or out working on Scotland's seas, people ought to expect that both Governments will work together positively to build more effective arrangements for the sector.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): To avoid the knockabout politics that the member mentioned, will he agree with me that the UK Government has provided Scotland with only £14 million for the fishing industry, as opposed to the £62 million that the European maritime fisheries fund would have provided?

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I was talking about trying to avoid knockabout politics, but that is what we have just heard. To reply to the member in the spirit in which she asked the question, I do not imagine that when she goes to speak to fishermen around her constituency they are desperately calling for us to go back into the common fisheries policy, but she might argue otherwise.

The coastal states negotiations are, of course, one part of the co-operative process and it is positive to see the Scottish Government play a significant role in them. This is a period where there are real pressures on our fishing fleet and on seafood producers as well as on others in the sector. A positive outcome is more important than ever. I note the commitment to collaborative engagement in the Scottish Government's motion today. That commitment is welcome and I hope that we see more of that.

There are other areas of concern for the industry, where more work with the needs of the sector will be invaluable. Earlier this year, the Scottish Government set out a fairly high-level vision for the blue economy, aimed at securing the future health of the sector. However, to realise that vision, there will have to be practical actions here in Scotland.

I note in particular the sector's increasing concerns about how—both now and in the future—fishing interests are not squeezed out by competing demands on our seas. That concern was raised with me by the Shetland Fishermen's Association when I met the association in the summer, and has been raised by others in the sector. Earlier this year, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations outlined just some of their concerns in a joint report, noting the expected pressures that will arise in coming decades.

The importance of offshore renewables—not just offshore wind, but also emergent wave and tidal technologies—is significant. I do not believe that anyone is seriously suggesting that those offshore renewables projects are not increasingly important or worth while, or that they should not be a vital part of the Government's energy strategy.

However, there is a call for such projects to be designed with fishing in mind and with serious consultation with fishing interests. As the SFF has pointed out, when fishing is done properly, it provides a sustainable and low-carbon food

source that will have a continuing role in building our food security, and can be a contributor to sustainability goals. More than that, it is an iconic industry in my region. It is an industry that has a great deal of experience in working with the sea and its voice should be heard on the future of offshore planning and management.

On the issue of management, I will turn briefly to some of the other questions raised. It is worth noting that the 2020 future fisheries strategy supports robust compliance in the sector and a “positive future” built on “mutual respect”. Those words were welcomed by many. The realities of the Government’s role in fishing are of managing the legitimate interests of competing users within a set area. However, the realities of effective enforcement have been quite different. We appreciate that Marine Scotland cannot be omnipresent, but too often it seems to be little more than a paper tiger, unable to intervene or effectively penalise unlawful and unfair activities.

Gear conflict has also been a long-standing issue. The Scottish Government, to its credit, has looked and taken action here, but more recently, enforcement has been found wanting. Taking action would not only protect the legitimate interests of those who work and earn their livelihoods from our seas, but would also have the benefit of providing protection for our marine environments where we have decided that they require it.

We should be proud of our fishing industry and Governments should be working hard to fight for its interests. Scottish seafood has a global reach. I was speaking with representatives from Heathrow airport only last week about how significant air freight capacity has been to my region’s ability to export its produce across the world. It serves as a reminder that we have a highly marketable product, with a long tradition of being utilised.

We should not forget the more positive position that we find ourselves in, outside the common fisheries policy. I urge the Scottish Government to resist suggestions that returning to the CFP in one way or another would be a good thing, or, worse still, a fair trade-off for other interests. We can harness the advantages of our new-found status as an independent coastal state. It is reasonable for our fishermen to expect that government, at all levels, will be out battling for their interests.

15:48

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate on Scotland’s approach to the 2022 coastal state negotiations to achieve the Scottish Government’s vision for Scotland to be a world-class fishing nation that

delivers responsible and sustainable fisheries management.

I grew up in the east neuk of Fife. My father was one of the local accountants, and a large part of his job in Anster was supporting fishers, their families and the businesses that had grown up around the fishing industry. He was also director of the Scottish Fisheries Museum, which was a role that he was extremely proud to hold. He oft quoted Walter Scott:

“It’s no fish ye’re buying—it’s men’s lives.”

The history of Scottish fisheries is traced in the museum’s displays and artefacts: boom and bust, innovation and adaption, and how the involvement of the whole community is integral to fishing’s success. With the economic pressures of Brexit, Covid, the cost of living and the war in Ukraine, alongside the twin impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss, the attributes of innovation and adaption are needed now more than ever.

The Scottish Government’s strategy for coastal state negotiations is influenced by high-quality science. Visiting the Scottish Association for Marine Science in my constituency, at Dunstaffnage just outside Oban, I learned about the research work that it does in marine science. It suggests that the main reasons why we still know more about the surface of the moon than we know about most of our marine environment are the difficulty, danger and expense of gathering ocean data, especially from extreme marine environments. Modern technology increasingly allows us to make those important observations, and that exciting technology is being led in Scotland.

Next door to SAMS is the European Marine Science Park, which is home to about 10 marine sector companies that are active in a broad range of commercial marine activities. For example, Tritonia Scientific Ltd is a diving and underwater research company that offers specialist diving services in support of a range of commercial and advanced scientific operations. As Morag Goodfellow of Highlands and Islands Enterprise said earlier this year,

“Argyll’s rich marine resource has created and maintained significant economic opportunity for generations, and these latest company expansions demonstrate how innovation and technology is continuing to drive the marine economy in the region.”

However, we also have generations of fishers working in our seas, such as those working in Argyll and Bute, from Campbeltown, Tarbert, Oban and many more smaller ports. The Clyde Fishermen’s Association suggests that utilising local fishing boats as reference fleets could provide data in addition to that from Government science vessels.

Finlay Carson: Does the member agree that it will take some time for fishers in her community to get confidence and trust back in the Scottish Government after the recent decisions on cod and herring stocks?

Jenni Minto: I point out that relationships change all the time, and I am working hard on, and the cabinet secretary has said that she is working hard on, ensuring that those relationships are the best that they can be.

In June this year, the Clyde Fishermen's Trust published "A Vision: The Clyde Fishery". It is ambitious and it introduces new goals and ideas and offers practical solutions. It supports the best possible outcomes for fishers, the seafood sector, coastal communities and the environment, through a collaborative and co-management approach.

In the 1800s, Loch Fyne skiffs were developed in the Clyde area, but their efficiency was dependent on an uncontrollable factor—the power of the wind. Now we can control and harness the wind as renewable energy. In Trondheim in Norway, in 2015, the first electrically powered inshore fishing vessel was built, and now Fisheries Innovation Scotland is co-ordinating changes that might be possible for the Scottish fleet; innovation and adaptation ensure sustainable fisheries and communities.

In telling the stories of our fishing communities, the Scottish Fisheries Museum shows how localness was taken over by big business. As technology improved, catches increased, but we now need to use that technology not just to harvest the sea, but to ensure that fishing is sustainable and, perhaps, to revisit localness.

The coastal state and regional fisheries management organisation negotiations are part of that. Getting that right will protect environmental, economic and social outcomes by supporting a move to maximum sustainable yield. The vision for the Clyde proposes a ring-fenced quota that is reserved from the national allocation and directly overseen by Government, with an independent auditing scientific body advising on removals. It suggests changing the 30-year old fixed quota allocations, and proposes a mixed-fisheries system that is informed by science and by fishermen's observations. That would allow inshore communities to get fairer quota allocations and give them an opportunity to diversify. Improved local port infrastructure would also help.

I said at the start of my speech that the Scottish Fisheries Museum highlights the importance of the wider community around fisher folk, and nothing has changed. To ensure that our fishing is sustainable and that the high-quality white fish and shellfish that our seas are home to survive, communities need to work together.

There has already been mention of the round-table evidence session on inshore fisheries that the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee held in October. The session included stakeholders from the fishing and environmental sectors, and was designed to support the committee's understanding of the key issues that affect Scotland's inshore fisheries, to help to inform its future work programme. Our discussion ranged from the spatial squeeze of our seas, to the just transition, to workforce concerns, which are all big subjects. It was a good start, and I look forward to building on the foundations of that session.

As the Government motion states, by working together we can achieve the best possible outcome for Scotland's fishers, the wider seafood sector, coastal communities and the environment through a collaborative and co-management approach with all stakeholders.

15:54

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): People who research family in East Lothian will very likely come across a fishing affiliation. In 2012, I had my family tree researched. On my papa's side of the family, there were four generations of fishermen—possibly, there were four generations before that, too. Fisherrow, Prestonpans, Cockenzie, Port Seton, North Berwick and Dunbar all have existing harbours that have been used for fishing to varying degrees. East Lothian has a strong fishing tradition.

Most early fishermen did not stray far from the shallow coastal shores. They fished for seasonal flat flounders and coalfish, which bred in large shoals among kelp and seaweed. Those fish were caught, dried and stored, and they made an ideal food supply for small communities. They kept communities going for years.

The Dutch were the great leaders of the herring industry in the 16th and 17th centuries. They held a monopoly over the North Sea and greatly influenced the Scots. Negotiations over fishing took place even then.

Fishing in East Lothian continued with varying success over the late 19th century and in the 20th century, and it continues today, but on a smaller scale. Fishing has, without doubt, made a considerable mark on the East Lothian way of life.

Dunbar, which is my home town, is the home port to some 29 fishing vessels, which vary in size between 6m and 15m long. The larger vessels concentrate on prawn trawling, and the remainder usually lay creels for lobster, brown crabs and velvet crabs. Different bait is used, depending on what species is being targeted.

We will discuss coastal state and regional fisheries management organisation with the EU, Norway and the Faroe Islands in 2023. The outcome of those negotiations will be pivotal in providing fishing opportunities to the Scottish fishing industry and in ensuring that sustainable management of fish stocks in the longer term supports efforts to achieve the best possible outcome for the wider seafood sector and our coastal communities.

Let us look at the context of fishing in Scotland today and the history of the past two years. The Tory Brexit sell-out of Scotland's fishing sector has not helped to build trust in the integrity of the UK Government's having Scotland's fisheries' interests at heart. Throughout the Brexit process, Westminster Tory Governments set up Scotland's fishing communities as a bargaining chip in their Brexit negotiations; from the start, the UK Government set up Scotland's fisheries as a bargaining chip. Boris Johnson saw our fishing communities as "expendable". Contrary to the Brexiteers' promises of less red tape and bureaucracy, the Tory Brexit caused, and is still adding, a pile-up of extra bureaucracy for exporters.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Does Paul McLennan believe that fishermen in his area or across Scotland want to go back into the common fisheries policy, as his party would?

Paul McLennan: I think that there are mixed views on that. [*Interruption.*] Members should listen to me. The key thing is that fishermen want trust in their politicians. They certainly did not get that with the Tories in the Brexit discussions—that is for sure.

Seafood Scotland has warned that

"in a very short time, we could see the destruction of a centuries-old market which contributes significantly to the Scottish economy."

Elsbeth Macdonald of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation has said:

"The SFF made clear its view that the Brexit deal on fisheries fell far short of what the industry had sought and what the UK Government had promised."

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Paul McLennan: No. I have taken one already.

The Scottish White Fish Producers Association's Mike Park said:

"It is clear, for the offshore catching sector, Brexit failed to deliver any benefits of being a coastal state."

As I have said, that damages the trust and support of Scottish fishermen in any negotiations that the UK Government leads.

A few members have mentioned spatial squeeze. I recently met representatives of RSPB Scotland, and I visited the Bass Rock with them. At that meeting, we discussed the report entitled "Powering Healthy Seas: Accelerating Nature Positive Offshore Wind", which was a collaborative effort between the RSPB, the fishing industry and conservation groups.

Douglas Lumsden: Will the member take an intervention?

Paul McLennan: No. I have taken one already, and I am conscious of my time.

I am glad to say that Scottish Renewables is talking with the RSPB and fishing groups about that report. It spells out what is needed to make the shift to nature-positive offshore wind, and deals with integrating marine recovery and resilience for our seabirds and fishing stock into energy development.

What should the Scottish Government's negotiating strategy and Scotland's approach to the negotiations be influenced by? High-quality science—we have heard about that—and wider policy objectives, including socioeconomic implications, are key. The Scottish Government has already stated that its negotiating approach is underpinned by a set of guiding principles that will remain consistent, with the need to progress towards good environmental status. We need to fully comply with a range of international conventions and obligations—in particular, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea—inform management decisions using best available scientific advice and, obviously, through speaking to fishermen; and ensure that foreign vessels that fish in Scottish waters meet the same high standards that apply to Scottish vessels in Scottish waters.

Of course, the Scottish Government will ensure that our vessels meet those standards when they are fishing elsewhere. Departure from the EU has changed the international context in which we operate, but the Scottish Government is determined to continue to play a full and key role in supporting and delivering international fisheries management.

In its briefing for the debate, the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust touched on the requirement to adapt to the changes arising from the biodiversity and climate crises. It states that it thinks that inshore fishery will have to adapt to the increasing competition for space in inshore waters. In its opinion, that transition will inevitably lead to displacement of certain fishing activities in specific areas. Perhaps the cabinet secretary could touch on that in summing up the debate.

Fishing communities have long been a part of East Lothian and Scottish coastal communities,

and Brexit has damaged the sector. The Scottish Government, in its approach to coastal states negotiations, will help our fishermen to thrive, and it will protect our environment and ensure sustainable fishing.

16:00

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): We are deep in a climate and nature emergency. The disappointment of the 27th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP27—reverberates around the planet, as we look set to cross over the “safe” limit of 1.5°C. That is the context that we need to keep fully in our minds when we are shaping and scrutinising legislation and debating topics such as the coastal states negotiations.

I thank the Scottish Government and its negotiators for their efforts to achieve the best possible outcome for Scotland’s fishers, the seafood sector, coastal communities and the environment. We are all aware that they are working within constraints, including economic challenges that are exacerbated by Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the after-effects of Covid-19. Of course, ministers must balance the economic interests of the fishing industry with the long-term sustainability of our seas and fish stocks. For too long, however, the balance has been off. If we are serious about achieving the best possible economic, social and environmental outcomes, the balance needs to shift.

Under the Bute house agreement between the Scottish Government and the Greens, we are starting to see a rebalancing. We are working to deliver fisheries management measures for marine protected areas and developing a suite of highly protected marine areas that will protect at least 10 per cent of our seas. The Scottish Government is taking steps to incentivise the use of selective fishing gear and low-impact techniques, and I welcome the call for ministers to report yearly on that. Those measures will be vital for restoring the health of our seas, but the benefits will be undermined if we do not also set quotas that protect and restore our fish stocks.

Fergus Ewing: Will the member take an intervention?

Ariane Burgess: I have a lot to get through, so I will keep on going, if the member does not mind.

The UK Fisheries Act 2020 sets objectives that the four Administrations are required to pursue. The sustainability objective includes the imperative “do not overexploit marine stocks.”

The precautionary objective is to enable biomass levels to recover until stocks can produce maximum sustainable yield.

Finlay Carson: Will the member take an intervention?

Ariane Burgess: I am sorry—I have plenty to get through.

The ecosystem objective requires that human pressures, including fishing, must be kept to “levels compatible with ... good environmental status”.

The Scottish Government’s “Blue Economy Vision for Scotland” reflects those objectives and recognises that,

“we must thrive within the planet’s sustainable limits”.

In order to fulfil that vision by 2045, however, we need to change the way in which we approach quota negotiations now.

Scottish waters account for 13 per cent of Europe’s seas so, although we are not an independent party in the negotiations, we have quite a responsibility, and an opportunity, to influence how the quota is set, in particular for certain species.

By way of example, I will focus on one stock of critical concern: west of Scotland cod. From Cape Wrath, up around the Faroes and down to the Clyde, west of Scotland cod has declined by 92 per cent since ICES started issuing advice in 1981. The biomass is below the level at which the stock is at risk of collapse; that is why the scientific advice is to set total allowable catch for that species at zero. However, the UK and the EU have set the catch limit above scientific advice every year, for 35 years.

Bottom trawlers argue that they need quota for that stock because they catch it as bycatch, and they do not want to breach the landing obligation. They want a higher quota so that they can use all their quota for other species without reaching the limit on west of Scotland cod first. However, it should not be acceptable to exceed scientific advice just because doing so would alleviate the choke in the fishery.

Fergus Ewing *rose*—

Ariane Burgess: The maximum sustainable yield is supposed to be a limit to keep fishing pressures to a sustainable level, as required by the 2020 act.

Fergus Ewing: Will the member give way?

Ariane Burgess: I am sorry, but I will keep on going. As I mentioned, I have limited time and plenty more to say.

By not staying within that limit, we are prioritising short-term economic gain over long-term stock recovery and ecosystem health.

Scotland is not solely responsible for west of Scotland cod, but we have a good opportunity to

influence negotiations on it. DEFRA listens to Scotland's position on that, so why do we not advocate for an approach that would ensure that the stock recovers, rather than sign up to the same approach that has failed to bring about significant recovery since the early 1990s?

Of course we must consider the socioeconomic impact of suddenly setting a zero catch because we do not want our fishers to face a cliff edge, but it does not have to be all or nothing. Why not set a commitment to recover west of Scotland cod stocks by 20 per cent each year and advocate for total allowable catch and quota to be based on that?

Sadly, west of Scotland cod is just one of many stocks that are overfished. The latest Scottish marine assessment found that 46 per cent of evaluated stock was below the level that is capable of producing maximum sustainable yield. Rebuilding fish stocks to that level could allow the UK to land an extra 442,000 tonnes of fish each year. With Scotland contributing 61 per cent of the UK fishing industry's economic output, that would deliver a significant benefit to fisheries and to the rural economies that they support.

Our seas are the last great commons for Scotland. Fish are public assets that are recognised under UK case law—

Rachael Hamilton: Will the member take intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is about to conclude.

Ariane Burgess: Sorry—what? I will keep on going.

If we surveyed the Scottish people, I bet that they would not want the public assets in our seas to be overexploited until they cannot recover. They would expect the Scottish Government to ensure that those assets are managed responsibly.

To wind up, Presiding Officer, if we get catch limits and quotas right—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are over your time, Ms Burgess, so please conclude now.

Ariane Burgess: Thank you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much. We are short of time. I call Siobhian Brown, to be followed by Mercedes Villalba. You have up to six minutes, please, Ms Brown.

16:07

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): Scotland's fish are a national asset to our naturally wealthy country. In 2019, 70 per cent of Scotland's seafood exports, worth more than £770 million, were to the EU. That same year, seafood

accounted for 57 per cent of our overall food exports, with a total value of £1.02 billion.

Scotland has only 8 per cent of the UK population, but Scottish vessels accounted for 61 per cent of the value and 67 per cent of the tonnage of all landings by UK vessels in 2021. In South Ayrshire, which is in my constituency, the industry employs around 215 people and is worth £11.6 million.

Scotland is a major, internationally recognised fishing nation, and we need to ensure that we do everything that we can to protect that important industry.

Do people remember the big red bus that was going to save the UK £350 million a week to invest into the national health service? Another very fishy story by the Tories was that Brexit would be a "sea of opportunity" for the Scottish fishing industry. That has yet to come to fruition, and is very unlikely to. Brexit has been disastrous for the Scottish fishing industry.

The end of the UK Brexit discussions concluded that the trade and co-operation agreement did not deliver on the UK Government's promises, particularly on the uplift of all quota shares.

Following the departure from the EU on 31 January 2020, the UK is now an independent coastal state. The Scottish Government, as part of the UK delegation, plays an active role in ensuring that Scotland's interests are protected.

It is really important that we listen to the industry. I have a fish exporter who is based in my constituency. With an extra £5,000 added to his weekly costs due to Brexit administration, he says that his business is no longer viable.

I have met local fishermen in my constituency. Brexit, lack of staff, the cost of living crisis and fuel prices—

Finlay Carson: Will the member taken an intervention?

Siobhian Brown: Yes.

Finlay Carson: Does the member welcome the fact that the trade and co-operation agreement of December 2020 will increase to 25 per cent the amount of EU quota being transferred to Scotland? Surely that is a positive move forward.

Siobhian Brown: I thank the member for that scripted question. I will get to that point later in my speech.

I have also met local fishermen, and I know that times are extremely tough for this once-thriving industry. Its existence is in real jeopardy, and time is running out to salvage the remains of our valuable fishing communities before they are lost for good. I thank the cabinet secretary for recently

visiting a local Ayrshire fishing company with me to hear about the challenges that it faces and about the fascinating work that goes on and the wealth of experience in the industry. I know that she will meet fishermen on the Clyde shortly to continue that positive engagement.

We need to look at ways in which we can support the industry, as it is so important to the Scottish economy. The cabinet secretary's motion highlights all the on-going negotiation with our international partners to ensure the best possible outcome for our Scottish fishers. I know that the Scottish Government's negotiating strategy and priorities are influenced by high-quality science and take into account the wider policy objectives and socioeconomic implications, but I ask for consideration to also be given to utilising local fishing boats as reference fleets. Without accurate science, knowledge of local stocks can be limited.

Specifically on the Clyde, it should be noted that, this month, boats have been recording temperatures on the sea floor of 13°. In recent years, the figure has been 8°, which is still very high in comparison with previous years. According to scientists, cod generally spawn in temperatures of 4° to 7°. Therefore, climate change is having an impact on the industry, and local knowledge is valuable.

In relation to climate change, I also highlight the issue of fishing safety. Climate change is affecting sea temperatures, and some people are predicting more volatile weather. Ageing vessels will struggle to operate safely in such conditions and cannot be retrofitted to accommodate hybrid engines or alternative fuels. That issue will affect many of our fishermen in future.

On the Clyde, there has been a strong interest in increased prawn access. It has been acknowledged that the reduction in the nephrops fleet has been largely due to age, lack of crew, the impact of Brexit and Covid and recent closures. Increased access to prawn stocks might help to revitalise and replenish the coastal fleet, which has been reduced in Scotland in the past few years. I highlight that the Clyde fleet has been particularly hard hit in relation to access to crew, as enforcement of the transit visa measures has now been in place for more than a year in this region only. That has led to disproportionate opportunities regionally, as Northern Ireland boats have continued to fish in the Clyde, with full transit visa crew, while our Clyde boats have been tied up.

The Clyde Fishermen's Association is deeply concerned that the number of fishing boats on the Clyde is now dwindling at a more rapid rate than numbers anywhere else in Scotland, so any consideration of support for diversification would be greatly appreciated. In Troon in my

constituency, 20 years ago, there were 70 boats and now there are only six. The factories in Ayr, Kilkeel, Glasgow and Lanarkshire are seeing demand for nephrops domestically and in the EU, but they do not have the required volume of fishing boats or staff to support that demand from the market. The issue is becoming critical for factories in fishing communities. The Clyde fishermen wanted that issue to be raised so that the negotiating team is fully aware of all the challenges that they face.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Please conclude, Ms Brown.

Siobhian Brown: Sure.

Scotland's commercial fishing fleet and sea fisheries are significant contributors to Scotland's rural and coastal economies. The commercial fishing industry contributes significantly to Scotland's food and drink economy and, in particular, plays an important part in remote and potentially fragile communities. We need to preserve the industry for future generations to come.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Brown. I must ask you to conclude.

16:13

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in the debate because, in the wake of COP27, many campaigners are concerned about the lack of significant progress internationally towards achieving net zero and environmental targets. Today's debate is a welcome opportunity for the Scottish Government to set out what it hopes to emerge from the upcoming coastal states negotiations.

There is much in the Government's motion that we support, including the points about the need to improve opportunities for Scotland's fishing industry and to ensure the sustainable management of fish stocks in the long term.

However, today's debate also allows us to assess the progress that we are making in Scotland in delivering a more sustainable fishing industry. As my colleague Colin Smyth has outlined, there is still much progress to be made by the Scottish Government.

Scottish Labour's five tests set out clear objectives on sustainability, fair quota distribution and support for socially, economically and environmentally beneficial fisheries. I urge the Scottish Government to work towards achieving those objectives, because, for too long, Scotland's seas have been in a state of decline, which must be reversed. While targets are missed and

pledges remain unfulfilled, we will not deliver the marine recovery that is vital.

Why is it so important that we reverse the decline of our seas and promote marine recovery? That is clearly important to Scotland's rural and coastal communities, which greatly rely on the fishing industry for jobs and for their local economies. By redistributing quotas, we can ensure that everyone in our coastal communities reaps the benefits of our national resource. By tying quota access to fisheries that provide local fair work and use low-impact measures, we can restore our marine environment while strengthening our coastal communities. All of that will contribute to repopulation and the preservation of an important part of our cultural heritage.

Finlay Carson: Will the member take an intervention?

Mercedes Villalba: Will I get the time back, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer: I am afraid that there is no time in hand.

Mercedes Villalba: I am sorry, but I do not have the time to take an intervention.

If we fail to grasp the opportunity to use existing mechanisms such as quotas to support Scottish fishers, it is coastal communities that will pay the price for our political inaction. Just as Scotland's mining communities suffered serious economic hardship that still scars us today, the loss of fishing jobs and opportunities has been, and will continue to be, devastating for our coastal communities.

However, it is not just coastal communities that need to be concerned about the decline of our seas; it is all of us. The impacts of failing to address issues such as quota allocation, support for more sustainable fishing methods and the landing of catches abroad will be felt across Scotland. Whether it is the harm that certain fishing methods cause to our marine environment, the loss of fish for food supplies or the break-up of our coastal communities, the responsibility falls on us all to ensure that Scotland's fishing industry is supported and sustainable, because, without such an industry, we will not reverse the decline of Scotland's seas or deliver marine recovery.

I have spoken about the need for Scotland to have a fishing industry that is supported and sustainable, and the Scottish Government must address a number of issues to make that a reality.

Scotland's fishers currently find themselves locked in competition due to the lack of spatial planning. Poor spatial planning is fatally undermining the future prospects of many fisheries and is causing significant harm to the marine environment. The lack of planning means that

poorly regulated scallop dredging is damaging marine habitats, while bottom trawling in concentrations of juvenile fish is leading to the killing of the next generation of fish stocks. I ask the cabinet secretary, in her closing speech, to address Marine Scotland's delivery of the 2015 national marine plan.

There is a requirement under the national marine plan for regional marine plans to be developed, but, as yet, there does not seem to be a single such plan in place for any of Scotland's inshore waters. Without coherent regional marine planning, conflicts between fishers and other marine stakeholders will continue, which will hamper attempts to protect the marine environment and ensure the future prospects of many fisheries, so I ask the cabinet secretary to update members on the progress that is being made towards delivering regional marine plans.

Along with many other industries, inshore fisheries will have to transition to more sustainable practices in the wake of the climate and nature crises. There will be costs to the transition, whether from adopting lower-impact fishing gears or from growing competition for space due to the creation of highly protected marine areas, and those costs will be prohibitive for many inshore fisheries. I hope that the cabinet secretary will be able to provide some detail on the conditions that will be attached to any financial support that the Scottish Government will make available, because public funds must be tied to local job creation, fair work principles and sustainable practices.

We need to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, and we need to do that in a way that protects and increases employment opportunities in the sector. We can do both, because, since the UK left the common fisheries policy, the Scottish Government has assumed full responsibility for the management of Scotland's fisheries. If the Scottish Government addresses the issues that I have set out, it can support the fishing industry into a sustainable and long-term future. The alternative is economic hardship for many communities across Scotland and further damage to our marine environment, which nobody in this Parliament wants to see.

16:20

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I do not represent a fishing constituency, but I like my fish, and in Scotland we are never too far from the coast.

I am a livestock farmer by trade, and my respect for the fisherfolk is immense. In days past, I used to post on social media pictures of the conditions that I faced during bitter winter days when I was feeding cattle and sheep out on the hills, and I

often got messages from folk commiserating or telling me what a tough life farming is. As tough as it is, I always tried to respond by saying that fisherfolk and their families have it much worse. Being out at sea in rough waters must be hard going at the best of times, so I can only imagine what it is like trying to make a living out on the water when the conditions change for the worse. Fisherfolk truly are the last wild food hunters in our everyday food system. I associate myself entirely with the comments of Colin Smyth and Rachael Hamilton about the loss of life that fishing communities endure.

Much like farmers, our fishing folk contribute enormously to our nation's food and drink output, which is the envy of the world. However, over generations, political decisions have impacted our fishing industries in a way that has rarely had fisherfolk's best interests at heart. When the Ted Heath Government was negotiating the UK's entry into the European Economic Community in the early 1970s, it took the view that

"In light of Britain's wider European interests they, the Scottish fishermen, are expendable."

It is estimated that for the Scottish fishing fleet that meant 100,000 job losses, as well as the loss of hundreds of millions of pounds to the economy every year. The decision changed the course of history for our fishing communities and opened the doors to a steady decline. Opening access to continental boats that employed aggressive fishing practices contributed to a significant reduction of the Scottish fleet from approximately 1,800 boats in the early 1970s to a third of that 40 years later.

Furthermore, the EU's approach to continental fisheries management—the all-encompassing common fisheries policy—was a failure in many regards, with overfishing and discarding resulting in huge environmental damage, which contributed to a further weakening of the industry in Scotland.

To compound matters, when agriculture and fisheries council meetings were taking place between EU member states, Scotland's voice was bypassed. Who can forget the farcical situation at the November 2014 council meeting in Brussels, when an unelected peer, Lord Rupert Ponsoby, took a seat in the absence of the UK minister, despite the presence at the meeting of Scotland's highly experienced fishing minister Richard Lochhead? Richard Lochhead was not even allowed into the room where the negotiations were happening. Lord Ponsoby made the briefest of interventions, clearly not understanding his brief. That showed, again, the UK Government's total disrespect for our fishing industry.

Representation is important in politics, and throughout the past 50 years it has been absolutely clear that the big decisions that are

relevant to Scotland's fisherfolk have simply not worked for them. It came as no surprise to me that there was a fervour for change in the fishing community, with many people choosing to believe the Tory-driven Brexit promises of a "sea of opportunity" if they voted to leave the European Union. That is why they voted to leave.

The opportunity never materialised. Members should not take my word for it; they should listen to Elspeth Macdonald, the chief executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, who said of the Brexit deal:

"This deal falls very far short of the commitments and promises that were made to the fishing industry by those at the highest level of government. It does not restore sovereign UK control over fisheries, and does not permit us to determine who can catch what, where and when in our own waters ... We are now a coastal state with one hand tied behind our back and the industry's task in the months and years ahead is to right the wrongs of this deal."

I am sure that Scotland's SNP Government will not be so sloppy with folk's livelihoods.

In taking the opportunity to influence the coastal negotiations, the Scottish Government is showing a full understanding of and appreciation for the vital contributions that Scottish fishermen bring to Scotland's coastal communities, economy and larder. The Scottish Government understands that the Scottish fishing industry is facing challenges that include recovery from the pandemic, the effects of Brexit and the impacts of the cost of living crisis. All that is balanced with the need for a sustainable and responsible approach to managing our seas, based on a thorough scientific approach that is guided by the impressive work of stakeholders and environmental organisations, some of which took part in a round-table discussion last month at the RAINE Committee.

Rachael Hamilton: The Bute house agreement between the Greens and the SNP contains a commitment to extend the renewables and offshore wind sector. What does Jim Fairlie make of the spatial pressures report from Elspeth Macdonald, which says that fishermen will be crowded out from our seas?

Jim Fairlie: Elspeth Macdonald said lots of things. I will quote Jimmy Buchan, who has previously stated:

"The Scottish Government has clearly listened carefully to the Scottish seafood industry in developing its strategy."

By balancing factors, Scotland is now recognising how best to deliver a long-term, sustainable future for our fisherfolk and our seas.

Although I fully support the sensible negotiating position of the Scottish Government, with international relations being a reserved matter, I am nevertheless concerned by both the long-term and short-term trends relating to the UK's handling

of what it views as an expendable industry. For an example of the UK Government closing its ears to concerns from the Scottish Government, we only have to look at George Eustice's comments last week, when he admitted to the trade deals with Australia and New Zealand being terrible—deals that were largely endorsed by the Scottish Conservative members sitting in the chamber.

With Scotland possessing 60 per cent of the UK's sea territory, the best longer-term solution for Scotland to fully realise its position as a world-class fishing nation is independence, freeing us to negotiate directly with our neighbours. We cannot afford to hope that the UK Government will do the right thing by putting vital industries such as farming and fishing at the forefront of its priorities. Fifty years of evidence has proven exactly what it will do, which, generally, is never good for Scottish sectors.

16:26

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): I apologise to members and, in particular, Beatrice Wishart for not being in the chamber for all the opening speeches.

As someone who represents the north-east of Scotland, I know how crucial Scotland's fishing industry is to the economies of our coastal communities. Everyone in the industry works incredibly hard to put high-quality food on our tables, and I thank them all for that.

Many people who work in Scotland's fishing industry voted to leave the European Union in 2016 because they saw a sea of opportunity on the horizon, with the United Kingdom, as an independent coastal state, building our fishing industry outside of the detested common fisheries policy, which every SNP member seems to want to bring us back into.

Jim Fairlie: Douglas Lumsden talks about coming out of the EU and how that has been a disaster for the fishing industry. The industry is crying out for people, yet the Conservative UK Government will not let it take them on.

Douglas Lumsden: What the industry is not crying out for is to be brought back into the detested CFP that the SNP wants to drag it into.

The UK Government has secured a deal that means that, for the first time in decades, we now control our own waters. By cutting out the bureaucratic behemoth of Brussels, we can end the years of managed decline in the industry and ensure that it is enabled to not only grow but flourish. That is what we should surely all want.

The total tonnage of fish that is landed in this country is increasing; leading the way is our Scottish fishing industry, which accounts for more

than 70 per cent of landings. Unfortunately, the anti-growth, anti-business and anti-fishing SNP-Green coalition is failing our industry. That comes not just from me but from industry representatives across Scotland.

Time and again, we hear of examples of the SNP-Green devolved Government choosing to ignore the industry. These days, we all know how important it is for us to follow the science but, according to the Shetland Fishermen's Association, that goes out the window with this Government when it comes to the science surrounding fisheries management. We also have the underresourced Marine Scotland, which, as it stands, is unable to properly deliver for the industry and lacks an innovative approach to the challenges that the sector faces.

Ultimately, it is the SNP's decision to clamber into bed with its anti-growth partners, the Greens, in a desperate attempt to cling on to power that is holding back the sector. It is a coalition that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation has said is fuelling an "increasingly hostile environment" for the industry. Let us not forget that it is the coalition partners in the nationalist Administration that would disgracefully drag Scotland's fishing industry back into the hated CFP, throwing away new opportunities only to satisfy their blind pursuit of division.

People in the sector can rest assured that, while the Scottish Government ignores the fishing industry, the UK Government is standing up for them. In the UK Government's 2018 sustainable fisheries white paper, it indicated that it intended to be a champion of sustainable fishing the length and breadth of our United Kingdom. Unlike the Scottish Government, that is what the UK Government is doing.

By angling for opportunity, this country has regained additional quota from the European Union that will be worth around £146 million over the next five years, which is to be shared among the four nations of the UK. We can certainly see that, all around us, there are plenty more fish in the sea.

The UK Government has also launched the UK seafood fund, which is worth £100 million. That fund is there to level up coastal communities across the UK. It will support the industry to process more of the fish landed in the UK, to create new job opportunities throughout the supply chain, to upskill the workforce, to train new entrants and to invest in technologies to put the industry at the cutting edge of sustainable fishing.

Did the SNP welcome that support for Scottish coastal communities? Of course not. How dare the UK Government do something to support Scotland's fishing industry! It is abundantly clear

that the SNP would much rather play petty constitutional politics than deliver for Scotland's fishermen.

I will give the minister some ideas on how the Scottish Government could help the fishing industry. The transport links to Peterhead are a disgrace. There is no rail, so producers have to rely on a single-track road that goes past the notorious Toll of Birness.

Karen Adam: I have been working with the Campaign for North East Rail on the issue of rail to Peterhead. Will the member join me in that campaign to ensure that we do get rail back there?

Douglas Lumsden: We have been looking at rail, but there is no rail just now, so the quickest thing to do would be to improve the road to Peterhead. Surely the member would support that.

Fish processors are reluctant to invest in improved buildings in Aberdeen because they face crippling bills for business rates. If the Government cared about the fishing industry, it would sort that out. Let us look at the lack of investment in new automation equipment. If the Government cared about the fishing industry, it would sort that out. The Government has the powers; it just needs to use them.

The UK Government is not only acting in the interests of, but listening to, our fishing industry. Earlier this month, Scotland Office minister John Lamont visited fisheries in Shetland, and he will soon chair the next meeting of the Scottish seafood industry action group. Meanwhile, I am left wondering whether Lorna Slater has yet managed to figure out where Scotland's fish farms are located.

The UK Government is meeting industry stakeholders, listening to what they need and what challenges they face, and working with them to ensure that they succeed in delivering smooth seas for the future.

The Presiding Officer: Emma Harper will be the final speaker in the open debate.

16:32

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): We have heard some interesting contributions, including from members who have strong fishing connections in their areas, as I do—inshore fishing is especially important across the South Scotland region. There are important fishing communities in Eyemouth, Kirkcudbright and Stranraer, as well as in other locations across the south-west of my region.

Like Jim Fairlie, I acknowledge that Colin Smyth and Rachael Hamilton rightly highlighted the dangers that are faced by our fishermen when

they go out to catch and supply food for us all. It is really important that those members mentioned that, and I thank them for doing so.

Rightly, the Scottish Government's key priority throughout negotiations is always to protect Scottish interests by securing sustainable catching opportunities for our fishermen. As others have said, it is important to work within environmental limits to ensure that fish stocks are managed sustainably, while providing a resource for future generations and safeguarding the diversity of our marine ecosystems. That is part of responsible fisheries management.

It would be wrong not to recognise the significant pressures that the Scottish fishing industry currently faces, including recovery from the pandemic, the effects of Brexit and the impacts of the cost of living crisis. We have already heard that from others.

Fishing opportunities for the majority of key stocks for the Scottish fishing industry are negotiated annually through a variety of multiparty and bilateral forums. The UK's exit from the EU has had a devastating impact on the seafood sector overall. The Brexit discussions concluded on 24 December 2020 with a trade and co-operation agreement that clearly did not deliver on the promises made by the UK Government, particularly those on the uplift in all quota shares.

Following its exit from the European Union, the UK has now become an independent coastal state, and it has conducted negotiations on that footing since 2021. The Scottish Government's key priority throughout negotiations is always to protect Scottish interests by securing sustainable catching opportunities.

However, for the Scottish fishing industry, the Tories' promise of a sea of opportunity has now been exposed as being completely hollow. This is not the first time that that has been mentioned this afternoon. Jim Fairlie was right when he said that the fishing industry has been clear in expressing its views.

Finlay Carson: Will the member take an intervention?

Emma Harper: I do not think that there is time. There have been a lot of interventions this afternoon. I am sorry, but I am going to continue, because I want to comment on the common fisheries policy, which has also been brought up.

Elsbeth Macdonald, chief executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, said that the Brexit deal on fisheries fell "far short" of what the industry sought and what the UK Government promised. Mike Park, CEO of the Scottish White Fish Producers Association, said:

“It is clear, for the offshore catching sector, Brexit failed to deliver any benefits of being a coastal state.”

Jimmy Buchan, CEO of the Scottish Seafood Association, said that fishers have been “badly let down” and that post-Brexit trading conditions for processors have been “challenging at best”.

In 2019, more than 70 per cent of Scottish seafood exports were to the EU—those exports were worth more than £770 million—and seafood accounted for 57 per cent of Scotland’s overall food exports, with a total value of £1.02 billion. Landings by the Scottish vessels accounted for 61 per cent of the value and 67 per cent of the tonnage of all landings by UK vessels. Members have mentioned that landings have increased, but the value has decreased. That is a really important point and one that we should explore in more detail.

The Scottish Government will continue to support our industry to recover from the Tories’ Brexit betrayal and will press for the £62 million of marine funding to which Scotland is entitled to be fully allocated to Scotland.

Rachael Hamilton: Will the member take an intervention?

Emma Harper: As I said, I will not. I am going to continue.

However, the impact that Brexit has had on our fishing industry, including through us losing our position in the negotiations, must be made clear. Through the UK seafood fund, the UK Government is directly funding projects in a policy area that is devolved. Additional spending on businesses and initiatives in Scotland is always welcome, but this is not simply additional funding. First and foremost, it is UK Government spending in an area that is devolved to the Scottish Government and is of crucial importance to Scotland. It is imperative that the Scottish Government is accountable to the Scottish Parliament in this area, and that it can make decisions about the use of marine and fisheries funding that are in line with Scotland’s priorities.

The UK Government is presenting the UK seafood fund as a solution to all the industry’s challenges, with more landings and more opportunities to support long-term economic development in the coastal communities. However, Brexit has had a devastating impact, and it has not delivered on the promises that were made in relation to uplift in all quota shares. Those promises were made, but they have not been delivered on.

If the appropriate share of the £100 million UK seafood fund had been allocated directly to the Scottish Government, it would have been able to support meaningful investments, informed by its

detailed engagement with Scotland’s marine and seafood sectors, in support of our blue economy. Instead, we have the UK seafood fund operating in the same space as the marine fund Scotland scheme. The Scottish Government does not ask to administer devolved expenditure in England, so there is no reason why the UK Government should do that in Scotland.

We need to ensure that there is an opportunity to do better and that we can be at the table so that we are front and centre of negotiations in the future. That will bring about improvements and a better deal for our fishing communities.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the winding-up speeches.

16:39

Colin Smyth: This debate has highlighted the importance of the fishing sector to all of Scotland, but particularly to the coastal communities that many of us have the privilege of representing. It has shown how crucial the current fisheries negotiations are and how vital the consequential decisions that the Scottish Government will make on quota distribution will be for the industry and our environment.

Paul McLennan spoke about not just the proud history of fishing in East Lothian but its importance for the county today. Karen Adam spoke about the pride in the fishing communities in her north-east constituency. Recently, I had the privilege of visiting the port of Peterhead and the fish market with my colleague Anas Sarwar to see just how important it is to the community but also to the whole of Scotland’s fishing industry. Emma Harper highlighted the importance of fishing in her South Scotland region—whether in Eyemouth, Stranraer or Kirkcudbright.

However, a number of members spoke about the significant challenges that the industry now faces as the current negotiations take place. Several members highlighted the continuing impact of Brexit. In particular, Siobhian Brown highlighted the fact that more than 70 per cent of fish exports go to the EU. That represents more than £1.6 billion of exports from the UK. Any barriers to market, therefore, are barriers for our fishing industry.

Rhoda Grant spoke about the well-documented challenges for the industry in accessing labour, which have resulted from the EU-UK trade and co-operation agreement. That agreement has delivered not so much the “sea of opportunity” that Douglas Lumsden claimed but more an ocean of uncertainty, with barriers to market and to labour that have all but cancelled out the very incremental increase in the share of fishery for Scotland’s fishers, up to 2026.

A key issue in the debate, which was raised by a large number of members—including Rachael Hamilton, Jamie Halcro Johnston and Beatrice Wishart—involves the practical challenges to fishing of the accelerated expansion of offshore wind and the pace of application of management measures within marine protected areas—the so-called “spatial squeeze”, which should be seen not just as a well-known view of the fishing sector and its representative bodies, such as the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation, but as needing to be better recognised by those involved in the planning and regulation of the marine area.

Beatrice Wishart was right to say that it is not a just transition if one sector squeezes out another. The Scottish Government has failed to implement the 2015 national marine plan, including spatial planning, and, as Mercedes Villalba said, there is an absence of regional marine plans, 12 years after the passage of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 and seven years since the first national marine plan was approved. The need for those plans has never been more important, both for the economic uses of our seas and for their vital ecological restoration.

As Karen Adam, Ariane Burgess and Mercedes Villalba all said, the debate comes at a time when the world has been meeting in Egypt at COP27. We cannot overestimate the environmental importance of our seas in capturing and storing excess carbon from the atmosphere. That highlights the importance of proper fisheries management in combating climate change.

I and Mercedes Villalba set out Labour’s five tests, through which we will continue to judge the Government on the establishment and distribution of sustainable fishing quotas and the management of our seas; on whether those negotiations and that quota distribution deliver a better deal for smaller boats; on whether they lead to more catch being landed in our Scottish ports; and on whether they deliver a lower-impact and more sustainable fishing industry for the benefit of our environment, our coastal communities and the future of Scottish fishing.

Some fishing methods cause more environmental damage than others. In June this year, Open Seas, in partnership with Greenpeace, began touring the Scottish coastline to document the health of the sea bed and observe the fishing practices that take place in UK protected areas. Operation Ocean Witness actively investigated the current health of our oceans and the damage that poorly regulated fishing can have on our sea beds and marine life. Valuable insights were gained into the health of our marine environment—from mapping Orkney sea grass beds to investigating and evidencing the impact of bottom-towed fisheries on biogenic reefs.

The Scottish Government’s own marine assessment in 2020 found that it had failed to meet targets to prevent damage to priority marine environments, which caused five large sea bed habitats to shrink.

The work highlighted the importance of marine protected areas but also the need to better incentivise a change to lower-impact fishing methods. I welcome the fact that Ariane Burgess supports Labour’s call for progress on that to be reported on annually by the Government.

A number of members raised the issue of the scientific advice used in negotiating quotas and in agreeing their distribution—not least because, by its very nature, such advice can never be 100 per cent accurate. Often, when the advice is more positive—as was the case with cod this year—it is obviously welcomed; however, that may not happen as much when it recommends a reduction in quota. It is important that any advice is scrutinised and that, if we feel that it is not robust, it should be challenged, because it has such a profound impact on the livelihoods of our fishers.

Finlay Carson, Rachael Hamilton and Rhoda Grant made the important point that we need buy-in from our fishers, so that they have a role in supplementing the science from their knowledge and vast experience. That is very different from entering negotiations on the basis of trying to find a way around the scientific advice if we simply do not like it.

There is unquestionably a challenge and, at times, a difference of opinion on how we balance the environmental, social and economic impacts of fishing and on how we protect the livelihoods of those who work in the fishing sector while preserving and, indeed, saving our diverse marine environment.

The debate has shown that one thing that is not in question or in doubt is the importance and recognition that all members who have spoken have given to the commitment and, indeed, the bravery of Scotland’s fishers, who continue, day in, day out, to deliver that high-quality, low-carbon food to our tables. For that, we are very much in all their debt.

16:45

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Not that we needed reminding, but today we have heard about the crucial role that fishing plays in Scottish life. Many of the comments that have been made during the debate reflect the importance that we place on the sector in terms of food, trade and the environment. It can, of course, be a precarious industry, both as a business and in terms of safety, and I join Colin Smyth and other members across the chamber in sending my

condolences to the family of the fisherman who lost his life despite valiant efforts from the Portpatrick inshore lifeboat and the emergency services at the weekend. My constituency has had its share of tragedies, with the Solway Harvester and Mhari L sinkings still fresh in our minds. We must never forget the men and women who put to sea every day to put high-quality, environmentally sustainable food on our tables. Our thoughts are always with every family that has lost a loved one, and our thanks go to everyone who sets sail around our coasts.

As a result of leaving the common fisheries policy in 2020, the UK is now an independent coastal state, which means that the UK and Scottish Governments now have control over the country's own fishing destiny. As my colleague Jamie Halcro Johnston said, we have finally emerged, after so long, from the CFP. While we are still in the early days of adapting to that renewed status, it offers opportunities to create a more sustainable and workable sector. Most notably, having independent coastal state status involves being responsible for our relationships with other international actors. While it is not perfect, as an independent coastal state and under the EU-UK trade and co-operation agreement, or TCA, we will see 25 per cent of existing EU quota being transferred to the UK.

The UK Government has also successfully negotiated a deal to access Norway's waters, with an estimated value of £16 million, something that Jim Fairlie failed to recognise. As usual, he concentrated on constitutional grievance, which does no one any favours—fishers or wider Scotland.

Fergus Ewing: Would Finlay Carson give way on that point?

Finlay Carson: I am afraid that I have no time.

Today, there will be a joint fisheries statement with the UK Government and the Scottish Government, with an announcement of catch quotas in the post-Brexit world. It is a hugely complex issue, with much negotiating behind the scenes, but there is a widespread belief within DEFRA and other bodies that the announcements tomorrow will be broadly welcomed by the industry.

On Thursday, our former MSP colleague and now minister John Lamont will host his first meeting as chair of the Scottish seafood industry action group at Queen Elizabeth house in Edinburgh. That group will involve UK Government and Scottish Government ministers, along with representatives of the seafood, catching, processing and aquaculture sectors. I look forward to hearing about the many positive outcomes that are agreed with both our Governments as a result

of those discussions. I and many members in the chamber—but, sadly, not all—understand the importance of co-operation and working between our two Governments, especially when it comes to standing up for Scottish interests internationally.

I agreed whole-heartedly with Jamie Halcro Johnston when he said that people, whether in the Parliament or working out on Scotland's seas, ought to expect both Governments to work positively together to build more effective arrangements for the sector. Similarly, Douglas Lumsden touched on the detested common fisheries policy, saying that it was one of the reasons why the Scottish fishing industry voted to leave Europe in 2016.

I acknowledge that there have been some issues with the deal that we have at the moment, but the total tonnage of fish landed in this country is already increasing. Scotland, where our industry is leading the way, accounts for more than 70 per cent of landings. Of course, it is critical that we follow scientific evidence to help the fish population to recover.

Fergus Ewing: Will Finlay Carson give way?

Finlay Carson: I am sorry—I do not have any time.

Earlier this month, I was pleased to host—albeit remotely—a reception by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, where the importance of science was highlighted, with a need for industry and scientists to work hand in hand to gain a better understanding of our marine resources and to ensure that the Government acts in response to the needs of all stakeholders: fishers, coastal communities and the marine environment. Right now, the lack of scientific data is of real concern, as was raised today by members including Rhoda Grant.

It is vital that the Scottish Government delivers the UK Fisheries Act 2020 as well as creating a spatial plan for fishing to prevent gear conflict and protect nursery spawning grounds.

Our seas are a public asset. Fish are a public resource that should be managed to achieve the optimal social, economic and environmental benefit for the people of Scotland. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation has already highlighted spatial squeeze and how our seas are becoming increasingly crowded, about which we have heard on numerous occasions in the debate. It is evident that there are more and more calls on the use of our seas but, until recently, there has been little recognition of the cumulative impact on fishing of different activities and policies. It is a bit like the Government failing to appreciate the cumulative impact of wind farms in rural areas.

For some time, the fishing industry has laid out its concerns about the cumulative impact on the sector of things including pipelines, cabling, wind farms and the unintended consequences of spatial pressures. Rachael Hamilton, Beatrice Wishart and others highlighted that.

Along with its counterpart in England—the National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations—the SFF commissioned a report to examine the spatial squeeze on fishing from other activities and policies in the marine environment now and looking ahead. That work was carried out by a well-known and well-regarded firm of marine consultants. From the fishermen’s perspectives, the results look pretty alarming. They showed that, in the worst case scenario, over the next 30 years, trawling could be restricted in more than half of Scotland’s share of the UK’s exclusive economic zone.

Worryingly, the report considers that the future demand for space in our seas will be on

“a scale not previously seen”

and that

“The displacement of fishing ... could be significant, and of a magnitude that cannot be absorbed by the remaining fishing grounds”.

However, surprisingly, there has been no meaningful engagement from policy makers on the displacement effort or attempts to quantify the impacts.

There is sometimes an assumption that fishing activity can somehow shift somewhere else without incurring cost or other impact. That is simply wrong. The UK and Scottish Governments must ensure that fishing is not squeezed out of our crowded seas. There is no doubt that we have to find better ways of allowing different activities to successfully coexist and of encouraging and enabling progress on some of the significant uncertainties that surround the just transition and the adjustments that addressing biodiversity loss and climate change will require.

In her speech, Rachael Hamilton highlighted the views of Sheila Keith from the Shetland Fishermen’s Association, who said that the Scottish Government needs to be more transparent and follow the science not only to tackle climate change but to tackle the challenges in our seas. However, we can do both: we can tackle climate change and help Scottish fisheries to survive and thrive.

The Bute house agreement between the Greens and the Scottish National Party to secure a mandate for independence is not the best thing. In it, there is an idea that we can put aside at least 10 per cent of our seas in highly protected marine areas in which, in essence, nothing would be

permitted. That, in isolation, will not help us to reach our climate ambitions if we end up relying on food that has been flown in from thousands of miles away and might not be sourced as sustainably as in the Scottish fishing industry.

There needs to be continual improvement but, unlike the Labour Party and others in the chamber, we Conservatives will recognise the marked improvements that have been driven by the fishing industry. The percentage fished sustainably in 2020 was the highest recorded since data collection started. An estimated 69 per cent of commercial fish stocks was fished at sustainable levels, which represented a 35 percentage point increase from 2000 and demonstrated the ongoing recovery, not decline, of commercial fish stocks.

Scotland’s fishing industry and communities want to be part of Scotland’s transition to net zero. However, space to fish in and the right political support are needed for the sector to thrive, not just survive.

16:53

Mairi Gougeon: I thank members for their speeches and interventions, because I welcome the interest taken in what are important annual negotiations for Scotland. It is clear from the debate that there is no shortage of issues to discuss. The wide range of views underlines the complexity of the issues and their importance for fishing and coastal communities across Scotland.

I also appreciate the personal contributions from members. It is clear how important the culture and heritage associated with the fishing industry are, too. However, I emphasise that we are fortunate in Scotland to be represented in negotiations by fisheries managers who have a wealth of experience. I am confident that they will again deliver a good deal for our industry.

Throughout the negotiations we will continue to take principled, robust positions based on the best available scientific information and also to take socioeconomic factors into account. I look forward to continuing discussions with our coastal state partners over the coming weeks and in due course reporting back to Parliament on the conclusion of the negotiations.

Many key points were raised in the debate and I will try to address as many of them as possible. First, I will come to Colin Smyth’s amendment, elements of which I support and would be happy to get behind. In particular, and as we have heard from other members across the chamber, we should recognise the resilience and bravery of our fishers, who every day risk their lives to keep us supplied with food and help with our food security.

I also support the aspect of the amendment that covers the support and development of our processing sector. I know that Colin Smyth and Ariane Burgess asked for consideration of a yearly report. I will take away that request, consider it fully and come back to the members on it.

I turn to other aspects of the amendment that illustrate why I am unable to support it. As I set out in my introductory remarks, with the exception of two stocks, every quota that we have is shared with partners and negotiated to reach agreed positions. Following the outcome of the negotiations, Scotland will eventually have a portion of the UK allocation.

For many key stocks, Scotland's quota share does not reflect the prevalence of those stocks in our waters or their importance to the Scottish fishing fleet. One of the main reasons for Brexit being such a bitter disappointment was that we did not get the rebalancing of catching opportunities that our fishing industry expected. Therefore it is not a simple Scotland-only choice when it comes to setting TACs for stocks in Scottish waters.

The Scottish Government is committed to rebuilding stocks. Our principle for TAC setting is to follow the scientific advice and set sustainable limits with an aim of securing opportunities that are consistent with maximum sustainable yield objectives wherever appropriate. In doing so, the UK Fisheries Act 2020 requires that environmental, economic and social considerations are appropriately balanced. However, we must also consider: the choke risk in mixed fisheries; stability for industries; avoiding large year-on-year fluctuations in TAC levels; and facilitating stock monitoring, as well as other factors.

For many key stocks, the Scottish industry is required to swap or purchase fishing opportunities each year, as Scotland's allocation does not meet the requirements of the fishing fleet. That is often at great cost to the industry and a result of the UK quota system in which the Scottish industry operates. We must therefore be alive to the considerable impact on our vulnerable coastal communities that cuts in allowable catches have. Were we to adopt the amendment and unilaterally set Scottish quotas without consideration for the nuances of wider fisheries management, that would adversely impact Scotland's fleet and fish stocks and set us at a disadvantage compared with other coastal states.

I will move on to how we allocate fishing opportunities, which was an area that came up quite often in the debate. The Scottish Government allocates fishing quota in line with our domestic and international obligations. For 2021 and 2022, we sought to widen socioeconomic benefit and reduce environmental impact by

allocating quota to methods of fishing associated with a reduced environmental impact—for example, by allocating extra mackerel and cod directly to the inshore under-10m fleet.

Another point related to the economic link, which Colin Smyth's amendment to the motion touches on. Amended economic link provisions for Scottish vessels will take effect in 2023. The amendments that are being introduced mean that, for species of key importance to Scotland, vessels will have to either land a set percentage into Scotland or provide the Scottish Government with fishing opportunities that we will then transfer to other sectors of the industry, such as inshore vessels. Those amendments are proportionate and will help to ensure that a fair economic link exists for Scottish vessels that will provide long-term benefits to our Scottish fishing communities.

Elsewhere, I have spoken about the importance of robust scientific information, which Rachael Hamilton and others across the chamber raised. Scotland is committed to ensuring that our policies and decision making are underpinned by clear evidence and science. Our position has always been to deliver the best outcome for Scotland's fishing interests through securing sustainable catching opportunities and the advice that we receive from ICES is a key part of that process.

ICES and its contributing experts are making huge efforts to improve their processes, methodologies and quality assurance. That will help to give greater confidence in the scientific advice that we receive. I know that Siobhian Brown raised the issue of working with the industry on that science. I am always happy to engage with the sector and with academics. With the best will in the world, and the best resource in the world, given the sheer size and scale of our marine area, it would not be possible for us to undertake all the science that we would like to pursue. We are always happy to consider what partnerships we can enter into to take things forward.

Rachael Hamilton: In a round-table meeting of the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee, Elaine Whyte suggested that we look at the Norwegian model. The Scottish Government is continuing to ignore scientific advice. We should bring in fishermen and allow them to give us reference data. What does the cabinet secretary think of that proposal?

Mairi Gougeon: I am always happy to consider what happens elsewhere to see if we can improve any of our processes. Ultimately, as I was saying, we want to work with the industry to see how we can take that forward.

Fisheries management within Scotland is underpinned by a number of national and international commitments and goals. Our

fisheries management strategy affirms our commitment to being a world leader in sustainable and responsible fisheries management. We have made good progress on several actions set out in the strategy. I want to take a little bit of time to outline some of that progress.

First, Scotland's future catching policy will see concrete action taken to support fishers to avoid catching fish and other species that they do not want to land or catch in the first place, including decreasing instances of accidental bycatch of protected marine species, and reducing waste and improving environmental outcomes overall. I disagree with Colin Smyth's take on that because, ultimately, that will ensure that we have the right rules in place, and that we avoid a rigid one-size-fits-all approach, which simply does not work in a mixed fishery and in such a diverse fishing fleet.

Finlay Carson: Will the cabinet secretary take a brief intervention on that point?

Mairi Gougeon: I am sorry, but I need to make progress and give some more information on that point. It is critical that there is an understanding of what the future catching policy is trying to achieve.

The policy has co-management at its centre and puts a significant emphasis on working with fishers and others to develop pragmatic measures to address the challenges around the current landing obligation. For example, under the current landing obligation, there are a total of 480 stock exemptions, 385 of which are based on de minimis and 95 on high survivability. Those exemptions are complex and lack transparency, which means that it can be difficult to account for their usage, hard to translate in terms of the impact on fish stocks, and challenging to enforce. That is why it is one of the key issues with the operability of the landing obligation as it stands.

The future catching policy aims to simplify the current exemptions, which will increase transparency and accountability. The proposals within it do not seek to undermine the integrity of the landing obligation. We are firmly committed to the principles behind it, which are in the spirit of the existing legislation and the objectives of the CFP.

Our approach to sea fisheries compliance and science is already world class, and the introduction of remote electronic monitoring to key fishing fleet segments will enhance our capabilities and build on the solid foundation that we already have in place, supplementing our existing approach and resources. We have committed to introducing legislation to make REM on scallop dredge vessels and pelagic vessels a mandatory requirement, and as part of that we will deliver equivalence for all vessels operating in Scottish waters. For scallop vessels, the mandatory

element builds on successful voluntary introduction through the inshore modernisation programme, which has seen around 95 per cent of the active Scottish scallop dredge fleet kitted out.

There is one last point that I want to cover that has come up in today's debate and that I think it important to address: the spatial squeeze.

The Presiding Officer: Please be very brief, cabinet secretary.

Mairi Gougeon: Scotland's marine space is of great importance for the health of people and our planet, and recognition of that is rapidly growing across society. Like other nations, we are facing the twin crises of climate change and loss of nature and biodiversity.

We know that there is increasing competition for marine space and we are committed to understanding the impact on the fishing industry, including displacement effects, of other marine spatial demands, including nature conservation and offshore wind activities. We welcome the report that was commissioned by the SFF, which looked at the issue in more detail.

The Presiding Officer: I must ask you to conclude, cabinet secretary.

Mairi Gougeon: I am coming to a close.

We will work together with the fishing industry as we look to address those issues. As we know from today's debate, those issues are complex and interlinked. It is important to find balance throughout all of that.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary. That concludes the debate on Scotland's approach to 2022 coastal state negotiations.

Business Motion

17:05

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-06912, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to this week's business.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for Wednesday 23 November 2022—

after

followed by Scottish Labour Party Debate: Cost of Living: Mortgage Rescue Scheme

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: NHS Forth Valley Update

delete

5.10 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.40 pm Decision Time—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:05

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-06889.1, in the name of Colin Smyth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06889, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, entitled "Scotland's Approach to 2022 Coastal State Negotiations—Securing Principled Sustainable Outcomes", be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access digital voting.

17:06

Meeting suspended.

17:09

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-06889.1, in the name of Colin Smyth, be agreed to.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 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)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)

Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-06889.1, in the name of Colin Smyth, is: For 20, Against 95, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-06889, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, entitled “Scotland’s Approach to 2022 Coastal State Negotiations—Securing Principled Sustainable Outcomes”, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament acknowledges the ongoing negotiations with international partners to agree fishing opportunities for 2023, including coastal state and regional fisheries management organisation negotiations, and bi- and tri-lateral negotiations with the EU, Norway and the Faroe Islands; notes that the outcome of these negotiations will be pivotal in providing fishing opportunities to the Scottish industry, and in ensuring the sustainable management of fish stocks in the long term, and supports the Scottish Government’s efforts to achieve the best possible outcome for Scotland’s fishers, the wider seafood sector, coastal communities and the environment through a collaborative and co-management approach with stakeholders.

Point of Order

17:11

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

I seek your guidance on how the Scottish Parliament can support the journalistic freedom of our independent media. Yesterday, BBC Scotland was forced to issue a statement in defence of a story that it published that highlighted the fears of NHS Scotland leaders about the future of our health service. The story revealed details of official minutes of a meeting involving national health service leaders that suggested that NHS management has been given the green light to consider a range of drastic reforms. Those included introducing a two-tier system in our NHS that would charge wealthier patients for care—

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): If I may have your attention for a moment, Ms White, I point out that the standing orders confirm, of course, that a member may, in any proceedings of Parliament, question whether proper procedures have been or are being followed in the conduct of parliamentary business. Will you confirm that the point that you are making relates to such matters?

Tess White: Presiding Officer, I would welcome any guidance that you can offer on how the Scottish Parliament can play a role in tackling misinformation online and defending the journalistic freedoms of our independent media outlets.

The Presiding Officer: It is not clear that the issue that you raise relates to parliamentary procedures, which are the subject of the standing orders. On that basis, that is not a point of order on which I can rule.

Brexit (Impact on Inflation)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-05709, in the name of Christine Grahame, on Brexit's impact on inflation. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with concern the reported impact of Brexit on inflation and the cost of living across Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale and elsewhere in Scotland; further notes that research by the UK in a Changing Europe think tank reportedly revealed that Brexit has increased food prices by 6%; notes reports that sterling has lost 10% of its value, leaving households poor by increasing import costs and inflation while lowering wage growth; is aware of research published by the London School of Economics and Resolution Foundation stating that Brexit has reduced how open and competitive Britain is, leading to, it believes, reduced productivity and wages over the next decade; recognises that the Office for Budget Responsibility reportedly says that Brexit will have the long-term effect of cutting UK GDP by 4%; understands that the *Financial Times* agreed that such a decline will mean £100 billion of lost output and £40 billion less revenue for the Treasury each year; is concerned by reports that the UK has now fallen behind all other G7 countries in the pace of its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, with, it understands, exports down significantly, and notes the view that Scotland will prosper more by regaining its independence and re-joining the EU than by remaining in the UK.

17:14

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Let us start at the very beginning: the European Union referendum vote in 2016. The vote across the United Kingdom was close, rounded up to 52 per cent voting leave to 48 per cent voting remain. In Scotland, the figures were 62 per cent voting remain and 38 per cent voting leave. Interestingly, by way of an aside, Northern Ireland voted 56 per cent remain.

In Scotland, every constituency voted remain, including in the Scottish Borders and Midlothian. That was in the face of an aggressive and ill-informed campaign blaming the EU for all ills and promising not just the infamous side-of-a-bus £350 million a week for the national health service, but more. We were promised that being tariff free would mean that bureaucracy would be cut, but was it? There is increased paperwork—for example, truckers need import and export declarations, security declarations and other paperwork for their shipments. New infrastructure is needed at ports to deal with queues and to check loads, and there are vast lorry parks.

The trading world was to be our oyster, despite the fact that even Barack Obama said that the UK

would be at the “back of the queue”, which is where it is, and where it has stayed. There were no favours waiting for the UK. The one new deal, with Australia, has infuriated farmers and was even criticised by George Eustice, who was then the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The reality is that most British trade is with Europe, and Brexit has crippled it.

We were promised that migration would be under control, as the UK “took back control”—more of that later, as it impacts on our economy. The UK then cut itself off from its biggest trading partner, the EU, where 40 per cent of its exports went, and for what?

The answer is: for the highest inflation among the G7 countries, which is currently running at 11 per cent, with food inflation at nearly 17 per cent. With regard to how UK inflation compares with inflation in other nations, recent analysis from the *Financial Times* shows that the rate of consumer price inflation is higher in the UK than it is in other devolved economies. It rose to 11.1 per cent in October 2022 in the UK, in comparison with 10.4 per cent in Germany, 7.7 per cent in the USA, 6.2 per cent in France and 3 per cent in Japan. A member of the Bank of England’s monetary policy committee noted, in a recent appearance before the Treasury Select Committee, that Brexit has added 6 per cent to UK food prices.

Yes, Covid had a price tag, and the war in Ukraine is having an impact on the UK economy, but Brexit is why it is doing so badly. Even before Brexit, the economy was weak, after nearly a decade of Tory government. If we add in Covid, Ukraine and Trussonomics, that is a heady mix for failure. That is bad enough, but when we add in the basic ingredient, the Boris Brexit, that explains much more.

Members should not take my word for it that Brexit has had a devastating impact on the UK economy. The Office for Budget Responsibility predicts that the UK will suffer the sharpest decline of any European nation, with a drop in growth of 1.4 per cent in 2023. That can be compared with small independent countries that are similar to Scotland, such as Ireland, which will see their economies grow by around 3 per cent next year.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Does the member agree with the OBR that Brexit will actually cost the United Kingdom £80 billion this year in lost trade? In 2016, Rishi Sunak said that we would be £20 billion a year better off. Does that not call into question the Prime Minister’s economic judgement?

Christine Grahame: I do indeed accept that. The OBR has also said that Brexit’s impact on the economy is now “adverse” over the medium term, to the tune of 4 per cent of gross domestic

product. This is massive self-harm. Not a week passes without cries of protest from traders, truckers, farmers, hoteliers, care homes, scientists and even performing artists. Trade bureaucracy has soared. Every exported cow needs a veterinary certificate and unskilled labour has dried up, and all of that is impacting on the UK economy.

Public opinion has now swung dramatically against Brexit, with just 32 per cent still in favour and 56 per cent regretting leaving. When there are rumblings in the Tory ranks about Swiss-style deals and mutterings from the Confederation of British Industry about the need for changes to rules for migrants to enable them to work here, we know that even the Tories who are wedded to the ideology of Brexit—Rishi Sunak is right up there—can no longer delude us that Brexit is just the ticket. However, Rishi Sunak has to keep his party together, foremost especially the uber-Brexiters, who include himself—and to pot with the rest of us.

Although the Bank of England, in its November monetary policy report, says that the major contributor to current levels of inflation is the global increase in gas, and therefore energy prices, it also highlights the impact of

“Non-energy tradable goods prices”.

Those are driven partly by global factors, such as the bottlenecks in international supply chains since the pandemic and disruption that is linked to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but also by costs associated with Brexit.

To quote from *The Guardian*,

“To state the obvious, the war in Ukraine and pandemic-related supply issues are sending prices soaring across the world, but what gives Britain a particularly pronounced problem—which forecasters say will endure into the immediate future, while inflation in the eurozone starts to fall—is Brexit. Our departure from the EU has weakened the pound, which increases the prices of imports, and adds to companies’ costs. Post-Brexit limitations on foreign workers are also hitting firms’ bottom lines, as are problems with the UK’s European supply chains ... Adam Posen, an American economist and a former member of the Bank of England’s monetary policy committee, said that 80% of the explanation for Britain’s higher inflation was bound up with Brexit and its endless complexity. It amounted, he said, to ‘a trade war the UK declared on itself.’”

While living standards are under immense pressure around the globe this year as a result of record inflation, in particular in food and energy prices, officials said that Britain would suffer more as a direct result of leaving the EU.

There is more bad news. Even before the economic disaster that was Truss, it is estimated that, between 2016 and 2021, Brexit cost the UK £31 billion. The equivalent for Scotland is £2.5

billion. For Scottish Borders Council, that is £53 million, and for Midlothian Council it is £43 million.

Keir Starmer is no help, battered by his past flip-flops on the subject, and rejecting any easing for a single market, in which he is not in line with public opinion. Neither are the Liberal Democrats. For them all, Brexit is done and dusted and we must make what we can of it.

In 2014, we were told that a yes vote for independence would see us thrown out of the EU. It is ironic, is it not, that we were dragged out, despite 62 per cent voting remain, and by a party that currently holds only six Scottish seats. That lie will not fly again. Already, support for independence is on the rise as the Scottish people see the inadequacies of UK economic policies. Tomorrow, we will learn of the UK Supreme Court judgment. However that goes, I know that, sooner rather than later, Scotland will regain its independence. Brexit was the final straw.

17:23

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Presiding Officer, I may have to leave just prior to 6 pm, as I am chairing a cross-party group later.

I congratulate Christine Grahame on securing this important debate, highlighting the catastrophe that Brexit has brought to her Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale constituency. As her motion indicates, the Brexit shambles has also affected “elsewhere in Scotland”, and that is where I will focus my comments.

Nobody with any credibility can state that Brexit has been positive. So-called Brexit opportunities have withered on the vine. From the false dawn of a trade deal with the US, which was much heralded by the former former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, to the admission by the former Prime Minister, Liz Truss, that a deal will be years away as negotiations are not even taking place, that proves that the Tories’ Brexit crusade has left people in Ms Grahame’s constituency, and in my constituency of Greenock and Inverclyde, worse off.

I voted remain and I would do so again tomorrow. I look forward to the day that we in Scotland can rejoin the EU as an equal partner when we secure our independence from Westminster. The economic climate that Scotland currently faces is driven by a variety of factors; that is undeniable. Once again, however, no one with any credibility can deny that Brexit has been a major contributing factor to rising costs, rising inflation and a reduction in opportunity.

The shambolic Truss-Kwarteng budget has also been a huge factor in the current economic crisis,

leading to the extension of the cuts agenda that we saw last week from the current Chancellor of the Exchequer. The filling of the budget black hole will lead to more austerity, with families struggling, kids going hungry and food banks facing unprecedented demand.

However, some in the chamber will argue that inflation is high elsewhere and therefore the cost of living crisis is not solely down to the Tories and the UK Government. The *Financial Times* reported that the consumer prices index inflation rate is higher in the UK than in any other developed country. The UK rate is 11.1 per cent, while the rates in Germany, the US and France are 10.4 per cent, 7.7 per cent and 6.2 per cent. Those are just a few examples.

The fact that a member of the Bank of England monetary policy committee has stated on the record to the select Treasury Committee at Westminster that Brexit has added a whopping 6 per cent to the cost of food in the UK tells a story.

Even worse, earlier this year, Adam Posen, a former member of the Bank of England monetary policy committee, suggested that Brexit was responsible for up to 80 per cent of the increase to prices in the UK.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the member give way?

Stuart McMillan: Sorry.

That truly remarkable statement once again highlights the folly of a Brexit that Scotland did not vote for and how the right-wingers of the Tory Party have led the country to a level of poverty that many of my constituents, and no doubt many constituents of members from all parties, have not suffered from before.

Decisions by politicians matter. Policy decisions and legislation that politicians and Governments progress have a real-life effect on our constituents.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: I do not have much time—I am sorry. That is why the UK Government’s complete disregard when pursuing Brexit legislation through the Westminster Parliament, which ignored the legitimate concerns not only from many across the political spectrum but from those with no political allegiance, has led to the situation that we face.

No matter how many cost of living surges I do in my Greenock and Inverclyde constituency, I know that I will just be scratching the surface of the support that my community needs and deserves.

The Tory obsession with Brexit is increasing poverty. The fact that Labour and the Lib Dems—

there is only one Labour member in the chamber and there are no Lib Dems—would not reverse Brexit speaks volumes about them and how thirled they are to be part of a Westminster system that helps the richest and punishes the poorest.

17:27

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): During this session of Parliament, Christine Grahame has used members' business debates to highlight non-overtly political issues, such as the men's shed movement and the mineworkers pension scheme. We have seen other MSPs follow the same convention, with debates on issues such as gas safety week and the cancer card. Sadly, this motion does not follow that recipe. It is overtly political and I believe that it goes against the unwritten conventions of the Parliament. That disappoints me, Presiding Officer. I believe it to be unworthy of Ms Grahame.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Mountain, please resume your seat for a wee second, if you do not mind.

I point out that the procedure for the selection of members' business is well known to members. The decision was taken to hold this debate. I do not know whether the member is calling the decisions of others into question—I hope not. The business motion was selected according to due process. I point that out to the member to reflect on.

Please resume, Mr Mountain.

Edward Mountain: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I have never been one to stray away from the subject of debate, so I will address some of the issues that Christine Grahame has raised. If there are members who want to intervene, I will be very happy to let them in, providing that you are able to give me back the time, Presiding Officer.

Christine Grahame makes much of this Parliament respecting democracy. I agree with her, and I will always defend democracy. However, that cannot be on the basis of agreement when it suits her views only. In her motion, she states that the solution to the issues that she highlights is twofold: becoming independent and joining the EU.

The voice of democracy spoke in 2014 and again in 2016. The answers were clear: no to independence and yes to Brexit. As a democrat, I respect both those results, and I believe that every parliamentarian should do so, too. Sadly, however, it appears that, because Ms Grahame did not get the answers that she wants, she wants to rerun the debate and the vote.

Let us be clear that, ever since the votes and the decisions of the majority have been made—

[Interruption.] Sorry, was there an attempt to intervene? Have I got time to take it, Presiding Officer? Will I get my time back?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes, absolutely.

Christine Grahame: I apologise for not taking an intervention from Edward Mountain in my speech, which I had to cut considerably.

I respect what Edward Mountain says. Will he address the issue, which is whether Brexit has contributed to high inflation across the UK?

Edward Mountain: Indeed I will and I will keep my speech short and to the point.

I think that most people would accept that forging a new relationship with the EU and other countries would, after 47 years of membership, be challenging. It has been. However, the suggestion that separating from a 300-year-old union would be easier is pure hot air. Flimsy pamphlets have been produced to support that argument but they have not dealt effectively with the issues, specifically fiscal issues, such as currency, pensions and national debt, to mention but a few. You cannot gloss over those issues or play fast and loose with the answers in the hope that no one notices. People will see through you and they have seen through you—your fantasy economics will not pay the mortgage.

What about the border that you would create with our biggest trading partner if you were, God forbid, to get independence and join the EU? The First Minister has said that that would lead to border crossing points, which no business would welcome. I am sad that the member I am about to mention has already left the chamber, but the only person who seems to welcome border controls is Emma Harper. Goodness knows why—perhaps she wants to establish a bureau de change.

We are better together. Take the pandemic for example. The figures speak for themselves: Scotland received £14.4 billion in Barnett consequential from the UK Treasury. On top of that, hundreds of thousands of Scottish jobs were saved through the furlough scheme. In Christine Grahame's constituency alone—a constituency that reaches into the Midlothian Council and Scottish Borders Council areas—nearly 34,000 jobs were saved.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Will Edward Mountain give way?

Edward Mountain: I will just finish this point and, then, if I get the time back from the Presiding Officer, I will be happy to give way.

Even now, during the energy and inflation crisis brought about by Putin's illegal war in Ukraine, the UK continues to step up and provide support to Scotland with the energy price guarantee and an

extra £1.5 billion in funding announced in last week's autumn statement.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you up to six minutes' speaking time to reflect the interventions, Mr Mountain.

Clare Adamson: Does Mr Mountain recognise that, last week, the Paris stock exchange overtook the London stock exchange in financial trading in the European Union, that Brexit has been an utter disaster financially and that people cannot pay their mortgages right now?

Edward Mountain: I would answer that question if I had more time but I do not, so I will continue. It is not in the motion, as Clare Adamson well knows.

Christine Grahame suggested that the cost of food is due to Brexit. As a food producer—I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests—I can tell members the following: fertiliser has gone up 450 per cent in price and sprays by about 30 per cent; tractor fuel has doubled in price and electricity has almost doubled. The result is that wheat, for example—a basic staple for human food and animal feed—has gone from £200 per tonne to £290 per tonne and, after Christmas, might well trade at £320 per tonne. None of that is due to Brexit. All those increases are down to Putin's illegal war.

Pursuing another divisive independence referendum is not the answer to today's problems. The impacts of war, inflation and the resultant energy crisis are not just local to Scotland or the United Kingdom. They are global challenges and are better addressed with Scotland remaining part of the strong United Kingdom.

17:33

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I thank Christine Grahame for bringing this important issue to the chamber for debate. Her motion mentions the scenic and beautiful area of Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale but Brexit poses challenges in Midlothian North, across Lothian and across Scotland. There is much to agree with in the motion that we are discussing but it will not surprise Christine Grahame that I cannot support its conclusion.

Last week, in the debate on the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee's report, my colleague Sarah Boyack said:

"Many of us did not want to be here, ... dealing with the consequences of the UK's departure from the EU."—*[Official Report, 17 November 2022; c 67.]*

She is right: Brexit and the levels of inflation that we face today lie squarely at the door of the Tories.

The EU referendum was a political choice by David Cameron to try to unite his party. The Brexit deal was first negotiated by Theresa May and was voted against by Boris Johnson, only for him to renegotiate parts of the deal. The former Prime Minister described it as an "oven-ready" deal, only for him and his two Tory successors to seek to unilaterally change that very deal through the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill.

The Tory party is now very keen to point out that there are inflationary pressures everywhere. That is true to an extent, but the UK finds itself in a far worse position than many comparable countries because of two factors: the recent political instability and the fact that the Tory party is held hostage by an internal faction that will accept only the most extreme form of Brexit.

I think that many people across the United Kingdom are tired of government by internal Tory drama. We need a Labour Government in Westminster to provide solid leadership and move the UK forward.

I cannot accept the conclusion of the motion that independence is the answer to those problems. Mark Blyth, who is one of the economists appointed to the First Minister's own panel of advisers—*[Interruption.]* I will just go ahead. As Mark Blyth has said, independence would be "Brexit times ten".

The answer to the disruption caused by separation from our biggest trading partner is not to repeat the process. The answer is a change of direction in Westminster, with a new, constructive attitude to our friends on the continent and a commitment to revitalising our economy. That is the only way that will deliver an economy that works for everyone across the UK. That better future is possible, and I want to see it for Christine Grahame's constituency just as much as I do for the Lothian region and the rest of Scotland.

17:37

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): I thank Christine Grahame for bringing the debate to the chamber.

I recall that we debated Brexit many times in the previous session, and it strikes me that much of what we said then has come to pass. This debate reminds us of what we said then and serves the useful purpose of puncturing the conspiracy of silence that seems to have taken hold in many quarters on the material impact that Brexit is having, in concert with other factors that are impacting on our economy and, indeed, our way of life.

We warned repeatedly and emphatically that Brexit—in particular, the hard Brexit variety being imposed by Westminster—would cause huge damage to Scotland’s economy and would add to the harm that would be caused economically, socially and culturally by the loss of the horizon 2020 and Erasmus programmes and by free movement, and environmentally, with plans to remove high EU standards from our statute books.

It is not only the Scottish Government that said that then and is saying it now. Sadly, it is reaffirmed by the sorts of statistics that are in Christine Grahame’s motion and are reported almost weekly in each new economic forecast or trade statistic. The governor of the Bank of England, Andrew Bailey, recently linked the current financial predicament to Brexit, and Mark Carney, a former governor of the Bank of England, believes that Brexit acts as a brake on economic growth and increases the rate of inflation.

The UK’s rate of inflation hit a 41-year high in October, having accelerated to 11.1 per cent. The sharp rise was caused by higher gas, electricity and food prices, and annual food-price inflation rocketed to 16.5 per cent, which is the highest for 45 years. Those figures mask a bleak reality—they mean hardship for more individuals, families, businesses and communities. The people who are paying the highest price for that are the people who are on the lowest incomes, and the people who are paying the highest price for Brexit are those who are on the lowest incomes, despite Scotland’s having voted to remain.

I recognise that there are other factors, but Brexit is a significant contributory factor. Of all the factors that we face just now, Brexit was the result of a clear political choice by a Government in these islands. The Office for Budget Responsibility has forecast that UK gross domestic product will be cut by 4 per cent as a result of Brexit, and the *Financial Times* reported £100 billion of lost output and £40 billion less revenue for the Treasury each year.

Brexit is fuelling inflation and is making Scotland and the rest of the UK poorer. As a consequence of Brexit, the UK is facing a worse cost of living crisis than it would otherwise be facing, which is partly due to the loss of free trade. Analysis in April by researchers at the London School of Economics and Political Science showed that post-Brexit trade barriers resulted in a 6 per cent increase in food prices in the UK.

Edward Mountain: As a food producer, I know that the majority of costs are actually down to the cost of fuel, which underpins all costs of production. They are not down to Brexit. Will the minister accept that fuel prices drive food prices? If that is the case, everyone will be affected, and I

suspect that others across Europe will be catching up shortly.

Tom Arthur: I have not said in my remarks that Brexit is the sole cause of the situation that we face. I acknowledge that it is not, and I recognise that inflation across the economy will ultimately be a reflection of energy-price inflation—that is just a reality and an economic fact that we can all accept. However, my point—which is based on independent statistics—is that Brexit has been a contributory factor.

A report by the Resolution Foundation in June found that even before the UK left the EU, currency depreciation that was linked to Brexit increased the cost of living in the UK by £870 per year for the average household.

The trade barriers that we now have are causing real harm. The OBR now expects trade volumes to decline over the medium term, with them falling to 8.3 per cent below current levels in the final quarter of next year. The food and drink sector in Scotland has borne the brunt of the hard Brexit that has been imposed by Westminster on Scotland. Compared with the same period in 2019, in the first half of 2022, exports of key food products to the EU have fallen—by 52 per cent for fruit and vegetables, and by 25 per cent for dairy and eggs. Scottish businesses have seen record increases in input prices in 2022, and they cite Brexit as a factor, according to statistics from S&P Global. That has, as of July, fed through to the 21st monthly rise in the prices that are charged by businesses.

Brexit has ended free trade and free movement, which is hurting key Scottish industries and contributing to and creating labour shortages. It is expensive and time consuming for employers to recruit from overseas and for people who want to come to Scotland to live and work.

Food processing and manufacturing, hospitality and agriculture are especially affected, which harms rural Scotland in particular. As at July 2022, a range of key economic sectors in Scotland were experiencing worker shortages, including shortages of 43.4 per cent in construction and 43.8 per cent in accommodation and food.

However, that economic harm is also a social harm. We are poorer as a result of Brexit and we risk missing out on the cultural benefits of having more people of working age from a range of backgrounds contributing to our common weal.

We are doing everything that we can within our limited powers to support people and businesses. By the end of March next year, we will have invested about £3 billion in a range of measures to support households. That includes support with energy bills, childcare, health and travel, as well as social security payments that are either not

available elsewhere in the UK, or are more generous than those elsewhere in the UK.

For businesses, we have an existing package of non-domestic rates relief that is worth more than £800 million, and includes the UK's most generous small business bonus scheme. We are doing all that with one hand—although sometimes it feels like both hands—tied behind our back.

Inflation is eating away at the Scottish budget, which has already fallen by 10 per cent in real terms from last year to this. Because of the lack of additional funding in 2022-23 and the financial restrictions of devolution, we have had no choice but to make savings of more than £1 billion. The announcements in last week's UK autumn statement do very little to address the damage that that has done to the Scottish budget.

I recognise that we face a series of global challenges, and that the situation in which we find ourselves today does not lend itself to easy solutions. However, Brexit can be cited as a contributory factor in many of the issues that we face. Ultimately, Brexit was a political choice. I dispute any argument that Brexit has democratic legitimacy in Scotland: Scotland comprehensively rejected Brexit in 2016, and in every election to this Parliament and to Westminster since then, parties that are opposed to Brexit have been overwhelmingly returned.

There could have been another reality; the hard Brexit that has been inflicted on us was not a necessity. There was a moment—in June, July and August of 2016—when the UK Government could have listened to, engaged with and heeded the warnings of this Government, this Parliament and many other stakeholders, and could have sought to pursue an arrangement with the European Union that would minimise damage. However, rather than focusing on what was best for the United Kingdom, the UK Government focused on what it thought was best for the Conservative Party. Unfortunately, as a consequence of that, we are all paying the price today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 17:46.

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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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