



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament

Wednesday 24 January 2024

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 24 January 2024

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

Portfolio Question Time

Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon, colleagues. The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio question time. The first portfolio is rural affairs, land reform and islands. I invite members who wish to ask a supplementary question to press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question. There is quite a bit of interest across both portfolios, so I appeal for brevity in questions and responses.

Woodland Planting Targets

1. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how the spending proposals in its draft budget will help to achieve woodland planting targets. (S6O-02990)

The Minister for Energy and the Environment (Gillian Martin): The draft budget will support more than 9,000 hectares of new woodland creation in Scotland, which will be more than in the rest of the United Kingdom combined. We are engaging with stakeholders so that we can maximise tree planting and its benefits to the climate, the economy, people and nature.

Graham Simpson: I thank the minister for that answer, but she neglected to say that the Scottish Government's target is to plant 18,000 hectares of trees per year. It is now providing funding for half of that, so the answer to the question is that the draft budget will not help to achieve the woodland planting targets—that was the answer that the minister was searching for.

If Scottish Forestry's woodland grants budget is going to remain lower after 2024-25, which it will, how will resources be split between native woodland creation, commercial forestation, agroforestry and trees outside woods, given that there is not enough money to fund more than 9,000 hectares of planting?

Gillian Martin: I am glad that Graham Simpson has given me the opportunity to respond to what he said about the 18,000 hectare target. There was, of course, that target, and we do not want to be in this situation, but the UK Government has reduced the Scottish Government's capital allocation by 10 per cent. I do not know how good Mr Simpson's arithmetic is, but when funding is

slashed to the bone, as it has been—the autumn statement was as disappointing from the Scottish Government's perspective as this situation is—devolved Governments need to make very difficult decisions about what they spend their budgets on.

It seems to me that, on many occasions, the Tories are content to shout about targets—they even vote for the setting of targets from time to time—but when it comes to advocating for the UK Government to uphold its responsibility to allocate adequate funds to devolved nations to allow us to fulfil our obligations, they are completely silent.

I do not have the details of—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Scotland is creating the most woodland in the UK, and it will continue to do so, despite the Tories savaging our budget by cutting our capital allocation. Does the minister share my view that, if that is what we can hope to achieve in the current fiscal nightmare, there would be no limit to what the forestry sector could achieve if the Scottish Tories put Scotland first and took a stand against the 10 per cent cut to our budget?

Gillian Martin: I agree with Emma Harper that it is a "fiscal nightmare". For many years, we have worked closely with forestry stakeholders to increase confidence and to grow capacity to deliver woodland creation in Scotland. As a result, during 2023, record levels of woodland creation projects were in development—schemes for both native and productive conifer—and we are encouraging applicants to turn that development into successful planting, so that we utilise all of our available budget this year. That would put us back on track for 2023 to be a record year, but the potential for 2024 is greater. Unfortunately, as Emma Harper pointed out, the reduced funding from the Westminster Tory Government means that the situation will be challenging.

King's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer (Powers)

2. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether there is any scope in its proposed land reform legislation to amend the power of the King's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer, known as the KLTR. (S6O-02991)

The Minister for Energy and the Environment (Gillian Martin): The King's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer is the Crown's representative in Scotland with the authority to deal with ownerless property. Any surplus funding from the KLTR's responsibilities is passed to the Scottish Government as a contribution to the Scottish consolidated fund. The KLTR's powers derive from

Scots common law and do not involve the exercise of executive power or control by the King. Given the KLTR's previous, current and future contributions to the Scottish public purse and the role's clear alignment with Government priorities, there are no plans to amend the KLTR's current powers in the proposed land reform bill.

Rona Mackay: I thank the minister for that explanation. I am pleased that any moneys that are released from such assets go to support essential public services. However, does the minister agree that often communities can be blighted by derelict and vacant land and assets that would fall to the KLTR? How can we ensure that communities might also benefit from such assets and their value in the future?

Gillian Martin: I thank Rona Mackay for that supplementary question and for her continued interest in vacant and derelict land.

In addition to the annual contribution to public funds, the KLTR is about to launch the ownerless property transfer scheme. I can confirm today that the date for the launch is 1 March 2024. The scheme will create new opportunities for public bodies, local authorities and community organisations across Scotland to acquire ownerless property, and it will help them to return local land and buildings, including abandoned and neglected property, to productive use for the benefit of local communities. It has been carefully designed with key stakeholders to ensure that properties are used and developed sustainably and in the public interest.

Fishing Suspension (Firth of Clyde)

3. **Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether fishing in the Firth of Clyde will be suspended in 2024, in line with the cod spawning season. (S6O-02992)

The Minister for Energy and the Environment (Gillian Martin): Following consideration of the Firth of Clyde closure, which was implemented for 2022 and 2023, and the responses to the public consultation that was carried out between June and September last year, I consider it appropriate to continue the spawning closure in the same manner, without exemptions, for the 2024 and 2025 period. That decision is based on the best available scientific evidence, which shows that any activity within 10m of the sea bed has the potential to impact on cod spawning activity.

Annie Wells: When will a full business and regulatory impact assessment be published? I know that the minister said that she would not consider exemptions, but will she consider exemptions for nephrops trawlers, creels and scallop dredgers?

Gillian Martin: We are working hard with the available data that we have on the Clyde to make decisions on the matter. We are under no illusion that a 10-week closure of particular areas of the Firth of Clyde is inconvenient and could be potentially costly for some vessels. However, those vessels can fish in other parts of the Clyde in that 10-week period.

We are talking about a 10-week period to prevent disruption to cod spawning. In those 10 weeks, vessels can fish in other waters. The closure affects only two areas in the Firth of Clyde, and it is being done to improve fish stocks, which we hope will mean that their fishing in the future is more sustainable.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The minister's letter to the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee on 11 January stated:

"We have reviewed the available scientific evidence to reassure ourselves that this approach is the most appropriate and proportionate."

Can the minister set out the evidence base that guided the Scottish Government to that decision?

Gillian Martin: The decision is based on the best available evidence. I know that it creates challenges for local fishermen, but the marine directorate is currently reviewing its scientific observer programme with a view to enhancing data from the Clyde, working with the Clyde Fishermen's Association. Work with our coastal state partners will begin this year to review the management measures that are in place across the northern shelf cod stock. That will provide a comprehensive route for managing northern shelf cod and the north-western sub-stock, which includes Clyde cod.

Rural and Island Communities (Budget)

4. **Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact of its 2024-25 budget on rural and island communities. (S6O-02993)

The Minister for Energy and the Environment (Gillian Martin): The budget has required and delivered very difficult choices due to the pressures on our public services and the lack of funding from the United Kingdom Government. Despite that, the Scottish Government will invest over £1 billion in 2024-25 in the rural affairs, land reform and islands budget. Although the budget sets the spending envelopes, cabinet secretaries across the Scottish Government will develop and deliver programmes within their budgets. My officials and those of the cabinet secretary are supporting colleagues in assessing impacts on communities as more detailed plans are developed, including in relation to requirements under the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

Pam Gosal: The costs of delivering services are significantly higher in the islands, and they vary significantly between different island communities. Scottish Government ministers and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities committed to reviewing the special islands needs allowance. SINA has not been adjusted for a number of years. What are the minister's views on a potential review of SINA? Does she believe that the current settlement is truly delivering for our island communities, which depend on that support?

Gillian Martin: Pam Gosal will appreciate that the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands is not here. I will pass back the specific asks about the review of SINA that she mentioned.

We were able to secure capital funding of £3 million to support implementation of the national islands plan, in addition to the £12 million over the past three years. That has already delivered a new nursery in Orkney, the refurbishment of community facilities in Papa Stour and the provision of workers accommodation in Mull. Pam Gosal should also not forget that the local government settlement for 2024-25 will provide island authorities with £1.5 billion. That is an increase of £74.7 million from the previous year.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy, Neil Gray, met me, the chief executive of North Ayrshire Council and representatives of Arran's hospitality sector on 29 November to discuss the sector's concerns. I am delighted not only that Mr Gray listened but that, in the Scottish budget, island hospitality businesses will receive 100 per cent relief on their rates on a rateable value of up to £110,000. Will the minister advise the Parliament what the impact of that additional assistance will be on island hospitality businesses?

Gillian Martin: The 100 per cent non-domestic rates relief for properties in the hospitality sector on islands, which is capped at £110,000 per rate payer, is expected to be worth over £4 million in the next financial year. That shows that the Government values and supports island communities. That is in stark contrast to the Westminster Government's pursuit of a hard Brexit, which is resulting in adverse impacts on island economies in general and hospitality businesses throughout Scotland in particular through the creation of new barriers to trade, increased costs and, especially, the loss of freedom of movement, which is resulting in and exacerbating labour shortages.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Last week, we debated the Scottish rural and islands youth parliament. Young people are calling

for sustainable transport, food and a more compassionate politics. Is the Scottish Government confident that its budget is sufficient to invest in the futures of young people in rural and island areas?

Gillian Martin: If Beatrice Wishart will forgive me for putting my other hat on, I was in Orkney a couple of weeks ago, and I plan to visit Shetland to look at how we can maximise employment opportunities for young people, particularly through renewables. The ScotWind developments give massive opportunities for young people in island communities, particularly in the northern isles. *[Interruption.]* We have heard for many years that young people often go to college and university on the mainland but, although they would like to go back to the islands, they find it difficult to get jobs for which they are qualified to do that. I hope that the energy revolution that we are steering through will help in that respect. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Halcro Johnston, I would appreciate it if we did not get a running commentary from the front bench.

Food Labelling

5. Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of reported concerns regarding food labelling being a devolved matter, what discussions it has had with the UK Government regarding the potential impact on Scotland's food and drink sector of the reported proposal for "not for EU" labelling on food and drink products in the UK. (S6O-02994)

The Minister for Energy and the Environment (Gillian Martin): As the First Minister noted in his answer to Emma Harper last week, we share the well-documented concerns that the Food and Drink Federation Scotland and many food and drink businesses have. They have highlighted many concerns about the labelling plans. Extending the labelling requirement risks arbitrarily putting additional costs on Scottish businesses when we already face a cost of living crisis and increasing food costs.

Ms Gougeon wrote to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs before Christmas to ask for some much-needed clarification on the United Kingdom Government's plans but, unfortunately, she has yet to receive a response.

Jackie Dunbar: A range of food and drink producers have voiced concerns that the additional labelling might add bureaucracy and put off consumers. If Scottish businesses are saying "not for EU" is not for us", how will the cabinet secretary advocate for them to the UK Government?

Gillian Martin: If people had known that taking back control actually meant adding more red tape, they might not have voted for Brexit. The food and drink sector has undoubtedly borne the brunt of the UK Government's hard Brexit, which has disrupted supply chains over the years since it happened, created new barriers to trade and driven up overall food prices.

We are all paying a high price for a Brexit that Scotland did not vote for. The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands has written repeatedly to the UK Government on a range of issues around that to urge it to address issues arising from Brexit, where it holds the levers to do so.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): The "not for EU" label will support retailers and supermarkets to move food and drink products between Great Britain and Northern Ireland as smoothly as possible. It means that suppliers will not have to establish different production lines to be able to sell those goods in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, ensuring that those products stay on the shelves and that consumer choice is maintained.

Cabinet secretary, despite the grievance that you talked about, will you welcome the move, which is good for shoppers and farmers?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair, please.

Gillian Martin: I thank Rachael Hamilton for that party political broadcast—and, indeed, for the promotion that she gave me there.

I will quote back to her Balwinder Dhoot, director of sustainability and growth at the Food and Drink Federation, who said:

"Our members are really clear that the Government's plan to extend 'not for EU' product labelling on a UK-wide basis will hamper growth, hitting investment, exports and jobs while increasing consumer prices and restricting the choice of products."

That is the sector speaking—not me.

Border Target Operating Model

6. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its most recent assessment is of the potential impact of the border target operating model on rural affairs in Scotland. (S6O-02995)

The Minister for Energy and the Environment (Gillian Martin): The Scottish Government agreed to adopt the United Kingdom Government's new model in order to bring in the much-needed biosecurity controls on imported goods. However, we continue to have a number of outstanding concerns and we are working with the UK Government to address them.

We urge the UK Government to pragmatically align its standards with the European Union and sign a comprehensive veterinary agreement, which would reduce the need for many of these controls.

The Scottish Government remains clear in its view that the best trading relationship for Scotland would be found as an EU member state.

Michelle Thomson: The minister will be aware that Grangemouth, in my constituency, is the biggest export port hub in the country. I am concerned about the potential impact of the border target operating model. To what extent is the Scottish Government content that Grangemouth and other Scottish ports and exporters have all the specific details that they need to handle the import controls when they are introduced?

Gillian Martin: The cabinet secretary and I share Michelle Thomson's concerns about that. The flat answer is that they do not have the necessary information at the moment. We spent considerable time and effort, during the development of the BTOM, balancing Scotland's biosecurity and trade interests and ensuring that all stakeholders who trade with and from Scotland have the clarity that they need to adapt to post-Brexit trading. Regrettably, the UK Government has not engaged with us, as it had promised to do. The BTOM was signed in August but we have yet to have any kind of engagement or clarity. An awful lot of areas require further detail. We are also getting that feedback from those who work in our ports.

The new provisions largely address imports from the EU, so they are a step towards levelling the playing field. However, our exporters have had to cope with the EU's own import controls for the past four years, whereas importers have faced minimal checks and burdens.

Farmers (Financial Support)

7. Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what financial support will be made available to farmers in 2024-25. (S6O-02996)

The Minister for Energy and the Environment (Gillian Martin): The Scottish Government will invest more than £1 billion in 2024-25 in the rural affairs, land reform and islands budget. We will continue to provide Scotland's farmers, crofters and land managers with the most generous package of direct support in the United Kingdom, which is worth more than £600 million.

That is despite an autumn statement that falls far short of what we need and that has delivered a cut to the capital allocation of more than 10 per cent and a real-terms reduction in the total block grant.

Sue Webber: In just two years, the common agricultural policy will have ended. The agriculture sector faces a very uncertain future, and I suspect that it does not feel that there has been much investment in it. Will the minister explain the decision-making process that has been followed by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, which has cut or frozen funding for key agricultural schemes such as pillar 1 payments, the agricultural reform programme and the less favoured area support scheme at a time when farmers and crofters are already under severe pressure?

Gillian Martin: Yes. Farmers and crofters are under severe pressure, and that was not helped by our exit from the EU. The common agricultural policy gave certainty through multiyear funding. It is worth mentioning that, in addition to the direct payments that we give to farmers and crofters, there are payments that are not available to farmers in other UK nations. For example, we give £48 million of voluntary coupled support for beef and lamb producers and £2.7 million for the fruit and vegetable aid scheme.

Sue Webber will not want me to go into detail about all the other funding streams that rural Scotland has lost as a result of her party taking us out of the EU in a Brexit that Scotland did not vote for. The Republic of Ireland has received an allocation of £180 million of LEADER funding. I will not take any lessons from the Tories on how we support our farmers. We are doing what we can with what we have, but unfortunately the UK Government taking us out of the EU has made that extremely difficult.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a number of supplementary questions. They will need to be brief, as will the responses.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I am very glad that the minister touched on this, but I will never tire of, or apologise for, repeating it—direct payments. The Scottish National Party-led Government is paying farmers to farm and produce food, and that is the single most important support element that could be made available. Does the cabinet secretary share my bewilderment that the party that is so desperate to cast itself as the farmers' champion has not lifted a finger to get clarity from its colleagues at Westminster about the quantum of funding that Scotland's farmers can expect from 2025 onwards?

Gillian Martin: I agree with Jim Fairlie, and I share his palpable anger on this. There is no funding commitment from 2025, and we need clarity and certainty from the UK Government about rural funding after 2025. Farmers need to plan and know what they will be getting. As I have mentioned, the UK Government provides only

yearly allocations that do not adequately replace EU funding. The EU CAP provided a multi-annual programme budget over a seven-year period.

Mairi Gougeon has made repeated requests to engage with UK ministers on this, including by writing several letters to Steve Barclay since his appointment, but she is still waiting for a response.

Agriculture is devolved, and it is crucial that Scottish Government policies are unhindered by the threats that are posed by the UK Internal Market Act 2020, the subsidy control regime and the lack of a long-term replacement for EU funding.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am going to get one more supplementary question in, but I am going to have to ask Tory members—again—to desist from heckling while answers are being given.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The Scottish Government still owes Scottish farmers £46 million. Why is it cutting the budget for agriculture when it still owes that amount of money?

Gillian Martin: As Rhoda Grant can see, I am not Mairi Gougeon, and she is in charge of the budget allocations. However, the fact that Rhoda Grant has raised the question in the chamber means that it is on the record. I will certainly pass it to Mairi Gougeon and get her to write to Ms Grant.

Salmon Industry (Economic Importance)

8. Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the importance of the salmon industry for Scotland's economy. (S6O-02997)

The Minister for Energy and the Environment (Gillian Martin): Scotland's salmon industry is a significant contributor to our economy. The Scottish Government's annual marine economic statistics and our fish farm production surveys show that.

In 2021, aquaculture generated £472 million gross value added, 96 per cent of which was from the salmon industry. In 2022, salmon farming achieved a record value of more £1.2 billion. A Scottish Government-commissioned report in 2018 examined aquaculture's wider economic impacts and showed that the sector supported 11,700 jobs and generated £885 million GVA.

Our vision for sustainable aquaculture sets out our ambition to grow the sector and makes clear our support for a sustainable industry.

Annabelle Ewing: Given the significant sums involved in gross value added and the extremely high number of jobs that are supported by the

salmon industry in Scotland, which the minister referred to, including 600 jobs at Mowi Salmon in Rosyth, in my constituency, when can we expect to see progress on full implementation of the Griggs review recommendations, which were made almost two years ago?

Gillian Martin: I am pleased to pass on that the cabinet secretary is content with the progress that has been made since receiving the ambitious recommendations in the independent review. Last July, she published the "Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture", and progress has been made on the consenting recommendations with the development of a pilot proposal for a new pre-application process for fin-fish farm applications.

The cabinet secretary looks forward to working with stakeholders to further consider the recommendations of the Scottish Science Advisory Council. She hopes that, in making progress and allowing sensible time for due diligence and collaboration with the Scottish aquaculture council and others, we will be able to implement the best possible solutions.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): We often hear about the economic benefit that salmon farming brings for Scotland, despite the fact that the vast majority of profits go to foreign-owned multinationals. However, has the Scottish Government assessed the cost of the environmental damage that the industry causes, which includes damage to blue carbon sites, precious fish nurseries, commercial shellfish stocks and our iconic wild Scottish salmon?

Gillian Martin: I do not recognise the picture that Ariane Burgess paints of Scotland's aquaculture sector. All fish farms in Scotland have to meet strict environmental guidelines. Local authorities consider potential environmental impacts of farms as part of the planning application process, and they are advised by a range of statutory consultees. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency also monitors the environmental impacts of all fish farms, with no exceptions, to ensure safe management.

As Ariane Burgess will know, the reasons for the decline in wild salmon stocks are wide ranging and extremely complex. We take that decline very seriously, and we are working to ensure the protection and recovery of that iconic species.

NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is NHS recovery, health and social care. Any member who wishes to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question. Again, there is a lot of interest in asking questions, so I make the

usual appeal for brevity in questions and responses.

Question 1 is not lodged.

Community Mental Health Services (Funding)

2. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the announcements made in its budget, what action it is taking to ensure that well-established community mental health services are appropriately funded. (S6O-02999)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): We continue to invest in quality community health services to support our prevention and early intervention priorities. That includes providing investment of more than £2.1 billion for primary care and supporting spending in excess of £1.3 billion for mental health, which will continue to enable record numbers of mental health staff to provide more varied support and services.

The mental health and wellbeing delivery plan commits to improving mental health service provision in primary care settings through a focus on prevention and early intervention in the community. That will include the development of multidisciplinary teams in general practice and maximisation of the role of community mental health teams, digital provision and NHS 24 to make access simpler and quicker.

Brian Whittle: Morven day services centre in Kilmarnock, which has been supporting people with learning difficulties and mental health issues for more than three decades, has had its funding withdrawn by the local health and social care partnership. The decision has been described as "devastating" by people who use the centre, and it will almost certainly lead to added pressure being put on local social services and the national health service, as people who would otherwise have gone to Morven day services are forced to seek services elsewhere.

Does the minister agree that closing established community mental health services such as Morven day services to achieve short-term budget savings is exactly the opposite of the approach that we should be taking with mental health in Scotland? Will she commit to exploring whether any alternative sources of funding are available through the Scottish Government's agencies to protect services such as the Morven day services centre?

Maree Todd: I certainly agree that investment in social care makes a profound difference to people's lives, and that it is vital that we maintain services for people with learning disabilities that are based in communities.

However, there is a requirement for local health and social care partnerships and local democratically accountable organisations, such as local councils, to be locally accountable for decisions, to set priorities, to understand the landscape that exists in their local area and to procure services to meet the needs of their population. It would not be appropriate for me, as a Government minister, to intervene in those processes, but I absolutely recognise the importance of good high-quality social care in transforming people's lives.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Although it is appropriate for local services to be decided locally, the minister cannot abrogate her responsibility for cutting the resources that are available to allow those decisions to be made in the best interests of local communities.

In 2022-23, the communities mental health and wellbeing fund was oversubscribed, with almost half of all applicants missing out. Does the Scottish Government accept that more support needs to be provided for community-based mental health services? What assessment has it made of the insufficient capacity of the communities mental health and wellbeing fund to meet the huge demand from local authorities and local health and social care partnerships? How is it helping to support the high number of unsuccessful applicants? If those services fail, that will surely have long-term consequences.

Maree Todd: We invest in local communities in a number of ways, through local authorities and the third sector interface fund, directly to support mental health organisations and to have a mental health impact in our communities.

The Scottish Government is absolutely committed to delivering high-quality services and to supporting households, but we are in an extremely difficult financial situation, and the financial pressures right across health and social care are by far the most challenging since devolution, because of rising inflation and the ongoing impact of Covid and Brexit.

We are making really difficult decisions to balance the budget. We are prioritising spending to support services and to make a record pay offer to our NHS staff to support them through the cost of living crisis and to avoid industrial action. We will absolutely maintain our focus on progressing those key commitments to support mental health. I have worked really hard to maintain spending and to protect mental health funding from the situation that we find ourselves in—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. We have to move on. I ask that supplementary questions be a question, rather than a question in four parts.

I call Beatrice Wishart. Please be brief.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): The pandemic highlighted the mental health crisis in Scotland and the impact on young people who are showing high levels of mental health issues. The Scottish rural and islands youth parliament wants service improvements, with interventions including the creation of social support places and solutions that are tailored to specific age groups. Given the £30 million budget cut that the Scottish Government has made, is it really committed to improving mental health services for young people?

Maree Todd: We are absolutely committed to improving mental health services for young people. It was a delight for me to meet those young parliamentarians in this building last week. We have made massive and sustainable improvements in our child and adolescent mental health services investment. Waiting lists are falling. The median time in which to be seen is now 10 weeks, so one in two children who are referred to CAMHS is seen within 10 weeks, and 13 out of 14 of our territorial health boards have all but eliminated long waits. I agree that progress needs to be made, but Beatrice Wishart can see from our track record that progress is being made.

Diabetes (Support)

3. **Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support people with diabetes. (S6O-03000)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that everyone living with diabetes can access clinically appropriate safe, effective and person-centred healthcare, treatment and support.

In February 2021, we published a refresh of the “Diabetes Improvement Plan: Diabetes Care in Scotland—Commitments for 2021-2026”. It sets out our aims and priorities to support those living with diabetes. The implementation of the plan is overseen by the Scottish diabetes group, with multiple well-established projects running, including improving diabetes education, prevention of foot ulceration, in-patient care and supporting people with diabetes during and after pregnancy. A major focus of the plan is to increase access to diabetes technologies. Since 2021, the Scottish Government has invested more than £19 million of additional funding to support that commitment.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I thank the minister for that answer. Many constituents in Glasgow have contacted me about the worryingly long periods of time for which they are waiting for insulin pumps, with some people waiting more than 12 months.

When will the Government's plan on technologies to support people with diabetes be rolled out, and what can the minister do to help my constituents to get the diabetes technologies that they need, in the meantime?

Maree Todd: As I said in my original answer, we have increased the level of funding for such technologies. Between 2016 and 2021, the Scottish Government invested £10 million of additional funding specifically to support increased provision of insulin pumps and continuous glucose monitors. Between March 2021 and March 2022, a further £19.6 million was allocated to NHS boards to support increased access to diabetes technologies, including closed-loop systems. In November 2023, the Scottish Government provided £1.5 million of additional support, via the outcomes framework for insulin pumps and diabetes technologies.

It is important to note that that funding is in addition to, not a replacement for, local budgets. Baseline funding is provided to NHS boards, which are expected to continue funding provision locally to meet patients' needs. We also work closely with the diabetes managed clinical networks in each health board to identify and resolve any issues that are raised—such as those that Pam Duncan-Glancy has raised in relation to Glasgow—regarding access to diabetes technologies, in order to ensure that resource is targeted at supporting the needs of the local populations.

We absolutely recognise that there are significant challenges for NHS services—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. I will take a couple of brief supplementary questions. Emma Harper is first.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): As we know, diabetes technology can significantly enhance people's quality of life. I remind members that I have type 1 diabetes and am a tech and pump user. However, there is disparity among health boards in Scotland in term of availability of diabetes technology. Will the minister comment on how the Scottish Government is supporting health boards to deliver diabetes technology to those who would benefit from it?

Maree Todd: I will take a quick moment to recognise Emma Harper's on-going interest in the area and her use of her experience to highlight the issue to our population.

As I said, we have invested £19.6 million of additional funding specifically to support the increased provision of diabetes technologies, but we recognise that significant challenges remain. It is difficult for national health service boards to provide technology to everyone who would benefit from it, under their current models of care, and variation exists. We work closely with the diabetes

managed clinical networks in each board to identify and resolve any such issues.

We recently commissioned the development of a national onboarding team. That pilot will provide dedicated support to NHS boards and will roll out technology faster and more efficiently. A key focus of that project is on reducing regional variation and making that technology more equitable to access across Scotland.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. I am a practising NHS GP.

Yesterday, a parliamentary inquiry that was chaired by former Prime Minister Theresa May published its report into type 1 diabetes and disordered eating in England. The former PM also shared her personal experience of living with type 1 diabetes, which is echoed by similar stories that I have read in reports that have been published by Diabetes Scotland. Will the minister provide clarity on what plans the Scottish Government and NHS Scotland have for treatment of type 1 disordered eating?

Maree Todd: We absolutely recognise the link between mental health, disordered eating and type 1 diabetes, and we have made a significant investment in the link between mental health and diabetes. The report by Theresa May is important. It is absolutely to be commended that she has used her experience to highlight that vital area. We, as a Government, are keen to read the report and see what we can learn from it.

Forth Valley University College NHS Partnership

4. **Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the Forth Valley university college NHS partnership's impact on the delivery of health services in Forth Valley. (S6O-03001)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson): The partnership, which was launched in October 2022, is the first formal regional partnership between a health board, university and college, and is an exemplar of cross-public-sector engagement among anchor institutions in Scotland. It is focusing on learning, career development, research and innovation. We are interested in its progress, which includes the January 2024 launch of a fast-track nursing course at Forth Valley College to widen access to the undergraduate nursing programme at the University of Stirling, and supporting new employability placement opportunities in local health services.

We recognise that those strong links have the potential to drive forward research and innovation,

improve health outcomes and improve attraction into health careers locally. We will continue to engage with NHS Forth Valley and its partners to understand the on-going impact of the new partnership on service delivery.

Evelyn Tweed: Would the Scottish Government encourage other health boards and education establishments to replicate that partnership model?

Michael Matheson: I encourage other partners to consider it. I put on record my congratulations to the Forth Valley university college NHS partnership and the collaborative approach that it is taking to working together.

As a Government, we encourage other local partners to look closely at the approach that has been taken in Forth Valley, as it provides an opportunity to drive innovation and support service delivery improvement.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Learning is critical to attracting the future national health service workforce and ensuring that they have the skills and experience to help healthcare. It is clear that recruitment and retention are issues for NHS Forth Valley, so what actions is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that the most experienced candidates are attracted to the workforce in order to drive forward innovation, improvement and health and wellbeing?

Michael Matheson: We are taking forward a range of work to attract people into our healthcare professions. The NHS nursing and midwifery task force, which I chair, is looking at a range of work that we can do to encourage people into nursing and midwifery. That involves a range of stakeholders—including our higher and further education institutions, regulatory bodies, trade unions and national health service boards—working collaboratively to identify the key measures that we can take to address the issue that Alexander Stewart mentioned.

Community Hospitals Network

5. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support and improve the network of community hospitals. (S6O-03002)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government is committed to supporting everyone in Scotland to receive the very best health and social care in the most appropriate setting. That includes community hospitals, which form a vital part of the health and social care system. Community hospitals are managed by either integration joint boards or national health service boards, which consider

how best to support people to move from acute hospitals and receive intermediate care when it is not yet appropriate for them to receive that care at home. To support that work, a national community hospital group has been established to link professionals so that they can seek assurance and share best practice on efforts to support system flow in and out of community hospital settings.

Finlay Carson: I am pleased to hear that the cabinet secretary agrees that patients and families should rightly expect to have health and social care services available as close to home as possible, whether in an urban or a rural setting.

I have highlighted the critical role of cottage hospitals with the health secretary on numerous occasions, because it is hugely important that step-down care, palliative care and other treatments are offered locally by dedicated health professionals.

Cottage hospitals have previously provided such services, but two of them in my constituency, in Kirkcudbright and Newton Stewart, remain closed. Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is totally unacceptable that there are no clear plans for their future? What can he do to ensure that those facilities and the services that they deliver are as close to home as possible?

Michael Matheson: Community hospitals are an essential part of our health and social care system. They provide a wide range of local out-patient and in-patient services from mental health services, palliative and end-of-life care through to rehabilitation, minor injuries units, out-patient clinics and, in some cases, access to diagnostic services.

It is important that those services are delivered at the local level. I am aware of the issue that the member raised, and I wrote to him on that matter in November last year. I understand that the local health board is considering the use of community hospitals in its area. I encourage the board to ensure that it remains engaged with the local community on how best to deliver and design those services.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Previous research into community hospitals in Scotland found that,

“Despite the range of primary and specialist care services offered at the community hospitals, staff and management in both settings felt that the potential for local provision had not yet been fully realised.”

What specific work is the Scottish Government undertaking to ensure that our highly valuable community hospitals realise their full potential in delivering for local people?

Michael Matheson: As I mentioned, we established a national community hospital group to

provide a link between professionals so that they can seek assurance and share best practice, in an effort to support the system more effectively.

General Practitioner Contract (Rural Practices)

6. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to take any action on any concerns that it may have regarding the 2018 GP contract in relation to rural practices. (S6O-03003)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government established the remote and rural working group, which was chaired by Professor Sir Lewis Ritchie, in response to the concerns of rural general practitioners about the 2018 contract. The group produced the “Shaping the Future Together” report in January 2020, and various actions have been undertaken as a result.

The 2018 GP contract is based on allowing GPs to focus on their expert medical generalist role by funding health board-employed multidisciplinary teams. Health boards, health and social care partnerships and GPs should work together to ensure that the transfer of services meets the needs of local patients.

Edward Mountain: It is clear that the 2018 contract has not worked for rural practices. That issue is now being compounded by NHS Highland withdrawing funding for GP-enhanced services. Will the Scottish Government address that with NHS Highland, as it clearly further impacts GPs’ ability to provide services for conditions such as diabetes and alcohol misuse, to mention only two?

Michael Matheson: I recognise that there are some challenges with the GP contract in rural areas. That is why we established the group under Sir Lewis Ritchie to look at some of the issues, and measures are being taken to address them. For example, through the creation of our rural health centre, we are doing work with a focus on primary care in rural areas to look at what further actions can be taken to support and sustain them.

On the specific matters relating to NHS Highland, I would want to make sure that the board, when considering any potential changes, fully engages with local GP practices to ensure that they are properly consulted on the implementation of those changes.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary provide any update on the national centre for remote and rural health and care and how it will support the sustainability and capacity of primary care in rural communities?

Michael Matheson: The national centre for remote and rural health and care was launched in October last year and is being delivered by NHS

Education for Scotland. The centre will work with health boards and health and social care partnerships on improvements to the sustainability and capability of remote, rural and island primary and community care services, avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach. A programme of rural-specific training sessions is in development and two pieces of work are already in progress, focused on improved support and training for remote and rural dispensing practices and developing supervisory training hubs.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): What does the cabinet secretary have to say to patients whose multidisciplinary teams can be 60 miles away, which worsens health inequalities? Indeed, those who face the bigger barriers find it more difficult to travel to centralised locations.

Michael Matheson: I recognise that, in rural areas, there can be challenges because of the remoteness of some of the service delivery. When boards are establishing and taking forward the planning for multidisciplinary teams in primary care, it is important that they address those issues as effectively as possible by having those teams as close to patients as possible. I understand that, in some circumstances, that may not be possible, but it is important that, where boards can achieve that, they do so.

Dementia (Support)

7. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the support that is available for people living with, or affected by, dementia. (S6O-03004)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): As is detailed in our new dementia strategy for Scotland, which launched in May last year, we are committed to improving the experiences of our dementia communities, including through our investment in dementia care and support by health and social care partnerships of £2.2 billion in 2022-23, which is a 14 per cent increase since 2014.

Our strategy recognises the need to build on our world-leading commitment to provide 12 months of post-diagnostic support following a dementia diagnosis and to expand the resilience of our dementia communities. More than £9.5 million has already been directly invested nationally to achieve that since 2021.

We have worked collaboratively with people with lived experience and national and local partners to develop our first two-year delivery plan, which will be published next month.

Mark Ruskell: Organisations such as Town Break and meeting centres provide essential

support to those living with dementia and their carers in Dunblane and Stirling. From peer support to social activities, such local independent groups provide exactly the care that people need to add life to years. However, the future of those groups is at risk and the local health and social care partnership's funding for dementia services is unclear for the next year. Does the minister agree that all efforts should be made to properly fund such community-led dementia support groups as part of the Government's strategy?

Maree Todd: Our strategy, which was developed in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, makes clear the importance of community support and the role of localities and the people who live there in deciding what dementia services and support fit their needs. In addition to the £2.2 billion that I set out, which is provided to HSCPs to fund dementia care, the Scottish Government has invested £1.5 million via Age Scotland since 2021 to enhance and sustain community-led support. I have personally seen the impact on people with dementia and their families and we are committed to continuing to work with local partners to improve access and to better co-ordinate available support.

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The minister will be aware of the link between audio and visual sensory loss and dementia. Given that there is such a strong connection, highlighting how important audiovisual stimulation is to keeping parts of the brain active, why are routine eyesight or hearing tests not provided as standard in our elderly care facilities?

Maree Todd: I am happy to write to the member with further supplementary information, but she will be aware that everyone in Scotland has access to free eye testing. Very often, optometrists go out into community settings when people are not able to access them on the high street. I will ask my colleague Jenni Minto to update the member on progress with community audiology.

Demographic Changes (Impact on NHS Services)

8. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what research it has undertaken on the impact of changing demographics on national health service services. (S6O-03005)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government has not undertaken specific research on the impact of changing demographics on NHS services. However, Public Health Scotland is currently undertaking research that will inform discussions on the impacts on NHS services as a result of the projected changes to

the burden of disease and Scotland's demographics. It is anticipated that that research will be published on Public Health Scotland's website by the end of 2024.

Christine Grahame: As the cabinet secretary is aware, there are more than 1 million Scottish residents aged over 65, and that number is increasing. Living longer can be a plus, but with age, regrettably, come more demands, as well as specific demands on the NHS. Does the weighting of the NHS Scotland's resource allocation committee—NRAC—formula, which allocates resources to NHS boards, need to be reviewed in the light of the increasing number of older people?

Michael Matheson: The NRAC formula takes into consideration a range of factors, including the demand for healthcare services within a health board area. The member may also be aware that we have committed to undertake a review of the NRAC formula. However, that piece of work is complex and will take some time. On the broader point that the member raises, it is critically important that we look at the potential impact that the increasing burden of disease, which we will face over the course of the next 20 years, will have on NHS services, as a key part of dealing with the challenges. That is exactly what the piece of work that is being carried out by Public Health Scotland will assist us to understand, so that we can then evaluate the potential impact of the changes in the years ahead.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Unfortunately, we have run out of time for portfolio questions on NHS recovery, health and social care. I apologise to those members whom I was unable to call. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business, in order to allow members on the front benches to change position.

Green Economy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-11945, in the name of Neil Gray, on investing in Scotland's green economy. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

14:52

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray): The transition to net zero will transform the global economy. For us, in Scotland, it presents enormous economic opportunities together with benefits for our people, businesses and communities. Economic transformation is also essential to delivering on our wider net zero ambitions, and we must manage it in a way that is fair and just. To realise those opportunities and to avoid the terrible harms that will come if we fail to make the necessary just transition, we must invest. We must invest in our future today or bear the consequences in harms and higher costs later. That is what the motion that we are debating is about.

I will start by looking at how things stand today. Scotland's green economy already has momentum. The latest PWC "Green Jobs Barometer" report shows that Scotland is leading the way in delivering a green jobs revolution and unlocking the tremendous potential that our energy transition and wider net zero journey holds. According to the Fraser of Allander Institute, more than 42,000 full-time equivalent jobs were already supported by Scotland's renewable energy sector in 2021, and we have businesses that are competing globally in growing markets, creating high-value jobs, innovating, and repurposing supply chain strengths and capability. In other words, we are already building the foundations for a thriving green economy. Scottish firms have the chance to sell to the world and create good, well-paid jobs as part of a fair, green and growing wellbeing economy.

An example is the ScotWind project, where it is projected that developers will invest an average of £1.5 billion per project into the Scottish supply chain. The recent climate emergency skills action plan report by Skills Development Scotland identifies almost £90 billion-worth of green investments that are under way or planned to commence in the next three years.

We know that the scale of change that is needed is significant. Delivering on our net zero target by 2045 will require the transformation of our economy and society, underpinned by sustained public and private investment in physical

infrastructure. If we do not invest now, we will pay for it later.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): I agree with all that the cabinet secretary has said. Does he agree that, in order to maximise the efficacy of the opportunities in the green economy, we must continue to support a thriving oil and gas sector, not least because the companies in it make very substantial investment in renewables from their resources and through the work that they do? Does he agree that, if we shut them down prematurely, we would lose the very skills that are required to operate, manage and run reservoirs in the North Sea—which, arguably, has the most difficult conditions around Britain—and make the realisation of our green ambitions more difficult?

Neil Gray: I agree with much of that. The traditional oil and gas energy companies will be putting private investment, which we need, into the renewables sector. I absolutely value the oil and gas sector's workforce, which has delivered so much for Scotland. I hope that we can see a just transition for the sector's workforce into the green economy. The First Minister and I delivered that message to the Offshore Energies UK round-table discussion that we held last week.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Neil Gray: I am mindful of the time, but I will take one further intervention.

Douglas Lumsden: Does the cabinet secretary agree that cutting the just transition fund by 75 per cent is detrimental to reaching net zero?

Neil Gray: The investments and the choices that we have had to make in the budget are a direct consequence of the choices and underinvestment that have come from UK Government policy making and that we are debating today. The reduction in our resource budget and our capital budget have an impact. It is therefore a bit rich for a Tory MSP to come here and moan about the impact of the austerity that his party is delivering at Westminster, which is having a direct impact on our budget in Scotland.

Alongside our commitment to realising economic growth, the Scottish Government is committed to a just and fair transition to net zero for Scotland's economy. We stand behind our ambition to make Scotland more prosperous, and that goes hand in hand with making Scotland fairer. We will make sure that the transition is planned and fair so that we can meet our ambitious climate obligations and secure economic growth in a way that leaves no one behind.

The publication of our upcoming energy strategy and just transition plan will respond to feedback

from the consultation last year. It will set a clear direction for the future of Scotland's energy sector and the actions that will be taken to maximise the economic and social benefits from our just transition to net zero.

We are fully committed to the delivery of a credible plan that provides policy certainty for consumers, workers, businesses and investors. We have strengths and potential in sectors ranging from offshore and onshore wind to financial and professional services and advanced manufacturing. It was a pleasure for me to see that work in hand at the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland this morning. It is driving the manufacturing innovation that will help us with our green economy ambitions.

There is a vital role for public sector investment in supporting the transition to net zero, especially in important parts of the green economy that are emerging but are not yet established and which need our support to become commercially viable investment opportunities. However, investment on the scale that is required to achieve our ambitions will require funding from both the public and private sectors. We are working hard to attract private sector investment where commercial opportunities arise, and we are targeting our investment in a way that aims to unlock that private investment. We are working collaboratively with industry to address the challenges that can sometimes hold private investment back. Together, we are supporting Scotland's companies, equipping workers with the skills and opportunities to access good green jobs, and exploring opportunities to boost international exports in sectors where we have a competitive advantage.

This summer, our green industrial strategy will set out our approach to working with business, investors and workers to realise the economic opportunities of the global transition to net zero. The strategy will offer a clear view of the economic sectors and industries in which we have the greatest strength and potential and what the Government will do to support those and help to give the private sector confidence to make decisions and invest in Scotland. The strategy will signal that we are serious about capturing for Scotland the economic benefits of the global transition to net zero.

I will give one example of our approach to investment in the green economy in action. The First Minister's investor panel identified offshore wind as the single most important opportunity for attracting capital to Scotland and raising Scotland's wider investment profile. It has become clear that the next two to three years are critical to anchoring core parts of the global sector in

Scotland, with further investment required beyond that.

We have already had significant investment in Scotland's offshore energy potential through the leasing rounds of ScotWind, which is a fantastic example of a team Scotland approach to delivering significant projects. To underpin delivery of that, we have worked with public sector partners to develop a framework that will achieve strategic alignment of public sector investment in offshore renewable supply chain and infrastructure development to ensure maximum impact. That very much aligns with the approach that has been taken in developing the strategic investment model to move from project to sector-level investment that better supports growth in port and supply chain capacity and capability. A strong pipeline of port infrastructure and supply chain projects is now emerging through the strategic investment model process.

That example highlights the huge opportunity for collaboration and demonstrates that there is a strong appetite from partners to take a strategic approach to the delivery of infrastructure and port investment. We are backing up that collaborative approach with funding, which will be targeted to achieve the maximum impact. In the face of challenging budget decisions, we chose to focus the limited resources that we have in 2024-25 on the huge opportunity that offshore wind presents for Scotland. That includes investing £67 million to kick-start our commitment of up to £500 million to anchor the new offshore wind supply chain in Scotland.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Neil Gray: I will come back to Mr Whittle later if time allows.

That strategic public investment in offshore wind will catalyse private investment in the infrastructure and manufacturing facilities that are critical to the growth of the sector and will contribute to a productive and competitive economy. It will also support market certainty, helping to create thousands of new jobs, embedding innovation and boosting skills. In short, it is an example of the power of strategic public investment in the green economy in action.

We must, however, be transparent in recognising that our powers to invest in that way are limited by devolution. We do not have the powers to borrow to invest that independent countries enjoy. I would like to have invested more in our offshore wind sector in the draft budget and to have put more money into other sectors, such as hydrogen, but we are constrained by the United Kingdom Government's actions and inaction.

The UK Government did not inflation-proof its capital budget, which we forecast will result in a near 10 per cent real-terms cut to our capital funding over the next five years.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention on that point?

Neil Gray: I will come back to the member later if time allows.

We need urgent action from the UK Government to buy in to meeting our net zero targets and securing the vast economic opportunities of the green economy. We have reached the point where there can be no further delay in that action from the UK Government. Market certainty is key. We need the UK Government to work with us to create a stable policy and regulatory environment and to deliver a well-managed transition that ultimately improves investor confidence that investing in the green economy is a worthwhile investment that delivers its economic potential.

The unprecedented announcement that the UK Government made last year to renege on its net zero commitments, including the roll-back of policies that were already announced and accounted for, has repercussions. Changing those timelines undermines our commitment to growing the green economy, securing private sector investment and, of course, our net zero transition, but it also knocks investor confidence. We need clarity to support long-term investment opportunities in Scotland as we transition to a green economy. Although we are doing what we can to provide that investor certainty, as is evidenced by the likes of the onshore wind sector deal, the lack of clarity and the uncertainty and barriers to investment are undermining our progress.

Alongside inaction and U-turns, we see a lack of recognition in Westminster of the global context in which we compete. We are deeply concerned by the UK Government's failure to recognise and keep pace with the level of capital investment that is required to deliver a just transition to net zero. Around the world, we see Governments stepping in to invest in the green economy at scale through things such as the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 in the US and the European green deal. Those ambitious packages are designed to drive investment in net zero technologies and the transition, and that funding and spending will shape future markets in which Scotland competes.

UK investment levels stand in stark contrast to those initiatives, and that position, sadly, looks unlikely to change regardless of whether it is Rishi Sunak or Keir Starmer in Downing Street after the election. Labour once pledged that it would invest an additional £28 billion a year. That was to be its

bold response to the US Inflation Reduction Act, but barely a week goes by without that pledge being watered down. First the target date was delayed, and then Labour quietly dropped the word "additional". Now, it is not a commitment but merely an aspiration, and one that is unlikely to make it to polling day.

We must see bolder, braver interventions in this space from the next UK Government to ensure that we are competitive for private capital. Given how competitive the landscape is and how quickly decisions are being taken, we might, arguably, have already missed opportunities. We cannot afford to wait any longer; we need action now.

Where does that leave us? Scotland must seize the opportunities that are presented by the global transition to net zero now, or risk missing out. We can meet our ambitious emissions reduction targets only with transformational action across our society and economy. However, without UK action, we cannot achieve our goals. Inaction at the UK level limits what we can do in Scotland. We call on the UK Government to recognise the scale of the challenge and the scale of the opportunity, and to invest appropriately. We call on it to recognise that one role of Government in this era-defining transformation is to create market certainty and to stay the course with the right policy choices; to recognise that, under the current devolution settlement, the UK Government holds many of the levers that are needed to make the transition work; and to use those levers correctly.

Our ambition in this Government and in Scotland is to build a fair and growing green economy, and we will deploy all the tools and levers that we have in the service of that ambition. We call on all the parties at Westminster to join us in that endeavour, and we call on members of this Parliament to recognise and support the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament considers that a just transition is vital to both tackling the climate emergency and building a strong and sustainable economy; welcomes the growing strength of Scotland's green economy, with more than 42,000 FTE jobs supported by Scotland's renewable energy sector, and the recent Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan report that identified almost £90 billion of green investments currently underway or planned to commence in the next three years; agrees that the energy transition and associated supply chain development has the potential to help grow a fair, green wellbeing economy in Scotland; recognises the vital role of public investment in continuing to deliver a just transition to net zero and that the forthcoming Green Industrial Strategy will identify and focus action on the most significant economic opportunities for Scotland; is deeply concerned by the UK Government's failure to keep pace, with overall capital investment levels in decline; understands that declining levels of investment in the UK are in stark contrast to initiatives to increase public investment elsewhere, such as the Inflation Reduction Act in the USA and the European Green Deal; recognises the limits that this lack of action at the UK level

imposes on Scotland, and that in spite of this, £2.7 billion will be invested by the Scottish Government in activities that will have a positive impact on the delivery of its climate change goals in 2024-25; notes that the Climate Change Committee has estimated that 1-2% of GDP needs to be invested in the transition annually until 2050, and calls, therefore, on the UK Government to urgently increase green investment to at least £28 billion a year to ensure that Scotland and the rest of the UK can deliver a just transition to net zero.

15:06

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): This is an important debate to shine a light on our move towards a more green economy and on how the Scottish Government should be doing more to support the industries that are contributing so much to achieving that goal.

Economic growth is key to ensuring the health and wellbeing of the people of Scotland. We must move forward by building our economy and encouraging entrepreneurship to drive industry and deliver growth. It is only through economic growth that our country can grow and we can deliver the public services that we all rely on.

However, we know that the Scottish Green Party members of this Government are fundamentally opposed to economic growth. They would put a stop to key industries in Scotland, such as our oil and gas sector, and they have stopped green energy sources such as nuclear energy being established in Scotland.

If we are to truly have a just transition and build our economy on a green footing, we must be able to explore options such as nuclear energy and green hydrogen. Scotland is falling behind when it comes to new technologies, and it is as a direct result of policies from this devolved coalition Government that we are seeing Scotland's economy grow at a slower rate than that of the rest of the UK.

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): Douglas Lumsden knows—or at least he should do—that Greens, like the whole Scottish Government, are extremely enthusiastic about the potential for green hydrogen. On nuclear, is he aware of reports just this week of yet more cost overrun and delay on the Hinkley development that the UK Government is proposing? That development, however expensive it ends up being to build, will rely on an incredibly expensive price for the electricity that it will produce. It is slow and costly, and it locks in high energy prices.

Douglas Lumsden: I will come back later in my speech to the commitment on hydrogen and to how much the Scottish Government is cutting that.

Regarding nuclear, the costs have gone up, but so has the cost for offshore wind. We can see

from the contract for difference round 6 that the price for wind has increased quite dramatically.

The most recent Scottish National Party budget was undoubtedly anti-growth, with cuts being made to vital industries—

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Will Douglas Lumsden take an intervention?

Douglas Lumsden: I will make some progress first.

Cuts are being made to vital industries that are leading in the areas of green economic growth, and the budget also makes Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK, with that gap set to become wider. By stymieing investment and cutting funding, this Government is moving backwards when we should be moving forward. It is making life more difficult for business leaders, communities and individuals with higher taxes, lower investment and cuts to public services.

Neil Gray: Will Douglas Lumsden give way?

Douglas Lumsden: I will continue a little further.

Those cuts will affect our ability to grow the economy and make the transition to a greener future more difficult because, although the SNP-Green coalition speaks highly of its green credentials, the reality is very different.

In November last year, Scotland's Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity postponed the publication of the draft climate change plan. To date, the Scottish Government has failed to achieve eight out of 12 of its emissions targets. Scotland is not delivering on key milestones such as energy efficiency in homes and peatland restoration.

In the Scottish Government budget, there is no commitment to green policies or economic growth; instead, we see cuts on cuts on cuts. The transport, net zero and just transition budget has been cut; the total rail services budget has been cut; the just transition fund has been cut; support for sustainable travel has been cut; the energy efficiency and decarbonisation budget has been cut; funding for Skills Development Scotland has been cut; and hydrogen support has been cut.

Michelle Thomson: Will Douglas Lumsden take an intervention?

Douglas Lumsden: I will give way to Michelle Thomson.

Michelle Thomson: I remind Douglas Lumsden that, with regard to capital expenditure, the Scottish Fiscal Commission projects a 20 per cent cut from the UK Government to the Scottish Government. It is that vital capital that is important

to grow the sector. Is he aware of that figure, and does he support that cut?

Douglas Lumsden: Let us look at the budget that Michelle Thomson is asking me about.

If we look at the Scottish Parliament information centre report, which is available for all members to see, and we look at the resource and capital budget together, we can actually see a 2.8 per cent real increase. It is where this Government has chosen to make political decisions that we see the cuts coming though.

All those areas contribute to achieving greener economic growth, and all of them have been cut, which shows that the priorities of this Government lie not in the wellbeing and prosperity of the Scottish people but in ensuring the wellbeing of its coalition party in Government.

Being from the north-east, I know how important the oil and gas industry is to the economic wellbeing of the whole of Scotland. The whole industry wants to be greener and wants to transition but to do so in a way that protects jobs, communities and the economy of the north-east.

However, the SNP-Green Government is driving energy businesses away, just at the very time that we need it to invest in our energy transition.

Neil Gray: Absolute nonsense.

Douglas Lumsden: I hear “nonsense” from the cabinet secretary, but today’s issue of *The Press and Journal* reported that “Big names” are due to join the

“North Sea exodus this year”,

with Apache, ExxonMobil and Dana Petroleum tipped as exit candidates. That is bad news for not just the north-east economy but the Scottish economy. This Government is making those companies feel as welcome as a hole in a lifeboat.

That is demonstrated by the letter from the chief executive of Ithaca to the First Minister, in which he spoke about the £8 billion investment in Rosebank and the contribution to the “whole Scottish economy”, as well as his disappointment that no Scottish minister welcomed the jobs that would be supported. He went on to say:

“Without support for oil and gas, our human capital and supply chain will be lost to the booming energy sector opportunities overseas thereby slowing down the energy transition”,

which is a point that Fergus Ewing has made.

So much for the new deal for business—and it is telling that no one from the energy industry was invited on to the group. The SNP is turning its back on the north-east again and again and showing that it simply cannot be trusted.

We also know how important nuclear power is to the green agenda, by creating energy in a clean and sustainable way. Nuclear energy currently provides around 15 per cent of the UK’s energy needs, but that proportion has fallen since the 1990s, when it was closer to 25 per cent. We must be much more open to discussing with the industry the place of nuclear alongside renewable energy to meet our energy needs. We are all agreed that we need to be less reliant on oil and gas, but the Scottish Government has ruled out a key source of energy that could contribute to that picture. We believe that that is a short-sighted decision that will adversely affect the ability of Scotland to take its place as a leader within the UK in clean and low carbon energy production. Renewables are great, but they are not enough to meet our changing energy needs.

Of course, when we look at green economic growth, we must also consider many of the fantastic smaller-scale businesses that have grown up in the sector. Green growth is now a key driver in our economy, and we should do more to support it.

In particular, I will mention the social enterprises that currently work throughout Scotland, contributing to our economy and providing employment and community services, as well as contributing to the green agenda. Such businesses have grown up while we have known about the need for us to be more environmentally aware, and they provide valuable services, including upcycling projects, services that collect garden waste and deal with compost, and those that provide wood and timber. We are also seeing more and more community energy production through smaller-scale wind power and hydropower schemes. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will join me in paying tribute to those businesses across Scotland and will recognise that we can do much more to support them.

We welcome the Scottish Government’s commitment to publish papers such as the green industrial strategy. Although I am sure that we will not agree with everything that the Government says, I welcome the debate and the focus on such important issues relating to our economy. We want more to be done—more investment and more understanding of how businesses that currently work in the energy sector want to adapt and change. We should not demonise particular sectors. Instead, we should work with them to move towards a greener future.

We want the Scottish Government to adopt green hydrogen as a fuel source, to be an early adopter of the technology and to move quickly to secure investment in that area, which is why it was disappointing to hear the cabinet secretary confirm at the Net Zero, Energy and Transport

Committee's meeting yesterday that the remaining 90 per cent of the promised green hydrogen fund will not be available in the coming financial year. We want there to be investment in the expanding offshore wind sector and in the onshore wind sector, in partnership with local communities. We also want there to be support for our oil and gas sector, which is a key ally as we move towards greener energy provision in Scotland.

There are so many aspects to our green economy and to green economic growth that it is difficult to cover them all in the time that I have. We must go further and do more. The Green-SNP coalition Government is failing to deliver on its priorities and targets. It has cut vital budgets and is spending money on vanity projects instead of focusing on what really matters. It is isolating key partners, such as the oil and gas sector and house builders, while shutting others out completely, such as those involved in nuclear and green hydrogen. When it comes to green energy, Scotland has so much potential, but, with the SNP and the Greens in Government, that potential could well be squandered.

I move amendment S6M-11945.2, to leave out from "is deeply" to end and insert:

"notes that the recent Scottish Budget for 2024-25 is anti-growth and will damage Scotland's ability to create a thriving green economy by stymying investment, cutting enterprise funding, and by placing a higher tax burden on Scotland compared to the rest of the UK; further notes that the education system is not aligned with the opportunities that the green economy offers; believes that the Scottish Government's opposition to new oil and gas exploration licences will damage the economy of the north east, and that the Scottish National Party administration's inability to deliver economic growth has hindered the development of green jobs and a just transition, and calls on the Scottish Government to back the 93,000 oil and gas sector jobs and ensure that they are not abandoned, to end its opposition to nuclear and to ensure that the financial costs of the transition to net zero do not disproportionately fall upon individuals, families and communities."

15:17

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I wanted to be constructive when crafting my amendment, but then I saw a news article this morning that summarised the attacks on Labour that the cabinet secretary was planning to make today, which he did, indeed, make.

I agree that we urgently need to see green jobs that benefit Scotland. Huge investment in renewables offers us the chance to shift to a circular economy, with manufacturing and recycling sectors being given more support from the Scottish Government. However, we have simply not seen such support in the time that the SNP has been in power. There has been too much in the way of warm words and not enough leadership and investment.

Sadly, the Scottish Government is not, as it says, deploying all the tools and levers that are available. We need to ramp up procurement, and best practice needs to be shared across our councils and public sector organisations. That is one of the reasons why I have been pushing so hard for the creation of a future generations commissioner as part of my proposed wellbeing and sustainable development member's bill.

The Scottish Government needs to move faster and deliver more joined-up thinking. Publication of the green industrial strategy was delayed, and we urgently need leadership so that our private and public sectors are able to provide and support investment right across the UK.

I regularly speak to innovative renewable energy companies and companies involved in retrofitting people's homes that cannot access the training courses for their staff that would be needed to deliver potential low-carbon projects across Scotland. We need the Government to be proactive in working with industry. It should not step back from its responsibility to deliver the building blocks for a just transition.

The UK Government has failed to effectively deliver major infrastructure projects such as high speed 2, which has been appallingly mismanaged. We also urgently need a grid that will work now and in the future.

Governments need to be strategic in providing confidence, certainty, clarity and support for supply chains, so that our renewables and industrial sectors get the major investment that is needed.

Neil Gray: Sarah Boyack says, quite rightly, that we need clarity and confidence. I was heavily critical of the current UK Government in its flip-flopping and renegeing on net zero commitments. Does Sarah Boyack not feel that it is fair for us, in Scotland—herself included, I expect—to challenge any incoming Labour Government to provide that clarity and certainty? Her amendment asks us only to note the policy of the Labour Party, which has changed four times in the past few weeks.

Sarah Boyack: I felt that it might not be appropriate to ask members to vote Labour, so I thought that it would be better to ask them to note our policy, then I would go through its benefits. My colleague Jonathan Reynolds has been talking about Joe Biden's fantastic Inflation Reduction Act 2022, and about the competition that means that we have to deliver in Scotland and the UK. That is the point of my speech today.

Our local authorities are vital in supporting low-carbon infrastructure, but we are, disappointingly, not seeing the levels of investment in community renewables that the SNP Government promised. We have huge opportunities to create heat and

power with our land and buildings, which would deliver lower bills to our communities and deliver investment. That is an unacceptable missed opportunity.

We need Government leadership at the UK and Scottish levels. To be honest, the Scottish Trades Union Congress was absolutely right in its briefing, in which it said:

“The Scottish Government has been too quick to set ambition for jobs and economic benefit from green industries without setting up the necessary policies and funding to realise them.”

The cabinet secretary is muttering, but the SNP has been in power for more than 16 years and it has failed to deliver the transformative change that we urgently need. We have come together on two climate change acts—in 2009 and 2019—but, as the UK Climate Change Committee reported in 2022, the Scottish Government has failed to deliver on lowering our carbon emissions, on homes and buildings and on transport and land. Scotland and the UK urgently need change, and Labour’s green prosperity plan would deliver that. *[Interruption.]*

To be honest, a lot of the comments that I can hear the cabinet secretary muttering are deflection from SNP failures. We have had no publicly owned energy company, as promised; delays to the green industrial strategy, energy strategy and just transition plan; and massive cuts to budgets. It is not just this year—

Neil Gray: Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: No, I will not.

There has been a 48.5 per cent cut to the climate change budget; a 75 per cent cut to the just transition fund; a nearly 40 per cent cut to the investment in the energy industries net zero budget, which last year’s budget promised would

“maximise the economic and social outcomes of the transition to a Net Zero Scotland”;

a 28 per cent cut to the carers budget; and a 100 per cent cut to the green jobs fund—which is a bit of an irony for this debate. That fund was announced to much fanfare three years ago, with £100 million committed over five years, but an answer to a parliamentary question that I got this morning shows that only a mere £28 million is expected to be spent by the end of this financial year. Then there was the underspend of £133 million last year on energy efficiency schemes.

I totally agree that the Tory Government has been completely chaotic on the economy, but we are talking about long-standing failings of the SNP. It is utterly hypocritical to attack the Labour Government that we are campaigning for.

We would establish GB energy, which would be based in Scotland. It would be a home-grown, publicly owned energy champion for clean energy generation and would build the jobs and supply chains that we urgently need. If we were elected, we would act fast to lead the world on clean and cheap power across the UK, with Scotland at the forefront, and make sure that we get the cheap, clean power that we need. We would set up a national wealth fund and, crucially, work with local authorities and communities to deliver renewable heat and power that people can afford. All those aims would directly benefit Scottish households and businesses.

Our ambitions would be funded by gearing up to the £28 billion throughout the term of the Labour Government. We would be inheriting the wreck of a Tory economy, but we would be committed to gearing up to that massive investment, which is crucial.

I want to ask the cabinet secretary what progress he is making in the discussions about the critical future of Grangemouth. What support will the Scottish Government offer through investment to support the just transition and protect the opportunities that the site offers in terms of its connectivity, its location and the skills in the local communities surrounding it? We urgently need a just transition to a low-carbon economy so that those who are already working in the energy sector get the skills, training and decent, well-paid jobs that will make our economy successful. We need a Government that is prepared to do the heavy lifting.

That is why we are committed to Labour’s green prosperity plan. We know that the oil and gas sector will be with us for decades, but we need Government action and support now to put in place the investment to ensure that the private sector and Government can work together to deliver the just transition and the green jobs that our country urgently needs.

I move amendment S6M-11945.1, to insert at end:

“; recognises the economic damage and challenges created by the fiscal policy choices of the UK Government, and the impact that this could have on investment in the green economy; notes the Labour Party’s Green Prosperity Plan; agrees that a cross-government mission is needed to deliver clean energy by 2030, and acknowledges the economic opportunities that this could create for Scotland.”

15:25

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I agree with the cabinet secretary’s criticism of the UK Conservative Government for its flip-flopping and its changing messages and rhetoric about investment in net zero. What Government policy is

is important, but how it sounds is equally important.

The indication of the direction of travel is incredibly important for investors, who are considering what to put their money into and which part of the world to put their money in, and for companies that are considering where best to deploy their resources. The mood music is incredibly important, and it was deeply damaging. In reality, the one or two years' change in some of the policies was probably not significant, but the rhetoric that was wrapped around what Rishi Sunak said was deeply damaging and sent a message of uncertainty, which is the last thing we need when we want people to make long-term decisions.

I will focus on some of the Scottish issues. I will try to be constructive and detailed on ScotWind, as well as on the Methil wind farm, grid capacity and various other issues.

Neil Gray: I agree with Willie Rennie on the UK Government's approach. Our response, in saying that Scotland is open for business, is the green industrial strategy and the £500 million that the First Minister announced for developing a domestic supply chain. The first £87 million of that is coming in this year's budget. I hope that Mr Rennie accepts that that is us ensuring that we put up a big saltire to say that Scotland is open for business and inviting people to come here and invest in a massive economic opportunity.

Willie Rennie: To be fair to the minister, there is consistency on the rhetoric. There are some questions about the policy enactment. The implementation gap, as the former First Minister might call it, is significant. I will come on to those issues.

Here is the first principle that we need to establish: I want to make sure that the communities that I represent—some of the working-class communities on the east coast of Fife—benefit directly from the wind farms that they see being built off the coast of Fife. That has not been the case so far. The collapse of Burntisland Fabrications cost the Scottish Government £50 million. The workers who were rooted in the communities of Fife were not directly benefiting, especially when the people of Fife and the rest of Scotland are paying higher electricity bills in part because of the investment that is being made in offshore renewables. That is the right thing to do, but we need to ensure that the jobs come alongside the electricity supply.

That leads me on to the ScotWind process. I fear that we have granted authority for too many opportunities for wind farm companies all at once and that we will not have the capacity in Scotland to maximise the benefit from that.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Willie Rennie and I are both big fans of offshore wind. Does he recognise that one of the big issues that we have with so much offshore wind is a global lack of undersea cabling and that that will limit the speed at which we can develop the strategy?

Willie Rennie: Some progress has been made on the cabling front. It is a technical area, because there are different types of cables for different parts of the process. Nevertheless, that speaks to the challenge of creating capacity in Scotland. It takes time. If we grant authority for too many opportunities at once, we might not have the capacity in the supply chain to exploit that. There might be enough to go round in any circumstances, but I would like us to maximise the amount that we get for Scotland. I am not sure that I have seen a Government investment plan for the supply chain that will ensure that we do not have a repeat of BiFab.

The facilities at BiFab were pretty rudimentary, which is partly why the company was not able to succeed in exploiting the Neart na Gaoithe opportunities. An investment plan is important. That is why I was concerned about the report earlier from the minister that some of the funds from ScotWind have been siphoned off to other parts of the Scottish budget. We need to make sure that we maximise the opportunities and help businesses invest in Scotland so that we have the maximum supply chain.

That leads back to how much we got for the ScotWind licensing round. We did not sell it for enough. The cap of £100,000 was, I think, incomprehensible. The £700 million that we got was about a third of what they were getting for the equivalent in England, and a quarter of what they were getting for equivalent space in California, where there was equally deep water and it was equally challenging to provide and build the wind farms. I therefore do not think that we got enough from ScotWind, and I deeply regret that we will not be able to use that money to invest back into the supply chain to make sure that we maximise the opportunity for Scotland.

Another issue that the minister and I have discussed before is the regulatory capacity. I also worry that companies will see a very narrow opportunity to get their licences and regulatory approvals through. I want to hear from the minister in their summing-up speech about how many more planners and specialists we have recruited to cope with the glut of demand that will come through. It is important that investors know that, if they go forward with a Scottish opportunity, they will get their application through, build the supply chain, and maximise the opportunity for Scotland.

I want to talk briefly—if I have time, Deputy Presiding Officer—about Methil.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have a little bit of extra time, Mr Rennie.

Willie Rennie: I am concerned that Harland & Wolff at Methil, which was previously the BiFab facility, is outside the Forth green port area, and so is not benefiting from the financial incentives that other parts of the Forth are benefiting from. It could be a subcontractor—which was, I think, the minister's response—but I would prefer it to be fully included in the opportunities in the wider Forth green port area.

If we cannot get that and the minister is unable to negotiate that, I hope that we get some kind of investment zone status to provide a bit of a level playing field between different parts of the River Forth estuary. I hope that the minister will look at that again.

My final point is on Home Energy Scotland, and is simply a plea to speed up the process for applications for grants for home energy, which takes an age. In England, applications are much faster—for what reason, I do not know, but they are much faster there. We need to catch up, because we are putting off customers and causing uncertainty in the supply chain. That means that we are not recruiting the people that we need in order to build the capacity to supply the likes of heat pumps in people's homes. Let us therefore speed up that process and get it working.

15:32

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I have the honour and privilege of being one of the MSPs who represents the future net zero capital of the world. We are not there yet, but, although we have a fair bit of work to do to realise that ambition, I am confident that we will make that title our own. That confidence is not unfounded. I believe that there are a range of reasons why Aberdeen will be a global leader in the move to net zero and at the heart of a fair, green and growing Scottish economy.

The motion recognises the vital role of public investment, and our region is being supported by a £500 million just transition fund from the Scottish Government. If the UK Government is going to do the right thing and increase green investment, matching the Scottish Government's £0.5 billion investment in the north-east would be a sensible starting point.

Douglas Lumsden: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Dunbar: I will not take an intervention. I would love to, but I will be talking up Aberdeen and I do not want it talked down.

Beyond public investment, so much of what saw Aberdeen establish itself as the oil and gas capital

of Europe has left the city very well placed to research, develop and pioneer the new technologies that will be needed to reach net zero. On top of that, we still have oil and gas companies that are based in Aberdeen and that recognise that their own long-term future relies on their being able to deliver more sustainable forms of energy.

However, the most important reason why I am confident that Aberdeen will be the net zero capital of the world is the people we have in Aberdeen, who are some of the most talented and innovative workers from across the world. There is a line from Jimmy Reid's rat race speech that I keep hearing from a colleague:

"The untapped resources of the North Sea are as nothing compared to the untapped resources of our people."

That line needs to underpin Aberdeen's approach to the just transition and our investment in a green economy. That we have oil and gas in the North Sea was key when it came to establishing Aberdeen as an energy capital. When it comes to renewables, although we rightly recognise the potential that our land and sea offer, I do not think that we talk up our folk enough. I will never tire of talking up Aberdeen and its folk.

Over the years, Aberdeen has amassed a workforce that includes many of the brightest and best in the industries that are key to making our economy green. Some of those workers were trained here; others have come from far and wide and have chosen to work here. Having such a skilled workforce means, however, that it is in demand around the world. The investment that we are seeing in the foundations of a green economy today will give those workers opportunities to move across to our green industries. It will help to keep them here and ensure that we retain our greatest asset in the move to net zero—our people.

I will use the rest of my speech to talk up a few examples of some of the amazing folk, businesses and organisations across Aberdeen that are key to growing our green economy today and that will help us to become a global net zero capital in the future.

Last week, I had the great privilege of visiting Verlume, a company in my constituency that specialises in intelligent energy management and storage technologies. It was not the first time that I had visited the company, but the word about its work seems to have gotten out, because this time it was also being visited by the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise, the cabinet secretary and our First Minister. During the visit, the First Minister spoke of wanting us to have a fair, green and growing economy. I think that Verlume's operations facility in Dyce, where it does the work

that has made it a front runner in the energy transition, was the perfect backdrop for that.

Another business that has received Scottish Enterprise's backing, and which I am looking forward to meeting soon, is Kionnali Living Systems, which is headquartered in the Bridge of Don area of my constituency. Avriel and Corinn, who founded the company, are re-imagining what housing will look like in years to come, and I look forward to seeing what the future will bring for them and the role that they will play in making that future more sustainable.

As we look to the future, I was pleased to meet Bryan Snelling, the chief executive of Aberdeen Science Centre, just last Friday, to hear about the work that it is doing to bring science, technology, engineering and maths learning about wind farms and engineering into communities and schools across the north-east of Scotland. The staff and volunteers at Aberdeen Science Centre have, for decades, especially with their outreach work, captured the imagination of our youngsters and encouraged many who are in the green economy today to study and work in STEM.

As we look to realise the untapped resources of our folk, whether through outreach work, support for start-ups, investment in growing opportunities, the just transition fund or creating green jobs, I am hopeful for a future that will see Aberdeen established as the net zero capital of the world and a Scotland that is fairer, greener and wealthier.

15:38

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): The Government likes to put warm and fuzzy titles to things when it wants to sound good. We have the wellbeing economy. Nobody is really sure what that is, but there is a cabinet secretary with it in his title. We have heard from him already. He is not here now, but he was on a bit of a whinge-fest earlier and, not for the first time, I found myself worrying about his wellbeing.

We have the circular economy, which is just not chucking things away and reusing as much as possible. There is a bill for that, which I suspect will cost businesses a good deal.

Here we have the green economy. Whatever we might think that is, according to the Government motion, it thinks that it is doing quite well at it, but ministers should not be so quick to pat themselves on the back.

I want to focus on two areas of interest to me, and they are both areas in which the Scottish Government should be doing better—transport and trees. Given the storms that we have seen this week, those are two things that can be linked,

and they must surely be part of the green economy.

The cabinet secretary has come back. I was just saying that I am going to talk about transport and trees.

Neil Gray: I heard you.

Graham Simpson: Good.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Gentlemen, please—not like that.

Graham Simpson: I am pleased that the cabinet secretary is doing well.

Let us look first at transport and what the draft Scottish budget says about that, which the cabinet secretary was somewhat in denial about.

As we heard from Douglas Lumsden, there have been a number of cuts to the transport budget. The Scottish Government has cut the total transport, net zero and just transition budget by £29.3 million in real terms. It has cut the total rail services budget by £80 million. It has cut the just transition fund by three quarters. It has cut support for sustainable travel by more than 60 per cent in cash terms. It has also cut the future transport fund by more than 60 per cent in cash terms—in 2023-24, it spent £99.4 million on that fund, but, in 2024-25, it will spend only £36 million on it.

Neil Gray: I find all of what Graham Simpson is saying a bit rich. I assume that he still supports the UK Government's approach to austerity in public spending, as a result of which our public finances have been cut. That has been confirmed by the Scottish Fiscal Commission, and the projections show a cut in our capital budget. Therefore, is it not a bit rich for Mr Simpson to come to the chamber and moan about the impact of the austerity policies that he supports?

Graham Simpson: The cabinet secretary needs to read the SPICe paper, which shows that the total budget from the UK Government has actually gone up. That is the reality.

I will tell you what is a bit rich, Deputy Presiding Officer—it is the cabinet secretary bringing to the chamber a debate about the green economy, when the Scottish Government has cut the total green economy budget completely. It has gone—it has been cut to nothing. The cabinet secretary is shaking his head; he obviously has not even read his own budget. The figure is zero. What a nerve the Government has.

The Government has absolutely no chance of hitting its target of cutting car miles by 20 per cent by 2030. It does not even have a plan for doing that; it has no idea how to do it.

If there is a green economy in transport, it should focus on making public transport better, but

the capital budget for Strathclyde Partnership for Transport has been cut to nothing—that is another zero—which is jeopardising key projects throughout the region, such as the upgrade to the subway system and a new station at Hairmyres in East Kilbride.

I will move on to trees while I still have time. I am a hugger of trees, occasionally. I am a member of the Woodland Trust and I am the species champion for the ash. Earlier, I asked a question about the forestry budget. The enormous cuts in the woodland grant budget will torpedo Scotland's chances of meeting climate and nature targets. Scottish Forestry faces a cut in its grant budget of more than £32 million.

The Scottish Government has increased its woodland creation targets every year, but the amount of woodland that is actually being created has fallen in each of the past five years, so the gap between ambition and reality has grown year on year. The creation of more than 14,000 hectares of new woodland has been approved for the current year, but the reduced funding will support the creation of only 9,000 hectares.

Alastair Seaman, director of the Woodland Trust Scotland, said:

“The Scottish Government must remember that warm words won't stop climate change or restore nature. We need investment in new woodland—and fast—if we are to have any hope of a strong economy”—

a green economy, we might say—

“and a healthy landscape in the years to come.”

I have not even touched on issues such as energy—on which ideology will get in the way, as it always does with this Government, but it will not keep the lights on—insulating homes, electric charging and missed environmental targets, which are all areas where the Scottish Government needs to do better.

I support the amendment in Douglas Lumsden's name.

15:44

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): There has been quite a bit of chat about the SPICe paper and the budget. For complete accuracy, I put on the record that the Scottish Government's budget will rise by 2.6 per cent in cash terms or, in so-called real terms, 0.9 per cent after taking inflation into account. I really do not think that people should be shouting from the rooftops about that, to be absolutely frank. All the people who are claiming that they have read the SPICe paper clearly have not read it.

I will move on to my speech.

I very much welcome the cabinet secretary's speech because, to my mind, effective investment in the green economy will require the Scottish Government, the UK Government and the private sector to be on the same page on an investment strategy. It absolutely requires a clear focus, mutual ambition and support.

The chief executive officer of Offshore Energies UK, David Whitehouse, said in his letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in October last year:

“In the right investment environment, UK offshore energy companies could invest £200 billion in homegrown energy this decade alone.”

Given the profile of Scotland's economy, we should expect a significant level of private sector investment that is counted in the tens of billions of pounds and dwarfs the amount of capital spend available to the Scottish Government. However, regrettably, that is not guaranteed.

Final investment decisions have to depend on policy, planning and design over several years as well as on having retained and enhanced capacity and capability among businesses. That brings me to a point that Willie Rennie made. That absolutely emphasises the need for a stable policy environment, and facing the challenges but also exploiting the opportunities together. It appears that, in fairness, only the Scottish Government is staying the course in that regard, with both the Tory Government and Labour, as the potential next Government, weakening their commitments.

Effective investment in the green economy of sufficient scale is needed to make a real difference, and it is dependent on an effective transition strategy that is backed up by practical commitments. In that respect, I am very much looking forward to the Scottish Government's green industrial strategy—the meat, if you will.

I feel—I will put this on the record—that there is naivety in some quarters when there are calls for the abandonment of any investment in fossil fuels, thereby creating a cliff edge for the businesses that are needed for an effective transition. I say that because I am well aware that we desperately need the existing energy supply chains to support investment in the future and, critically, to supply the necessary skills, capacity and capability for a sustainable green economy.

Douglas Lumsden: Does Michelle Thomson support the Rosebank development? That is oil and gas that we desperately need.

Michelle Thomson: That is a good question. I suspect that I will be out of alignment with the policy, as ever. I am putting it very clearly that I am very much against falling off a cliff. We all need to be sensible about that. In fact, as Al Denholm put it in the Scottish National Investment Bank's “Transition Finance 2023” report:

“For transition to net zero to succeed, we need the skills and capabilities of the people and organisations currently working in the fossil fuel supply chain. A just transition means bringing them on this journey with us, not leaving them behind. And that will take long-term, strategic investment.”

It is therefore absolutely about real, active partnership, not merely to protect current jobs, but to invest in the future and realise opportunities.

Let us take, for example, the situation in my constituency regarding the future of the Grangemouth refinery. Scotland and, indeed, the UK need the refining skills, business capability and supply chains that are currently serving our economy. The decline of fossil fuel refining should not be the end of refining in my constituency.

Part of a just transition must involve the establishment of, for example, biofuel refining capacity, including to support the development of sustainable aviation fuels. Those fuels will play a critical role in reducing aviation greenhouse gas emissions.

I was very disappointed to learn that the UK Government’s sustainable aviation fuels plan, included in its £15 million green fuels, green skies competition, led to funding being given to eight projects, but none of those was from Scotland. However, the still modest £165 million advanced fuels fund might be a further opportunity. I hope that, if that comes to pass, the Scottish National Investment Bank, given its already stated views, would be a willing partner.

One possible process involves hydrotreated esters and fatty acids—or HEFA—which refines vegetable oils, waste oils or fats into sustainable aviation fuels through a process that uses hydrogenation.

Because of refinery capabilities and wider planned developments in Grangemouth, it would seem to be the ideal centre for urgent investment from Government and the private sector to realise new opportunities. I am aware that the Scottish Government ministers Neil Gray and Gillian Martin are involved in very purposeful discussions on Grangemouth and are working hard on the matter. I thank them for that. It may be that the minister is able to provide further updates in his summing up.

It is clichéd to say that every problem is also an opportunity. However, in the case of Grangemouth, it may well be that the current problems will act as a spur—indeed, they should—for future strategic investment from the public and private sectors. As Willie Rennie put it, the mood music is important in that respect. I will certainly be doing all that I can as the local member to support the development of a sustainable future built around Grangemouth.

15:50

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The Scottish Government’s motion is true to form. The Scottish Government rightly criticises the UK Government’s failings, but it does not show any humility at all by acknowledging its own. The motion mentions the 42,000 jobs that are supported by the renewable energy industry, but it does not mention the 130,000 jobs that Alex Salmond promised when he said that we would be the “Saudi Arabia of renewables”.

I recognise the huge progress that has been made in reducing emissions through renewables, but I know that the cabinet secretary accepts that that has not translated into a jobs-led transition at the scale that we all want to see and, frankly, we should have seen. The just transition commission was right when it said:

“Despite progress in applying a just transition approach to policy development and planning at the national level, the tangible benefits in people’s everyday lives are yet to be felt.”

Scotland has a massive share of Europe’s installed onshore wind capacity, but we know that no turbines are manufactured here. We have some of the largest offshore wind farms, but we barely fabricate any jackets, and Scotland’s sea beds have now been leased for offshore wind almost entirely to overseas-owned firms, which means that billions of pounds of profits will be offshored.

We cannot afford to continue to offshore far too many of those supply chain jobs. That means that we need to ensure that the positive words of national planning framework 4 on renewables translate to delivery on the ground through the pace of consenting to those offshore wind developments. It means setting out an energy route map with timelines for the steady stream of work that is needed to give supply chain companies the confidence to invest. It means, as the STUC has highlighted, having a proper green industrial strategy—it is long awaited—that includes the sectors that are key to building Scotland’s manufacturing and supply chains, having the interventions and investment that need to be made to build capacity in those sectors and anchor them domestically and, crucially, creating jobs on fair work terms that are covered by collective bargaining agreements. It also means ensuring that the economic growth from renewables is inclusive and benefits all of Scotland.

If we consider the sectors that can tackle Scotland’s sluggish economic growth and create those greener, fairer, good, secure jobs, we know that all roads lead to renewables, but, sadly, those roads do not currently lead to every part of Scotland. If we are serious about a just transition

in which no worker, family or community is left behind, we need to get more serious about where those green jobs are created.

Dumfries and Galloway, which is my home region, has 3 per cent of Scotland's population but we generate 8 per cent of Scotland's renewable energy and we are home to 11 per cent of Scotland's more than 4,000 wind turbines. However, few of those renewable jobs are located in the region.

There are exceptions. There are innovative companies, such as Natural Power, which has a proven track record of running a high-tech international business from a rural location and supporting the local population. However, there is a need and there are opportunities to do an awful lot more. For example, the decommissioning of wind farms will significantly ramp up from 2028, when many first-generation developments will come to the end of their lifespan. It is an environmental contradiction that, although some parts of those wind turbines can be easily reused or recycled, the blades, which are made of reinforced polymer, have created a significant challenge.

The Scottish Government recognised that in September, when it agreed, as part of the onshore wind sector agreement with the industry, to deliver a specialist blade facility in Scotland for the decommissioning and recycling of old wind turbine blades. A cross-party group of MSPs and I have written to the cabinet secretary to make the case for that hub to be at Chapelcross in Dumfries and Galloway, which is the optimal location for Scotland's blade hub.

Using the former nuclear power station would be a visible example of a just transition in action, and it would fit in with the Government's commitment to the Borderlands inclusive growth deal, with its pledge to make Chapelcross a focal point for clean energy. The site is at the geographical centre of the on-and-offshore decommissioning pipeline, with major wind farms not only across South Scotland but in north Wales and Northern Ireland. There are transport links, with its close proximity to the M74 and the A75, and the major ports provide ease of access to—

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take a wee intervention?

Colin Smyth: If I have time.

Emma Harper: You mentioned the site at Chapelcross. I have been involved with the letter writing on that as well. Do you agree that highlighting the opportunities in South Scotland for a just transition demonstrates that a just transition is for the whole of Scotland and not just the north-east?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members should speak through the chair.

Colin Smyth: I agree that the just transition should be for the whole of Scotland but, so far, the south of Scotland has not benefited as much as it should have. As I have highlighted, there is an opportunity to do so by locating Scotland's blade hub at Chapelcross. It already has service land available via South of Scotland Enterprise and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.

The region is also the operational base of ReBlade, which is the UK's first blade-decommissioning company. That high-growth Scottish start-up would be an obvious anchor enterprise to lead Scotland's new blade hub. It is a great example of an indigenous innovation that was born out of the Scottish green energy sector. It is an existing supplier of blade services to major wind farm developers and turbine original equipment manufacturers. The company is already delivering contracts for its innovative work in turning those blades into public realm furniture. It has pioneered blade material repurposing research and development, it is a global leader in circular blade innovation, and it has established links with academic blade research and organisations, including the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland. The company already has existing specialist supply chains located in Dumfries and Galloway, which will be required to grow, and it forecasts that there will be 80 full-time jobs situated in Chapelcross by 2030 if we grab the opportunity.

I hope that, at the very least, the cabinet secretary will respond positively to the request in our letter to meet me and the cross-party MSPs who are based in Dumfries and Galloway to discuss the opportunities that locating Scotland's blade hub at Chapelcross would bring to the local economy.

I passionately believe that our net zero targets are not the barrier to economic growth that some claim, but that they are the very pathway to it. That must lead to every part of Scotland if we are serious about making the transition to net zero a genuinely just one.

15:57

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Energy—especially oil and gas—has been a big part of the Scottish economy in recent decades and, as we move towards using more renewable energy, Scotland has tremendous potential.

The green economy is not solely about energy, and we want the whole of our economy to become greener. However, energy is obviously a big part of it, and that will not happen automatically. We

need to invest now, but, sadly, the UK Government tends to have a very short-term outlook. It has cut national insurance in order to win the next election, but it has cut expenditure—especially capital expenditure—as a result. The UK is spending only about 3.1 per cent of gross domestic product on capital investment, which means that it is in the lowest quarter of 30 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries; generally, the UK ranks between 23rd and 27th out of 30 countries. It spends only 1 to 2 per cent of GDP on a just, green transition. It seems that the UK is falling behind larger competitors such as the United States and the European Union.

Brian Whittle: Does John Mason recognise that the UK is the only one of those countries that has cut its carbon emissions by half?

John Mason: I will speak about some other foreign examples in due course. I welcome any improvement by the UK and other countries but, to go back to the point about nuclear power that was made earlier, if that is included as cutting carbon emissions, the counting is being done very badly.

The result of low UK capital investment is a low capital budget for Scotland. As has been said, SPICe told us that there is a decrease next year of 1.2 per cent in cash terms, which equates to a 2.8 per cent decrease in real terms. Of course, that is using the GDP deflator, but real inflation is much higher than that, so the purchasing power has fallen by a lot more than 2.8 per cent. The vast bulk of our capital funding comes from Westminster—some £4.7 billion—whereas our limit for capital borrowing is less than 10 per cent of that. It has been £450 million per year for some time and, even with the updated fiscal agreement, that only takes us up to £458 million. Whether we use bonds or other forms of borrowing, that is still the limit.

The very restricted capital budget impacts on the electrification of rail, SNIB investment, improved housing capital and a host of other spending that would boost the economy in general and, specifically, the green economy in the longer term.

The Finance and Public Administration Committee is often critical of the fact that we do not talk about the national performance framework and national outcomes explicitly enough or often enough. Civil servants have told us that the NPF lies behind decision making and is usually more implicit than explicit. Let us remind ourselves that our overarching purpose is to focus on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for the whole of Scotland to flourish through increased wellbeing and sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The national outcome for the economy is that we have a globally competitive,

entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy. The relevant national indicators include international exporting, economic growth, carbon footprint, greenhouse gas emissions and income inequalities. The related sustainable development goals include SDG 7, on affordable and clean energy, and SDG 12, on responsible consumption and production.

Previously, when I was on the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee, it was clear that one of the huge challenges that we face is in storing energy. What happens when the wind does not blow or the sun does not shine? Cruachan and pump storage are great, but they only take us so far. That is why my gut instinct is that green hydrogen will be a great opportunity for Scotland and beyond. When we have excess wind, rather than turning off the turbines—

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

John Mason: If it is brief, yes.

Edward Mountain: I thank the member for giving way. I agree with you that hydrogen is a real opportunity for us, partly because it also means that we do not have to have pylons all the way across Scotland—we can have pipes instead. However, given that the Government has drawn back from its commitment to invest £100 million in hydrogen, how do you think we will achieve that?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that they need to speak through the chair.

John Mason: I will come back to my point that, if the UK restricts our capital investment, Scotland has very little room for manoeuvre, especially when some of the capital investment is already legally committed, so the space for moving around what we can do is very limited.

It is great that there is the opportunity to export hydrogen, as well as storing it for our own use. The costs of production are high at the moment, but it is surely likely that costs will come down as the technology advances. We know that there will also be export opportunities, with Germany, for one, looking to reduce its dependence on Russia.

Just the other week, in one of the rail magazines, I read that Alstom is producing hydrogen-powered trains for both Lombardy and the south of Italy. Today, in the same magazine, I was reading about a Spanish consortium that is developing the world's first hydrogen high-speed train. Nearer to home, we have the H100 project in Fife, and we look forward to seeing the results of that and other pilot projects.

There does not need to be any clash between supporting our green economy and continuing to support our tourism sector. I get emails from

around Scotland complaining about turbines—and perhaps, as Mr Mountain said, pylons, as well—and their claimed negative impact on the allegedly unspoilt countryside. However, for many, the wind farms are very attractive. Whitelee, near Eaglesham, is the UK's largest onshore wind farm, and a walk around there is a great experience. My father, as an electrical engineer, used to point out to us the beautiful pylons in the Highlands and how the wires curved around the valley.

I will skip the next bit of my notes, as I need to finish.

Finally, at a more local level, Scottish Enterprise makes the point in its briefing for today's debate that social enterprises are already delivering in our green economy. It gives examples of local organisations and points out that it has produced a toolkit for net zero, which aims to help social enterprises improve their environmental impact. I will close by mentioning a company in my local area that has achieved B Corporation certification, which is Dear Green Coffee, in the east end of Glasgow. That shows that companies can become more green and be very successful.

16:04

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate on an extremely important topic for Scotland as the world looks to transition to cleaner energy solutions. I will start with a brief moment of consensus: I am sure that we all agree that Scotland has some fantastic opportunities to benefit from the necessary move to a greener, renewable economy. We have a richness of natural resources that could, and should, put Scotland at the forefront of the green economy. However, the actions of the Scottish SNP-Green Government fall far short of the stated ambition that it is so keen to peddle. It puts me in mind of a quote from Milton Friedman, who said:

“One of the greatest mistakes is to judge policies and programmes by their intentions rather than their results.”

That encapsulates everything that has been wrong with the Scottish Government over the past 17 years. It is all about targets and objectives, without the Government ever coming up with a route map to achieving the desired effect. Outcomes are what matter. Without them, all that we have is a wish list that may as well have been born in the land of rainbows and unicorns.

With the Greens in tow, the green credentials of the Government have got worse, not better. Let us not forget that Patrick Harvie declared that, by 2030, Scotland was going to have 1 million homes that had been retrofitted with heat pumps. What a fantastic ambition—right up to the point where we highlighted that we were 22,500 engineers short,

and that they would have to be in place by 2028, which meant that they would have to be in education and training right then. In a written question to Patrick Harvie, I discovered that the Scottish Government does not even keep track of how many qualified engineers are currently working in the industry. How can we possibly plan to have the numbers we need if we do not know what number we have?

Patrick Harvie: Will the member reflect for a moment on the appallingly damaging signals that were sent to those who want to invest in the skills, supply chain and capacity for our heat in buildings programme when they saw the UK Government backtracking on, downgrading and diluting climate action, including action on heat in buildings? If we want the investment that is necessary to make these changes possible, at the scale and the pace that we want, we need to give the industry crystal clarity in order to make it worth its while to invest. Rishi Sunak blew a hole in that agenda.

Brian Whittle: In that answer, we see everything that is wrong with the minister's approach. He did exactly that: once he had realised that he could not reach his ambition, he backtracked and decided to bench his own target. Willie Rennie was quite right to point out that, in Scotland, to get the money through for the licences to put in heat pumps takes in the region of three to four months, whereas in England, it takes about five days. That is why Scotland's policy has failed.

It is simple: work out what has to happen to hit the targets—targets that, incidentally, the Parliament agrees with—and then put the building blocks in place so that those targets are achievable. I am a big fan of the approach of creating stretch targets and making them bold and even world leading, but that is not the end of the process. It is only the beginning. Unfortunately, it seems as though the thinking stopped at the targets and then it was off to celebrate at the wine bar.

Big decisions matter little if they are not followed up with a commitment to action. We saw that when the First Minister at the time, Alex Salmond, declared that Scotland was going to be the Saudi Arabia of wind. What an opportunity that was to ensure that we had the education in place, as well as the technology and engineering capacity, to deliver on that opportunity, but none of that happened. We imported all that technology, enriching other nations that had made plans and were ahead of us on the curve. We had some potential manufacturers that had intentions to develop wind farm manufacturing technology capability—BiFab and Ferguson Marine. Unfortunately, those opportunities did not come to

fruition. What did they have in common? Scottish Government intervention.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): It is important to bear in mind that the UK had a comparative advantage in offshore wind development in the 1970s and 1980s but, unfortunately, it did not take that opportunity. The manufacturing industry in Germany and Denmark became very strong and that remains the case to this day. The issue goes back way longer than the dates that the member has mentioned.

Brian Whittle: I love the way in which the SNP tries to find any strangled route to blame someone other than itself. Alex Salmond declared that the SNP Government was going to make Scotland the Saudi Arabia of wind power. The fact of the matter is that the member's Government has not done that.

As we look to transition from fossil fuels to a greener, more sustainable energy source, it is hugely important that we recognise three things. First, we will require the oil and gas sector for decades to come; secondly, we need the skill set that has been developed in that sector transitioning to the green economy; and, thirdly, we must ensure that our education system is developing the skill set that is required to deliver a just transition. Unfortunately, none of that is happening. The language that is used in the chamber by the SNP and the increasingly shrill and ill-informed Green Party is vilifying an oil and gas sector that, if we are not careful, will stop investing in Scotland.

There is clear evidence that the workers in the sector are already moving away. A recruitment agency told me that it is taking highly skilled workers from the oil and gas sector in Scotland and moving them to other oil-producing nations. Why would those workers stay in Scotland when they are having to pay for their own retraining to get jobs that pay far less? There is a gap between the highly paid skilled jobs that are available in the oil and gas sector and what is available in the green economy, especially when it comes to high-value jobs.

Yes, we need targets to develop a green economy, but, more important, we need policies that are backed up with actions that give us a clear direction for our skilled workers to make that move. We need to weave the green economy throughout our education system to show the huge opportunities that it can bring and we need to stop undermining our oil and gas sector before we just offshore that problem and end up importing more and more of our energy requirements. The SNP does not seem able to grasp that—

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Thank you, Mr Whittle. You must conclude.

Brian Whittle: —and the Greens just do not seem to have a grasp on reality.

16:12

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): The Highlands and Islands should become the heart and hub of renewable development in Scotland over the next 50 years—working with Aberdeen and other centres of excellence, of course. That is not Trumpian hyperbole, but a conclusion that can inescapably be drawn from the facts—not only the facts of existing developments in the Highlands over the past 20 or 30 years in various types of renewables, but the fact of the huge scale of planned investment over the coming decades, as, I am sure, the minister is extremely well aware.

The Highlands really is where it is going to happen, whether that be through massive grid upgrades, pumped storage projects, offshore and onshore wind, modern salmon farming, the Inverness and Cromarty green freeport development, Kishorn, tidal energy in the Pentland Firth, the constant array of exciting developments in Orkney, in particular, and in other islands as well, and the plans for Stornoway harbour.

The scale of development is quite immense; it is staggering, actually. The Highlands and Islands Enterprise five-year plan fleshes that out. I will give some examples.

Haventus Ltd owns Ardersier port, which was once the home of McDermott, Barmac and the largest fabrication centre in Scotland. The port has been a sleeping giant, and we have seen many false dawns, with potential developers coming and going. Haventus has come up with £300 million of investment for the port's development. Lewis Gillies, the chief executive officer of the company, showed me round the port a couple of months back. It is quite stupendous what the company is doing there. It has huge plans to extend its scheme in order to attract manufacturers of components of offshore wind equipment. I have known Lewis Gillies for some years. He will succeed—provided that he gets co-operation from the Government, which I will come on to.

Roy MacGregor's Global Energy Group is equally set to achieve great things with a huge manufacturing plant for subsea power cables, which Brian Whittle and Willie Rennie mentioned. That will be a key aspect of our succeeding. There is a shortage of cable manufacturing capacity globally, so we need to be part of that party in order to have a properly integrated supply chain.

The Japanese company Sumitomo Electric Industries has announced plans for a factory at Nigg. The Coire Glas and Red John pumped storage hydro schemes, along with the schemes

at four other sites in Scotland, which build on our two existing sites at Foyers and Cruachan, are enormous investments. Each such scheme usually involves investment of around £1 billion to £3 billion. The grid upgrade that is planned by SSE is, I believe, to the tune of £20 billion.

Bakkafrost is investing in modern salmon farming techniques and Stornoway harbour is set to welcome cruise liners, which will be the missing piece of the jigsaw and will provide a place for cruise liners to stop, as they circumnavigate the British coast. From the commercial aspect of the cruise liners' business, that has been a missing link. Of course, we also have Ali Ferguson doing great things at Kishorn.

I have mentioned some things that are happening, but an awful lot still needs to happen. I will make one general point. Much of the debate has been about defending or attacking the record of the Scottish Government or that of the UK Government. Those are political points and this is a political debate, so far be it from me to present myself as being on a higher plane than anybody else. However, political debate is not really the point, because the companies that I mentioned are going to do business not because somebody gives them a handout or a subsidy, but because they think that they can make a success of that business. I am not even sure that subsidy or financial support is necessarily what they want, anyway. Therefore, I just want to make a few general points about things that they do want.

Neil Gray: As I am originally from Orkney, it is very welcome to me to hear being played back Fergus Ewing's insights into success and competitive advantage in the Highlands and Islands, and the success that is already happening there on the renewable energy front.

The member is absolutely right that the needs of business must be addressed, and that that goes beyond subsidy. Actually, the most important things are the business conditions in which people operate and the investment certainty that is given. That is why I hope that the member will welcome the fact that we are producing a green industrial strategy to set out exactly that for those who are looking to invest in the supply chain, for example.

Fergus Ewing: Yes, I welcome that.

I hope that, as a humble back bencher, I might get a little bit of time back for that intervention, Presiding Officer.

We need more people and more homes, and we need proper transport links. It would be remiss of me not to mention dualling of the A9 and the A96. If we are to achieve all those things, we cannot continue with the transport system that we have, because it ain't good enough. I make that general plea, as members would expect of me.

Willie Rennie mentioned the streamlining of consents and of the licensing and regulatory regime. That is absolutely key, because there is a real risk that the process will take years, or decades. I have seen it happen. When I was energy minister, we very nearly got island connections—for which I pay tribute to Ed Davey—but, sadly, I am afraid that that was stymied by political intervention.

Therefore, my next suggestion—of course, I do not wish to be uncontroversial—is that we should have in Britain a standing committee that is comprised principally of the UK and Scottish Governments to drive forward those matters. They do not stop at the border but require action from both sides and from many public bodies—maybe too many. A standing committee would provide political oversight and drive. It could meet biannually—in Inverness, obviously, and maybe in London. To be serious, I suggest that it would provide focus and momentum, which we need in order to drive things forward. In politics, we move from one topic to another and things are quickly forgotten. I recommend that consideration be given to that idea.

I see—

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude, Mr Ewing.

Fergus Ewing: You have anticipated my words, Presiding Officer.

I hope that I have given some food for thought, and I wish the cabinet secretary well in what I found to be an absolutely fascinating and engrossing portfolio.

16:19

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I thank all the organisations that sent us briefings for the debate, challenging us to think differently about what our economy is for, about what a green economy includes and about the kinds of actions that we need to take to make it a reality.

The Scottish Greens are clear that the just transition that we need is not just an energy transition: it is not just a shift from polluting fossil fuels to clean renewables, and it is not just about replacing dirty energy with clean energy. It is a transformation of our economy and, therefore, of our society.

The transformation is a vital effort to create communities that are fairer, healthier, more empowered and more prosperous, and to ensure that our planet remains liveable for humans and other species for generations to come. That is the purpose of the flourishing momentum that is

driving Scotland's commitment to a green economy.

With that foundational purpose, it should be clear that we need to recognise the intertwined nature of social, environmental and green economy outcomes, and that we need to act accordingly. Scottish Greens have always been clear that social justice, environmental justice and economic justice are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing.

Our work to develop a green economy is not just about technological innovation and industrial transformation, although those matter, as we have heard. A green economy must be a pathway to more equal communities that have the powers and resources that they need to shape their own socioeconomic objectives. It is that emphasis that will be the measure of our success or otherwise in our commitment to a just transition—one that centres the voices and needs of communities and workers; that supports equality and inclusion; and that prioritises the wellbeing of our citizens and the sustainability of our planet, alongside decentralised economic development.

Of course, although the imperative to transition away from oil and gas is clear, given the climate crisis that is already devastating communities here and around the world, it presents us with significant opportunities. We have already heard about the substantial increase in jobs in the renewables sector—by more than half in 2021 alone—and the potential for more secure, well-paid and highly skilled jobs in energy, as well as in agriculture, nature, construction and transport. We must also recognise that there will be low-carbon jobs beyond those sectors—in sectors that are vital to our wellbeing as humans, such as care and creativity.

Our economic development activities and investment must align with social and environmental wellbeing. The “Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan 2020-2025”, with its pipeline of nearly £90 billion of green investment over the next three years, is welcome. However, we must ensure that such plans also deliver on gender equality and inclusion objectives. As Close the Gap has highlighted, our current approach is “gender-blind” and risks reinforcing unequal structures and practices.

We must understand the symbiotic relationship between public investment and the just transition to net zero, and we must see that as underpinning the forthcoming green industrial strategy. The strategy must be more than a plan; it must identify and channel actions to take advantage of the economic opportunities for Scotland in energy, manufacturing, house building, food production and more. Public investment is the catalyst for our

social and environmental goals, as the cabinet secretary identified.

In this context, the UK Government's failure to match the ambition of, and the action that has been taken by, the US and European Union with, respectively, the Inflation Reduction Act and the green new deal is a major barrier to progress. It constrains our ability to rise to the challenges that we face in Scotland to deal with the climate crisis and build the new society with care, equality and opportunity at its heart, and to secure Scotland's place as a world leader, with all the advantages that that affords, in our just transition journey. I hope that we see the investment that we need from future UK Governments.

Despite those limitations, however, Scotland remains steadfast in our commitment to climate action, with significant investment planned in the coming year. We know that we can enhance our lives without disrupting the planet's life-sustaining processes. Our communities need to see the benefits of the opportunities that are available—from clean air and warm homes to good jobs and healthy food.

Therefore, all the practices and approaches that we develop must be genuinely sustainable. They can help us to replace precarious, repetitive, unfulfilling or dangerous jobs, improve working conditions and work satisfaction, and support community empowerment and wealth building. Alongside that, we should develop and implement the right regulation, monitoring and assessment not only of our practices and processes, but of our institutions and governance structures. Tweaking around the edges of the status quo will not do.

We must lift our sights, remind ourselves that strategic planning and long-term thinking are required, and remember that our communities and workers have extraordinary skills, creativity and capacity to change.

I echo Jackie Dunbar's passionate call for Aberdeen—I would say the whole of the north-east—to be the driver of Scotland's green economy and sustainable future. I pay special tribute to the excellent work of the just transition lab at the University of Aberdeen, as a model of interdisciplinary working that brings together social, environmental and economic understanding in a way that we need to replicate across Government and wider society.

Our pursuit of a just transition goes beyond mere economic realignment: it is a call for synergistic integration of social, environmental and green economy outcomes into the fabric of our future.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Chapman. You must conclude.

Maggie Chapman: The time for decisive action is now. Together, we can propel Scotland towards that future.

16:25

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I will address two things today—first, the ScotWind leases; secondly, the opportunities that community energy can deliver.

Like other members, I cannot comprehend why the Scottish Government set an arbitrary maximum for bids for ScotWind projects. It was absolutely senseless. The maximum was well below what was bid in later international auctions. The Scottish Government massively undervalued Scotland's natural resources. Since the ScotWind auctions, three offshore wind auctions have been completed—two in the United States and one in England—and Common Weal estimates that they raised up to 40 times as much as the ScotWind auctions. The UK Crown Estate ran a similar auction in 2022 with annual fees rather than a block sum and without an arbitrary bid cap. If Scotland had followed a similar model, ScotWind would have raised £28 billion over the next decade—enough to cover the budget shortfall and more than £1 billion a year to invest in our public services and a just transition.

As other members have said, very few supply chain jobs have come to Scotland from those auctions. Sarah Boyack quoted the STUC, which made it clear that the Scottish Government was quick to state its ambitions for economic benefits but

“without setting the necessary policies and funding to realise them.”

There is no industrial strategy. We see workers who are in danger of losing their jobs at Grangemouth. That is not a just transition.

It is a disgrace that the Scottish Government has squandered the opportunity that ScotWind brought. If that was not bad enough, we now learn that the sums that the Government raised from ScotWind will be used to fill a black hole in its budget that was created by its mismanagement. It is disingenuous of the cabinet secretary to criticise those who are not yet in Government and so do not have the tools and levers that the Government has when the Scottish Government has squandered its tools and levers.

I contrast this Government's incompetence with what communities have achieved. Communities that have had the opportunity to develop their own renewables have built their local economies and laid down the foundations to address depopulation. Energy companies that develop renewables will create community funds, but the amounts that are given are paltry and they often

come with caveats that prevent communities from investing in what they need. Assisting communities to develop their own renewable generation means that the profits stay local and the communities have control over how they are spent.

I will give members some examples. Point and Sandwick Trust found that community returns from community-owned wind farms are 34 times the standard industry community benefit payment. The figure is £170,000 per megawatt per annum, compared with the £5,000 per megawatt per annum that would otherwise have been received in community benefit. On the Orkney island of Westray, a 0.9MW community-owned turbine has returned to the community approximately £299,057 per megawatt per annum, and it is expected to contribute £6.8 million to the community over its 25-year lifespan.

The Knoydart hydro scheme, which is owned by the community foundation that owns the Knoydart estate, is not connected to the national grid, so it supplies its energy to the 120 local residents using a 280kW hydropower system, which was recently upgraded. That has allowed a new micro brewery to be connected, which will create new local jobs, and new property developments will be able to benefit from the electricity. The lower energy prices that the scheme charges the community mean that the micro brewery is able to thrive and is not paying the colossal energy costs that other micro breweries have to pay.

In Kinlochbervie, there is a wholly locally owned hydroelectric scheme. It is estimated that it has saved more than 13,000 tonnes of carbon emissions and contributed £1 million in community benefit over its lifetime. Investment has been made in training local people in maintenance of the scheme, which has created local skills and ensured that the community has energy security.

Those examples and the many others contrast starkly with the Government's efforts and its management of resources. It is time that we invested in communities and enabled them to develop their own projects. That will not only help us to meet our targets but provide investment in the economies of our local communities.

16:31

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): This debate on the development of our green economy is important not only because, collectively, we must contribute to tackling the climate emergency but because a green economy brings huge economic and social benefits, and there will be more such benefits as we develop that economy, whether lower energy costs, better health, less pollution or more job creation.

The green economy development that there has been so far and that we want there to be in the future has been and will be mostly led by the private sector. That is the reality. However, appropriate strategic public investment and policy direction are extremely important. Examples include the measures that the Parliament has taken in recent years, the development of the First Minister's investor panel, the focus on enhancing the supply chain and creating opportunities, and UK Government subsidy funding through things such as the current contract for difference. All those things matter, as do, internationally, the Inflation Reduction Act in America and the European green deal.

As I said, the change that we want will be led by the private sector. When reflecting ahead of today's debate, I thought about two different roles that I played in the private sector before I became an MSP, and about why they matter. About 15 years ago, I worked for one of Scotland's wave energy companies, which was staffed largely by people from the oil and gas sector. I emphasise the point that has been made about how that expertise is vital for the development of our renewables capability. In that company, there was huge technological innovation and development, with remarkable people looking for solutions and not being perturbed by problems. We were moving towards the commercialisation of that technology.

Many lessons were learned about such technological development, and we should think about those as we go forward so that we make the most of the opportunities that are before us. Those opportunities might relate to current tidal development, to the growing capacity of our hydrogen sector or to companies such as Gravitricity, in my constituency, which is looking to use the power of gravity to create storage and then release it when the market needs it.

We have a comparative advantage in all those areas of innovation—including sustainable aviation fuel, which has been mentioned—and we must not lose that. That is why support is vital. As I said earlier, in the 1970s, the UK was at the forefront of onshore wind innovation, but we let that go. Companies elsewhere, particularly those in Denmark and Germany, grew their capacity, and now they have such strong market power that, for the foreseeable future, onshore wind technology will be manufactured in those countries. Through strategic public investment and policy, we need to create the conditions here to ensure that companies invest in our renewables development and potential. What is happening at the moment in that regard is really exciting.

Sarah Boyack: I am a bit unnerved, because I have agreed with most of what the member has said so far. However, will he reflect on the issue

about consenting, particularly for offshore wind? I know that, for a lot of companies, some of which are based in our constituency, it takes two years to get consent in Canada but about eight years in Scotland. That is something that we could work together to change.

Ben Macpherson: I absolutely agree. I raised those points at committee yesterday and I will conclude on them shortly.

I want to go back to the second role that I had in the private sector before becoming an MSP. The period when I worked in this role is an important aspect, as we can learn lessons from it to make sure that we maximise the opportunities. About 10 years ago, I was involved as a solicitor in helping to finance onshore wind. That demonstrated to me the excellent professional services that we have in Scotland for renewables, as well as the more manufacturing-based skills and opportunities. I worked in the financing of such wind farms in a thriving time when we had the renewable obligation certificate. Unfortunately, a Conservative Party manifesto commitment in 2016—which I think the Conservatives would now, in good conscience, regret—removed subsidy support from onshore wind at a time when the industry was about to reach a position of not needing subsidy. It was such an illogical mistake. We need to learn from that as we move to offshore wind.

That brings me to contracts for difference. It is widely recognised that the auction round 5 was not well considered by the UK Government. As we move to auction round 6, I hope that there will be an increased auction strike price so that Scottish offshore projects are eligible for the auction. The UK Government is giving a signal on that, and I hope that it bears fruit, because there is such an opportunity in offshore wind.

I will conclude on the point that Sarah Boyack rightly raised about consenting. This is an ask of the Scottish Government. From my experience and my constituency casework for a range of different organisations, I know that we have to improve the consenting timelines in Scotland. I know that the Government is attentive to that. I see that as the most prominent area in which we could lose out on opportunities if we do not make improvements in the period ahead. We need resource and we need to build a skills base, and I welcome the Government's attention to that.

Collectively, we have huge opportunities, and we need to learn from the mistakes of the past. Let us work together, create as many jobs as possible and make the social, economic and climate difference that we can.

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

16:37

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

Neil Gray talked about the enormous economic opportunity, which is a point that was also made by John Mason and Brian Whittle. To achieve that opportunity, we need to ensure that we are able to deliver and not just talk.

Fergus Ewing was right to highlight the issues around oil and gas, and Michelle Thomson said that we must not fall off a cliff edge, and I agree entirely with that. The cabinet secretary's response to that is generally to talk about a just transition. However, many workers want to know what a just transition is. It cannot be just words. Coming from a mining community, I know what happens when workers are not supported, and we are still paying the price for that in such communities.

Willie Rennie talked about the Energy Park Fife and BiFab, up at Methil. There is a real concern there, and I am not sure why those yards were not included in the Forth green freeport. The yards at Methil and, indeed, Arnish are now at a major disadvantage. I hope that the Government is well aware of that point and is going to take some action on it.

Douglas Lumsden said that the Scottish Government should do more. I agree that both Governments should do more. Crucially, the people of Scotland want our Governments to work together. People are sick and tired of both Governments point scoring and fighting with each other instead of putting the interests of the people of Scotland first—a point that Fergus Ewing made. It has been a good debate, but we need actions that speak louder than words.

Yesterday, I met workers from Grangemouth. They also want a just transition, but their future looks bleak. I hope that the minister will say what actions are being taken to support those workers and their industry.

Ultimately, the debate is about how we prepare for a future that is fast approaching—a future that demands a change in thinking, attitude and action. My interest in the debate comes not only from my concerns about the increasingly harmful impact of the climate crisis on our planet, but from the work that I undertook for my proposed member's bill to introduce a Passivhaus-equivalent energy efficiency target for all new-build housing in Scotland, which the Government has adopted.

Throughout that work, I had the opportunity to meet a range of stakeholders, many of whom work in the industries that we are discussing, and to hear from them not only on my proposals but on the issues that affect them and their future successes. A point that came up time and again—which I have raised in the chamber time and

again—is the shortage of skilled workers in construction and across the Scottish economy. When it comes to skills, training and education, there is the real world, and then there is the SNP Government world—a world of strategies, plans and wishful thinking but little action and delivery.

Our colleges are in a state of paralysis and locked in industrial action. There are job losses and staff morale is at rock bottom. There is little evidence that colleges have the resources to deliver on all the SNP plans and strategies, so where will the skilled labour come from to fill the jobs that the Government says will materialise with all the new opportunities? Scotland's industries would collapse tomorrow if they were not able to access skills and trades from abroad. Meanwhile, education is going backwards, resulting in school pupils not getting the knowledge and qualifications that they require to advance to the apprenticeships that exist. That is why we have a skills shortage in near enough every part of our economy.

Members do not have to take my word for that; they just need to speak to employers anywhere in Scotland and ask them what the main challenges are. They tell us that the main challenge is the inability to recruit skilled labour. We must move beyond the rhetoric and give our children an education, skills and the chance to gain quality jobs for the future. Otherwise, those pupils will not get that access.

The Scottish Government is correct to assert that a just transition is vital to tackling the climate emergency and building a secure future for the Scottish economy. However, the future workforce sits alongside that. If our colleges are buckling under the pressure, our schools are in serious trouble and children are not getting opportunities, are we building a workforce for the future or are we dependent on bringing that workforce from abroad?

Patrick Harvie: It comes down to the case that we are making for large-scale investment. I hope that we have common ground with Scottish Labour, which will press an incoming Government to bring the scale of investment that is required. However, we should also press that Government on restoring freedom of movement, because that, too, is a critical part of addressing the skills shortage in many parts of our economy.

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, Mr Rowley, as we are over time.

Alex Rowley: I think that even the Conservatives in the chamber will accept that we will have a change of Government. That Government will bring investment, but it is crucial that we use the powers that we have in the Scottish Parliament to tackle the skills shortages and start to give every child in this country the

opportunity of skills, a decent education and the opportunity of a well-paid job. That has to be our priority.

16:44

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I will start on a note of consensus. All parties in the chamber welcome the opportunity to develop Scotland's green economy, want to celebrate its current strength and want it to continue to grow and create secure and well-paid jobs for the future while helping us to meet our ambitious climate change targets. On those points, we all agree.

However, it is regrettable that, in many of the speeches that we have heard from members on the SNP benches, the focus seemed to be not on addressing what the Scottish Government is doing but, rather, on criticising the record of the UK Government. As Brian Whittle reminded us, under a Conservative Government, the UK is making faster progress on reducing carbon emissions than any other country in the G20.

John Mason: Will Murdo Fraser give way?

Murdo Fraser: In a second.

We are the first country in the G20 to halve our carbon emissions. We are genuinely a world leader among major nations.

John Mason: However well the UK is doing, would it not be doing better if there was more capital investment?

Murdo Fraser: I wish that, instead of being quite so grudging, Mr Mason would at least celebrate how well the UK is doing. We have to look at what other countries are doing, too, and we are leading the world. Why can we not just celebrate that?

Those ambitious targets are, of course, being backed up with hard cash. Back in September, we had an announcement by the Prime Minister of £2 billion for the green climate fund, which is the single biggest commitment of its kind that any UK Government has ever made.

We heard earlier in the debate from Mr Simpson, who, with his usual forensic and laser-like focus on numbers, set out all the cuts in the Scottish Government's budget, one after the other, in areas in relation to this portfolio. There was a very interesting exchange between the cabinet secretary and Mr Simpson about the overall size of the Scottish budget. Mr Simpson quite rightly quoted the Scottish Parliament information centre briefing, which shows that the Scottish Government's budget is up, in both real terms and cash terms, since last year, which was very helpfully confirmed by Michelle Thomson through her intervention from the back benches. Even the

SNP's own back benchers do not agree with the cabinet secretary's analysis or the Scottish Government's position.

Michelle Thomson: I am enjoying the joke that Mr Fraser is making—I know that it is a joke—but let us be absolutely clear that 0.9 per cent is not something to write home about. Let us be honest about that.

Murdo Fraser: I say to Michelle Thomson that it is still a real-terms increase. I am glad that she recognises that, even if members of the SNP front bench do not.

As we heard in the debate, a lot of good work is going on and there is a lot of expansion, particularly in offshore wind developments around the UK coast and particularly here in Scotland. The UK Government has invested £110 million in offshore wind manufacturing in Ross-shire, creating jobs and supporting a vital industry. That expansion is supported by a tax and regulatory regime that is designed to encourage investment.

We heard from SNP members about the contracts for difference policy. Mr Macpherson, for example, referred to it. That policy is, of course, there to ensure value for money for energy bill payers. The UK Government can hardly be criticised for trying to drive the cost for offshore wind down as low as possible under contracts for difference. It is something of an irony that the very people in this chamber who constantly demand more action to reduce energy bills are exactly the same people who criticise the UK Government for trying to do just that through the contracts for difference regime.

Neil Gray: Will Murdo Fraser give way?

Murdo Fraser: If I have time, I will give way again.

The Presiding Officer: There is no extra time.

Murdo Fraser: I will give way anyway.

Neil Gray: Murdo Fraser's generosity is noted and appreciated.

A balance has to be struck in the allocation rounds for contracts for difference. I hope that we will see an increase in the quantum for AR6, as there has been an increase in the strike price.

However, for Murdo Fraser's line to be consistent, he must be incredibly disappointed at the strike price that has been achieved for nuclear and, as we have heard this week, the extra £1 billion that is having to go into the Sizewell C project, which will increase bill payers' costs incredibly.

Murdo Fraser: I gently say to the cabinet secretary that he needs to sit down with an energy economist and discuss with him the whole-system

cost of different types of energy production. When we take an intermittent source of energy, such as wind, we have to factor in the additional costs for storage, transmission and, potentially, back-up from fossil fuel-burning stations, whereas nuclear provides base load and is therefore in a different category. Look at the whole-system cost, cabinet secretary, and it gives a different position.

Let us move on and consider ScotWind. Rhoda Grant reminded us of the scandal of the ScotWind round. Some estimates say that the Scottish taxpayer has lost out on £60 billion of potential income because of the Government's mishandling of the ScotWind bidding process. Yesterday, we learned from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance that £750 million has been taken from the money that was raised by ScotWind to fill the black hole in the Scottish Government's budget for the coming year. That is a one-off capital windfall being used to fill a revenue black hole. For years, we have sat in the chamber and been lectured to by SNP members about previous Westminster Governments—Conservative and Labour—not using oil revenues to establish an oil fund for the future. They are now doing exactly the same with the ScotWind money. They are using it to fill a black hole in the budget instead of building for the future.

I am very short on time, but I will try to cover a few more points briefly. I am sorry that we do not see more investment in new nuclear, as Douglas Lumsden said. The new technology is coming on. Small modular reactors are being developed by the likes of Rolls-Royce, and they have a real opportunity in Scotland. Here, in Scotland, we have expertise in the nuclear power industry that is unsurpassed in many other parts of the world. What a shame that we are missing out on those opportunities and those jobs.

There is still a role for oil and gas, as Douglas Lumsden and Fergus Ewing said. We will continue to need oil and gas, even after 2045, and it will still have a role with carbon capture and storage. We should not be turning our back on it as the SNP and Labour would do.

We also need a proper workforce plan. Alex Rowley and Brian Whittle made the point that we will need many more skilled workers, but the Government has no plan to train them. Where will the 23,000 additional trained technicians come from to install domestic heating systems, for example? We have no idea.

There are big gaps in the Government's plan. Our approach is summed up in the amendment in the name of my colleague Douglas Lumsden, and I am pleased to support it.

16:51

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): There has been a little bit of fairly predictable knockabout stuff in today's debate, as usual. Perhaps it is inevitable—we all do it sometimes. However, I will start by stepping out of character a little bit and agreeing with something that Fergus Ewing said—yes, it happens once in a while. Fergus Ewing was right when he said that those who simply make speeches saying how wonderful or awful the Scottish or UK Government is and that kind of simplistic knockabout stuff are not rising to the occasion. The debate was intended to set out the urgent need for a scale of investment, both state and private, that would rival the likes of the European green deal and the US Inflation Reduction Act 2020.

Some members did rise to the occasion and engaged with the deep question—not just about what is happening with Scottish Government or UK Government policy, but about the context of the UK economy. Could Scotland do it better? Will an incoming UK Government do it better? That is about the scale of the challenge and the investment that will be necessary if we are going to recognise that addressing climate change is not just a necessity—the greatest challenge of our age—but an enormous opportunity for Scotland. That is why it is one of the three defining missions of this Government.

The cabinet secretary highlighted some hugely positive developments, and I will do the same. In the 20 years that I have been an MSP, we have seen a revolution in renewable electricity. Twenty years ago, a little more than 300 sites were generating electricity from renewable sources in Scotland. That compares with 130,000 sites today. In the next 20 years, other areas, such as green hydrogen, have the potential to mirror that scale of growth. To deliver that, we need not just investment but the right environment for the relevant businesses to grow in the right way and respond to those challenges. That means clarity, stability and long-term horizons. That is at the heart of what I am seeking to do in my portfolio in heat and buildings, to support Scotland to transition away from a volatile fossil fuel market to a clean energy future.

At the end of last year, we consulted on a proposed legal backstop for decarbonising our homes and buildings, which sent a clear signal of intent that all homes and buildings will use clean heating by 2045. The response to that has been positive. The chief executive of the UK Climate Change Committee called it a template that could be followed by other parts of the UK. The Aldersgate Group, whose members include National Grid, Scottish Power and Lloyds Bank,

welcomed the clarity that our proposals provide and the potential benefits to the economy of upgrading our housing stock. That contrasts clearly with the damaging signals that the UK Government has sent out.

There is, of course, far more to do. We need to continue to grow our skills, our capacity and our supply chain. We are already making changes to improve the application process, which Willie Rennie referred to, and there will be further developments on that later this year. Our proposed heat in buildings bill will also further increase the investment that has been happening, which has led, for example, to the employment of 1,800 people in a heat pump factory in Scotland, as a result of a choice by a global business to base that part of its operation here.

Across Scotland, a great many businesses, new and old, are seizing the positive opportunities that come from manufacturing the products that will be needed, skilling up their workforce and investing for the future. The bill will create—

Brian Whittle: Will the minister give way?

Patrick Harvie: Yes.

Brian Whittle: I am grateful to the minister for giving way. Does he recognise that there is a gap between the high skill set that exists in the oil and gas sector and the skill set in the renewables sector, and that, if we do not bridge that gap, we will lose that highly skilled workforce abroad?

Patrick Harvie: We are already seeing people transition across—there are many examples of that—and we should support them to do so. When it comes to the heat in buildings agenda, the gap in skills between people who install fossil fuel systems and those who will install, or are already installing, heat pumps is relatively small and that can be met easily, quickly and cheaply.

The opportunities across our economy are huge, and we have a great deal to build on, whether that is in decarbonising our homes, which I mentioned, in onshore and offshore wind or in green hydrogen. Several members have mentioned some of the issues around planning and consenting. A great deal of work is already being done on that, some of it under the auspices of the onshore wind sector deal, and there is a great deal more besides. I am sure that the minister with the relevant portfolio responsibilities will want to update colleagues on that as it continues to progress.

We need the UK Government to share that ambition as well. We have seen other Governments seek to rise to the challenges that exist in this area. I have mentioned the Inflation Reduction Act, as a result of which \$369 billion is being provided in tax credits, subsidies and loans.

Through its green deal industrial plan, the EU has pledged to mobilise at least €1 trillion of investment to build industrial capacity in green technologies and accelerate the transition to net zero. Scotland could and should be among the countries that are responding at that scale.

Sarah Boyack: In the context of that process, will the minister reference Grangemouth, given the new opportunities for existing staff that the green transition, and the opportunity to use that site for that transition, will provide?

Patrick Harvie: Yes, indeed. A strong case for Grangemouth has been made by a number of members. The workforce there needs investment in its future. Information on that has come into the public domain and has appeared on Scottish Government social media during the course of the debate. I do not have that information right in front of me at the moment, but during the day more will have come into the public domain about the work that is taking place there.

What do we have as part of the UK, instead of having the ability to make macroeconomic choices about the scale of investment for ourselves? We have a Prime Minister who sees climate change as the latest front in a culture war that he wants to provoke. His notorious speech in September signalled to householders and businesses alike that climate change is basically dispensable and that the economic opportunity of net zero is to be ignored.

The former chairman of the UK Government's own net zero review, Chris Skidmore, who is departing Parliament in dismay at the Government's climate reversals, said that diluting green policies would

“cost the UK jobs, inward investment, and future economic growth that could have been ours by committing to the industries of the future”.

He also said:

“Rishi Sunak still has time to think again and not make the greatest mistake of his premiership, condemning the UK to missing out on what can be the opportunity of the decade”.

I think that he was right. His position contrasts with the arguments of the Conservative Party's net zero scrutiny group and Mr Sunak's policy reversals. Indeed, this week it has been reported that the UK Government's net zero secretary has taken cash from a funder of climate denial lobbyists. The UK Government's position is a mess.

Therefore, attention must turn to a change in Government and the opportunity that that might offer to develop an approach that stands comparison with what we see in the USA and the European Union.

Back in 2021, the UK Labour Party seemed up for that, proposing a £28 billion annual green prosperity plan, which would have been additional investment from the outset. That would have been extremely welcome. I hope that Labour MSPs will put pressure on the UK Government to stick with that original plan of £28 billion additional investment from the outset.

The First Minister has engaged with that. In his letter to Keir Starmer, he argued that

“Scotland’s transition to Net Zero represents a huge ... opportunity for the country, but one which ... requires action by both governments”—

so that, for example,

“other parts of the UK can benefit from Scotland’s huge renewable energy resources”.

However, hardly a week now goes by without more chipping away at the £28 billion commitment. A funding commitment that was additional is now the total commitment. First, it was a pressing priority, then Labour said that it might be achieved by halfway through the parliamentary session and then it was to be the second half of the parliamentary session—it could be as late as 2029.

We will support Labour’s amendment, but we do so on the basis that Labour must expect that its support for our motion signals its support for that full £28 billion of additional investment that is outlined in our motion—

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, minister.

Patrick Harvie: —and that Parliament expects it to support the delivery of that package.

In closing, let us recognise that even that level of investment is at the bottom end of the 1 to 2 per cent figure that the United Kingdom Committee on Climate Change has recommended and that it would not bring us up to the level of investment in the economy overall that we have seen in countries such as the US and across the EU—

The Presiding Officer: I must ask you to conclude now, minister.

Patrick Harvie: I support the motion in the name of the cabinet secretary and send that clear signal not only to the current UK Government—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister.

Patrick Harvie: —at the tail end of its term, but to those who are incoming as well.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on investing in Scotland’s green economy.

Business Motion

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-11952, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 30 January 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scotland’s Place in the European Union

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members’ Business

Wednesday 31 January 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Constitution, External Affairs and Culture; Justice and Home Affairs

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members’ Business

Thursday 1 February 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister’s Questions

followed by Members’ Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Education and Skills

followed by Finance and Public Administration Committee Debate: Scottish Budget 2024-25

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.15 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 6 February 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Bankruptcy and Diligence (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Bankruptcy and Diligence (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 7 February 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy;
Finance and Parliamentary Business

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 8 February 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Budget (Scotland) (No. 3) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 29 January 2024, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first is, that amendment S6M-11945.2, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11945, in the name of Neil Gray, on investing in Scotland's green economy, 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 the digital voting system.

17:02

Meeting suspended.

17:05

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on amendment S6M-11945.2, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11945, in the name of Neil Gray, on investing in Scotland's green economy. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

The Minister for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am not sure whether my vote has been recorded.

The Presiding Officer: Just give us a moment, Ms Hyslop.

I confirm that your voted has been recorded.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Haicro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 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)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-11945.2, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, is: For 30, Against 89, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-11945.1, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11945, in the name of Neil Gray, on investing in Scotland's green economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms White. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Doris. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 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)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 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)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)

Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Doney, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-11945.1, in the name of Sarah Boyack, is: For 87, Against 31, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-11945, in the name of Neil Gray, on investing in Scotland's green economy, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Kerr. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 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)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-11945, in the name of Neil Gray, on investing in Scotland's green economy, as amended, is: For 88, Against 29, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament considers that a just transition is vital to both tackling the climate emergency and building a strong and sustainable economy; welcomes the growing strength of Scotland's green economy, with more than 42,000 FTE jobs supported by Scotland's renewable energy sector, and the recent Climate Emergency Skills

Action Plan report that identified almost £90 billion of green investments currently under way or planned to commence in the next three years; agrees that the energy transition and associated supply chain development has the potential to help grow a fair, green wellbeing economy in Scotland; recognises the vital role of public investment in continuing to deliver a just transition to net zero and that the forthcoming Green Industrial Strategy will identify and focus action on the most significant economic opportunities for Scotland; is deeply concerned by the UK Government's failure to keep pace, with overall capital investment levels in decline; understands that declining levels of investment in the UK are in stark contrast to initiatives to increase public investment elsewhere, such as the Inflation Reduction Act in the USA and the European Green Deal; recognises the limits that this lack of action at the UK level imposes on Scotland, and that in spite of this, £2.7 billion will be invested by the Scottish Government in activities that will have a positive impact on the delivery of its climate change goals in 2024-25; notes that the Climate Change Committee has estimated that 1-2% of GDP needs to be invested in the transition annually until 2050; calls, therefore, on the UK Government to urgently increase green investment to at least £28 billion a year to ensure that Scotland and the rest of the UK can deliver a just transition to net zero; recognises the economic damage and challenges created by the fiscal policy choices of the UK Government, and the impact that this could have on investment in the green economy; notes the Labour Party's Green Prosperity Plan; agrees that a cross-government mission is needed to deliver clean energy by 2030, and acknowledges the economic opportunities that this could create for Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Native Woodlands

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-11728, in the name of Ariane Burgess, on celebrating Scotland's national native woodlands. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the 10th anniversary, on 29 January 2024, of Scots pine becoming Scotland's national tree; understands that Caledonian pinewoods are unique to Scotland, and are the natural home of Scots pine; considers that Scotland is globally important for Caledonian pinewoods and Atlantic rainforest, and therefore has a special responsibility to protect and restore them; understands that both types of woodland support a wealth of biodiversity and can help mitigate against the impacts of climate change; notes the belief that browsing by deer and the spread of invasive non-native species means that many Caledonian pinewoods and Atlantic rainforests will not survive without urgent action; believes that these pressures impact all native woodlands across Scotland; notes the support for landscape-scale deer management and targeted grant funding to enable their restoration; further notes the view that Forestry and Land Scotland should continue to take a leadership role in this restoration, especially in the removal of invasive non-native species such as rhododendron; notes what it sees as the growing number of private landowners involved in pinewood and rainforest restoration, including at Glen Loyne in East Glen Quoich, Highlands, and thanks environmental groups like Trees for Life, Woodland Trust Scotland and Plantlife, as well as community groups such as Arkaig Community Forest in the Highlands, Langholm Initiative in the Borders, Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust, Argyll Coast and Communities Trust, and others in the Community Woodlands Association, for their efforts to restore Scotland's native woodlands.

17:14

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I thank my fellow MSPs for joining me in the debate this evening. I also thank the organisations that are mentioned in my motion, which are all working passionately to protect and restore our precious native woodlands: Trees for Life, the Woodland Trust Scotland, Plantlife International, Arkaig Community Forest, the Langholm Initiative, Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust, Argyll and the Isles Coast and Communities Trust, and the Community Woodlands Association as a whole.

We have just faced two back-to-back storms that wreaked havoc on people's travel, businesses and lives, and which even took human lives. Those were not the first such storms and they will certainly not be the last, so we should remember that healthy native woodlands help to protect us from extreme weather events by protecting soils from erosion and communities from flooding.

Native woodland restoration is not something that is “nice to have”; it is an essential part of the response to the climate emergency that is playing out right in front of our eyes. This evening’s debate marks the 10th anniversary of the Scots pine becoming our country’s national tree. That was announced at a parliamentary reception on 29 January 2014, following a nationwide consultation in which thousands of Scots backed our native pine for that honour.

That tree is a symbol of Scotland, with a rich and storied history. Pine candles were used in wedding rituals in fishing communities, as they were believed to bring prosperity and luck. In Orkney, people would circle a pine candle three times around a mother and newborn child. Scots pines mark the burial places of warriors, heroes and chieftains. When wearing tartan was outlawed after the Jacobite uprising, the MacGregor clan wore the Scots pine as their plant badge in a gesture of defiance.

As the largest and longest-lived tree in the Caledonian forest, Scots pine is a symbol of durability. As the Gaelic proverb says, “Cruaidh mar am fraoch, buan mar an giuthas”—hard as the heather, lasting as the pine. However, Caledonian pinewoods now cover less than 2 per cent of their original area in Scotland, and scientists say that many of those remnants may not survive without urgent action.

Turning to Scotland’s temperate rainforest, the situation looks similar. That beautiful ecosystem, which survives in fragments along the west coast and on the inner isles, covers less than a fifth of its former area. Both types of woodland support a wealth of biodiversity and can help to reduce the impact of climate change. Globally, Scotland is one of the last bastions of those important habitats, so we have a special responsibility to protect and restore them. Fortunately, many community groups and third sector organisations are making a valiant effort to do just that.

Early in my time as an MSP, I visited Arkaig community forest, which boasts both Caledonian pinewoods and temperate rainforest. I was so impressed by the multifaceted projects, which include a native tree nursery, a community venison project and a forest school. More recently, the organisation’s young chairperson, Liam McLoone, wrote to me, explaining how the woods are “bursting with opportunities”, to use his words. He said:

“We regularly visit our woods, both individually and as a community, to experience the wildlife within and connect with our heritage. Our woods also contribute towards our community in the form of timber production, venison produce, craft materials, ecotourism and conservation jobs. I got involved with our community wood to learn more about the forest, and I am proud now to be involved in the management and restoration of that iconic place.”

That demonstrates how important people are to our native woodlands and how important our native woodlands are to people. However, without increased efforts to save them, they could be lost forever. A recent RSPB Scotland report found that 40 per cent of our rainforest shows a very high level of grazing, mainly by deer, which prevents or limits its long-term survival. Deer also pose a serious threat to Scots pine, especially now that many of the fences that were built to protect those woods in the 1990s have fallen into disrepair.

I was heartened by the commitment last year from the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands that, by 2026, we will have

“Taken steps to further protect and restore our iconic Atlantic rainforests and ancient Caledonian pinewoods”.

I know that the groups and organisations that I have mentioned would like those steps to include exploring new technologies including drone and thermal surveys, development of a community-based approach to deer stalking, and adding deer management as a cross-compliance condition for farm support.

Landscape-scale deer management is the all-important tool in the woodland recovery toolbox. In Strathspey and upper Deeside, land managers worked together on deer management across the landscape, thereby allowing the pine woods to recover without the need for fences to remain in place.

That is why it is so welcome that the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity is consulting on modernising deer management for climate and nature, and that the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill creates powers to support co-operation between people who work in rural areas. Stakeholders have proposed a summit to discuss how working together across the public, private and third sectors could save the Caledonian pinewoods.

If we all work together across different locations, vocations and policy spheres, we can save our globally important, locally precious native woodlands, so that they can endure for centuries more and create livelihoods that keep people in our straths and glens.

17:21

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): The debate feels especially pertinent as we weather the 10th named storm of this winter, storm Jocelyn, as a result of which we are facing mass disruption and power outages. Weather is becoming more extreme, and it cannot be denied that climate change is playing a huge role in that.

Biodiversity loss and climate change are twin crises. Climate change fuels biodiversity loss, but

healthy natural habitats are important in removing carbon from the environment. Although woodlands in general can help to support biodiversity, Scottish Forestry says that native forests “will contribute the most.”

In her motion, Ariane Burgess rightly highlights that many of Scotland’s native woodlands

“will not survive without urgent action”.

I thank Ms Burgess, therefore, for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

An example of such action can be seen in the work of the Woodland Trust, which spent five years searching for the wild native crab apple—one of Scotland’s rarest trees. It is amazing that my constituency now hosts an orchard of 59 of those trees. The site, on the shores of Loch Venachar, is a genetic refuge for a tree that could otherwise have been lost forever.

The orchard sits in Glen Finglas, which is a hugely significant woodland regeneration project that is overseen by the Woodland Trust. The work there is repairing years of damage from overexploitation, and it will give wildlife more adaptability against climate change. Hosting a range of research, from PhDs and wildcat counts to experiments on the impact of grazing, the site has a national impact, too. It is part of the Great Trossachs Forest national nature reserve, which involves a collaboration between the Scottish Forest Alliance, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority, the Woodland Trust, RSPB Scotland and Forestry and Land Scotland.

The project will have a 200-year lifespan and will become one of the largest native woodlands in the United Kingdom. The collaboration has already had great success. In the first 10 years, more than 2.5 million trees have been planted, creating a connected corridor of woodland. I would like to hear some detail from the Government on how ambitious projects such as that one will be encouraged. The project in Glen Finglas has had huge input from committed volunteers, as Ariane Burgess pointed out, and many conservation projects, both large and small, involving community woodlands also depend on volunteers.

Much of what has been achieved in native woodlands would not be possible without them. I thank the organisations for their work, and I call on the Government to consider providing support to make volunteering accessible—especially as the cost of living crisis continues to have a negative impact on volunteers and their time.

The Scottish Government has been ambitious in its aims, including those to create 3,000 to 5,000 hectares of new native woodland per year and to restore 10,000 hectares. It recognises the

environmental benefits that forests and woodlands provide.

As the climate crisis becomes more and more acute, I would like the Government to support and empower volunteer organisations and communities to meet those goals.

17:25

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): I welcome today’s debate, which was secured by Ariane Burgess, and the opportunity to highlight the important role of groups such as the Woodland Trust and community woodland associations across Scotland in their efforts to restore Scotland’s native woodlands.

Tree planting is a vital part of the Scottish Government’s commitment to net zero and biodiversity. In my region of South Scotland, native and non-native woodlands play a vital role in local tourism and bringing communities together. Community woodlands such as Gifford community woodland, which my garden opens on to, have helped to bring people together, and they create spaces for visitors and residents to enjoy. I take this opportunity to thank Neville Kilkenny, the woodland manager of Gifford Community Land Company, and its trustees for all their efforts—and for delaying any noisy work on a Sunday morning to give me an extra 30 minutes’ rest.

The Woodland Trust has supported tree-planting activities at Butterdean Wood and Pressmennan Wood in East Lothian, which I have been delighted to visit since becoming an MSP. In the Scottish Borders, which I represent, three of Scotland’s 11 heritage trees are located at Dawyck botanic garden, which attracts tens of thousands of visitors into Tweeddale and the Scottish Borders.

Scotland’s formal target is to plant 18,000 hectares of new woodland every year. That equates to at least 40 million trees planted for new woodland creation. Earlier this week, I had the pleasure of visiting Rodney and Craig Shearer at Elsoms Trees, outside Haddington in East Lothian. After only two years, it has become one of the UK’s leading independent seed specialists and native plant breeders. During my visit, I was told of the devastating consequences that the Scottish Government’s 41 per cent cut to the Scottish forestry grant will have on local jobs, as well as on the delivery of important environmental and biodiversity targets. I wish Rodney and Craig well as they develop their business, which contributes to the local economy and to the Scottish environment.

I have also heard from Alba Trees, another East Lothian-based nursery, which employs around 100 people locally and grows 20 million trees every

year. Its managers, too, are concerned about the significant cut to funding that has been proposed in the 2024-25 budget. Make no mistake: that will come as a major blow for the industry and could undermine our forestry goals.

The proposed woodland creation budget is assessed by Scottish Forestry as being able to fund only 9,000 hectares of new planting, which is only half the annual target. That contrasts with the expected planting figure of around 13,000 hectares over the past 12 months. Both companies that I mentioned have also raised concerns about the administration of the grant, which neither accommodates the planting seasons nor addresses the production of trees, which takes between two and three years.

This year, tree nurseries will collect and sow seeds for trees that will not be planted until 2026. It would be worth considering the administration of the Scottish forestry grant, which operates on a calendar-year basis and is subject to overdemand and overapplication, meaning that trees are presently being cultivated that might not be purchased or sold.

The actual planting numbers have been erratic over recent seasons, falling to 8,190 hectares of new planting last year. That downturn was caused by a number of factors rather than by a lack of available trees. Nurseries took a huge hit in that season and millions of viable trees had to be disposed of.

A reduction in new woodland creation in 2024-25 will mean that between 10 million and 20 million trees will go to waste and may be destroyed. That makes absolutely no sense in a climate change emergency. It will impact the environment and cost jobs, and it is a tragic outcome for trees that have been grown to fulfil a national purpose and that could play a key role in helping Scotland to meet its net zero commitments.

We should be really proud of Scotland's native woodlands, but they need careful management and considered, long-term financial support. That is why the Government should reconsider the savage cuts to the forestry budget, which will undoubtedly have a negative impact across Scotland.

17:30

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Ariane Burgess for her motion, which provides a timely opportunity not only to celebrate our national native woodlands but to recognise the perilous state of our native species and to highlight the urgent action that is needed to save and restore them.

As we have heard, Scotland's native woodlands face a range of challenges. Those include unsustainably high levels of grazing by wild deer, pests, disease, the impact of climate change, and the problem of invasive non-native species, some of which come from poorly planned commercial forestry that was planted in the 1960s to 1980s.

I recognise the huge importance of commercial forestry. It can help us to meet growing demand and creates important jobs. I see that in Dumfries and Galloway, where forests and woodland cover 31 per cent of my home region, making it the most forested part of Scotland. I therefore support an increase in the tree planting targets, but we must ensure that those targets are met, which they have not been and will not be following the grant cuts that have been announced in the budget.

We must deliver the right mix of trees in the right place. That means having a better geographical spread to ease the pressure that excessive tree planting puts on many communities, having a greater focus on restoration through natural regeneration and using more trees that are sourced and grown in the UK and Ireland. We know from the Woodland Trust's landmark "State of the Woods and Trees 2021" report that Scotland's ancient woodlands hold an average of 30 per cent more carbon than other woodland types, so we need not only an increase in trees to meet timber demand but a significant expansion and restoration of our native species.

Many projects are playing their part in helping to achieve that, and I will highlight one that is mentioned in Ariane Burgess's motion. In the muckle toon of Langholm, which is tucked away in the beautiful Esk valley, a quiet land reform revolution has taken place.

Langholm moor sits on the doorstep of the former textile town and was part of the large land portfolio of the Duke of Buccleuch until recently. When the Buccleuch estate's efforts to revive grouse shooting on the moor were unproductive, it promptly declared the land as surplus and put it up for sale. The moor's dramatic hills, its native woodland habitat with amazing ancient oaks and alders and the stunning river valley are home to hen harriers and curlew and marked the historic boundaries of the common land for more than 250 years. It is little wonder therefore that the tight-knit community did what Buccleuch had failed to do and recognised the real opportunities that lay in the land.

Against the odds, a bold fundraising effort launched by the Langholm Initiative put the town on the map, captured international attention and raised a remarkable £6 million from thousands of online crowdfunding donations from around the world and £1 million from the Scottish land fund. In Scotland's biggest community land buy-out,

10,000 hectares—more than 5,500 football pitches—of the duke's land came under the protection and ownership of the people who live and work that land, which is now known as the Tarras valley nature reserve.

The community owners, brilliantly led by estate manager Jenny Barlow and an amazing team of staff and volunteers, are pushing the boundaries of ecological and community restoration. They are improving the environment and seeking to build a better economic future by pursuing sustainable and responsible tourism. Their vision and plans for the moor are truly inspiring. With support from the Woodland Trust, they are restoring and expanding ancient woodland on the moor and are mapping its magnificent trees so that they can undertake work to give those trees more space and light to thrive. They are also working to remove Sitka spruce from the land, and a native tree nursery has been established nearby. That work, along with the vision of the Tarras valley nature reserve project, has really captured hearts across the world, and this Parliament and the Government recognise and support it.

17:34

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I, too, thank Ariane Burgess for bringing this very important subject to the Parliament.

I will be a little bit boring and mention some of the things that I have done in my life. In 1996, I started a project with a landowner that I was working for to replace 600 acres of Caledonian pine in the Cairngorms. It was a big project. We collected seed and grafted trees on to roots that had been specially prepared for them, and we spent £20,000 of consultants' time to try to get the scheme through the local bodies that needed to be consulted.

One would think that it would be an easy thing in the Cairngorms to plant more Caledonian pine trees, replacing the forest, but it was not. It took nearly 10 years of my life, and I probably still bear the scars of trying to achieve that. Therefore, I absolutely believe that, if we are going to take this project on and do it properly, we need to make the process easier.

People might be surprised about my doing this, but I congratulate Fergus Ewing on something that he did in the previous session of Parliament, which was to try to speed up the process of getting consent. He went to Jim Mackinnon, who produced a report. I am not sure that it speeded up the process, but we jolly well ought to speed it up, because we need these woodlands now—not tomorrow, next year or in 10 years' time. We need to start building them now and regenerating the stock that we have.

I say to the Government that it will have to do better at meeting its planting targets. Since 2016, I think that it has managed to achieve the targets that it has set itself in only two years, even though it has adjusted them downwards. We have lost 17,000 hectares of trees that should have been planted, and those could have been the Caledonian pines that we need to replace.

Therefore, I urge the Government and all the organisations that are involved in the project to set about more targeted zoning and planting of those trees. They need to work out where we want them and how we will get them. After doing that, they need to work out how we will get people to invest in them, because, as Colin Smyth has said, there are people who want to do so. Also, as Craig Hoy mentioned, the issue of planting grants is a real issue. Reducing the planting grants by 41 per cent—a £30 million reduction in the budget—does not really help. That will not get us more of those forests or protect the forests that we need to protect.

I agree with Colin Smyth, and probably with Ariane Burgess, about deer control. We need to do a more significant job on deer control. When the minister came in and produced a plan to kill more male deer, I spoke against that. It is not male deer that propagate the population but female deer, and we need to get on top of their numbers. I have asked the minister whether she is happy to come to the hill with me and some stalkers to see what the real problems are with deer control. I hope that she will respond to that in her summing-up speech. I have offered you an open invitation, on any date that suits you, to come to talk about the issue. I hope that you will find time to do that, minister.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please speak through the chair, Mr Mountain.

Edward Mountain: I apologise, Presiding Officer. I hope that the minister will do that.

The other thing that I will mention on deer control is the importance of working together. Deer migrate from one estate to another. My view and understanding is that we can get deer numbers down one year, but they sure as hell pop up the next year if we do not make sure that we have controlled them.

It would be remiss of me if I did not mention one of the things that I have found most difficult, which is the introduction of beavers into the Cairngorms national park. I have found that difficult because they will eat the very trees that I have spent a huge amount of my life trying to propagate and move into the Cairngorms. I am happy to admit that, by signing off stalkers to kill deer, I have consigned to death probably about 25,000 to 30,000 red deer in Scotland. Then, having done

that to protect the trees, we have introduced a species that lives on trees, eats them, fells them and uses them for their advantage. I find that really difficult.

In closing, I would say that, although I respect the huge amount of work that has been done by all the organisations that Ms Burgess has mentioned, there are other people—private landowners—who are doing a huge amount of work as well. We should encourage them, and we should make sure that they have the facilities to do the very job that we are asking everyone to do, which is to ensure that our Caledonian pinewoods expand and do not contract.

17:39

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I thank our colleague Ariane Burgess for bringing the debate to the chamber.

Scotland's native woodlands are a national treasure to be enjoyed by all. One tree that is often found skirting those woodlands like a guardian and protector is the Scots pine—an imposing, majestic giant looming over the land, reaching skyward and earthward and inspiring and connecting us. A decade ago, the Scots pine became Scotland's national tree, following a campaign run by Scottish Natural Heritage and VisitScotland as part of the year of natural Scotland celebrations. That campaign was inspired by Scotland's big five campaign to identify the nation's favourite wildlife. The Scots pine topped the poll of Scotland's favourite native trees and plants, narrowly beating the humble bluebell into second place by 1 per cent of the vote. You would think that the majestic giant versus the shy, retiring bluebell is hardly a fair contest, but, to me, the carpet of beautiful blue flowers covering the ground underneath the trees, with their leaves just starting to open, is equally majestic and a wonderful sign of spring returning.

I will go off at a very mild tangent to say that, as we gather to celebrate Burns night and the days grow longer, we are reminded of Burns's connection to nature and his love of the bluebell as a harbinger of change, immortalised in the words of his 1890 poem "My Bonnie Bell":

The smiling Spring comes in rejoicing,
And surly Winter grimly flies;
And I rejoice in my bonie Bell

Old Time and Nature their changes tell;
But never ranging, still unchanging,
I adore my bonie Bell.

In my constituency, we have one of the most spectacular bluebell walks in Scotland: the Drumchapel bluebell woods. They are a haven for walkers, cyclists, families and, of course, various species of trees and wildlife.

Although the debate recognises the Scots pine and the Caledonian pine woods, it is equally important to recognise the important role that urban woodlands play in mitigating the impacts of climate change, alongside the effects that they have on our urban communities' mental health and wellbeing.

Many studies have shown that regular contact with good-quality green space is linked to better health. Scottish Forestry lists a number of benefits, including anger reduction and attention restoration, alongside the restorative effect for people experiencing stress and mental fatigue. Among the physical benefits to locals is a reduced risk of heart disease, obesity, type 2 diabetes, cancer, osteoporosis and other life-threatening conditions. There is also an improved social perception of neighbourhoods, alongside increased social interaction and stronger communities, an improved sense of place and a reduction in inequalities between the richest and poorest in society.

Groundbreaking research that was undertaken at the University of Dundee has also shown that green space can help people who are affected by early-stage dementia by creating meaningful experiences and increasing feelings of self-worth. As a result of a hugely encouraging 10-week pilot project, that woodland activity scheme is due to be rolled out in more areas of Falkirk, Clackmannanshire, Edinburgh and Inverness.

I hope that the Scottish Government will keep a close eye on those programmes to evaluate the potential benefits nationally. It is evident that the diverse benefits cut across many of the national objectives that are set out by the Government. Therefore, I would be interested to learn how the cross-cutting outcomes are incorporated into Government thinking. I encourage the consideration of further research into the potential benefits of increasing cross-portfolio interlacing.

Woodlands benefit us all. I hope that such benefits will continue to flourish across the country.

17:44

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I thank Ariane Burgess for bringing the debate to the chamber. It provides a chance to talk about some of the positive aspects and untapped potential of forestry in Scotland.

I often find myself speaking out against tree planting in my constituency. As Colin Smyth mentioned, Dumfries and Galloway already has a large amount of forestry, an awful lot of which is commercial forestry, and I have grave concerns that those projects push ahead but represent the wrong tree in the wrong place. Many of the

incentives and packages that are in place are geared towards commercial planting rather than doing what is right for communities and the environment. The large commercial forestry plantations are skirted by some broadleaf planting, but that is often on the least favourable ground and the trees are planted poorly, not cared for or maintained, and in such small pockets that they do not achieve the environmental and natural benefits that they would achieve if they were more concentrated.

Even in projects such as Langholm moor, which is very positive—an oasis in the desert—increasing numbers of commercial planting proposals come around, taking away some of the future opportunities for branching out. I understand that there is an economic benefit to having home-sourced commercial timber, but the Sitka spruce does not add much biodiversity. I am concerned that, in Langholm, as I think was mentioned by Colin Smyth, those trees spread out past where they were planted—almost like weeds on the hills—and the people who planted them in the first place do nothing to try to keep them within their existing boundaries. That is sad to see, because it wastes the potential for doing something better. That is only going to get worse, given the cut to the forestry grant, because, I imagine, in a race to meet planting targets a lot of focus will be on planting as many trees as is possible with the money. That is likely to favour planting large numbers of Sitka spruce in specific geographical locations rather than smaller native schemes.

The cut to the forestry grant should not happen, but, at the very least, I hope to hear from the minister that she expects such a cut to be proportionate and that smaller native planting schemes such as the planting of broadleaf trees will not be unduly squeezed in order to push ahead.

In the short time that is available, I will briefly mention deer fencing. In my constituency, a lot of unnecessary deer fencing is put up—often in scenic spots—preventing walkers and other land users from enjoying the hillsides. At Corehead in Moffat, there is a Borders Forest Trust project through which we see that, with careful management and other plans, there are alternatives and a better balance can be found, provided that the reason for planting trees is right in the first place and that it is not done to maximise economic return. The Government needs to do more in that space.

17:48

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): I thank my colleague Ariane Burgess for bringing the motion to the chamber, as I thank everyone

who has spoken. I am delighted that, from every speaker, there has been a recognition that Scotland has the ambition to become a more wooded country and that it should do so. That means more of our native woodlands, our Caledonian pinewoods and our rainforest.

It is distressing that, as Ariane Burgess highlighted, only 2 per cent of our Caledonian pinewoods remains to us. We have experienced such a loss. We have gotten so used to having so many bare hills in Scotland that, in some ways, our ancestral connection to our woodlands has been cut. We have lost that connection.

People who now make their livelihood from woodlands show us the way of the future by providing chances for wildlife to thrive and by showing us how to re-experience the heritage of livelihoods that depend on the woodlands, in order to develop our venison industry and the eco-tourism and conservation jobs that are part of a woodland expansion, as well as to provide wood for craft and commercial forestry, keeping in mind our ambition to maintain that proportion of native woodlands.

It was very encouraging to hear so many people talk about the importance of collaboration and co-operation, including what our land managers are achieving in Scotland through collaboration with deer management groups, and what community groups have been able to achieve. Working together is how we will achieve this. It is not something that the Government can do alone. With the funding challenges of the current financial settlement, we all have to work together to get the best possible outcomes. I reassure Mr Mundell that we are committed to having that proportion of native woodland and to seeing the expansion of native woodland.

Many members have spoken about the impacts of climate change, including the storms that we are having in Scotland, and about the importance of carbon sequestration. In relation to the recent flooding that we have seen in Scotland, which we will only see more of as climate change progresses, we know that the right tree in the right place can help us to manage flooding and with catchment basin management. That is why we are looking at landscape-scale change in Scotland, and it is why land managers working together makes such a difference.

During the debate, we have heard about both planting and native regeneration. The number 1 risk to native woodland regeneration, as highlighted by Ariane Burgess, is the large number of deer in Scotland. I will address Mr Mountain's comments about the deer and the beavers. There are currently an estimated 1 million deer in Scotland. There were too many deer in the 1950s, so legislation was brought in to manage them, but

the number had doubled by 1991. Further legislation was brought in and the number doubled yet again. This Government has taken expert advice from the independent deer working group on what we can do to bring deer numbers down, because in areas where we wish to have natural regeneration—as highlighted by Colin Smyth—we must get deer numbers right down and significantly lower than they are now.

Edward Mountain: My first comment on deer is that they are not all in the areas where the Caledonian pine forests are. Secondly, if we are to reduce deer numbers, will we be reducing the numbers of all herbivores, including hares?

Lorna Slater: As Ariane Burgess said, the number 1 risk to the pinewoods and to the rainforest is deer grazing. The member mentions hares, and he previously mentioned beavers. This is pure mathematics. There are 1 million deer in Scotland and there are 1,500 beavers. The reason we need to manage the deer is that, in places where we need to regenerate Scotland's woodlands, there are too many deer. Their numbers need to be brought down. There is a relatively small number of beavers compared with the number of deer, which is why we must manage the deer effectively to have that important natural regeneration of Scotland's woodland and our rainforest.

Some non-native species were mentioned today, such as the self-seeding Sitka, which is a challenge that we need to face, but I did not hear any specific mention of the risks around Rhododendron and the work that we need to do to reduce that invasive species. Those are all part of the package of issues that we need to work together on.

I highlight the positive work that is being done for native woodlands by communities such as Arkaig and Langholm, which Colin Smyth beautifully highlighted, and in Perthshire and Argyll. There are more projects across Scotland's rainforest and pinewoods.

I also highlight the work of the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest in bringing people together and energising landscape-scale restoration projects. The Woodland Trust Scotland is expanding and restoring the Ben Shieldaig Caledonian pinewood, which is part of Scotland's rainforest, and it recently received £1 million of forestry grant scheme funding.

The Knoydart Forest Trust has created more than 400 hectares of new native woodland in the rainforest zone, has controlled Rhododendron at a landscape scale and continues to provide local jobs by, for example, purchasing an electric sawmill to increase the use of local timber.

Forestry and Land Scotland has been improving the condition of ancient woodland across all of Scotland's national estate for more than 50 years. With funding from the Scottish Government, it is currently focusing rainforest restoration work on selected priority areas such as Knapdale, Glen Creran, Morvern, north Arkaig, Slattadale and east Loch Lomond. At Loch Lomond, it has consolidated and expanded the work of the past 27 years, converting the Ben Lomond national memorial landscape to a native habitat, and it has invested heavily in removing invasive non-native species in inaccessible locations. The work is slow and expensive, but it is vital to successfully removing the seed source.

NatureScot will also continue to restore, expand and improve the condition of its pinewoods at the Beinn Eighe and Loch Maree islands national nature reserve, and it will continue to support work on these iconic woodlands through the nature restoration fund.

I welcome the suggestions of how we can support the businesses that are developing the seed stores and nurseries. I am delighted to hear that there are businesses that are able to make their livelihoods by breeding and nurturing the seedlings of Scotland's native trees. That is important work, and I look forward to supporting those industries and businesses as we work to make Scotland a more wooded country.

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

Meeting closed at 17:56.

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

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